

Natural
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Natural Climate Solutions in Action

The Conservation Coast

Project/Program Type	Landscape-scale community-based project for forest protection under the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism.
Description	This project is the world's largest grouped forest-based carbon project bringing together hundreds of diverse landowners to protect more than 55,300 hectares of threatened tropical rainforest on the Guatemalan Caribbean. The Conservation Coast is a shining example of a landscape-scale and community-based project that takes a multi-faceted approach to conservation, rooted in diverse involvement from stakeholders. With conflict over resources one of the key contributors to deforestation and forest degradation, this is a long-term and resilient conservation strategy.
Location	The project is located in an area of Guatemala that has experienced some of the highest global deforestation rates in the world. Located in Guatemala's Izabel region and spanning the entire Caribbean coastline, the project lies within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, a vital habitat for migratory birds as they traverse central America.
Scale	55,308 hectares of forest protected, as of the end of 2020. Future scale is 128,448 hectares.
Number of credits verified	5,354,168 (2020 verification)



Impacts

Impact To-Date

To date, the project has avoided over 6 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions by protecting 55,308 hectares of tropical forest threatened by the expansion of industrial agriculture, such as for palm oil and cattle ranching. In doing so, habitat for 30 threatened species, including the West Indian manatee, has been conserved. Project activities are supporting 487 entrepreneurs and local producers, 24% of which are women, and three sustainable business lines have been promoted, such as an ecotourism travel hub. To date, project activities have contributed €8.4 million to the local economy, and helped to boost the production and sale of sustainable commodities, including cardamom pepper and lychee.

*figures are from end of 2020

Projected Longer-Term Impact

The project's current phase comes to a close in 2022, but the impacts so far achieved are just the start. With a lifetime out to 2042, the project will aim to achieve total emissions reductions of 21,844,843 over 30 years. During this time frame, the project also has the potential to conserve up to 128,448 hectares of tropical forest. Looking beyond the current phase, the project is targeting increased involvement with both indigenous and non-indigenous communities, and further engagement with women to improve health and education outcomes.



A REDD+ Lifeline for Guatemala's Indigenous Communities

Emilio Pitan became the national representative of Guatemala's indigenous Q'eqchi' people in 2020—the same year that consecutive November hurricanes destroyed many Q'eqchi' farms on the country's Caribbean coast. Pitan had spent decades helping Q'eqchi' farmers obtain legal titles for their land, yet now the weather was becoming too extreme and unpredictable for agriculture. Many of Pitan's constituents instead decided they would rather make the long and dangerous journey to the United States.

The legal and property rights of the Q'eqchi' people are now becoming important tools in the global fight against climate change. Using revenues from carbon credits, the [Guatemalan Conservation Coast Project](#) has succeeded in protecting almost 60,000 hectares of forest spanning the country's entire Caribbean seaboard. It has done so, in part, by providing legal assistance to help the Q'eqchi' obtain land titles, so that small property owners can receive forestry incentives from the Guatemalan government and benefit from protecting forests that store carbon.

"We're not a forest in the middle of nowhere," says Marco Cerezo, the general manager of FUNDAECO, the nonprofit that leads the Conservation Coast. "It's a very fragmented forest with lots of people. We have to get them involved and create direct benefits to communities from conservation itself."



Marco Cerezo
General Manager,
FUNDAECO

It's a very fragmented forest with lots of people. We have to get them involved and create direct benefits to communities from conservation itself.

We have over 1,000 property owners that own approximately 700 forest parcels that came together in a collaborative effort to create the largest group project in the world.

Cerezo was one of five founders of FUNDAECO in 1990, not long after Guatemala became a democracy. The new government was too poor to create and manage large protected areas, so it enlisted nonprofits to help. FUNDAECO wanted to protect Caribbean forests that were an important avian migratory corridor and as well as a habitat for jaguars, howler monkeys and more than 500 species of bird.



6 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions avoided*



55,308 hectares of threatened tropical forest protected*



1,000+ property owners collaborating on project*



487 entrepreneurs and local producers supported, 24% of which are women*

Follow the progress



*as of end of 2020.



Cattle ranchers and palm-oil plantations were snatching up the most valuable land in the region and pushing small farmers into forested areas. The Caribbean coast of Guatemala has experienced one of the fastest deforestation rates in the world.



Emilio Pitan
Sarstún River
Chapter
Coordinator,
FUNDOECO

Since REDD+, we have the commitment of these forest owners.

There is more money and more resources to cover the needs of the community.

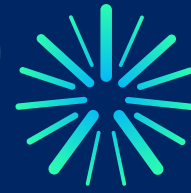
As FUNDAECO's responsibilities grew, so did the challenge of funding its conservation activities. "We went from trying to save a patch of forest to trying to save a bigger patch of forest to a large protected area to a network of protected areas across Caribbean Guatemala," Cerezo says. "Eventually we realized that our model of working through grants and donations was not going to be sustainable or powerful enough to achieve conservation at a large regional scale."

Carbon credits became available as a new source of revenue in 2013 through the United Nation's framework for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+). "With the funds from the sale of these carbon credits, we can finance our whole operation on the Conservation Coast," Cerezo says. FUNDAECO's annual budget has tripled from carbon credits, and the

Conservation Coast has cut the deforestation rate in the project area in half. It has used the funds from carbon credits to systematize its legal assistance to small farmers seeking land titles; expand its network of women's health and family-planning clinics; create new scholarship and educational programs; implement biological monitoring in the forests; and support a variety of local agricultural and ecotourism businesses.

The Conservation Coast has become a coalition of different stakeholders in the region, including the government, businesses, nonprofits and communities. "We have over 1,000 property owners that own approximately 700 forest parcels that came together in a collaborative effort to create the largest group project in the world," Cerezo says. As the value of carbon credits rises, so will the Conservation Coast's ability to protect forests by improving the livelihoods of local residents. It will use new revenues from carbon credits to make direct payments to communities to protect forest. Cerezo believes the Conservation Coast is finally making real the FUNDAECO founders' original vision: "a model that simultaneously tackles the challenge of conservation and the challenge of rural poverty," he says.

Pitan can already see the difference that forestry incentives are making in Q'eqchi' communities. Villages that depend on ecotourism lost all their customers during the Covid-19 pandemic, and forestry incentives have helped them stay afloat. Other villages have used forestry incentives to build solar panels, pay for medical care for elderly residents, and send their children to better schools. "Since REDD+, we have the commitment of these forest owners," Pitan says. "There is more money and more resources to cover the needs of the community."



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About the NCS Alliance

The NCS Alliance (NCSA) conveys the voice of businesses, NGOs and solution providers on the need to mobilize a high integrity demand for high quality Natural Climate Solutions (NCS). The Alliance focuses on identifying opportunities and barriers to investment in the NCS voluntary carbon market and serves as a forum for knowledge sharing and technical capacity building to ensure natural climate solutions reach their full potential in abating climate change, while also tackling nature loss and socio-economic issues. NCS in Action was established to showcase how NCS are making a real difference in the world today.

For more information visit www.naturalclimatesolutionsalliance.org and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).



Statement of Acknowledgment

The NCS in Action are testimonials designed to highlight the benefits for people and nature associated with NCS projects and programs financed through the voluntary carbon market. The NCS Alliance strongly believes that the voluntary carbon market is necessary for financing NCS projects and programs. It is critical however that it rests on the integrity of the climate benefits, i.e. the ability of credits to truly represent real and verifiable carbon reductions.

The NCS Alliance recognizes the importance of staying up-to-date with the latest science and best practices as carbon-crediting programs evolve. We acknowledge that there have been challenges with certain methodologies and that improvements have not always been made as quickly as necessary. However, we believe that this is a valuable learning-by-doing process and that scaling up NCS is crucial in achieving global 1.5C goals. In support of this, the NCS Alliance will continue to highlight projects and programs in this space while also advocating for consistent improvement in standards and methodologies. For more information about how and when these methodologies are updated see [Verra](#), [Plan Vivo](#), [ACR](#), [ART](#).

NCS in Action is made possible with generous funding support from the We Mean Business Coalition.

Disclaimer

Inclusion of an NCS project or program in the NCS in Action program does not imply a recommendation to purchase, trade or retire credits associated with the project or program.

The NCS Alliance and its members take no responsibility for the purchase, trade or retirement of credits from these projects and programs. Instead, it recommends that individuals, companies and other organisations procuring credits as part of their climate strategies conduct their own independent due diligence to validate the quality and environmental integrity of their purchases.

The NCS Alliance secretariat in no way benefits financially or by other means from the selection.

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