



THE REDD + MECHANISM IS A VEHICLE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF FORESTS AND PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**External impact evaluation of the
REDD+ Project Portfolio in the
Biogeographic region of Chocó**

**Gestión Ambiental Estratégica
Consultants**

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General information

Project or program name	REDD+ Community Portfolio
Leading entity	Fondo Acción
Contact point	elfondo@fondoaccion.org
Author (s)	Gestión Ambiental Estratégica, Consultants
Other actors involved	Fondo Colombia Sostenible Inter-American Development Bank Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss government USAID Acapa, Bajo Mira and Frontera, Río Cajambre, Bajo Calima, La Plata Bahía Málaga, Concosta, Sivirú, San Andrés de Usaragá, Pílizá, Pizarro, Acaba, Río Pepé, Montaña, Vigía de Curvaradó, Santa Rosa de Limón, Apartadó-Buenavista, Río Domingodó, Chicao and La Madre Community Councils Mutatá Indigenous Council: Jaikerazabi, Chontadural Cañero, and Coribí Bedadó Indigenous Councils Community Council of the Black Communities in the Río Tolo River Basin and Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur)
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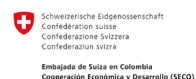




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1. Executive summary

REDD+¹ communities in the Biogeographic region of Chocó: progress and impacts of its implementation on local human welfare, climate, and sustainable development

1.1. Background

The communities' journey to REDD+ began in 2009 in the municipality of Acandí in Chocó, in the northern part of the Biogeographic ecoregion of Chocó, considered one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. In that year, the Community Council of Río Tolo and Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur), as part of its objectives to conserve its territory and protect its forests, joined forces with Anthrotext, a company dedicated to making conservation an option for communities, to design the first REDD+ project model in Colombia. Based on this example, in 2012 the country had its first verified carbon credits. Thus, Cocomasur became the first ethnic community to implement a REDD+ project. From this successful experience, eight additional projects were consolidated and have been verified by the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCB) and the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS), which make up the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region

1 REDD+: It is an international mechanism originating in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), whose objective is to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions produced by deforestation and forest degradation in order to mitigate climate change. REDD stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of forests. Likewise, the + symbol implies that in its implementation there are components of conservation and sustainable forest management with the participation of the local population and an increase of forest carbon stocks. [Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.](#)

of Chocó. These projects have been developed with local communities, collective, and indigenous territories, where implementing actions to diversify unsustainable activities in the forest, such as logging, have been agreed upon in order to generate income in exchange for their conservation efforts, through the inclusion of production projects.

The Community Councils and Indigenous Councils, through their Governing Boards, propose and implement the projects, form the community groups that support the implementation of the REDD+ Project Portfolio, and, together with Fondo Acción, coordinate and monitor the prioritized activities.

In this process, Fondo Acción has played a key role as implementer and main supporter of the communities through the strengthening local capacities, implementing tools that have contributed to the construction of territorial governance, developing production systems with technical assistance and product commercialization channels, and training and encouraging community participation in project monitoring, reporting, and verification.

1.2. Evaluation

A decade after its inception, in late 2020 and early 2021, an evaluation of the impacts and results achieved by the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó was carried out in order to consolidate lessons learned, conclusions, and recommendations for improvement for future investments in community welfare and REDD+ projects in the country. This evaluation is due to the completion of the support program for the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó financed by the Sustainable Colombia Fund.

The evaluation methodology included interviews with community representatives, surveys, and a bibliographic review of the documentation

provided by Fondo Acción. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the Community Councils and Indigenous Councils, local REDD+ Unit coordinators, the Fondo Acción team, community leaders, and members of the institutions that have participated in some of the project phases.

The evaluation recognizes REDD+ projects as a strategy for biodiversity use and conservation, as well as their contribution to the conservation of natural areas and the creation of benefits and wellbeing. One of the main achievements of the REDD+ Project Portfolio, evidenced in this evaluation, is to confirm that a significant reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions has been achieved, in line with the REDD+ Initiative's main objective. It is also evident that the communities are satisfied with the evolution, opportunities, and territorial recognition they have experienced since the projects were established in their territories.

After comparing the information presented in the project design document (PDD)², project monitoring reports, and the information provided in the interviews and surveys, it is evident that the result of the evaluation is positive overall. This is not only because a large part of what was established in the initial plan is currently being fulfilled, but also because a high percentage of the people interviewed recognize significant personal and community improvements.

1.3. Progress

REDD+ Community Project Portfolio progress is presented for each of the three project components.

Component 1. Forest Governance

The communities surveyed recognize the importance of capacity building on various issues such as collective rights and gender

² The Project Design Document (PDD) is a 'roadmap.' It is an essential document for project validation and registration. It is also one of the three documents required for registration. The other two documents are the Designated Operational Entity (DOE) validation report and the Designated National Authority (DNA) approval letter.

equity, which are adopted and used by the entire community. Regarding the zoning of the territory and establishing plots of land in the area, a significant change is identified, especially as of 2019, with the participatory development of land use maps, which are an essential part of territorial zoning. There was also an increase



in the number of people involved in zoning and governance visits. Throughout the process, there has been a significant increase in the number of people hired directly in the projects. This employment dynamic has two important impacts: the first has to do with new job opportunities taken advantage of by people who were previously engaged in logging. The second is due to the greater number of women involved in the projects, which empowers their participation, reduces gender inequality, and strengthens the entire community's sense of project ownership.

Component 2. Alternative Production Development

This is one of the most relevant points of the evaluation, not only because of the impact it has had on the communities, but also because of the challenges its implementation posed throughout the process. It has been very gratifying for the communities to receive constant support and guidance to improve and strengthen their production chains. They are also grateful for the workshops and

training, and recognize that they now have more knowledge that will allow them to manage their crops more efficiently, making better use of phytosanitary and forest resources. The Agricultural Field Schools (ECAs, as per its acronym in Spanish) and the tools provided to the communities as part of the projects have had a



positive impact on increasing production and improving production chains, which has begun to improve family incomes. Progress in this component also includes a considerable improvement in forest conservation. Between 2015 and 2016, REDD+ Pacific had 280 hectares of forest under conservation agreements. By 2018, this figure had increased to 1,041 hectares of natural coverage under such agreements.

Component 3. Management, monitoring, reporting, and verification capacities

This component plays a fundamental role in the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó as it is the basis for quantifying project progress in terms of forest carbon accumulation. According to those interviewed, this is one of the areas most worked on by the communities thanks to the capacity building workshops. The involvement and training of leaders recognized by the community turned them into replicators of REDD+



knowledge and experiences, which has allowed them to participate in the construction of monitoring reports. It is important to highlight that the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio resources have been important to strengthen the organizational dynamics and increase presence in the territory. According to Luis Armando Ospina, legal representative of the Acapa Bajo Mira and Frontera Council, “The resources have made it possible to reach the communities, talk to them, and reduce the skepticism surrounding the REDD+ project.”

Overall, it is worth highlighting two fundamental aspects of Fondo Acción’s support related to increasing women’s participation and reducing gender barriers and gaps. In Acapa Bajo Mira and Frontera, women are making progress in the development of associations to add value to coconut and cocoa. They have identified chocolate candy as a business and market opportunity, as well as the sale of coconut oil and other derivatives (ice cream).

The second fundamental aspect in which Fondo Acción has contributed to the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio is generational renewal. Today more than ever, communities recognize the importance of involving children and young people in community processes, and that they should participate in training to learn how to make decisions about their territories and the wellbeing of their communities.

1.4. Recommendations



- Make additional efforts so that buyers of the REDD+ Portfolio's VCU (Verified Carbon Unit) credits become catalysts for these projects, efforts, and collective results.



- Continue to follow up on communities' emerging needs or difficulties related to reducing the factors that cause disinterest in the project. Some of these factors are project continuity and activity implementation. Ensure that there is continuity between the Operational Plans and that the community remains involved in the projects. Continue strengthening alternative production systems to ensure the support and continuity of the activities prioritized by the project and its communities.



- Develop specific informative material for local communities to encourage them to return to the territory and become multipliers of knowledge.



- Develop mechanisms to monitor the benefit distribution schemes for the proceeds from VCU or credit sales.



- Continue with support on technical and production issues, cultivation techniques, and support of inputs and tools that ensure alternative income and encourage conservation actions.



- Continue to improve value chains and strengthen negotiation strategies for product marketing.



- Involve the private sector in building marketing chains for the products created in the production systems.



- Continue having workshops, as they have proved to be ideal spaces for acquiring new knowledge and identifying opportunities, especially ecotourism, legal issues, and ethnic and cultural rights.



- Create training opportunities for the communities, especially for their representatives, in resource management and administration, including resources received from the commercialization of production system products, so that they can be recipients, administrators, and executors of their resources.



- Design a method for the Governing Boards to autonomously assume REDD+ project management. Continue to provide administrative, commercial, control, and monitoring tools so that the Boards and their communities are able to manage all project activities.



- Strengthen coordination with local authorities because, although they are aware of the projects, there has been no significant coordination with local programs or resources..

1.5. Conclusions

After a detailed review of the information, it was confirmed that Fondo Acción has been a key player and catalyst, not only because it has provided resources directly, but it has also been fundamental in the transparency of cooperation resources. Additionally, Fondo Acción has provided the technical support necessary to comply with the essential elements in the development and evolution of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. The communities emphasize that the projects have been essential in boosting territorial development and their capabilities by fostering empowerment through the workshops and training. Knowing the territory well and the wealth it

has to offer has allowed for better ownership in each of the areas REDD+ project progress is necessary.

For the communities, the REDD+ Project Portfolio is becoming increasingly important because they are beginning to see the positive impacts of forest conservation and the implementation of production systems. This is because, by improving value chains, they are enjoying more financial income and a stability and wellbeing they had not experienced before.

Specific REDD+ Community Project Portfolio activities in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, such as zoning and governance visits, have allowed local communities to gain knowledge of their territory and recognize values that go beyond the volume or quality of standing timber. Thus, they recognize forests as a fundamental part of their future development.

The Project Portfolio achieved its objectives, which focused on increasing territorial governance and empowerment through conservation and REDD+ project sustainability. This is how a knowledge base, tools, mechanisms, and instruments were created for the appropriation of REDD+ projects in the communities.





2. Introduction

Colombia, as a signatory party of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience to climate change. From its position as a developing country, in particular, it recognizes that the conservation of carbon reservoirs in vegetation and soil is one of the most effective strategies for mitigating emissions. The country is an active participant in the REDD+ mechanism (Reducing Emissions of greenhouse gases caused by Deforestation and Degradation of forests), which is part of the Framework Convention and includes activities to reduce deforestation, reduce forest degradation, activities focused on forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and increasing forest carbon stocks (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development³).

In 2010, Colombia decided to initiate its REDD+ preparation process through the formulation of a national strategy and the development of early implementation initiatives, known as REDD+ projects, which sought to connect with the voluntary carbon market. The national REDD+ strategy is part of the National Policy on Climate Change (set out in CNONPES 3700 of 2011), which defines “the institutional strategy for the coordination of policies and actions on climate change in Colombia.” This strategy highlights the country’s need to understand and act on the

3 <https://www.minambiente.gov.co/index.php/convencion-marco-de-naciones-unidas-para-el-cambio-climatico-cmnucc/historia-de-colombia-frente-al-cambio-climatico>

phenomenon as an economic and social development issue (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development) ⁴.

Thus, in the development of early implementation initiatives, the community of the municipality of Acandí, located in the north of the Biogeographic region of Chocó on the border with Panama, began to design the first REDD+ project model in Colombia in 2009. This community is organized under the Community Council of Río Tolo and Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur) and is promoted by Anthrotec⁵ (Bernal, A., Fontecha, M.M., Jiménez, N., Jiménez, N., 2020).

The REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó is composed of nine REDD+ projects verified by the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCB) and the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS). The projects have been developed jointly with local communities, who exercise rights over collective and indigenous territories recognized by the Colombian constitution, where they have agreed to implement a series of activities with the expectation of being able to generate income in exchange for their conservation efforts (Bernal, A., Fontecha, M.M., Jiménez, N., 2020).

These projects have been developed since 2010, with Fondo Acción being a key player in defining and developing the REDD+ mechanism in Colombia. The main results include the following: 1.) Development of governance strategies, production activities, monitoring, reporting, and verification in ethnic communities to reduce emissions through REDD+ projects. 2.) Public policy dialogues with national, regional, and

4 REDD+ Strategy Stages. Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. <https://www.minambiente.gov.co/index.php/component/content/article?id=439:plantilla-bosques-biodiversidad-y-servicios-ecosistematicos-32>

5 Anthrotec S.A.S. is a privately owned Colombian entity dedicated to making conservation a viable alternative that creates economic opportunities resulting from land degradation. It works with community landowners to implement payment schemes for environmental services, which connect communities to emerging carbon and biodiversity markets.

international entities to promote REDD+ as an effective mechanism to combat deforestation and mitigate climate change in Colombia. 3.) Development of methodologies, financing mechanisms, and capacity building for the promotion of the REDD+ community portfolio. (IDEAM, 2017) Taking the above into account, there was an opportunity to carry out an evaluation that allows Fondo Acción to identify, evaluate, and describe the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the actions that have been carried out during the establishment of a REDD+ community portfolio focused mainly on forest conservation, forest governance, and sustainable rural development.

2.1. Evaluation Methodology and Scope

The objective of the evaluation is to conduct an analysis through an independent external entity that reviews, identifies, describes, and evaluates the impact of the actions and investments that have been made during the last ten years in the establishment of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. The purpose of the above is to learn about the impacts and results achieved compared to what was initially defined, come to conclusions, and propose recommendations for improvement for the following investments and actors in community wellbeing and REDD+ projects.

The purpose of the evaluation defined in the work plan was:

- Evaluate the overall performance of the projects compared to the proposed objectives as set out in the formulation documents, follow-up reports, and other relevant documents, such as monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV).
- Establish project relevance in terms of national priorities and strategic objectives defined by Fondo Acción and the stakeholders involved in each of the projects.

- Evaluate the impact, effectiveness, and efficiency of establishing a REDD+ Project Portfolio in the Colombian Pacific.
- Evaluate the sustainability of the actions defined in each of the projects.
- Document lessons learned and best practices on project design, implementation, and management that may be relevant to other projects in the country or in other parts of the world.
- Identify the improvement of living conditions in the communities involved.

The methodological process for the development of this Impact Evaluation was based on a review of the available project documentation provided by Fondo Acción (Annex 1), in order to define commonalities for comparing and evaluating the main results achieved by each REDD+ project. The parameters chosen for the analysis were: i) objectives for each project, ii) baseline (conditions prior to the start of the projects) established in the Project Design Document ([Annex 2](#)), iii) results achieved, and iv) actors involved (communities, counterparts, institutions).

An evaluation matrix was defined and designed and is presented in [Annex 4](#), which made it possible to establish the starting point, measure progress, and record findings and limitations. Based on this ordered and organized information, it was possible to analyze the additional⁶ project achievements, focusing mainly on governance, production systems, and monitoring, reporting, verification, and overarching issues, such as gender and generational renewal.

Based on the identification of the relevant stakeholders for each REDD+ project, the information gathering tool was applied with direct interviews with Community Council representatives, local REDD+ Unit coordinators,

6 The level of greenhouse gas emissions if the activities defined by the projects had not progressed.

and community leaders in order to gather information on key issues. The matrix with the information collected in these interviews is presented in [Annex 4](#). A survey was also conducted among the different entities participating in the projects, as well as among people involved in the financing, implementation, and definition of policy lines. Based on this information, the evaluation team was able to validate compliance with the objectives, products, and goals achieved, document the processes of change, recognize and measure the benefits achieved and the installed capacities that can ensure REDD+ project sustainability.

Given the qualitative nature of the evaluation, the information was triangulated in order to validate the general findings and conclusions for the Project Portfolio. Likewise, in order to legitimize the data obtained through the interviews, the surveys, and the documentation review, the evaluation used methodological triangulation to verify, interpret, and contextualize the information, cross-checking it with the quantitative data presented in the reports provided by Fondo Acción. To the extent possible, a cross-examination of findings by stakeholder/beneficiary/community type was carried out.

After completing the surveys and interviews, the evaluation criteria were reviewed. The scope defined for each of the proposed criteria was:

- **Relevance:** the degree to which the project portfolio contributed to community capacity building and whether its effects were consistent with the priorities established in the project formulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the degree to which the REDD+ Project Portfolio has made progress in achieving the expected results (outputs and outcomes).
- **Efficiency:** the contribution of the project portfolio to the establishment of joint processes that maximize results with the available resources.

- **Sustainability:** to establish the level of knowledge transfer and installed capacity that the projects have instilled in the communities involved. This will include the analysis of lessons learned, best practices, and opportunities.

These criteria were analyzed based on their development over time for each of the nine REDD+ projects, and then a general analysis of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó was carried out so that Fondo Acción could have a comprehensive view of the projects' aggregate results.

Finally, the result of this exercise is a document called "Impact Evaluation," which represents the analysis of the results and goals achieved in the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. This document allows project participants, especially Fondo Acción, to learn about the lessons learned, conclusions, recommendations, and best practices, which will help guide new REDD+ community projects.





3. Project description and context

3.1. Context of project development

The REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó aims to reduce the pressure exerted on forests by the community and other stakeholders through the implementation of forest governance programs. These include improvements in territorial plotting, land use recognition and planning, design and implementation of alternative production activities, and the strengthening of administrative capacities and resource management. This seeks to contribute to the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda and reduce the country's contribution to climate change (Bernal, A., Fontecha, M.M., Jiménez, N., 2020).

This portfolio is composed of nine REDD+ projects verified by the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCB) and the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS). Currently, the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó covers a forest area of approximately 710,000 hectares, which are managed and protected by community members. The projects are composed of an Indigenous Council of the Embera-Katio ethnic group and 19 Afro-Colombian Community Councils living in collective territories.

The Community Councils and Afro and indigenous peoples of the Pacific are:

- Acapa Community Council
- Bajo Mira and Frontera Community Council

- Río Cajambre Community Council
- Bajo Calima Community Council
- La Plata Bahía Málaga Community Council
- Concosta Community Council
- Sivorú Community Council
- San Andrés de Usaragá Community Council
- Pilizá Community Council
- Pizarro Community Council
- Acaba Community Council
- Río Pepé Community Council
- Montaña Community Council
- Vigía de Curvaradó Community Council
- Santa Rosa de Limón Community Council
- Apartadó-Buenavista Community Council
- Río Domingodó Community Council
- Chicao and La Madre Community Council
- Mutatá Indigenous Council: Jaikerazabi, Chontadural Cañero, and Coribí Bedadó Indigenous Councils
- Community Council of the Black Communities in the Río Tolo River Basin and Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur)

The consolidation of this program has been the result of a great deal of work carried out with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Sustainable Colombia Fund, operated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), as well as thanks to the technical contribution of Anthrotec in the initial phase of the project and the constant accompaniment of Fondo Acción and other actors, who over the years have sought to ensure project sustainability through ongoing work with the communities.

Portfolio sustainability has been achieved through the implementation of three specific components: (i) increasing territorial governance and

empowerment through REDD+ project conservation and sustainability. Under this objective, the aim is to provide greater knowledge of the territory, strengthen community management to improve social control and ensure proper forest management through activities that mitigate deforestation hotspots. (ii) Increase the capacities of communities and associated local producers to improve their living conditions through the implementation of production alternatives, such as planting annatto, cocoa, coconut, and açai, or fishing, and thus diversify sources of income by strengthening value chains. (iii) And finally, to increase local capacities for the implementation of monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) activities. This last component is directly related to the REDD+ mechanism, as it aims to build MRV capacities to support the process of external and independent verification of the tons of CO₂ prevented as a result of the actions implemented in REDD+ projects.

The Portfolio was initially implemented thanks to resources from USAID and the IDB, which have served as the initial input for the purchase of seedlings, the design of workshops and community work, as well as the purchase of tools and inputs to begin strengthening the production chains. During 2020, production systems continued to be strengthened through the development of the value chain, especially with the resources donated by the IDCB, which marked the beginning of a new stage for the REDD+ Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó.

3.2. Timeline

The results we see today from the program are the result of the work carried out hand in hand with the communities and different actors aware of the need to curb the accelerated deforestation process that Colombian forests have been facing, especially those located in the Biogeographic region of Chocó.

The origin of these projects dates back to 2007, when Colombia began to develop the REDD+ mechanism, proposed in the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as a strategy to contribute to climate change mitigation, reduce deforestation, and promote forest conservation actions. The national government developed a preparation proposal for the National REDD+ Strategy, which became part of the climate change actions included in the 2010-2014 National Development Plan.

The first REDD+ project in Colombia began in 2009 in the municipality of Acandí, located in the north of the Biogeographic region of Chocó, thanks to the Community Council of Río Tolo and the Southern Coastal Zone's (Cocomasur) interest in conserving their territory and protecting the forests, together with the support of the company Anthrotext. Thanks to this partnership, the first REDD+ project model in Colombia began to be designed, which, in 2012, was able to establish the first verified carbon credits. This is how Cocomasur established itself as the first ethnic community to develop a successful REDD+ project.

In 2011, USAID made resources available to implement the BioREDD+ program, which was managed and implemented by Chemonics International until 2015. The program was aimed at supporting Colombia's efforts to curb deforestation by implementing sustainable development programs in conjunction with the communities. This project focused on two



specific areas. On the one hand, it sought to support the development of activities that would allow for better adaptation and mitigation of climate change, while ensuring the economic livelihood of the families involved in the projects. On the other hand, it hoped to develop production chains based on raw materials obtained from managed forests in order to promote a source of income. (USAID, 2015)

The year 2013 was a decisive year for the USAID-funded program, since, by that time, 20 communities had been brought together in order to continue making progress on the design and implementation of REDD+ projects. This posed great challenges, since implementing the strategy implied a greater knowledge of the territory and its cultural aspects, so they decided to hire Fondo Acción to support the process of strengthening communities and management in the territory. From this moment on, Fondo Acción began to work as an implementing agent hand in hand with Cocomasur in order to replicate its experience and knowledge in the new communities and thus promote the exchange of visions, experiences, and, above all, a dialogue between peers that would build confidence about the challenges inherent to REDD+ project implementation.

In 2015, the BioREDD+ project came to an end, leaving eight REDD+ projects established in the Colombian Pacific corridor. During the process, five production chains were designed as one of the strategies to contain deforestation and forest degradation, and the formulation of a business model for each of these value chains was promoted, with the communities as strategic partners, in order to create a new source of financial income for them.

During this same year, USAID, with the Connected Landscapes Program, hired Fondo Acción as the implementer of the activities established in the REDD+ projects, decided to focus on three specific areas: governance, production systems, and monitoring and verification. This was not easy, as Fondo Acción had to work on the models that had already

been designed and shared with the community by BioREDD+. From that moment on, a slow but very important process began between Fondo Acción and the communities, with which some models were restructured and new strategies were jointly designed to continue strengthening capacities and governance in the territory.

In 2018, the Paramos and Forests program emerged, also funded by USAID, which aimed to contribute to addressing the effects of climate change in Colombia, and one of its lines of action is to support the implementation of REDD+ project activities.

In 2019, the Supporting Project for the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó IDB-FCS-FA is launched, whose resources were mainly allocated to MRV, governance, and production development activities. This same year, thanks to the work done by Fondo Acción together with the Paramos and Forests program, 7,055,091 tons of carbon were verified, which was a unique milestone in the program's history. For the first time, the communities were able to tangibly see the result of their actions and began to refer to it as “our carbon” (Bernal, A., Fontecha, M.M., Jiménez, N., 2020).

3.3. Problems that the project sought to address: threats and barriers

Given that the projects in the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó were designed and implemented to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in their areas of influence, it was these two phenomena they sought to address.

In their characterization of the main causes and agents of deforestation in the country for the 2005-2015 period, González et al. (2018)⁷,

7 González, J. Cubillos, A., Chadid, M., Cubillos, A., Arias, M., Zúñiga, E., Joubert, F. Pérez, I, Berrío, V. Characterization of the main causes and agents of deforestation at the national level during the 2005-2015 period. Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology, and Environmental Studies - IDEAM. Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. UN-REDD Program Colombia. Bogotá, 2018.



Bosque degradado en el Pacífico Colombiano. Foto: Juan Andrés López.

the Colombian Pacific region is categorized as the third most forested area, after the Amazon and the Andes. For 2018, the Forest and Carbon Monitoring System (SMBYC, as per its Spanish acronym) reported an area of natural forest coverage in the region of 5,510,932 hectares. (At the time of writing this evaluation, the Forest and Carbon Monitoring System had not yet published statistics for 2018-2019). González et al. (2018) state that shrublands, with 48%, correspond to the coverage that contributes most to the transformation of Pacific forests (2005-2012 period). This behavior contrasts with the national trend, where pastures account for 50% of forest transformation during the analyzed period. In turn, these authors recognize two high deforestation nuclei (HDN) in this region—the first in the “Central Pacific” and the second in the “South Pacific”—which together accounted for nearly 3% of the total national deforestation quantified during the 2005-2015 period. For these nuclei, the authors identify the following direct causes of deforestation:

- Traditional agricultural production
- Industrial agricultural production
- Agricultural production of coca
- Mechanized open pit gold mining
- Timber extraction

During the design of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, commercial timber extraction was identified as the main agent of deforestation and forest degradation, and as one of the most important historical sources of income for the communities living in the areas of influence. Deforestation and forest degradation resulting from selective logging often leads to land use change for agricultural and livestock activities. To this end, each of the projects in the portfolio focused on three general activities: strengthening forest governance, creating alternative production activities for forest logging, and strengthening capacities in administration and resource management (Fondo Acción, 2018).

Among the main threats and barriers to the implementation of this type of projects to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in the Colombian Pacific, the following are identified: the appropriation of the REDD+ concept among communities, their involvement in forest governance activities to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, the long-term sustainability of alternative livelihoods, and, in some cases, the presence of external actors who carry out activities that are directly or indirectly related to forest logging. (IDEAM, 2017)

3.4. Description of project activities

The REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó is distributed throughout nine different areas of this region, from

the border between Colombia and Panama to the border with Ecuador, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 1 shows the summary of the projects at the time of design according to the Project Design Documents (PDD) submitted to VCS and CCB.

The REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó were developed under the standards of the VCS v3.4 issued on October 8, 2013 by the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBS), third edition, December 2013 (Fondo Acción).

For the design of the projects, methodology VM0006 “Methodology for Carbon Accounting for REDD Projects v2.1” was used.(Verra, Carbon Accounting for Mosaic and Landscape Scale REDD+ Projects, 2014) In addition, the tool for measuring biomass through remote sensing, designed by Terra Global Capital, was applied, as well as other tools for quantifying the carbon present in the reservoirs, to determine the number of plots of land being monitored that should be implemented, as well as the extra project activities, among others (Terra Global Capital⁸).

The Project Portfolio also considered the environmental safeguards of the World Bank and IFC’s Environmental Performance and Social Sustainability Standard that prohibit support for projects that result in the loss or degradation of highly important natural habitats (World Bank⁹).

The conceptual design of the projects in the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó is based on the “theory of change.” This theory basically consists of attributing the capacity to contribute to the long-term achievement of the objectives for each of the project activities, as a result of considering the casual relationships

8 <http://www.terraglobalcapital.com/emission-reduction-quantification-suite>

9 <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-policies>



Figure 1. Location of REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó (Source: Beltrán et al., 2020)

Table 1. Summary of REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, at the time of their design

Source: own elaboration based on project PDDs



ACAPA-BAJO MIRA AND FRONTERA

Project name: REDD+ Project Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera (ACAPA - BMF)

Project area:

- Bajo Mira and Frontera: 37,572 hectares, excluding forest harvesting area.
- Acapa: 20,640 hectares.
- Total: 58,212 hectares of forest, excluding legally approved forest harvesting area in BMF.

Project zone: Territory of the communities of Bajo Mira and Frontera and part of the territory of Acapa. Acapa was reduced due to access and security conditions. For BMF, the area included is the total of the titled area. The project area has 112,118 hectares.

Location: Collective territories of Bajo Mira and Frontera and Acapa, Tumaco, Nariño.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 10,535,712 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 351,190 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: Community Councils of Acapa and Bajo Mira and Frontera, who have property rights protected by the Political Constitution/91 and Law 70/93.





"COCOSU"



Consejo Comunitario
de San Andrés de Usaragá



SUPP

Project name: REDD+ Project SUPP Siviru-San Andrés de Usaraga-Pizarro-Piliza

Project area:

- Svirú 4,526 hectares.
- San Andrés de Usargá 10,821 hectares.
- Pizarro 17,935 hectares.
- Pilizá 14,385 hectares.
- Total Area: 47,667 hectares.

Project zone: 59,866 hectares of native forest.

Location: The project area is located in the collective territories of Svirú, San Andrés de Usaraga-Pizarro-Piliza, Usaragá, Pizarro, and Piliza on the Pacific coast, municipality of Bajo Baudó in the department of Chocó, Colombia.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 7,917,741 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 263,925 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: The project proponents are the Community Councils of Svirú, San Andrés de Usaragá, Pizarro, and Pilizá, who have property rights protected by the Political Constitution/91 and Law 70/93.



CHOCÓ-DARIÉN

Project name: REDD+ Project Chocó-Darién Conservation Corridor

Project area: The project area corresponds to more than 9,000 hectares distributed in two non-contiguous blocks, both adjacent to the Darién National Park in Panama.

Project zone: Municipality of Acandí, department of Chocó, Colombia.

Location: Community Council of black communities COCOMASUR in the Río Toló river basin and in the Southern Coastal Zone of the Acandí municipality. Collective title recognized through Resolution 1502 of 2005 Incoder.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): Not reported in the design phase.

Estimated emission reductions: 80,938 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: AnthroTECT and the Community Council of the Black Communities of the Río Tolo River Basin and the Southern Coastal Zone (Cocomasur).



RÍO PEPÉ Y ACABA

Project name: REDD+ Project Collective Territories of the Black Communities of the Río Pepé and Acaba

Project area: 47,902 hectares of forest influenced by project activities, of which 4,757 hectares belong to Río Pepé and 43,145 hectares belong to Acaba. Areas with forest management plans are excluded because harvesting activities will continue in these areas in the future.

Project zone: 84,804 hectares.

Location: Department of Chocó, Colombia. It is located on the Pacific coast, in the municipalities of Medio and Alto Baudó, department of Chocó. The nearest towns are Medio and Alto Baudó.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 6,135,587 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 275,738 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: Community Councils of Río Pepé and Community Councils of Acaba, who have property rights protected by the Political Constitution/91 and Law 70/93.



MUTATÁ

Project name: REDD+ Project Mutatá Indigenous Reservations

Project area: The project area corresponds to 33,797 hectares of forest influenced by project activities. Forest Management Plan Areas are excluded as they will continue to be harvested in the future.

Project zone: 42,437 hectares of native forest.

Location: Department of Antioquia, Colombia.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 4,241,776 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 141,393 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: The Embera-Katio communities of Chontadural Cañero, Embera-Katio of Jaikerazavi and Embera-Katio of Coribí-Bedadó.



CONCOSTA

Project name: REDD+ Project Concosta

Project area: 5,348 hectares of conservation and 73,033 hectares of project area, corresponding to 54,420 hectares of forest.

Project zona: It includes the area that directly affects the use of the land and associated resources. The areas under conservation are 5,348 hectares and the project area has 73,033 hectares.

Location: Collective territory of Concosta, Pacific coast, municipalities of Litoral de San Juan and Bajo Baudó, department of Chocó.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 8,272,143 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 275,738 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: Community Council of property rights, protected by the Political Constitution/91 and Law 70/93.



CAJAMBRE

Project name: REDD+ Project Collective Territory of the Black Communities of Río Cajambre

Project area: The project area corresponds to 60,278 hectares of forest influenced by project activities.

Project zone: Department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia.

Location: Collective territory of Río Cajambre, municipality of Buenaventura, department of Valle del Cauca, south of the Pacific coast of Colombia.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 7,358,393 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 280,991 tons of CO₂ annual average.

Proponents: Community Council of Río Cajambre.



BAJO CALIMA Y BAHÍA MÁLAGA

Project name: REDD+ Project Bajo Calima and Bahía Málaga (BCBM)

Project area: The project area corresponds to 83,269 hectares of forest, excluding, in the case of Bajo Calima, the legally approved forest harvesting area.

Project zone: There are 13,798 hectares of conservation areas and the project area is 104,761 hectares.

Location: Collective territories of Bajo Calima and La Plata-Bahía Málaga on the Pacific coast, municipality of Buenaventura, in the department of Valle del Cauca.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 13,031,611 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 434,387 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: Community Councils of Bajo Calima (BC) and La Plata-Bahía Málaga (BM). Granted by the official title for the Community Council of Bajo Calima by Resolution 2244 of December 4, 2002. For Plata-Bahía Málaga through Resolution 2802, dated December 13, 2012.

CARMEN DEL DARIÉN

Project name: BioREDD+ REDD+ Project Carmen del Darién

Project area: 118,318 hectares, excluding legally approved forest harvesting area in Carmen del Darién.

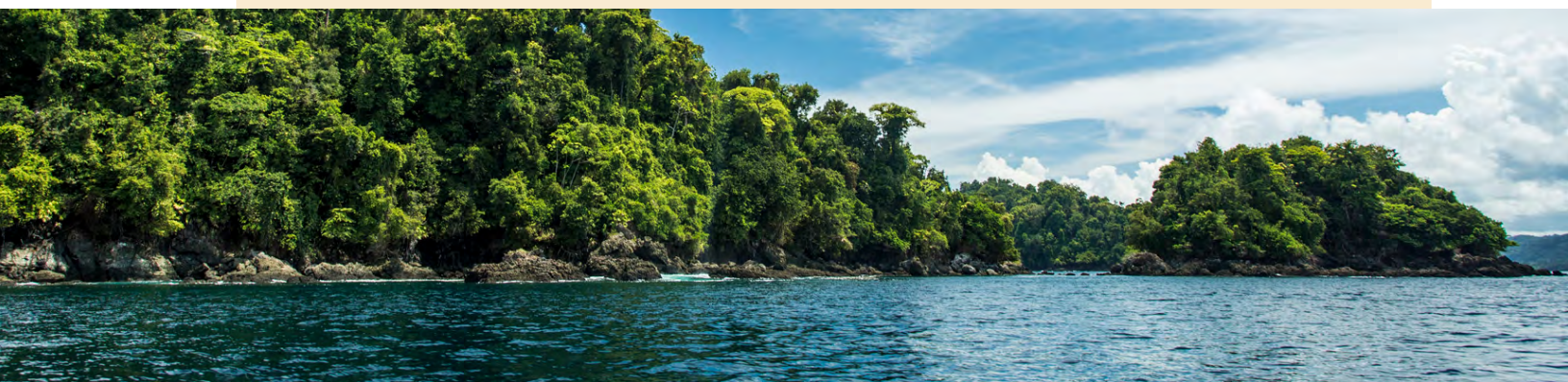
Project zone: 140,650 hectares of native forest. The entire territory of the communities of Chicao, La Madre, Apartadó-Buenavista, Domingodó, Vigía de Curvaradó, Santa Rosa de Limón, and Montaña.

Location: Pacific coast, municipality of Carmen del Darién, department of Chocó.

Verified Carbon Units (VCU): 12,391,716 VCU, over 30 years.

Estimated emission reductions: 141,393 tons of CO₂ each year.

Proponents: Community Councils of La Madre, Río Montaña, Apartadó-Buenavista, Chicao, Río Domingodó, and Vigía de Curvaradó, with property rights protected by the Political Constitution/91 and Law 70/93.



and assumptions that are projected over time. Project activities have been defined and prioritized with local communities who have participated in identifying the drivers of degradation and deforestation, and the types of measures to mitigate them, and were established in a way that would create long-term change and have a direct and positive impact on the communities.

Broadly speaking, during the design of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, the following six general activities were considered: (Biored, 2013):

1. **Strengthening land tenure and forest governance**, including aspects such as updating statutes and defining areas of use and usufruct.
2. **Support in the development and implementation of Sustainable Forest and Resource Management Plans**. These plans included zoning of the territory for production activities, conservation zones, and forest reserves.
3. **Forest delimitation, tenure, and ownership limits and forest protection areas**. This activity included plotting reserve zones within the forests as well as carbon monitoring actions through conservation agreements and the creation of incentives for the payment of environmental services.
4. **Production activities**, ranging from crop establishment and expansion to technical assistance.
5. **Alternative livelihoods**, which would guarantee, for example, value-added agricultural products created within the project framework, especially in terms of processing facilities.
6. **Other activities**. This category of activities included those aspects that were not directly related to the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation, but that definitely contributed

to the improvement of the wellbeing of the local communities belonging to the project, such as access to water (quality and quantity), improving health and education systems, etc.

3.5. Mechanisms and project implementation deadlines

The project proponents are the Community Councils and Indigenous Councils themselves, who, through their Governing Boards, are responsible for forming the community group that will support REDD+ project implementation processes. Likewise, the Boards are responsible for monitoring project implementation and will be in charge of coordinating any contracted activities with Fondo Acción, along with their socialization, conflict resolution and complaints, distribution of benefits, and interaction with the authorities and the environmental police to monitor conservation commitments.

The Community Councils are organized by the community itself. They have an administrative body consisting mainly of a general assembly made up of all members of the community and a board elected by the assembly.

Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez, Fondo Acción, as the implementing agent in recent years, is responsible for managing all investments and revenues from production and carbon activities, efficiently and transparently distributing the flow of revenues to beneficiaries and investors; managing or facilitating the incorporation of special companies for the development and commercialization of value-added products, and establishing trust accounts for each of the Community Councils, which are governed by a Board composed of representatives of the local communities, an investor, and the cooperating entity. They are also responsible for training and hiring a leader from each community to direct and manage the day-to-day project operations.

Fondo Acción has been the main support thanks to training on REDD+ issues. Through the projects and the implementation of the prioritized



activities, governance has been strengthened and the Council's Board has been trained, especially in land management issues. The Board of Directors makes decisions and, in turn, reports them to the Community Council in assemblies in which the entire community participates. The promoters and coordinators carry out tours in the territories in which the community is involved and which have become spaces for socialization.

Table 2 presents the timelines for the implementation of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, based on each project's project description documents and monitoring report.

Proyecto	Fecha de inicio	Período de acreditación	Período(s) del (los) reporte(s) de monitoreo
Acapa-Bajo Mira y Frontera	13/11/2012	30 years	11/13/2013 - 12/31/2018
Carmen del Darién	28/01/2014	30 years	01/28/2014 - 12/31/2017
Bajo Calima y Bahía Málaga	26/08/2013	30 years	08/26/2013 - 12/31/2017

Proyecto	Fecha de inicio	Período de acreditación	Período(s) del (los) reporte(s) de monitoreo
Concosta	18/07/2013	30 years	07/18/2013 - 12/31/2017
Cajambre	14/11/2013	30 years	11/14/2013 - 12/31/2017
Río Pepé	1/12/2014	30 years	12/01/2014 - 31/12/2017
Mutatá	26/06/2013	30 years	06/26/2013 - 12/31/2017
SUPP	26/10/2013	30 years	10/26/2013 - 12/31/2017
Chocó-Darién	18/10/2010	30 years	10/18/2010 - 06/15/2012
			06/16/2012 - 12/31/2017

Table 2. Deadlines for implementation of REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó(Biored, 2013)



4. Evaluation Findings

This section presents the findings of this impact Evaluation, based on an analysis of the different sources of accessible primary and secondary information.

First, and as one of the main results derived from the monitoring reports of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, it can be stated that by the end of 2017, activities to reduce deforestation and forest degradation resulted in the reduction of net greenhouse gas emissions of a little more than 6.5 million tons of CO₂ equivalent. This does not include the Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera project, whose final monitoring date was one year later, which contributed to reducing just under 900,000 tons of CO₂ equivalent (see Table 3). (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019) For reference, in its “Update of Colombia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC),” the Government of Colombia (2020)¹⁰ reported a total emissions balance of 233.5 million tons of CO₂ equivalent for 2015 and 291.3 million tons of CO₂ equivalent for 2020 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. These numbers include the energy, industrial processes, agriculture, forestry, and other land use (AFOLU) and waste sectors.

The main findings are presented below, broken down by each of the components presented in the evaluation matrix (forest governance,

10 <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Colombia%20First/NDC%20actualizada%20de%20Colombia.pdf>

Proyecto	Período(s) del (los) reporte(s) de monitoreo	Reducción en las emisiones netas estimadas en el área del proyecto, medidas versus el escenario sin proyecto (tCO ₂ e)
Acapa Bajo Mira y Frontera	13/11/2013-31/12/2018	895.924
Carmen del Darién	28/01/2014-31/12/2017	779.818
Bajo Calima y Bahía Málaga	26/08/2013-31/12/2017	1'852.924
Concosta	18/07/2013-31/12/2017	622.548
Cajambre	14/11/2013-31/12/2017	579.785
Río Pepé	1/12/2014-31/12/2017	648.915
Mutatá	26/06/2013-31/12/2017	507.343
SUPP	26/10/2013-31/12/2017	1'167.834
Chocó-Darién	18/10/2010-15/06/2012	104.577
	16/06/2012-31/12/2017	330.711

Table 3. REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó and the reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions.(Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019).

production systems, administration, monitoring and verification, and overarching issues, in addition to the sections on lessons learned and significant thematic experiences).

4.1. Forest governance

The training of community REDD+ teams has been one of the sub-components of forest governance and a constant task during the

implementation of the Connected Landscapes (USAID) and Sustainable Colombia Fund strategies, which is operated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with activities such as the 24 days of training and land management, climate change, and REDD+ projects developed in 2017.(Biored, 2013) In addition, the monitoring reports of each project identify specific training activities in both carbon stock and biodiversity monitoring and other aspects, such as accounting, financial analysis, and project evaluation, environmental and social project management, markets, administration and management, and leadership (Verra, 2020).

In the interviews with community stakeholders ([Annex 4](#) of this evaluation), the importance of training was recognized, not only for REDD+ teams, but also for communities in general. This has allowed them to have a greater knowledge of the forest, of its benefits beyond timber, as seen in specific cases such as those of Acapa Bajo Mira and Frontera, Mutatá, and SUPP. In Bajo Calima, specifically, training in remote sensing (LIDAR) and establishing and managing plots of land for carbon monitoring are mentioned. In the case of Carmen de Darién, the interviews revealed that there is a challenge regarding communities' technical qualification, in order for them to be the ones who integrate the technical teams, which would mean that there would be no need to hire personnel from outside the community. In general, in the interviews, the communities identify Fondo Acción as a key ally in terms of training.

Regarding the **zoning of the territory and demarcation of areas**, another subcomponent evaluated in forest governance, which was the follow-up reports of the grant by the Sustainable Colombia Fund, allow us to confirm the importance placed on this aspect as of 2019 (through the development of 17 participatory zoning and planning (Biored, 2013) workshops), although related activities were carried out during the implementation of the Connected Landscapes program, such as the installation of information billboards or community monitoring visits. In the monitoring reports, the projects indicate that during the verification

periods, participatory land use maps were prepared, which are the basis for zoning exercises. In the interviews, community stakeholders from projects such as Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera, Carmen de Darién, Río Pepé, and SUPP make explicit reference to activities associated with territorial zoning, in some cases with the presence of young people, who also participate in the governance visits. By incorporating remote sensing information, this zoning has improved the knowledge that the communities in the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó have of their territory.

The **hiring of local teams and REDD+ Units** has been one of the subcomponents the Connected Landscapes and the Sustainable Colombia Fund strategies emphasize the most in their implementation reports. Hiring specialized personnel is reported, as is the case of the expert leader in sustainable forest management for the Carmen del Darién project in the second half of 2019. (BioRED, 2013)

Project monitoring reports also recognize the hiring of community members in the local REDD+ Units who were previously involved in logging, which represents an economic alternative, the recognition of local skills and knowledge, and a way to influence the modification of behaviors and perceptions about the forest (some examples are the 24 people



hired for the Río Pepé project and the 7 former loggers in charge of selective silviculture activities in the Mutatá project).

In the interviews, community stakeholders acknowledge that priority in hiring is given to members of their own community, and that only in extreme cases (due to qualification issues) do they resort to external recruitment. It is important to mention that the lack of continuity in hiring is a barrier for improvement recognized during the interviews, which will possibly be overcome when the Annual Operating Plans of the Community Councils and Indigenous Councils begin to receive constant and sustained funding through the sale of credits or VCUs.

Regarding the hiring of women in these local REDD+ Units, since the implementation of the Connected Landscapes strategy, the hiring of women in these teams has been promoted, which has been maintained during the implementation of the Sustainable Colombia Fund and is also reflected in the monitoring reports. It is also clear that most of the projects emphasize the incorporation of women at both the technical and decision-making levels. In some cases, such as Río Pepé, women perform administrative activities, but they are also part of the promotion teams.

Given the conditions of the communities at the time of REDD+ project implementation, the **provision of community equipment** was a priority. During the implementation of Connected Landscapes, equipment was provided to the 19 Community Councils and Indigenous Council, including computers, cameras, GPS, and binoculars. The Sustainable Colombia Fund's implementation report for the second half of 2019 mentions this subcomponent once again, specifically regarding cameras and audio recorders.

In the interviews, it was possible to detect that, as the communities acquire experience handling the equipment, they begin to require specific elements, as in the case of Bajo Calima-Bahía Málaga and Cajambre, where they have acquired items such as wireless microphones for use in

their communities. Both mobile and office devices are managed by each Community Council's Board and used primarily for project monitoring. The interviewees recognize that these teams have been useful for the fulfillment of the prioritized activities in the communities. One of the fundamental elements highlighted in the Chocó-Darién Conservation Corridor project is the need to be connected to the outside world, especially in Peñaloza, which is why they have invested resources in Internet antennas because they consider this the way to be able to communicate with the local boards and have a constant report of what is happening in their territory (Everildys Córdoba-Interview)¹¹.

Culturally appropriate materials are recognized as an important tool for local communities to understand and make the REDD+ project concepts their own, such as those implemented in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. During the implementation of Connected Landscapes, materials were produced and shared, such as the booklet *Leyendo y escuchando del clima vamos aprendiendo* (Reading and listening to the weather, we are learning) (150 copies), the kits *Juégatela por el Pacífico* (Do it for the Pacific) (including its version adapted to the Embera language), and the video “Gana el clima, ganamos todos,” (The climate wins, we all win). For the dissemination of results, during the implementation of the Sustainable Colombia Fund strategy, “Our REDD Story” brochures were produced (700 copies), which adapted the monitoring results of seven of the portfolio's projects to culturally appropriate language. In the interviews, the communities recognize these materials, and in some cases, they have been incorporated into the schools' educational tools (Luis Armando Ospina, Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera)¹². In this regard, the community leader of the Concosta project “identifies a couple of issues to improve,” including the use of illustrations and photographs

11 Everildys Córdoba, COCOMASUR legal representative. January 23, 2021. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

12 Luis Armando Ospina, legal representative ACAPA & BMYF. December 16, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).



from his region and the use of their Community Council logos (José Fernando Mosquera González-Interview)¹³. These aspects could improve the appropriation of these materials among the inhabitants. In terms of dissemination, those interviewed in the Río Pepé project mentioned the ethnic radio as an appropriate vehicle for these tasks and, in some cases, such as in Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera, the need for a communications antenna has been detected to facilitate the exchange with the most isolated areas in the territory.

In terms of **ownership and participation events**, since the implementation of the Connected Landscapes strategy (2012), training was launched on issues such as collective rights, climate change, and the REDD+ concept. Over time, these spaces have evolved from training events (21 workshops in 2017), to spaces for dialogue and participatory construction of management tools, as in the case of the 39 participatory spaces organized during the second half of 2019.

The monitoring reports reaffirm the importance of events where

13 José Fernando Mosquera González. Legal Representative Concosta. December 1, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via phone, [Annex 4](#).

capacities are generated in relation to territorial governance, particularly in matters of Law 70 for black communities. Two general perceptions can be drawn from the interviews with local stakeholders: that these types of events are useful and timely for learning new things (even beyond what is directly related to REDD+ issues) and that as long as these workshops are planned in advance and with adequate logistical coordination, local communities will participate and, in some cases, even exceed expectations. However, it should be noted that the community leader of the REDD+ Concosta project considers that the number of workshops “can be confusing, resulting in the same people being trained” (José Fernando Mosquera González-Interview)¹⁴. Perhaps one of the aspects to be improved is the technical language used in some of these events, although interviewees recognize the efforts of the Fondo Acción team to promote inclusive and culturally appropriate language.

4.2. Production systems

The design of **action plans for production lines (including feasibility assessments and farm plans)**, has been one of the subcomponents that has required the most effort throughout the process. Since projects were in their initial PDD stage, different production lines that were considered relevant for each of the communities were chosen—with confidence and participation. However, with the passage of time, and thanks to Fondo Acción’s participation, some of these plans were changing, and a period of transition and community work was necessary for the implementation of the new plans (Fondo Acción, 2018). According to the information gathered in the interviews, the communities highly value the fact that they have been able to participate in choosing activities and maintaining their production systems.

For example, in Río Pepé and Acaba, the communities had approximately 20 hectares of annatto in production, and the project expects to reach

14 José Fernando Mosquera González, legal representative Concosta. December 1, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via phone, [Annex 4](#).



200 hectares in these two territories. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019) In the case of the Carmen del Darién REDD+ project, the production systems that had been considered in the design phase, plantain and cocoa, were implemented. However, rice had also been prioritized, but they do not yet have the resources to implement it. The Indigenous Council of Mutatá has had cocoa crops since the project began, and technical assistance has been offered to improve production, which is reflected in the improvement of approximately 12 hectares of crops. Fishing has also been strengthened as an alternative livelihood in addition to cocoa production, since the communities have previous experience in raising cachama and tilapia. To this end, the project has provided outboard motors and other tools to improve fish marketing. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019)

The feeling of the communities is positive about the production alternatives that are being worked on. Strengthening the development of farms with mixed cropping systems is suggested, where priority crops are mixed with other timber or edible alternatives, as they do in Mutatá. There, cocoa crops are traditionally combined with bananas. Timber extraction in agroforestry settings provides income in the short term, while cocoa is growing. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019).

It is important to note at this point that some communities have yet to see the economic results of these efforts, as the crops are still very young. However, community perception is favorable as the action plans are progressing.

Regarding the **strengthening of production lines and value chains (business linkages)**, the communities in general acknowledge the support they have received from Fondo Acción and the evolution of this subcomponent in terms of improving production chains and strengthening community capacities. Prior to Fondo Acción's support, a very high percentage of the harvest simply stayed in the community for their own consumption. Thanks to the partnerships that have been managed throughout the process, some communities, in addition to having a stable job, also have a competitive production system for the market. The 2019 Monitoring Reports highlight the hiring of experts in the different production lines, especially for the açai, cocoa, coconut, and annatto crops, and for fishing. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019)

One example of strengthening production lines and improving value chains was in the community of Río Pepé, where an agreement was reached with MeyberSAS and Selacéutica for the commercialization of annatto. This is thanks to the joint work between the communities and Fondo Acción's support.

In Cajambre, the pilot phase of açai commercialization began and the production and sale of 10 tons of açai was defined as a goal. The results were quite positive, since as of December 2019, a harvest result of more than 7,000 kilos of fruit and the transformation into approximately 2 tons of pulp was obtained. Communities in general recognize the process they have experienced, but have also identified the need for Community Councils and communities to continue to focus the strategy on economic development. This is due to the fact that they identify a limitation in

the commercialization of their products, since not all of them have a guaranteed market for their sale or a sufficient volume (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019).

Crop establishment and improvement (phytosanitary management) is one of the strongest points recognized by all communities. This result is mainly due to the constant workshops and training carried out by Fondo Acción in order to tell the community about new ways and strategies to improve the production chain. The communities are grateful for the training sessions, especially those focused on pest management, planting, and processing, which, in addition to involving a large number of families, have also resulted in an increase in the number of hectares under production schemes. For example, in Río Pepé, the workshops focused on the development of new grafts and pest management for cocoa cultivation.

Concosta also recognizes that açai is a historical crop in the region and that, thanks to the training, they have learned about the use of natural açai palms (clean) and how to obtain the best product with techniques for the management and conservation of the forest. Even though the communities recognize the importance of receiving workshops focused on crop improvement, many consider that at this point, after years of work and accompaniment by Fondo Acción, it is important to focus the workshops on extending and expanding the cultivation areas in order to increase the production areas.

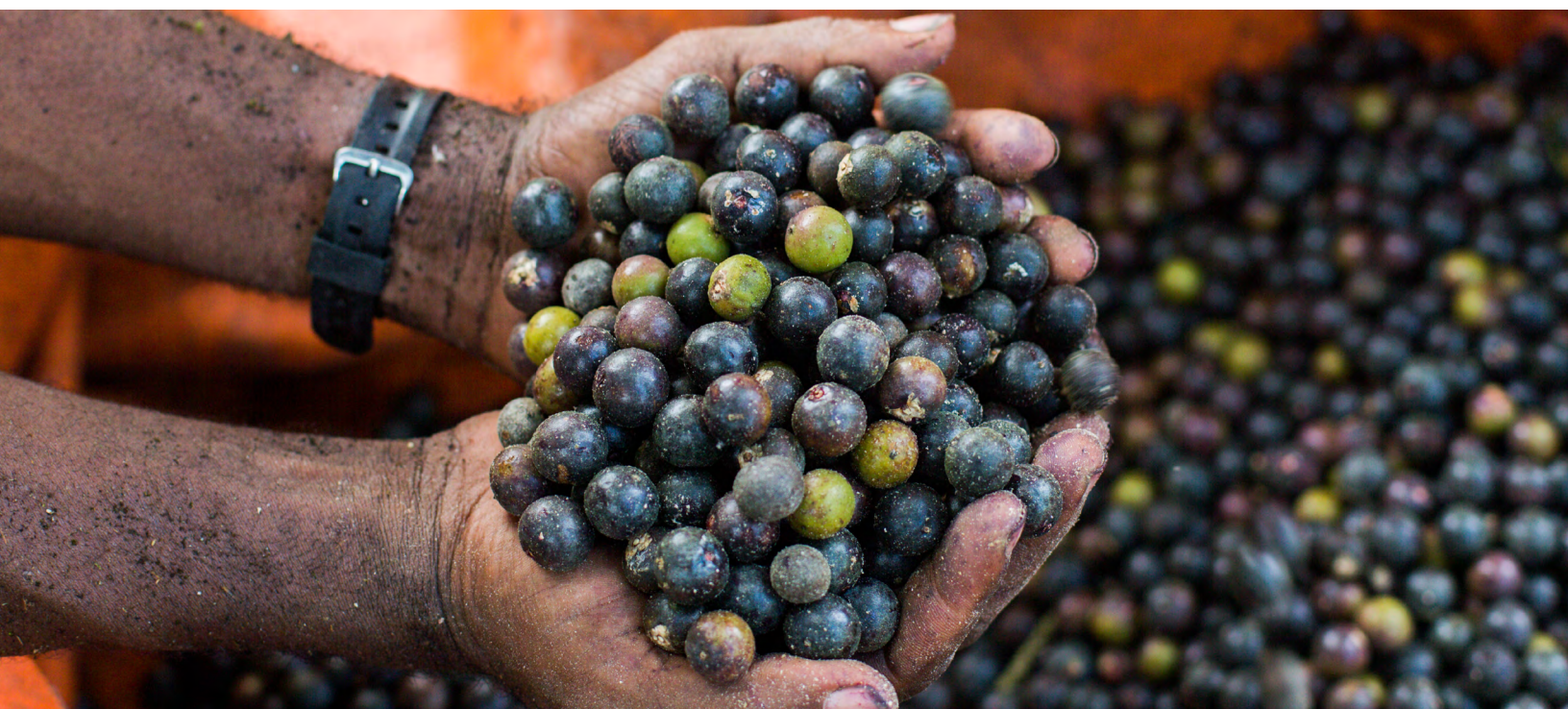
Considering that most of the projects were focused on strengthening production systems, the issue of **Conservation Agreements** is not so visible. However, the economic alternatives and synergies that have been created in the Community Councils have had a positive impact on forest conservation. According to information for 2015-2016, the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio had 280 hectares under conservation

agreements and in the 2018 report, there were already 1,041 hectares, which shows a significant increase.(Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019)

Currently, the communities in general recognize the importance of the forest in their territory and value the fact of being able to maintain it through new forms of work. As Yovani Dogari¹⁵ states in his interview: “Awareness has been raised that it is possible to work without exploiting natural resources and that there are more production alternatives such as cocoa and cassava, fish farming, livestock, and silvopastoral systems, and this generates less impact on forests.”

The **Training and Agricultural Field Schools (ECA, as per its Spanish acronym)** have been a fundamental part of the project’s success. The field schools are the ones that favor the improvement of techniques by the producers, which is evidenced in the improvement of the crops, the quality of the harvested product, and the income received by the families. In terms of production lines, the communities emphasize that, thanks to the knowledge acquired in the workshops, their relationship

15 Yovani Dogarí, Mutatá community leader. December 1, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).



with the crops has improved significantly. In the 2017 monitoring report, 12,157 people trained in HARMOS Workshops were recorded, including several women. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019) The main points addressed in the workshops are aimed at phytosanitary control, training in surveillance and monitoring strategies, as well as sustainable and appropriate fishing techniques. However, even though there is a high level of community participation in the annual reports, the communities recognize and appreciate the importance of the workshops and trainings. However, in the interviews they mentioned the need to diversify the theme of the workshops and focus them on topics related to entrepreneurship or ecotourism.

Regarding the subcomponent of **supplies and tools**, both for the control, monitoring, and verification of projects and to strengthen production projects, the community recognizes Fondo Acción's efforts to guarantee the supply of all tools. According to the information recorded in the PDD regarding the different materials to be supplied and what was mentioned in the monitoring reports and the information provided in the interviews, it can be established that the project has been complied with.

The representatives interviewed from the different projects acknowledged the provision of computers, binoculars, primers, and GPS to carry out monitoring and control tasks. They are also grateful for the supply of seedlings, fertilizers, plant material, and work tools to strengthen and facilitate the work in the communities. Families dedicated to fishing as an alternative activity also recognize the usefulness of coolers and freezers, and outboard motors for fish marketing.

Regarding the last subcomponent, which refers to **business legal advice and support for business strengthening**, it can be established that, even though it is useful, it is not as appropriate for the community and they

recognize that they need more support in business issues. For example, in Siviru, in 2017, training was received regarding the action plan that included, among others: restructuring and adjustment of the bylaws, trainings, and advice to 5 people (1 woman) on topics such as diagnosis and organizational structure, team profiles, and accounting and legal concepts for the management of the company. This same year, in Cajambre, they received support in the production of a peach palm presentation brochure and the elaboration of a business model for this product. Years later, according to the 2019 monitoring report on the Río Pepé, two consultancies were conducted through the Partnerships for Forest P4F counterpart, one of the trainings focused on operations and logistics, and the second talked about marketing and focused on açai.

4.3. Administration, monitoring, and verification

The administration, monitoring, and verification component is key for the fulfillment of the objectives of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, especially those related to climate change mitigation through the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation (Bernal, A., Fontecha, M.M., Jiménez, N., 2020).

The subcomponent of **administration and strategic planning** of the projects has been framed in the training of community teams, especially in administration, management, and leadership through spaces aimed at members of the Governing Boards and community teams of project REDD+ units. The involvement of the community from the beginning of the projects has been vital for the appropriation, knowledge, and continuity of the activities. Although there are difficulties with the appropriation of technical concepts, through meetings, workshops, and trainings, the knowledge of the community and its representatives on all REDD+ issues has been strengthened (Fondo Acción, 2018).

The training workshops on basic concepts, and especially on REDD+ issues developed for the leaders of the Community Councils (legal

representatives, boards, and teams of local promoters), have provided the necessary understanding for the leaders to appropriate the issues and thus facilitate a bridge of effective knowledge transmission to community members and other stakeholders. The interviews validated the importance of the training and workshops for the communities. In general, the community attends the workshops with ease, even if it means traveling and spending days away from their production activities. A specific case is the feedback from the communities of SUPP and Concosta, where they stated that they should be summoned well in advance and offered transportation, food, and lodging to guarantee attendance. In this regard, it should be mentioned that the workshops are usually held in the most populated centers and sometimes, attendance involves traveling long distances that the community is not willing to do.

In this line of **monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV)**, sforest plots and measurements of carbon, social, and biodiversity indicators have been carried out. This information generates the inputs that allow the construction of verification reports. To coordinate and carry out activities, including MRV, each project, with its own characteristics, had a REDD+ unit whose team included representatives from the communities (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019).



The resources that have arrived within the framework of the REDD+ project have been very important to strengthen the organizational dynamics. Previously, the Community Council had very little to do in order to have a presence in the territory. In this way, the resources from REDD+ projects added to others have allowed them to reach the communities, talk to them, and reduce the skepticism that surrounded the REDD+ project (Luis Armando Ospina-Interview)¹⁶.

In the different interviews with the legal representatives of the Community Councils and Indigenous Councils, it was evident how the REDD+ projects have imposed dynamics on the Community Council Boards. Meetings are more frequent and the Boards are more coordinated and have a greater presence of their members, as stated by the coordinator of the Cajambre/LPBM-BC REDD Unit¹⁷.

Although the decision-making scheme has not changed, the General Assemblies and the Governing Boards (Regional and Rural (veredal) Boards) have been strengthened. The project has increased the participation of the communities in these spaces, as confirmed by one of the interviewees: “We are more coordinated and more united,” (Dilma Rodríguez-Interview)¹⁸. The constant participation of the community in the tours and monitoring activities is a reflection of the increase in local capacities. “We have learned new techniques and processes to take care of the forest and how to improve our relationship with it (...) We have field forms to gather information, for the findings (logging, biodiversity, etc.)” (Hoover Carabalí-Interview)¹⁹.

16 Luis Armando Ospina, legal representative ACAPA & BMYF. December 16, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

17 Bernardo Orobio, Cajambre/LPBM-BC REDD Unit coordinator. November 23, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Zoom, [Annex 4](#).

18 Dilma Rodríguez, Río Pepé REDD Unit coordinator. November 30, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

19 Hoover Carabalí, leader in the Pacific. December 1, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

It is important to highlight the project execution scheme, which includes the administration of resources by the Community Councils and the Indigenous Council. It is recognized in the different interviews that the legal representatives and coordinators of the REDD+ units manage the programming and execution modality through the Annual Operating Plans, which reflects the administrative and financial strengthening of the communities.

The objective of the monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) component is to generate local capacities in MRV for the process of external and independent verification of the tons of CO₂ prevented as a result of the actions implemented in REDD+ projects. Thus, the subcomponent **training events for MRV liaisons** has been developed with the participation of the community.

According to what was reported in the monitoring report for the second half of 2020, during this period, together with the communities, the operating manuals that define the governance of the resources produced by the sale of carbon certificates were agreed upon and validated. These manuals were presented to the community through a dissemination package of culturally appropriate products for the community to learn



about the process and those responsible for managing REDD+ project resources.

The community has participated in the construction of monitoring reports for REDD+ projects. The reports have been constructed based on information from technical verification studies, workshops with the communities, and follow-up reports on the benefits generated in the implementation of the project during the verification periods.

The community recognizes the importance of participatory community monitoring to know and respect their territory, “a person who does not know cannot experience the territory,” (Everildys Córdoba-Interview)²⁰. These visits strengthen the valuation of ancestral knowledge and the recovery of the direct relationship between the communities and the territory. Enhancing participatory community monitoring made monitoring and the practices required for verification processes easier to carry out and part of community development.

20 Everildys Córdoba, legal representative of COCOMASUR. January 23, 2021. Interview with Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).



The involvement and training of leaders, both men and women, recognized by the community, allowed them to become replicators of the project's knowledge and experiences. For example, the REDD+ Units have involved people from the community, including promoters, technical and administrative support. To name a few: 14 people in the Calima REDD+ Unit and 14 in the Málaga REDD Unit; Concosta: 6 promoters, 1 technical liaison, 1 coordinator, 1 administrative assistant; SUPP: 13 people; Mutatá: 10 people, including environmental promoters, technical and commercial promoters, and administrative personnel. In Carmen del Darién, there are currently 6 people employed and another 6 are expected to be hired with the resources from the verification, information that was confirmed by the representatives and coordinators in the interviews.²¹

According to the monitoring report for the second half of 2020, 6,065,860 tCO₂ emissions have been reduced as a result of preventing forest degradation and deforestation. To date, the communities have their own resources from the first verification, which has enabled them to strengthen the project's management and follow-up capacities.

Replicating these projects from the community has been one of the project's successful practices. The workshops and meetings where the experiences of the Cocomasur Chocó-Darién project were presented and recognized. These meetings helped to resolve any questions, as was the case of the visits to the Chocó-Darién project, "to see that everything was true," (Elvis James Ramírez Gurumende-Interview)²².

"With regard to the **promotion of the sale of VCUs**, it is worth highlighting the agreement for the sale of carbon certificates with the Prodeco Group, which bought and sold 40,000 certificates, benefiting and encouraging project activities and promoting the commitment of the

21 Annex 4. Interview matrix for Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team.

22 Elvis James Ramírez Gurumende, SUPP REDD Unit coordinator. November 23, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

Pacific communities to conserve and restore the forests” (Sergio Petro, Socio-environmental manager of the Prodeco Group)²³. Similarly, Banco Itaú made the purchase of about 10,000 certificates for the offsetting of emissions from the four administrative headquarters for the years 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 (2,192 tCO₂e) from the four administrative headquarters of Itaú. (Itaú, 2013) On the Verra platform, the total number of VCU certificates traded and deregistered from projects from the Redd+ Project Portfolio of the Pacific can be reviewed (Verra, 2020).

4.4. Overall issues (gender and generational change)

The project formulation documents (PDD) did not consider women as direct actors in the project. However, reports and interviews show that the importance and need for women’s participation in project implementation is becoming more visible.

“We are seeing significant changes in terms of women’s participation. The process, although it has been slow, has generated women’s ownership and has increased their participation in the governance and conservation of the territories,” (Yolanda Asomanos Negras-Interview)²⁴.

During 2020, the gender issue was recognized and advanced. “Comadreando” is the proposal for gender guidelines with a focus on women’s participation to guide the design, implementation, and monitoring of REDD+ projects²⁵. These guidelines were constructed in a participatory manner through an initiative led by women to make their influence visible and generate participatory processes in decision making.

23 Petro, S. (December 16, 2018, Diario Portafolio). First sale of carbon certificates for the Pacific. Portafolio. <https://www.portafolio.co/economia/primera-venta-de-certificados-de-carbono-para-el-pacifico-524519>

24 Yolanda García, Aso Manos Negras Foundation. November 20, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via phone, [Annex 5](#).

25 Semiannual Report-Support to the REDD+ Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. Non-reimbursable technical cooperation No. ATN/CM-17084-CO Fondo Acción. Reporting period July 1 to December 31, 2020.



They are in the process of becoming involved in the management processes, as, for example, in Plata Bahía Málaga, where they already have an impact from the Boards with a participatory exercise. Currently, women are frequently involved in administrative issues; however, this aspect is expected to improve in the Community Councils and the Regional and Rural (veredal) Boards (Fondo Acción, 2020).

A great example is the case of Acapa Bajo Mira and Frontera, where women are advancing in associativity to add value to the products: coconut and cocoa. They have identified chocolates as a business opportunity, as well as coconut oil and other derivatives (ice cream), and this has been led by women. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019) In terms of leadership, women have an association and are involved in production activities, families, and in terms of rights. The participation of two women on the Board of the Community Council, who have also been able to travel outside Colombia (Peru and India), is also noteworthy (Luis Armando Ospina-Interview)²⁶.

26 Luis Armando Ospina, legal representative ACAPA & BMYF. December 16, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

The participation of the entire community, especially women, is key. However, although this aspect has improved, it is recognized that its intervention is mostly in administrative issues and in some governance components. Thus, a challenge is identified to improve participation in decision-making bodies. In the case of Carmen del Darién, the women focus on administrative matters of the project. Their involvement in the REDD+ Unit has improved, but field work there falls to men due to the conditions of the terrain.

On **generational sustainability** issues, several of the interviewees recognize the importance of involving children, adolescents, and young people in training and decision-making. The need is identified to develop specific informative material for them and thus enable them to formalize their education so that they return to the territory and become multipliers of knowledge.

The challenge lies in the inclusion of new generations in REDD+ project activities. In the interview with the legal representative of the Community Council of Carmen del Darién, he recognized an opportunity in the professionalization of young people, which could be a consequence of improvements in the income of the communities as a result of the project, which would imply that they would return to the territories and take an active part in the implementation and conservation.

4.5. Institutional dynamics

It is recognized that the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó has been an interesting commitment of the donors and institutions that have participated, as it includes environmental issues and inclusive and sustainable rural development, and the synergy with different public and private actors.

In the documentary review and validation through interviews, little coordination with local authorities was observed, although they are aware of

the projects and have not achieved great synergies with local programs or resources. For example, in the case of the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), negotiations began in the Tumaco area (area of influence of the Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera REDD+ project) and communities currently feel that the program has been regressive for them. The REDD+ Community Project Portfolio scheme in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, joining efforts and generating regional resources and opportunities, has maximized benefits, especially creating a value chain.

However, one of the greatest challenges has been institutionalization. Working with national institutions to generate impact in local communities implies understanding and managing the timing of decision-making, resource appropriation, and policies of entities that are not always aligned with the needs and timing in the territories. Fondo Acción has managed the institutional work, maintaining interest in the communities and achieving responsiveness and teamwork. More than resources, it is the management of long-term policies that allow deadlines to be met, as well as project expectations and benefits (Marcela Portocarrero Aya-Interview)²⁷.

The interviewees are familiar with the process and have participated in different ways throughout the implementation of the project. They also highlight the experiences and lessons learned from working with black and indigenous communities, which should not be lost. Knowing and working in a region as diverse as the Biogeographic region of Chocó should be taken advantage of and included in other experiences (Catalina Villegas-Interview)²⁸.

27 Marcela Portocarrero Aya, specialist in natural resource management. From the Global Environment Practice for Latin America and the Caribbean - IBDB. December 21, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Teams, [Annex 4](#).

28 Catalina Villegas, Sustainable Colombia Fund Program coordinator. December 18, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Teams, [Annex 4](#).



The participation of the entities is mainly in project financing and design. The institutional actors recognize that at the beginning it was difficult for the communities to accept the portfolio, but without the participation of Fondo Acción, which was able to create and maintain links with them, it would not have been possible to implement the actions in the field. Thus, developing the activities with a local team financed by the projects represented a benefit for the communities and the region.

In addition to the donors and Fondo Acción as the implementing agent, a number of private organizations have joined in the implementation of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó. They have contributed with their experience and technical knowledge, becoming an alternative to leverage the projects throughout the process.

The representatives of the institutions that were interviewed recognize Fondo Acción as an organization that is committed to moving forward with the REDD+ Project Portfolio for the Biogeographic region of Chocó, which recognizes the role of the communities and has consequently done everything possible to build local capacities. Among these institutions, it is recognized that Fondo Acción actively participates in public policy decision-making bodies and has managed to position REDD+ issues on the national agenda.

Despite the above, some of the interviewees concluded that the national government and its entities do not have sufficient capacity to promote



REDD+ projects in Colombia and that, without international funding, projects such as those in the Biogeographic region of Chocó would not have been possible.

The fact that this Impact Evaluation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic made it possible to indirectly establish the level of interest of the local communities in participating in the interviews, even if this meant for them to travel or have unconventional time slots (weekends and outside working hours). In contrast, the team that conducted this Impact Evaluation did not find the same level of receptivity from the organizations that Fondo Acción requested to be included in the institutional interview section.

4.6. Lesson learned

One of the main lessons was to learn to work hand in hand with communities in similar conditions and with similar interests. The project is consistent with the ancestral thinking of caring for the forests. It was not so difficult to accept, because, in the words of one of the interviewees, it was a formal recognition that “we could have sustenance from the forest without destroying the forest.” A fallen tree is carbon that leaks (Bernardo Orobio-Interview)²⁹.

One of the great challenges of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio has been to ensure that the community is the decision-maker, recognizing

29 Bernardo Orobio, Cajambre/LPBM-BC REDD Unit coordinator. November 23, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica’s evaluation team via Zoom, Annex 5.

their ways of life and governance. Fondo Acción's participation with its experience and knowledge of the communities built trust to reach agreements and work in harmony with the communities.

From the beginning, the project contemplated a communication strategy based on the relevant stakeholders: the communities. The work of communication pieces with appropriate language has allowed the communities to recognize and learn about REDD+. In addition, it has been made operational and the results have been seen when it comes to using them for the benefit of the communities.

The interviews confirmed the ownership of the REDD+ project by the community members, who feel proud and have ownership of their projects. The training processes and the tours of the territories made it possible to reach remote areas and people who are becoming increasingly involved in the project and its activities.

The development of culturally appropriate materials proved to be fundamental. The REDD+ brochures, role-playing games, and ethnic exchanges, among others, raised project awareness, as well as its approach, results, and benefits, which made it possible to manage the communities' expectations and strengthen knowledge of the projects and, therefore, the sustainability of the portfolio.

The implementation and strengthening of production systems as options other than logging has been key to the success of the portfolio. The active participation of men and women has been essential in the definition of the production lines thanks to their ancestral knowledge and practices, which have allowed progress in implementation. Changing forestry practices that result in deforestation is possible if there are real opportunities for sustainable and alternative production projects. As was generally evidenced in the interviews with community leaders, it was easy for the communities to reach consensus on the production lines to be prioritized, given that the proposals came from

the Community Councils themselves and that they responded to a large extent to the work they had done, but without the technical or commercial support of the products. These decisions were made by the community in assemblies through consensus and maintaining the traditional activities of each community.

It was found that it is essential to focus project activities on strengthening production chains in order to achieve sustainability of income alternatives. For the communities, Fondo Acción's support in this process has been important and very valuable.

Specific activities of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio, such as zoning and governance visits, have allowed local communities to gain knowledge of their territory that they did not have previously, and recognize values that go beyond the volume or quality of standing timber.

The REDD+ Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó has become a catalyst for the community councils involved to develop capacities related to governance and ownership of their territory, beyond the considerable task of reducing deforestation and forest degradation. Today, thanks to the first actions resulting from the implementation of their Annual Operating Plans, the Community Councils feel that they have the capacity and power to be the authorities in their territory and comply with legal mandates that, in the past, were unfeasible for various reasons, including financial ones.

The REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó has an opportunity that very few have, and that is its 30-year implementation horizon. This circumstance allows the design of ambitious activities

4.7. Significant thematic experiences

The **forest governance** component of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó aims to increase presence

in the territory and promote local empowerment for the projects. In this regard, one of the significant thematic experiences is the Bahía Málaga-Bajo Calima project. There, the REDD+ project has allowed communities to remain in their collective territory, safeguarding it. During the design stage, this and many other communities in the Biogeographic region of Chocó believed that the projects were going to take away their territory or “steal their air.” Today they recognize that REDD+ project activities make the territory more dynamic, make it possible to conserve it and recognize its value. Community leader Ruth Valencia, from the La Plata-Bahía Málaga and Bajo Calima Community Council, affirms that “REDD+ is experienced when you are in the territory.” This experience is additionally significant, given that women in the community have been gaining space and are taking ownership of the REDD+ process..

The **production systems** component focuses mainly on strengthening the production capacities of the communities to improve their living conditions by implementing production alternatives, such as the planting of annatto, cocoa, coconut, and açai, or fishing, to diversify sources of income. Thus, through the strengthening of value chains, significant progress can be recognized in all projects.

Although all the projects report considerable improvements in their production systems, and especially in the strengthening of value chains, it is important to highlight the work done by the SUPP and Cajambre REDD+ projects with açai, due to the evolution that has been seen with the communities and the relationship with this fruit. When the project was proposed, the community was a little apathetic because, although they were already familiar with the fruit, they were not used to growing it on a larger scale than small plots. With the support of Fondo Acción, workshops, and training, the communities began to take ownership of the product. Currently, they have a strengthened value chain, are implementing a pilot project for marketing the product in the country, and are making efforts to improve yields and increase production. Fondo Acción facilitated the accompaniment of an

expert on the subject, which generated great interest in the communities, as expressed in the interviews. Cases like this are what allow projects to be sustainable over time and allow greater ownership of the process in the communities, since, in addition to representing an additional economic income, they create direct jobs in the communities.

The **monitoring, reporting, and verification** component aims to generate local capacities to support the process of external and independent verification of the tons of CO₂ prevented as a result of the actions implemented in REDD+ projects. Within this component, community participation in community monitoring processes is highlighted, as well as support and participation in the collection and systematization of information, an activity carried out by means of LIDAR procedures and establishing plots of land. The interviews revealed, especially in conversations with REDD+ unit coordinators, the knowledge acquired specifically in image analysis, delimitation and management of conservation areas, and indicator registers. In the case of Bajo Calima, training in remote sensing (LIDAR) and the establishment and management of plots for carbon monitoring are mentioned. In the last semester of 2020, the participation of REDD+ coordinators in the collection of information, such as surveys, for the follow-up and monitoring of the perception of the social wellbeing of the beneficiary communities is highlighted.

Finally, it is important to highlight that to date, there are 8 technical studies for the verification process of REDD+ projects, which now comply



with the gold, VCS, and CCB standards³⁰. The projected goals of emissions prevented by the implementation of the projects were exceeded and to date are duly audited and verified according to the defined international standards. There are 7,055,091 tons of CO2 equivalent emissions reduced, 466,828 hectares were designated for biodiversity conservation, protecting more than 70 endangered species. (Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019)

In the case of gender as a cross-cutting issue, it is important to highlight the construction of the Mutatá Gender Plan. It is worth highlighting the significant changes in women's participation. During 2020, the gender guidelines were validated in the black communities and the Embera indigenous community of the Indigenous Council of Mutatá carried out its process to develop its Gender Plan for the REDD+ project.(Verra, reportes de monitoreo del Portafolio de Proyectos REDD+ comunitarios en el Chocó Biogeográfico, 2019) This process was carried out through workshops in which the participation of women in the project was reviewed, the main needs were identified, and the activities were proposed to be included in the AOP of the Mutatá REDD+ Project. In an interview with Javier Domicó, Embera legal representative, he stated that they have made progress in the participation of women. "They are very encouraged in the cultivation of cocoa, they have motivated their families and their husbands, and now they have great leadership and are trained," (Javier Domicó-Interview)³¹.

30 The CCB Standards must meet criteria or conditions, which are composed of 20 discrete criteria, including 14 mandatory criteria and three optional Gold Level criteria, which are: climate change adaptation benefits, exceptional community benefits, exceptional biodiversity benefits. Third Edition Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Standards. CCB Standards.

31 Javier Domicó, Mutatá legal representative. November 26, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via phone, [Annex 4](#).

5. Assessment of the results against the standards and evaluation criteria

5.1. Relevance

The level of relevance was evaluated by measuring the degree to which the project portfolio contributed to the strengthening of the communities' capacities and whether its effects were consistent with the priorities established in the project formulation. Relevance was evaluated mainly through comparison of secondary data obtained from project documentation (PDD documents, reports, monitoring and implementation reports) with primary data obtained from interviews and surveys applied to the relevant stakeholders of the project.

1. This project, like the other REDD+ initiatives, is relevant to both national development and the global context. According to the results of the information gathered, it can be observed that, thanks to the training, the communities have acquired knowledge on governance and production systems.
2. The interviews revealed that, at the local level, the project also acquired a high relevance for most of the inhabitants of the territory,



due to the benefits it offered them. The project has been consistent with local needs, with the ancestral culture of respect for their forests and their way of life. In addition, in the interviews they stated that, little by little, they have taken ownership of the project. More and more families are benefiting, which increases credibility and more families are involved in forest conservation (Edinson Palacio-Interview)³².

3. Some members of the communities (residents and neighbors) obtained their livelihoods directly from the logging and commercialization of timber, without authorization from the Community Councils themselves. It is evident that the implementation of the projects and the focus on governance activities, conservation, production alternatives, and monitoring activities and involvement of many of the community members was a good and highly relevant strategy to achieve the overall project objectives and, in turn, guarantee resources through daily wages to these people. The involvement of the fellers who have experience in the identification of forest species has been a strategy clearly recognized by the communities (Dilma Rodríguez-Interview)³³.
4. A key component of the project implementation strategy is the coordination and decision-making scheme. The importance of including the Governing Boards and Assemblies in joint decisions, respecting the community organization schemes, was fundamental for the acceptance and appropriation of the project's activities. This means that REDD+ projects are not seen as just another project, but as a way of living and inhabiting their territory in a beneficial way.

32 Edinson Palacios, Carmen del Darién legal representative. November 30, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via phone, [Annex 4](#).

33 Dilma Sudelis Rodríguez Valencia, Acaba Río Pepé REDD Unit coordinator. November 30, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).



5. In each Community Council, the Governing Boards had local knowledge of the needs and problems of the communities, which helped to give proper guidance regarding the activities.
6. In the Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera project, the community recognizes that it has been strengthened organizationally thanks to the investments derived from the REDD+ project. The project's activities have made its meeting, dialogue, and decision-making processes more dynamic. The priorities established at the beginning were ambitious and created many expectations in terms of the number of productions systems that could be supported. Not all of these projects have materialized, since a feasibility analysis was done, but the community recognizes that production systems are a good alternative to compensate for the income lost from timber extraction.
7. Since its design, the project has respected the dynamics of the communities in their territory, identifying and strengthening their own institutional processes through training on topics and areas identified by their members, allowing the community itself to identify its own barriers and threats.

8. For the community of Mutatá, the REDD+ project has been very useful and has encouraged greater ownership of the territory, thanks to the community's interest in the project and willingness to acquire new knowledge. In addition, with respect to governance, land management, and new production models, ownership has been quite favorable. More than 800 people have participated in the workshops.
9. One of the objectives is capacity building, in this sense, the project is relevant to the extent that it has strengthened the communities and their representatives for consensus and decision making, despite the fact that in the interview with the representative of the Pizarro community, his resistance to the project was evident. In the interviews with the coordinators and representatives of Sivirú and Pilizá, the progress and contributions of the project in its implementation were recognized. Harold Valencia, representative of Pilizá, stated: "We are a single project (Pizarro, Sivirú, Pilizá, and Usuragá), we have had difficulty in reaching consensus on the distribution of benefits, it has not been easy. Many times we do not speak the same language, however, we have learned that this belongs to all of us and through meetings and with the support of Fondo Acción, we are reaching an agreement."
10. With the technical knowledge of the project, it was possible to design a strategy to obtain additional benefits from the conservation of the forest.

5.2. Efficiency

The efficiency of the project was assessed according to its contribution to the establishment of joint processes (including the contribution of the results groups) that maximize what is achieved with the available resources. This includes the analysis of comparative advantages. The evaluation did not focus on the financial management of the projects,

however, under the criterion of efficiency, the fulfillment of goals, the implementation models and portfolio implementation, the existence and quality of resources and time, and the effectiveness of their use were assessed. The latter was evaluated through analysis of the documentation provided by Fondo Acción (reports, implementation reports, etc.) and the answers obtained during the interviews.

1. The REDD+ Project Portfolio has contributed favorably to community development, creating new participation schemes that strengthen communities.
2. Capacity building in a variety of areas has undoubtedly been one of the best ways to connect a large part of the Community Councils, since they are not only connected to forest conservation actions and activities, but have also recognized the importance of having production systems (annatto, cocoa, plantain, among others) and their processing and marketing chains.
3. It is evident that the representatives, coordinators, and community leaders have a clear understanding of the concept of the AOP (Annual Operating Plan) as a mechanism for the appropriation of resources and the implementation of activities, which strengthens the administration and implementation of the projects and makes them efficient.
4. The project has created synergies with other organizations and initiatives, such as the Pastoral Social for the dissemination of the results, the Corporaciones Autónomas and the police authorities for the control of activities that go against forest conservation, the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA) and Agrosavia for the control of crop pests, and the Ministry of Industry and Trade for associative business processes. However, communities, such as Acapa, identify the shortcomings of the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) and their hopes

for the implementation of the Development Plans with a Territorial Approach (PDET)

5. One problem that has become evident is the lack of continuity in the hiring of personnel. Delays in the transfer of resources or changes in the origin of resources (donors) delay contracting and the implementation of activities prioritized by the communities. To the extent that the activity planning schemes have the necessary resources, whether from donations or income from the sale of products from the strengthened production systems, this situation will change.
6. Although alternative production activities have been advanced, it is evident that there are still no major changes in the income of the beneficiaries of these systems, which generates resistance in some members of the community. In the interview with Concosta's coordinator, the benefits from production activities are still few. The crops need to mature so that the community can continue to participate and generate its own resources. The development of production systems involves cultivation techniques, pest management, planting and processing, processes that take time to yield the expected results.
7. The hiring of efficient local personnel, such as coordinators, promoters, and production technicians is recognized for the appropriation of the project. The change in income contributes to local development and strengthens capacities.
8. The delivery of inputs, plant material, and tools for the establishment of production systems under sustainable practices is noteworthy. Technical assistance for the establishment of crops, such as cocoa or annatto, has improved the relationship with the forest.

9. For example, in the case of SUPP, nine people have been trained for capacity building in the communities. There were 316 participants in capacity building workshops for input, project planning, and implementation, as well as 18 people trained in best governance practices, benefit sharing mechanisms, and project management.

5.3. Effectiveness

The evaluation measured effectiveness according to the degree to which the REDD+ Project Portfolio has achieved the expected results (outputs and outcomes). Effectiveness was evaluated mainly by comparing progress from baselines to the goals established in each project's PDD, based on the review of reports and analysis of primary data, such as stakeholder perceptions obtained during interviews.

1. The main objective of the project is to reduce pressure on the forest through forest governance (including improvements in the recognition of family-use property, land-use planning, and the establishment and monitoring of conservation and reserve zones), the creation of alternative production activities, and capacity building in resource administration and management. Through the documentary review and the instruments applied in the evaluation, it is evident that the general objective of the project has been largely fulfilled.
2. In the area of governance, the project has strengthened forest governance in different ways, such as, for example, updating its statutes, as well as the consistency of the tours, which have helped the communities to be more aware of the limits of the areas of family use and usufruct within the collective territory.
3. The Acapa-Bajo Mira and Frontera project has made progress in raising awareness of the REDD+ concept in its communities, dispelling the doubts and fears that the project caused at the

beginning. However, the communities want to see the benefits they will obtain from forest conservation materialize, given that the 2021 plan is the first Annual Operating Plan to be financed with resources from the sale of carbon certificates.

4. The projects have achieved the involvement of the majority of the community by providing them with alternatives to change their livelihoods, either by connecting them through production systems that are still in the early stages, or by giving them participation in forest visits and monitoring.
5. As the project progresses, there are more people involved and interested in participating and therefore the pressure on the forest has decreased. This is because the fellers and those who illegally harvest the forest are part of the group that makes monthly visits and do other production activities, such as planting and cultivation, and raw material processing. In this way, many members of the community are given the opportunity to participate and to get paid daily wages for these activities.
6. Despite the resistance and inconveniences, the projects have managed to advance and generate benefits in the communities, thanks to the accompaniment and training on issues of interest to the communities.

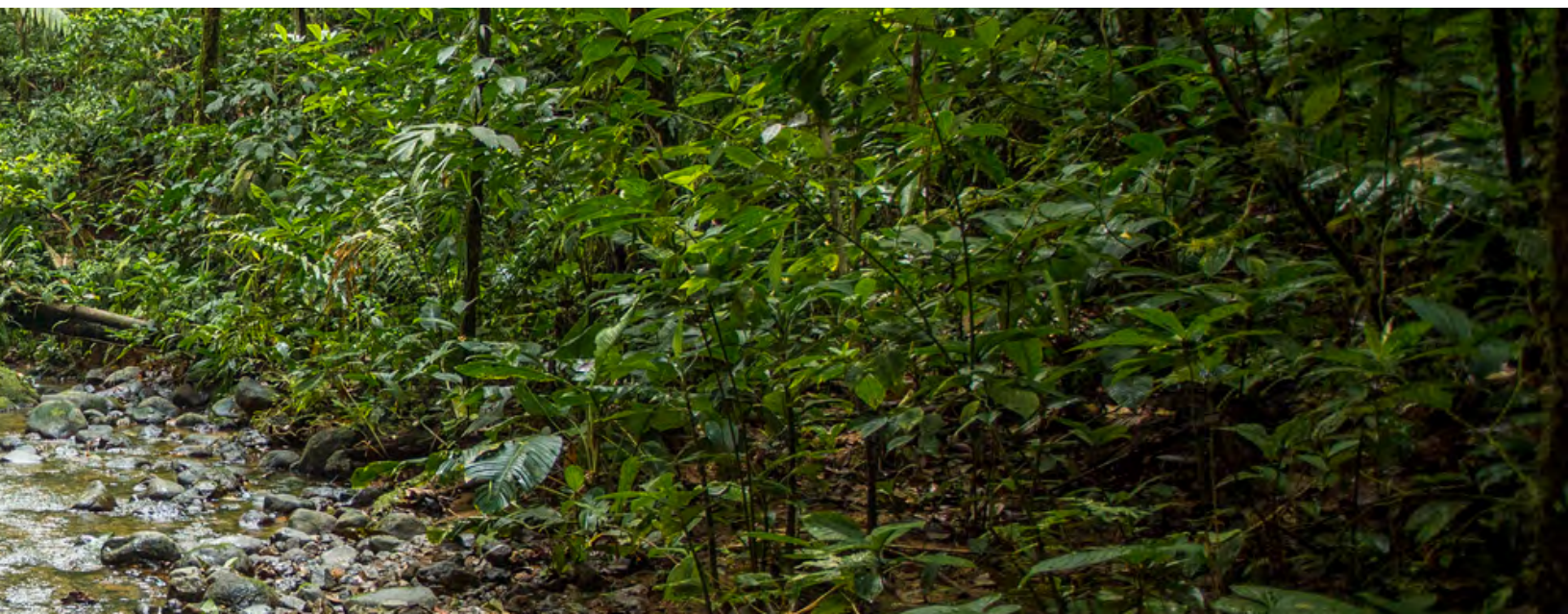


7. In the case of Mutatá, despite the initial difficulty with the appropriation of the REDD+ language, the communities have managed to move forward with the project objectives and have adopted them.
8. SUPP has sought to involve the councils in all processes, involving men, women, and youth equally. Despite the setbacks, the communities have begun to strengthen and modify their production systems and their relationship with the forest, however, they continue to work along the same production lines that existed before the project. The Boards and Fondo Acción, through training sessions and workshops, have made efforts to involve the community and maintain expectations and interests in the project.

5.4. Sustainability

The evaluation assessed the sustainability of the results of the Project Portfolio through the level of knowledge transfer and the capacities that the projects have instilled in the communities involved. The sustainability criterion was measured mainly through the analysis of the findings of the three previous criteria, evidence of the existence of capacities in the communities, analysis of documentary information versus interviews.

1. For the communities, it is important and essential for the sustainability of production systems to strengthen production chains and establish purchase agreements for their products, improving their



production practices and guaranteeing market access for their products.

2. The visits to the villages, which are recurrent and constant, are necessary as a means of disseminating project activities, to strengthen conservation agreements for the continuity of the project and for communication strategies to go beyond the Assemblies.
3. The constant training of community members, in order to achieve greater direct involvement (promoters, technicians, support personnel) of local labor, strengthens project appropriation and its sustainability.
4. The sustainability of the project depends to a large extent on the resources obtained from the sale of carbon credits; therefore, it is necessary to continue with governance activities to guarantee the conservation of the areas and to continue working hand in hand with the monitoring and evaluation processes, which facilitate sustainability.
5. Although some of the communities that have benefited from the implementation of production systems have been able to sell their products and thus generate some income, they have not achieved financial sustainability that would allow them to continue with these activities without the need for external financial support or additional resources from donors.
6. The gender focus of the project has been good not only in recognizing the importance of women's participation, but also in encouraging their participation in decision-making and in some of the activities developed in the field. This gender approach to development is a positive factor in terms of the sustainability of the actions carried out.

7. As stated by one of SUPP's representatives: "Continuing with governance, monitoring the forest, applying the internal regulations of the territory, planning the use of the territory, all this helps its sustainability," (Elvis Ramirez-Interview)³⁴.
8. REDD+ projects have made the Community Council meetings more dynamic, so they take place more frequently. Likewise, the Boards are more coordinated and have greater participation of their members.
9. The Acapa community recognizes the commitment they have to conserve the forest, without it depending on the presence or not of a project or a donor, and that commitment is to the planet. The REDD+ project then becomes an economically attractive and long-term alternative, but to ensure that the reduction in deforestation and forest degradation is sustained after the verification period, they need to move from the production of primary goods to adding value to the products they harvest. They also identify new production systems that have not yet been implemented, such as açai and deep-sea fishing, and alternative production methods, such as mixed crops, which are important to ensure food sovereignty. The latter was evident during the period of confinement that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, when they were able to rely on what they had on their own farms for self-sufficiency and to trade with their neighbors.
10. Although it is a little early to say that this is a project that has guaranteed sustainability for the remainder of the implementation period, it is possible to say that they have advanced different strategies that have internalized in the community not only the need to conserve forests, but also have shown that they can have

34 Elvis James Ramírez Gurumende, SUPP REDD Unit coordinator. November 23, 2020. Interview with Gestión Ambiental Estratégica's evaluation team via Google Meet, [Annex 4](#).

a better welfare (new income) associated with the preservation of their areas.

11. Just recognizing the need to keep the necessary resources for the next validation and verification is a good indication of the importance of giving continuity and sustainability to the project.
12. Based on the information collected, it can be established that there is installed capacity in the territory, thanks to the interest and active participation of the community, as well as the participation of young people, which guarantees a generational replacement.
13. Although the interviews showed that the community's interest in the project has varied over time, the apathy or distrust that was present at the beginning has changed and shows confidence and hope in the project's activities. The execution of resources resulting from the first verification is a challenge to expand the coverage of activities, include new members of the community, and continue production practices with the knowledge acquired.





6. Conclusions

1. Claiming that a portfolio of REDD+ projects exists today in the Colombian Pacific is evidently easier after 10 years of sustained efforts with a high diversity of communities and enormous challenges. Undoubtedly, the participation of BioRedd and Anthroprotect was fundamental, since it is very difficult to think and design projects that improve the quality of life of the communities of an environmental service that is neither seen nor felt, as well as to get the members of the communities to take ownership of them. And achieving a level of conviction and internalization by the communities is undoubtedly the greatest indicator of success.
2. Recognizing the institutions and forms of governance of the collective territories and indigenous reserves present in the territory is one of the best achievements of the REDD+ portfolio. Knowing beforehand that they had to be strengthened and that REDD+ projects had to be designed and implemented from their own instances has allowed the activities to continue advancing and to achieve wellbeing from their forests and natural resources. At the same time, it has generated the empowerment of their territory and strengthened the common feeling for their traditions and protection of their culture.
3. It is necessary to always dedicate significant time to consultation and coordination with the communities, as this will maximize the possibilities of appropriation of the support provided.

4. The Project Portfolio achieved its objectives, which focused on increasing territorial governance and empowerment through conservation and REDD+ project sustainability. As a result, a knowledge base, tools, mechanisms, and instruments were created for the appropriation of REDD+ projects in the communities. In addition, Fondo Acción was able to create spaces and procedures to facilitate the participation of relevant stakeholders in the region and the country.
5. Community representatives emphasize that the projects supported them through capacity building and empowerment, which resulted in the progressive participation of the members during the different phases of the project. The strengthening of governance and the involvement of the community in the definition of agreements was essential to advance in the appropriation of the issues.
6. The governance component of the project has led to a greater understanding that the forest is not only timber and that other types of additional benefits can be received. In addition, people have understood that conservation translates into economic and social benefits.
7. The documentary review and the interviews revealed relevant advances in gender issues and generational change. Although these are issues that were not priority goals of the projects (PDD of the projects), there is currently a more active participation of women, as evidenced in the interviews conducted³⁵. Likewise, there are women leaders and representatives who are part of the decision-making process and promote actions to reach more women in many communities who were not previously involved.

35 According to information gathered in the interviews, there is evidence of greater participation of women in decision-making and project activities. However, for this evaluation, there was no data available to establish a baseline of gender inclusion to be able to show with exact figures the increase in participation.

8. The income received from VCU sales should be used to guarantee the development of other activities defined by the communities in the PDDs. This is one of the pending challenges to be addressed, since most of the projects proposed the improvement of schools, health centers, among others (Biores, 2013), and so far no progress has been made on these goals.
9. The production of material in appropriate language has allowed the appropriation of REDD+ issues by the communities.
10. The project continues to be as relevant as when it was designed at the national level, as it meets the current demands and needs of the regions and the country. It also responds to national and regional policies and priorities, as well as those of the different beneficiary communities.
11. The portfolio of REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó encompasses two radically different ways of implementation: one that did without donor funding, and another that resorted to this mechanism to ensure its viability during the first phase of implementation. Each of these ways has its advantages and disadvantages. First, the lack of donors gave the Chocó-Darién



Conservation Corridor project some independence, but required communities to be highly committed to the project and to develop the necessary capacities to access other sources of funding, to the point of becoming managers beyond the boundaries of their Community Council. For the projects that received support from the Connected Landscapes and Sustainable Colombia strategies, the funds enabled them to implement the activities they had planned, but in some cases these had to be subordinated to the donors' own dynamics and their priorities over time.

12. It can be concluded from the documentary review and the interviews and surveys conducted that the communities are satisfied with the project's activities. They recognize that it has brought them benefits, that it has changed their relationship with the forest and that it has allowed them to know and reorganize their territory. "We have changed a lot, now we respect the areas and what we have to take care of. We have always had the forest, and now we can live better if we take care of it," (José Fernando Mosquera-Concosta).



7. Recommendations

Despite the progress made, there are still several challenges that go beyond the projects and that should be considered, in addition to the situation for the continuity of the REDD+ Community Project Portfolio in the Biogeographic region of Chocó, such as:

1. Develop follow-up mechanisms for benefit distribution schemes, since the appropriation and distribution of resources from the sale of VCUs has just begun.
2. Strengthen production systems, continue with technical and production support, crop techniques, and support for inputs and tools. The production systems are in an initial phase and require support to reach a productive and mature stage that will allow them to create alternative income that will really promote changes in forest practices and management, and favor the continuity of the portfolio's conservation actions.
3. Focus efforts on improving value changes to avoid intermediaries, seek better prices, and expand production areas that generate higher income, and strengthen negotiation strategies for marketing their products.
4. Achieve greater involvement of the private sector to establish marketing chains for the production lines. It is recommended that the products that go on sale have information on the places where they come from and the communities that produce them.

5. It is important to generate dynamics that keep the community active and involved in the project. The interviews revealed the community's interest in holding workshops focused on topics such as technical training, ecotourism, raw material processing, and marketing. In addition, there was great interest in training on legal issues, ethnic rights, and gender.
6. Provide tools, capacity, and confidence to the community to assume the responsibilities of supervision of interventions in the territory as direct beneficiaries of REDD+ projects. The Governing Boards must begin to assume the responsibilities of managing REDD+ projects autonomously.
7. Document lessons learned to capitalize on the experience. It is necessary to have conceptual and systematization documents for each of the components, as well as to socialize the experiences of working with black and indigenous communities in the Pacific region in user-friendly formats. The work of almost ten years is very relevant for future projects.
8. Follow up in the communities on emerging needs or difficulties in order to reduce the factors that generate disinterest in the project as much as possible.
9. The situation of isolation generated by the pandemic highlighted the need of the local communities of the REDD+ projects in the Biogeographic region of Chocó to be able to guarantee their food security, beyond the productive systems to which value can be added and commercialized outside the project's area of influence. Local knowledge should be incorporated into the design and implementation of demonstration plots related to vegetable gardens, mixed crop systems (for example fruit and timber), and small-scale meat production.
10. Make additional efforts so that the buyers of the VCUs understand and take ownership of the efforts made by the communities to participate in the carbon market and that they become the main disseminators of these great achievements made by the communities in the Biogeographic

region of Chocó. In other words to make VCU buyers aware of the co-benefits that have been achieved within these communities.

11. Continue with the involvement of young people in the projects and continue empowering women in areas other than administration, as they have shown a great willingness to participate, learn, and improve.



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9. Annexes

1. [List of documentation received and analyzed](#)
2. [Baseline matrix based on the projects' PDD documents.](#)
3. [Evaluation matrix from document review and interviews](#)
4. [Matrix with interview results.](#)
5. [Matrix with survey results.](#)



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