UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

High-Integrity Carbon Markets Toolkit



Advancing Social Integrity in Forest Carbon Initiatives

Insights from Ecuador

MODULE 2 | CASE STUDY 3

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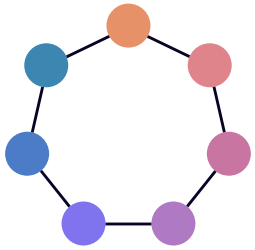
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Acronyms

CONAIE	*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*
CONFENIAE	*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
FPIC Guidelines	National REDD+ Guidelines on Consultation for the Implementation of REDD+ Actions in Collective Lands and Territories
GCF	Global Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
MAE	Ecuador Ministry of Environment and Energy
MAGP	Ecuador Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries
NAP REDD+	National REDD+ Action Plan
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDI	REDD+ Implementation Plan
PKR	*Pueblo Kichwa de Rukullakta*
PNRP	Ecuador National Program of Reforestation
RBP	Results-Based Payment
REDD+	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (plus conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks)
REM	REDD+ Early Movers
RIA	REDD+ Indígena Amazónico
SDB	Sevilla Don Bosco
SES	Social and Environmental Standards



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1 Introduction

Introduction

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This case study examines Ecuador's experience integrating social integrity into its national Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme, with particular attention to **how the country developed and applied a participatory framework for free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in Indigenous Peoples' territories.** That framework was set out under the National REDD+ Action Plan, *Bosques para el Buen Vivir* (Forests for Good Living) 2016-2025, and applied through the programmes delivered under it, including PROAmazonia. UNDP has been a partner throughout, from the readiness phase under the UN-REDD Programme through implementation and results-based payments. The case study illustrates how a strong domestic legal rights framework, combined with the active engagement of Indigenous representative organizations at multiple levels, shaped the design and implementation of REDD+ consultation and consent processes, and offers lessons relevant to jurisdictional forest carbon programmes more broadly.


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2 Methodology

Methodology

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The UNDP PROAmazonia Project team organized a series of on-site visits and interviews with representatives of three Indigenous communities: *Pueblo Kichwa de Rukullakta* (PKR), *Sevilla Don Bosco* (SDB) and *Yamanunka*, and representatives of the regional Indigenous organization, CONFENIAE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*). The rationale behind the selection of the communities to visit was to include two examples of forest restoration (PKR and Yamanunka) and one related to the development of a Life Plan (SDB). Life Plans (*Planes de Vida*) are community-developed instruments through which Indigenous Peoples articulate their collective vision for self-determined development, encompassing territorial, cultural, social and economic priorities as defined on their own terms. One of the forest restoration communities (Yamanunka) had also developed its Life Plan under the PROAmazonia Project, while PKR had developed its Life Plan separately. The communities also corresponded to diverse geographies, institutional maturities and ethnicities, thereby giving insight into a range of distinct contexts at the local level. CONFENIAE representatives were interviewed in relation to their REDD+ Implementation Plan (PDI)[1] and on possible future projects.

Online and in-person interviews were held with representatives of Ecuador's Ministry of Environment and Energy (MAE), the sub-secretariat of Ministry for Climate Change and the National Restoration Programme delegates, representatives of UNDP and the PROAmazonia team, and with members of organizations partnering with CONFENAIE and the communities (WWF, Altrópico, HIVOS). Additional interviews were carried out with members of civil society organizations that work with Indigenous Peoples and with Indigenous representatives not involved in the project. These interviews were complimented with desk-based research spanning academic, governmental and civil society literature.



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3 Evolution of REDD+ in Ecuador

Evolution of REDD+ in Ecuador

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Ecuador began engaging with REDD+ in 2008 and by 2019, it had completed all three phases of REDD+ under the UNFCCC process: readiness, implementation and results-based payments. A key aspect of the process in Ecuador has been the concerted effort taken by international organizations, government agencies and Indigenous representative organizations to ensure Indigenous Peoples were consulted and fully able to participate in the design and implementation of REDD+, and that ultimately REDD+ was executed in Indigenous Peoples' territories with FPIC.



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	Key milestones in Ecuador's REDD+ journey	Indigenous Peoples consultation & participation
Readiness	→ Ecuador starts engaging with REDD+ in 2008. → Ecuador joins the UN-REDD Programme in 2011, with a focus on capacity-building and institutional development, leading to the design of the National REDD+ Action Plan (NAP REDD+) and REDD+ specific consultation guidelines. → Activities centered on aligning national policies with the Warsaw Framework for REDD+. → The National REDD+ Roundtable (*Mesa de Trabajo REDD+*), a formal space for dialogue, participation and monitoring among key actors, was created in 2012 and institutionalized by MAE under Ministerial Agreement No. 049 of July 2017, with technical and financial support from UNDP. It has operated in four periods since 2013.	→ Early consultation through the National REDD+ Roundtable with Indigenous organizations to introduce REDD+ and initiate a process to jointly develop the National REDD+ Action Plan, which incorporated the vision and interests of Indigenous Peoples → Development of REDD+ FPIC Guidelines (2014)
Implementation	→ In 2017, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) awarded Ecuador US $41.2 million for PROAmazonia (the Amazonian Integrated Forest Conservation and Sustainable Production Program), a national initiative led by MAE and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), with support from UNDP. The program also received $12.5 million funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). → PROAmazonía was the first programme to be implemented under Ecuador's REDD+ Action Plan. Operating in six Amazon provinces and the dry forests of the southern region (Loja and El Oro), the programme established a global blueprint for sustainable, deforestation-free production. It also developed practical tools to engage local governments, Indigenous Peoples, communities, and producers of coffee, cocoa, palm oil and livestock in sustainable land use and forest management.	→ Multi-stakeholder dialogues were held with Indigenous federations such as CONFENIAE. → MAG, MAE and CONFENIAE formally established coordination efforts in October 2018 by signing a trilateral agreement to incorporate Indigenous Peoples into the implementation of the PROAmazonía programme. → The agreement enabled the implementation of a wide range of REDD+ measures aligned with CONFENIAE's governance structures, including the development of five Indigenous Life Plans. → These efforts directly benefited over 4,000 Indigenous individuals and strengthened CONFENIAE's engagement with the State as a key partner in the fight against deforestation and climate change.

	Key milestones in Ecuador's REDD+ journey	Indigenous Peoples consultation & participation
Implementation	→ Delivery of the REDD+ Action Plan has also proceeded through six Implementation Plans (PDIs) agreed between MAE and territorial partners, including water funds, decentralized autonomous governments and Indigenous organizations. The PDIs translate national policy into territorial action on forest conservation, ecological restoration, sustainable forest management and multi-level governance.[2]	
Results-Based Payments (RBP)	→ Starting in 2017 and in subsequent years, the REDD+ Early Movers (REM) programme, backed by the governments of Germany and Norway, compensated Ecuador for REDD+ results achieved during the period 2015-2019, totaling $43.3 million. → In 2019, Ecuador became one of the first countries to secure RBP from the GCF for verified emissions reductions achieved in 2014. (Ecuador REDD+ RBP) → In 2021, Ecuador signed an agreement with the LEAF Coalition, a public-private initiative to generate carbon finance for forest conservation. → 2026, Ecuador submits a TREES Registration Document and Monitoring Report (2017–2021 crediting period) to ART, accepted March 2026, advancing the country toward independent validation and verification of emissions reductions results.	→ Funding from GCF was allocated to Indigenous-led initiatives, including: • Land regularization and community and titling; • Strengthening Indigenous governance institutions; and • Conservation agreements in Indigenous territories. → ~11,000 Indigenous Peoples received direct training on REDD+ policies and implementation. → CONFENIAE's REDD+ Implementation Plan (PDI) is being implemented within the framework of the REDD+ results-based payments project, with approximately $2.5 million allocated.
Current phase (2024-2030)	→ Ecuador is updating its National REDD+ Action Plan for post-2025 and is seeking innovative sources of finance and public-private partnerships tied to measurable emissions reductions from deforestation. → Ecuador's post-2025 REDD+ work is being taken forward through the Integral REDD+ Programme, which consolidates support from UK PACT, the UN-REDD Programme, AGFund, the Lavazza Foundation, the NDC Partnership, the Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa (SWISSCO), Felchlin and the GCF.	→ Ecuador continues to promote the direct participation of Indigenous Peoples in REDD+ and climate change mitigation through the implementation of CONFENIAE's PDI, with MAE, UNDP and WWF. → The National REDD+ Roundtable continues to be the primary space for dialogue and participation for civil society, with a significant presence of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and the Afro-Ecuadorian People. This space is in its fourth period of operation, valid until 2026.



4 Enabling conditions for REDD+ in Ecuador

Enabling conditions for REDD+ in Ecuador

4

A number of contextual considerations played an important role in enabling the development and implementation of a participatory REDD+ Programme in Ecuador. These are as follows:

4.1. Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights

The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution, described by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as one of the most advanced in the world in terms of the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights, was a key factor for enabling the conditions for developing the REDD+ FPIC Guidelines and implementing the consultation and participation processes during REDD+.

The Constitution recognizes that Ecuador is a pluri-national State (Article 1), and that nature is a subject of law (Articles 71-74). It also enshrines Indigenous Peoples' ownership rights over their ancestral and community lands and territories in Article 57, including the right to participate in the use, administration and conservation of natural renewable resources located on these lands. The scope of consultation rights under Article 57 span plans, programmes and projects related to exploring for, or exploiting, non-renewable resources, as well as legislative and administrative measures more generally. The Constitution explicitly states that the aim of consultation is to obtain FPIC for natural resource exploitation. The withholding of said consent must be considered in light of other constitutional and legislative protections for Indigenous Peoples' and their rights.[3]

4.2. The participation of regional Indigenous organizations with extensive community membership

The most recent census estimates the Indigenous population of Ecuador to be over 1.3 million people, consisting of 14 Indigenous nationalities.[4] Indigenous Peoples are organized at the national, regional and local levels.

The Indigenous representative organization at the national level is the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE), consisting of 53 organizations from the main coastal, mountain and



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Amazonian regions. The main regional (Amazonian) organization is CONFENIAE. Its members include over 90 percent of the Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon region, who number 250,000 people and 11 nationalities and pertain to a further 22 local organizations and federations in the six Amazonian provinces.[5]

Early experiences with carbon credit projects in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru initially made CONFENIAE and other Indigenous organizations skeptical towards REDD+, and the concept of payment for conservation and restoration activities more broadly. However, CONFENIAE participation in regional consultation roundtables with Indigenous organizations in Brazil and Peru between 2009 and 2012 (for the development of the REDD+ *Indígena Amazónico* (RIA) proposal), helped change these perceptions. The commitment to meaningful consultation and engagement evidenced by those consultations was key in the evolution of CONFENIAE's position from one of deep skepticism, to one that saw REDD+ as an opportunity from which Indigenous Peoples could benefit, provided certain conditions and safeguards were met.[6] These conditions include respect for self-determination rights, titling of traditional or otherwise acquired lands, and respect for the principle of good faith consultation and FPIC.

CONFENIAE were integral to the success of the REDD+ process in Ecuador. As well as participating in the design of Ecuador's REDD+ National Plan (2012-2016) through participation in the National REDD+ Roundtable, CONFENIAE played a central role in the development of the REDD+ FPIC Guidelines (see 5.1), facilitating Amazonian Indigenous participation, particularly in the validation process. CONFENIAE's overall objective was to ensure REDD+ in Ecuador aligned with Indigenous Peoples' rights and vision as articulated in the RIA. It subsequently acted as a facilitator for REDD+ implementation at the local level, in the context of the ProAmazonía programme (2017-2023), which included the development of Life Plans in five Indigenous *Comunas*[7] of Yamanunka, Chikta, SDB, Santiak, and Pangui,[8] and the restoration of over 15,000 hectares of forest in Indigenous lands, including approximately 3,500 hectares in Yamanunka, and 3,691 hectares in PKR. CONFENIAE is now participating as a strategic partner in the Ecuadorian Results Based Payment Project (2019-2026) with its own REDD+ Implementation Plan (PDI). It is also exploring the possibility of entering into a new agreement with MAE for a post-2025 REDD+ implementation plan.

4.3. Political will on the part of MAE to move towards an intercultural approach

Despite the constitutional protections in place for Indigenous Peoples' rights, in practice, their decisions to withhold consent are often not fully respected, particularly in large-scale development projects. This has sometimes led to challenges in building trust between Indigenous communities and the Ecuadorian State. In several instances, mining concessions and other significant projects have been approved and implemented without securing FPIC, even in the face of local communities' opposition. This has affected the perception of the State in some Indigenous areas, highlighting the need for stronger engagement and respect for Indigenous decision-making processes.

However, in the context of REDD+, MAE demonstrated a growing and evolving commitment to adapt its way of working with Indigenous Peoples, and to implement consultation and participation processes. For example, MAE's technical team worked throughout the REDD+ Phases to make the REDD+ policy development an inclusive space for Indigenous Peoples. This was achieved by facilitating workshops aimed at aligning the national REDD+ strategy with RIA and collaborating with CONFENAIE on the development and implementation of its PDI. Another example of MAE's evolving approach was demonstrated in the implementation of the National Program of Reforestation (PNRP) in the PKR territory. After consultation with PKR communities, MAE included *chakra*-based approaches (traditional Indigenous agroforestry systems that integrate food crops, medicinal plants and trees) in the methodology of the National Plan for Landscape Restoration. FPIC is now mandatory in PNRP and legally binding for implementing restoration initiatives on Indigenous Peoples' collective lands. This highlights the government's willingness to adapt and learn from practical experience.



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5 Social integrity as a key success factor in Ecuador's REDD+ process

Social integrity as a key success factor in Ecuador's REDD+ process

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The REDD+ Action Plan in Ecuador stands out as a remarkable example of participatory environmental policymaking, particularly as it is a unique example where FPIC has been both regulated and successfully implemented. The participatory mechanisms for REDD+ were designed to ensure ongoing, meaningful input opportunities for Indigenous Peoples, facilitated by community members and others with deep cultural knowledge and understanding, strengthened by ongoing support at community and regional level. This in turn strengthened community cohesion and contributed to capacity-building of Indigenous communities and their organizations. Aspects of social integrity, and specifically those related to consultation and consent, that contributed to Ecuador's success are outlined below.

5.1. The participatory development of FPIC Guidelines

As part of the REDD+ Readiness Phase, between 2012 and 2016 National REDD+ Guidelines on Consultation for the Implementation of REDD+ Actions in Collective Lands and Territories (FPIC Guidelines) were developed and recognized by formal decree. Participatory mechanisms were critical to the development of these FPIC Guidelines, as was the already existing legislative requirement of Ministerial Decree No. 33, which affirmed the requirement for consultation and consent of communities with collective property.[9] The FPIC Guidelines' legal status was formalized by Ministerial Decree No. 116 of November 7, 2016, thereby creating a specific legal framework around consultation and FPIC that is adapted to REDD+.[10]

The development and formalization of the FPIC Guidelines followed a series of processes aimed at meaningful inclusion and participation of Indigenous and other previously marginalized communities and ensuring consistency with RIA. These included:

- A UN-REDD regional participatory workshop in 2012, which involved the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to ensure an outcome consistent with international standards including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;[11]

- Regional workshops involving coastal, Amazonian and Andean communities in 2013;[12]
- A MAE run workshop in 2014, discussing issues such as meaningful consultation, social and environmental safeguards, monitoring and verification, and grievance processes; and
- A national workshop at the end of 2014 to review and validate the draft FPIC Guidelines and its contents.[13]

An important aspect at every stage was working with an expert on international human rights law with extensive knowledge on the right to prior consultation and consent under Ecuadorian, regional and international law.

The engagement and participation underpinning the development of the FPIC Guidelines was also critical in the creation of the National REDD+ Action Plan, which is perceived as consistent with the RIA[14] and, as such, is supported by many Indigenous communities in Ecuador. The Guidelines include a commitment to the principle of FPIC.[15] Consistent with international human rights law and the Ecuadorian Constitution, the Guidelines clarify that the aim of FPIC is to promote and respect Indigenous collective rights, including the rights to maintain their identity, to decide the form of development of their lands and territories, to manage its biodiversity, to decide their forms of social organization, and protect their collective knowledge.[16] They also outline four high-level steps to follow when seeking to implement REDD+ initiatives:

1. identification of the affected Indigenous Peoples and their characteristics;
2. provision of information to the collective and collection of their input and suggestions in relation to the REDD+ initiative;
3. internal discussion and decision-making amongst the affected Indigenous People; and
4. the consent agreement resulting from the consultation process.

The FPIC Guidelines are sufficiently flexible to be implemented in accordance with each Indigenous groups' governance structures and decision-making practices. Importantly, the state actor promoting the activity (whether government ministries in various sectors or local governments) are responsible for the application of the FPIC Guidelines. They must also guarantee the rights of the affected Indigenous Peoples, including the right to consultation, are respected where third parties propose the activities/interventions.[17]

5.2. Broad-based consultations with different levels of Indigenous organizations

As noted above, CONFENIAE's involvement was key to the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and the requirement for FPIC in the National REDD+ Action Plan. In addition to CONFENIAE, Indigenous Federations (3rd level organizations, meaning provincial and regional Indigenous federations that sit between community-level associations and national organizations such as CONFENIAE,) were involved in facilitating the PROAmazonía programme introductions to communities and ensuring that all communities were involved in FPIC processes. This approach–of working through the tiered structures of Indigenous Peoples' organizations–was formalized in the PROAmazonía entry protocol developed in collaboration with CONFENIAE.



It is worth noting that in Ecuador, approximately 10 percent of Amazonian communities are not affiliated with CONFENIAE. PROAmazonia's approach of ensuring that consultations were broad-based and inclusive by engaging local Federations, as well as CONFENIAE, prior to approaching communities, associations or *communas* (legally recognized forms of collective organization, primarily associated with Indigenous and rural populations in Ecuador), helping to identify such contexts, and reducing the risk of communities being excluded. It also helped ensure disputes about representation were identified, and processes established to resolve them, before consultations on substantive matters were initiated.

5.3. Inclusive participation and the strengthening of community cohesion

Beyond including Indigenous organizations and representatives, part of the success of the REDD+ programme and its broad and inclusive consultations was the attention paid to ensuring the inclusion of all community members in the design and implementation of initiatives, not only representatives from organization. This was underpinned by the requirement for Indigenous communities to implement their own internal FPIC processes when

considering REDD+ initiatives. The REDD+ FPIC Guidelines clarify that internal decisions must be taken in accordance with the community's own processes and governance structures, and be inclusive of all sectors of the community, including women, youth, elders and persons with disabilities. External actors (the State or its implementing agencies) must respect the principle of non-interference. They can, however, validate compliance with international standards, such as inclusive decision-making processes, without interfering with a community's internal processes. That this occurred during the REDD+ process in Ecuador is evidenced in assembly meetings minutes and other material relating to community participation.

The participation of women in particular, played a key role, for example, in identifying a diversity of species to restore in the *chakras* that could support Indigenous subsistence and traditional livelihoods, beyond just trees that could generate an income stream, such as cedar.

This was reflected in feedback from the Yamanunka community. They reported that the success of their forest restoration FPIC process was based on internal communication and a focus on unity, shared beliefs and values, informed by an intergenerational and gender sensitive approach to ensuring long-term sustainability. They also reported that this helped strengthen their cultural identity and change the mindsets of those who had worked for oil companies (mostly younger men). Given the socio-economic needs of the community, the women also stressed the importance of the component of PROAmazonía on bio-enterprises as a necessary complement to forest restoration. Furthermore, they reported that the participatory processes for the development of Life Plans and the design of forest projects also helped support the rebuilding of community cohesion, which had been partly weakened due to historical oil development on their lands. However, as a result of the FPIC processes, the community came together to build a Life Plan and restore their forests.

5.4. Mutually reinforcing nature of Life Plans and FPIC processes

Life Plans provided a framework for communities to make informed decisions on forest restoration, conservation and management projects, while the FPIC process facilitated the participatory development of both Life Plans and the forest projects. The PKR and Yamanunka experiences demonstrated the benefit of communities having the opportunity to collectively develop their own Life Plans before embarking on the design and implementation of REDD+ forest initiatives, as well as the underpinning importance of FPIC. The Life Plans helped:

- ensure respect for documented community governance structures;
- pre-establish strategic direction, including plans for forest restoration (thereby allowing consultations to focus on implementation); and
- communicate the community's self-determined development priorities externally to a range of state and non-state actors.



The implementation of FPIC processes for the design of the forest initiatives helped ensure that these initiatives were culturally appropriate and guaranteed the communities' role in determining restoration methodologies and implementing project activities.

"Thanks to the Life Plan, all our projects are marked by what it means to be part of the Shuar Nationality and the conservation of the forest"

Irma Tsahuanda, Indigenous leader of the Yamanunka community

5.5. Building relationships and the necessary structures and resources for ongoing engagement and support

A hallmark of PROAmazonia's success was its ability to bring together a wide range of actors from government to non-governmental organizations (including Altrópico, WWF, and Hivos) to provide a strong base of support to Indigenous communities in developing territorial planning actions, landscape restoration and promoting REDD+ initiatives.


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PROAmazonía's engagement with PKR, as outlined in interviews and UNDP documentation, reflects good practice in terms of consent-based participatory development of forest restoration. Community consultation was carried out several times over the course of 16 months to help resolve diverging views between MAE and the Governing Council on the appropriate methodology for restoration, budgetary changes, changing intervention areas, and the need to support bio-entrepreneurships.

As part of the FPIC process, PROAmazonía staff regularly visited PKR and SDB territories both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining contact with the communities throughout. Because many Indigenous representatives work long days and weeks, this required being responsive out of office hours. Partner NGOs also ensured continuous on-the-ground presence of field staff. Altrópico ensured this presence by employing PKR community members, HIVOS based staff permanently in Yamanunka, and WWF established a team in Puyo (where CONFENIAE is headquartered), providing an institutional presence to assist in the PDI implementation. State presence was also key. PNRP provincial representatives regularly visited PKR communities, MAE staff were present during the development of SDB's Life Plan, and an Indigenous Peoples' focal point was established in the PNRP offices in Quito, enabling local and national governmental oversight of consultation processes.

The relationships nurtured by these approaches helped manage emerging challenges, such as the impact of national strikes and the pandemic. This approach also ensured an ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders, which played a key role in avoiding grievances during FPIC processes,

or resolving them before they escalated into conflict. Such informal mechanisms functioned because of the relationships of trust developed between the PROAmazonía team and the community organizations, and the effective communication channels thus created with decision-makers in the community.

5.6. Ensuring trusted and knowledgeable facilitators and staff, as well as hiring local people for FPIC processes

Contributing to successful FPIC processes was the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples' rights and political realities held by facilitators and safeguarding staff. **The importance of employing staff with humility, respect and dedication to Indigenous Peoples' well-being was tantamount, alongside employing people with soft skills such as active listening and the ability to situate discussions and consultations in locally understandable frameworks.** CONFENIAE's PDI, and the processes used by PKR, demonstrated the positive impact of Indigenous persons facilitating these processes. Both organizations also employed community members within the technical teams, which added to the feelings of trust and engagement. Likewise, the Yamanunka community stressed the importance of the organization building trust with the community, treating them as equals, and using language, terminology, and examples people understood to show links between restoration and cultural revival. In addition, young people from SDB communities assisted with the consultation process on Life Plan development. As well as contributing to the long-term success of these initiatives, the involvement, training and empowerment of local technicians proved critical to strengthening the capacity of Indigenous organizations.

5.7. FPIC documentation

To record FPIC processes and their outcomes, while also capturing key learning, the PROAmazonía project maintained a range of documentation including meeting recordings, agreements, photos, informational materials, community characterizations, FPIC methodologies, community statutes, land titles, leadership appointments, official communications, and project details and results. **In providing an archive of all aspects of the processes, communities are provided with a roadmap to implementation that provides a vast array of evidence demonstrating that respect for FPIC is possible and leads to successful outcomes.** This can be a useful tool in ensuring other actors engage with them in a similar manner, and in arguing that such an approach should be applied in contexts such as health and education policies and services, or in relation to mining or other activities with significant human rights impacts.

5.8. Adequate budgeting for resourcing and time constraints

For participatory rights to be guaranteed, it is imperative that sufficient funding is budgeted, and adequate time is allocated to the consultation processes. Between 2018 and 2024, over $13 million[18] was strategically invested to advance the rights, priorities and participation of Indigenous Peoples in forest conservation and sustainable development in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The budget for these activities was secured and the projects implemented in a way that enabled consultation processes to run in parallel with participatory design. **Ecuador's REDD+ consultation experiences demonstrate that for participatory rights to be guaranteed, realistic estimates of these costs and timeframes need to be budgeted into programmes.**



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6 Recommendations

Recommendations

6

6.1. Empowering Indigenous Peoples to develop their own FPIC protocols

In 2022, PROAmazonía held a review workshop with CONFENIAE to assess if the FPIC Guidelines were adequate for the forest restoration and Life Plan projects. The consensus was that they were well-received and applied. This view was echoed by Indigenous communities and CONFENAIE representatives interviewed for this case study. They suggested, however, that **implementation could be strengthened if each Indigenous group were to develop their own protocols, which would then serve as community-specific means of implementing FPIC.** By being specific to the governance structures and decision-making processes of each Indigenous group, these protocols could be used in a range of contexts. Future support for FPIC protocol development would be a way of entrenching the learning from the REDD+ FPIC processes and enabling communities to engage on a more even-footing with outside actors, including state bodies responsible for facilitating consultations. It could also help address the perceived ambiguity in Article 57 of the Constitution regarding when and why FPIC is required, in a manner consistent with respect for Indigenous Peoples' internationally recognized rights and with the jurisprudence of the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

6.2. Administrative and financial needs of Indigenous organizations

A repeated theme raised by Indigenous representatives in the feedback interviews was the need for funding to support basic project implementation infrastructure, including building capacity in financial literacy for the organization. As such, a significant part of CONFENIAE's PDI budget is aimed at ensuring its financial and administrative sustainability, partly through support to access more direct funding. Future project budgets should help cover organizations' operating costs and include dedicated administrative and financial capacity-building activities to ensure Indigenous organizations' financial sustainability.



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7 Challenges

Challenges

7

Strengthening Indigenous Peoples' land tenure rights and their institutional capacity to exercise them is one of the most effective ways of ensuring conservation. As FPIC is a safeguard for Indigenous Peoples' collective rights, in contexts where land rights have not been formally recognized, FPIC processes must ensure they are safeguarded. While the Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes that Indigenous Peoples own their lands, with or without titles, in practice, the absence of titles prevents Indigenous Peoples from exercising their land and self-governance rights, which enables others to take advantage of their resources without obtaining their FPIC. It also contributes to territorial conflicts (of which there are many) including in relation to national parks declared over Indigenous lands, with licenses granted to companies to bring tourists into those lands. As noted in the FPIC Guidelines, in cases where land has not been titled, the titling process should be initiated before REDD+ actions are implemented.

Ecuador has recently begun working within the RBP project on land regularization (the formal administrative process of registering and recognizing land claims within protected forests). However, the challenges in this area are complex because tenure conflicts emerge not only with external stakeholders, but also within and between communities. The conflict resolution and legal advice provided in the RBP land regularization processes, within the framework of FPIC, along with the participation of federations and CONFENIAE, has been important in helping address such scenarios. It demonstrates that if budget and resources are made available, much needed progress can be made in land titling and conflict resolution, which would have considerable benefits for Indigenous Peoples' overall well-being, as well as environmental conservation.

Land regularization under Ecuador's GCF RBP Project

The land titling process in the Kutukú Shaimi Protected Forest has resulted in the legalization of 18,408 hectares across five Shuar communities during 2024 and 2025. Titles were issued first to the Shuar Centers of Pumpuis (1,753 hectares) and Tayuntza Norte (7,331 hectares), and on 18 July 2025 to Tunants (2,636 hectares), Kampan (3,879 hectares) and Tsuntsuim (2,809 hectares). More than 1,000 community members have benefited, nearly half of them women. The process was grounded in free, prior and informed consent: over four years, 72 participatory sessions were held across the communities to define territorial boundaries and jointly develop Integrated Management Plans. While significant challenges persist in land titling due to pre-existing conflicts related to boundary demarcation, the RBP project was able to facilitate land adjudication by actively engaging beneficiary and neighboring organizations in consultation and consent processes, and by seeking the support of second-tier associations to support conflict resolution.

REDD+ projects in Ecuador have supported Indigenous Peoples to establish local businesses and economic initiatives. While these were welcomed by the communities, they are not at a scale to meet all their economic needs. Communities and their commitments to REDD+ projects are in a highly vulnerable position due to a number of factors, including: youth unemployment and related migration, the lack of financial resources to support forest protection, mining (both legal and illegal), logging and other extractive activities, and the increasing entry of violent criminal actors into Indigenous territories often linked with the latter activities.[19] As was noted by PKR representatives interviewed, such issues could eventually affect community decisions to prioritize the protection of their forests over extractive industry operations.

Framing national environmental policies including, but not limited to, REDD+, from an Indigenous rights perspective, and establishing the conditions for funding to be channeled directly to Indigenous Peoples in accordance with their needs, could play a part in enabling conditions for greater economic self-determination and addressing these wider contextual risks to the sustainability of REDD+.

Ensuring greater alignment of Indigenous Peoples' Life Plans with local government territorial plans is one element of helping channel funds directly to them. However, a much more concerted and ambitious effort will be needed by the State to confront the aforementioned threats, and to create the conditions under which Indigenous Peoples can realize the aspirations affirmed in their Plans. Without this, initiatives like REDD+ will remain vulnerable to external forces.

8 Conclusion

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Conclusion

8

Experience in Ecuador and elsewhere shows that Indigenous Peoples with robust institutional structures and clearly defined internal decision-making processes to ensure participation of all community members (including women, youth and the elderly), that are networked with other Indigenous Peoples locally, nationally, regionally and internationally, are better positioned to engage in FPIC processes than less organized, more fragmented and isolated peoples and communities. These varying levels of capacity and solidarity can have significant impact on timeframes, costs and outcomes. As such, time and funding to support this needs to be factored into the design and planning of projects. Longer term investment in helping communities build self-governance capacities will be key to realizing the objectives of REDD+, because coupled with legal recognition of, and respect for, their territorial rights and the capacity to pursue economic self-determination, it is one of the key contributors to forest protection and conservation.



There is a diversity of opinions about carbon markets amongst Indigenous Peoples. Some object to the commercialization of nature, and regard carbon markets as a means for governments and companies to continue, and even increase, carbon emission activities, viewing them, as a false solution to climate change. Others adopt the position encapsulated in the slogan 'No Rights-No REDD+', holding that, provided they are designed and implemented with adequate rights safeguards that ensure respect for self-determination and autonomy, territorial and cultural rights, as well as fair and equitable benefit sharing, carbon markets can benefit Indigenous Peoples.[20]

To date, a regulated carbon market has yet to emerge in Ecuador. However, it is being discussed in government.[21] The possibility of a jurisdictional REDD+ programme or private carbon credit projects raise important questions, including: what rights do Indigenous Peoples' have over carbon stored in their forests? How will consultations be held about regulation of carbon markets? How will FPIC for potential impacts on rights be guaranteed? And how will fair and equitable benefit sharing arrangements be negotiated? The experience of designing and developing REDD+ in Ecuador to date can provide some important lessons learned for these questions.


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Endnotes

1 Plan de Implementación (PDI) de Medidas y Acciones REDD+ en Territorios Indígenas Amazónicos del Ecuador, or Implementation Plan (PDI) for REDD+ Measures and Actions in Indigenous Territories in the Amazon of Ecuador Holistic Management of Forests, Biodiversity, and Territories in Amazonian Nationalities to Combat Climate Change. CONFENIAE's PDI was approved by MAE in January 2019.

2 The six PDIs are FONAG, FONAPA and FORAGUA (2017-2022); the Provincial Government of Pastaza, Phase I (2021-2025); Verde Canandé (2019-2025); San Pablo del Lago (2022-2023); and CONFENIAE, Phase I (2022-2025).

3 Indigenous Peoples also have the right to participate in the benefits derived from the exploitation of these resources and to be compensated for any related social, cultural and environmental damage. They are entitled to protect their biodiversity, exercise their natural environment management practices, and participate in the establishment and implementation of programmes to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

4 Those are, Tsáchila, Chachi, Epera, Awa, Quichua, Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Cofán, Siona, Secoya, Zápara, Andoa and Waorani. See Dwayne Mamo (ed.) (2023). The Indigenous World 2023. The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). CONAIE refers to 18 nationalities and 15 peoples.

5 Regionally, in Latin America, the Amazonian Indigenous Peoples are represented by COICA (Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin); COICA coordinates proposals and negotiations at regional and international levels concerning their member organizations territories and environment.

6 This mirrors the experience of Andean Indigenous communities in Ecuador with the Forest Partnership Programme–Programa Socio Bosque (PSB) – with a recent research paper echoing findings that "in theory, using cash-based payments to incentivize conservation practices appears antithetical to Indigenous values and worldviews, such as Pachamama. In practice, the responses and expenditures of community members suggest that Indigenous peoples were not necessarily opposed to putting a price on the páramo, but rather receiving a price that reflected what they felt was a fair land-use value." McBurney, Matthew & Tuaza, Luis & Johnson, Craig. (2022). Paying for ecological services in Ecuador: The political economy of structural inequality. Journal of Agrarian Change, 23:2, 385-403.

7 In Ecuador, a comuna is a legally recognized form of collective organization, primarily associated with Indigenous and rural populations. See: Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas.

8 PROAmazonía Policies and Institutions, accessible at: INICIO - Proamazonia Programa Integral Amazónico de Conservación de Bosques Sostenible.

9 MAE Ministerial Agreement No. 33 (2013), Article 10, establishes conditions for the implementation of REDD+ activities. Article 10(1): the "requirements and procedures for free, prior and informed consultation of Indigenous Peoples and nationalities, Afroecuadorian and montubio peoples and communes for REDD+ activities; or, when their territories, lands and resources are affected or threatened by the implementation of REDD+ activities." Article 10(2): "where a proprietor seeks to implement a REDD+ project in the "land of collective property, additionally s/he must certify the consent, the full and effective participation of the community or communities involved, as an essential requirement."

10 MAE Ministerial Agreement No. 116 (2016).

11 National REDD+ Action Plan, p. 78.

12 The workshops were held in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Pastaza and Sucumbíos.

13 MAE, Ecuador Forests for Good Living REDD+ Action Plan 2016–2025, p. 78.

14 National REDD+ Action Plan, p. 89.

15 Guía Nacional de Consulta para la Implementación de Acciones Redd+ en Tierras o Territorios Colectivos, Ministerio del Ambiente de Ecuador (henceforth, FPIC Guide), 2016, p. 5.

16 FPIC Guide, p. 5.

17 While only Indigenous communities were visited on the fieldtrip for this case study, it is notable that the REDD+ FPIC Guidelines also include Afro Ecuadorian Peoples, the Montubios, and other collectivities that depend on forest resources for their subsistence.

18 $7.46 million from PROAmazonía; $5.15 million from the GCF Results-Based Payments (RBP) project; and $635,000 from UK DEFRA and GCF co-financing.

19 United Nations (2023). "Using the Organized Crime Convention for stronger legislation on illegal mining and trafficking in metals and minerals in Latin America", UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

20 This is the position of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) and was reflected in the 2010 report of the UNPFII on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change UNPFII E/C.19/2010/7.

21 See Jonathan Palma (2024). "Ecuador opens to carbon markets, amid optimism and opposition," Dialogue Earth, (30 September); Carbon Plus (2024). "Ecuadorian legislature votes to legalise carbon markets" (17 September).



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