

The CBR+ initiative: Supporting grassroots engagement for REDD+ action

REDD+ is an international mechanism to support policy options and financial incentives to safeguard the world’s forests in order to mitigate climate change. REDD+ is a component of the UNFCCC and was endorsed by the Paris Agreement (Article 5). REDD+ is a country-led multi-stakeholder endeavour. Indigenous peoples and forest communities – who are custodians of large forest areas – are crucial stakeholders and indispensable actors for the success of REDD+. Furthermore, their rights and development objectives may be impacted by REDD+ activities. Hence the need to ensure the full engagement and inclusion of the perspectives of indigenous peoples and forest communities in REDD+.

In 2013, the UN-REDD Programme established the Community-Based REDD+ (CBR+) initiative specifically to enhance the engagement, capacities, innovations and perspectives of indigenous and forest communities on REDD+ (see objectives in Box 1). The ultimate aim is that local knowledge, practices and priorities inform and underpin national policy and investment frameworks for REDD+. The CBR+ initiative is a hands-on, bottom-up endeavour for genuine stakeholder engagement in REDD+. It also fosters synergies between local action and national policy for REDD+.



Box 1 - Core objectives of CBR+

- Support the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, communities and civil society in national-level processes related to REDD+, including supporting communities to determine whether and how they see themselves engaging in REDD+.
- Build the capacity and awareness of communities to engage in REDD+ activities and processes.
- Facilitate the integration of community-based activities, knowledge and ideas into national REDD+ processes.
- Develop and share knowledge and lessons learned from community-based experiences to inform national and international REDD+ policies and practice.

The CBR+ initiative supports grassroots action through small grants (up to USD 50,000) that are awarded to indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities and civil society groups. Projects are connected to the national REDD+ process, but vary in focus, theme and approach.

CBR+ is currently being implemented in six pilot countries: Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay and Sri Lanka. These were selected on the basis of criteria that ensured and promoted the local-national interface on REDD+: (i) a national REDD+ process ongoing; (ii) a government willing to engage indigenous peoples and forest communities in REDD+ processes; and (iii) indigenous peoples and forest communities willing to engage in REDD+ actions in the field.

CBR+ is implemented in partnership with the Small Grants Programme (SGP), a joint UNDP-GEF programme with over 20 years of experience in delivering community grants across 125 countries. The CBR+ initiative uses the SGP’s grant making and managing system to disburse grants quickly and efficiently, while SGP provides co-financing at a 1:1 level.

CBR+ operates at the country level and globally. At the country level, operations follow well-tuned SGP systems, with some adjustments to genuinely respond to the features of REDD+ (Box 2). At the global level, a small team provides technical guidance, oversight and knowledge management functions.

Box 2 – The CBR+ inception and functioning at the country level

- CBR+ operates in countries that already have an ongoing SGP national programme.
- The existing SGP national steering committees (NSC), which are multi-stakeholder in composition, are expanded with REDD+ expertise and related stakeholders to form the CBR+/NSC. The CBR+/NSC provides overall guidance to the CBR+ initiative in the country, including reviewing proposals and selecting the beneficiary projects.
- A National Plan for CBR+ is designed through consultation with stakeholders and adopted by the CBR+/NSC. The National Plan provides guidance for the submission and selection of CBR+ proposals, ensuring synergies between local initiatives and national processes for REDD+ results.
- A call for proposals is issued in line with the National Plan for CBR+ and following SGP procedures.
- Capacity building is given to potential grant applicants to help them develop and submit proposals.
- Typically, CBR+ delivers small grants (up to USD 50,000) directly to indigenous peoples and forest communities for REDD+ action, which can range from organisational capacity to actual actions to conserve forests and address deforestation drivers.
- SGP and UN-REDD specialists guide and monitor the implementation of CBR+ projects.
- On completion of the CBR+ grant and knowledge management cycle, lessons are shared with REDD+ decision-makers in order to influence REDD+ policy and action on the ground.

Progress and achievements

Successful inception of a new global concept at the grassroots

REDD+ is a new concept internationally, with agreement on how REDD+ should function only coalescing in the last few years. Ensuring the alignment of CBR+ to the principles and aims of REDD+ was a challenge, as it attempted to bring highly technical concepts based on global policy to the grassroots. However, the inception of CBR+, conducted in 2014-2015, has shown good progress and results in all six pilot countries:



- CBR+/NSCs have been established, with government and non-government representatives working cooperatively.
- CBR+ Country Plans developed, consulted, revised technically and adopted.
- Capacity building has been carried out for indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities and civil society groups to understand REDD+ and the CBR+ initiative as well as apply successfully for grants.
- Essential monitoring and evaluation functions have been created, as well as provisions for capturing lessons.

“Community-Based REDD+ provides an opportunity to identify community members from all over the country, who are capable of inspiring their own communities to understand and act against drivers of climate change.” – Nimanthi, CBR+ grantee, Sri Lanka

“Through our work with Community-Based REDD+ in Nigeria, we are seeing the value of this initiative as a means of managing community expectations, and to inform national policy with grassroots perspectives and experiences” – Salisu Dahiru, Federal Director of Forestry and National Coordinator REDD+, Nigeria.

Commitment to deliver

As of December 2016, a total of USD 3.3 million in UN-REDD Programme financing and SGP co-financing has been disbursed for grants to community-level projects in the six pilot countries (Box 3).

In addition, CBR+ has disbursed funds to support country-level planning, organisation and monitoring of CBR+ grants, including: managing the project cycle at country level, supporting local organisations that need technical support to prepare proposals, knowledge exchange events (see Box 4) and extracting lessons.

So far, key results at the end of 2016 comprise as follows:

- 94 grants have been approved and are under implementation.
- 100% of UN-REDD grant financing (USD 2.4 million) has been disbursed.
- A significant amount of SGP grant co-financing has been disbursed, with the rest to be leveraged during 2017.
- In addition to matching funds from SGP, some grantees have further leveraged co-financing, creating a rich partnership/engagement dynamic.
- Innovations, policy reflections and valuable lessons are emerging.

Box 3 - CBR+ grant delivery to date (2015-2016)

Countries	No. of CBR+ grants	Grant delivery (USD)
Cambodia	13	500,000
Sri Lanka	10	425,000
Nigeria	12	466,249
DRC	26	834,000
Panama	20	800,000
Paraguay	13	468,118
Total	94	3,300,000

Emerging lessons

Funded projects cover a wide range of activities that will ultimately serve REDD+ goals. They include capacity building, organisational strengthening, territorial mapping and testing REDD+ actions. They will yield capacities, experiences and lessons that will inform and underpin the design and implementation of national policies for REDD+.

Initial surveys of CBR+ proposals show the following diversity of proposals:

- Building community organisational capacities to better protect, monitor and manage the forests;
- Reforestation;
- Community-led forest monitoring;
- Mapping community forests and forest resources;
- Support to community forest rights, so that communities can legally and effectively become agents for REDD+ results;
- Strengthening community forest networks;
- Sustainable agroforestry; and
- Legal aid to communities.

CBR+ is spurring innovation and progress, for example:

- In **Panama**, an extensive CBR+ process has resulted in valuable policy recommendations for REDD+, which the Government is considering (see Box 4);
- In **Paraguay**, CBR+ has resulted in the first time SGP has provided grants directly to indigenous communities; and
- In **Sri Lanka**, CBR+ has led to the formation of a civil society REDD+ policy watchdog group.

Box 4 - Country case study: Panama

CBR+ was initiated in the country in 2014 with the development of the CBR+ Country Plan via consultations and workshops with key national stakeholders, such as the Environmental Ministry, COONAPIP (indigenous representative body) and UN-REDD. Thematic areas and priorities of work were defined and in response to stakeholder feedback it was decided that in Panama CBR+ would be referred to as *Bosques de Vida* to be more representative of Panama's perspectives. It was also decided that a Technical Committee composed of representatives of indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, campesinos, and the UN-REDD National Programme would be formed to revise and enrich the projects before sending them to the National Steering Committee.

The Country Plan was finally launched on 31 March, 2015, in an event that had the presence of COONAPIP, the indigenous Masugandí and Guna Yala Congresses, afro-descendants and campesino representatives followed by a workshop to build the capacity of potential grantees. *Bosques de Vida* has contributed considerably to the momentum of REDD+ in Panama, showing how activities from the grassroots can support REDD+ progress at the national and policy level. A total of 20 CBR+ projects have been funded in the country. These include:

- The establishment of pilot sites in the District of Macaraca to demonstrate sustainable cattle raising practices that increase forest cover while improving productivity and contributing to the protection of water resources and other ecosystem services.
- The sustainable management of forests through the reproduction and protection of traditional medicinal plants, conservation of traditional medicine, and recovery of sources of water.
- Demarcation of the lands of the indigenous community of the Puerto Indio in the Emberá Comarca for the protection of the catchment area and sustainable management of wood and hunting resources.
- Rescuing traditional plants and trees and traditional agricultural techniques of afro-descendant communities in the Darien.

Two knowledge exchange workshops were held in March and October, 2016, to share results and lessons between participating CBR+ communities and provide lessons for the government. Findings included:

- *Bosques de Vida* has made traditional knowledge on agriculture and medicine more visible, and the validation of these approaches through an international programme such as UN-REDD has elevated their value nationally.
- The protection of critical water sources is an issue that unites goals of forest protection, reforestation and the fight against deforestation more than any other concern and could therefore be seen as an important co-benefit and motivation for increasing forest cover in the country.
- Almost all participating communities have identified agrochemical pollution as an issue they want to work on further – environmental leadership is seen to go beyond REDD+ through these projects.



Looking ahead

CBR+ is not merely a local grant mechanism: it critically aims at fostering synergies between the community constituency and the national government for common REDD+ progress. The CBR+ Country Plans ensure local action aligns with national policy; in return, results and lessons from CBR+ grants are meant to inform national processes.

Many of the currently funded projects will come to a close over 2017. Thus, **next steps** in 2017 include:

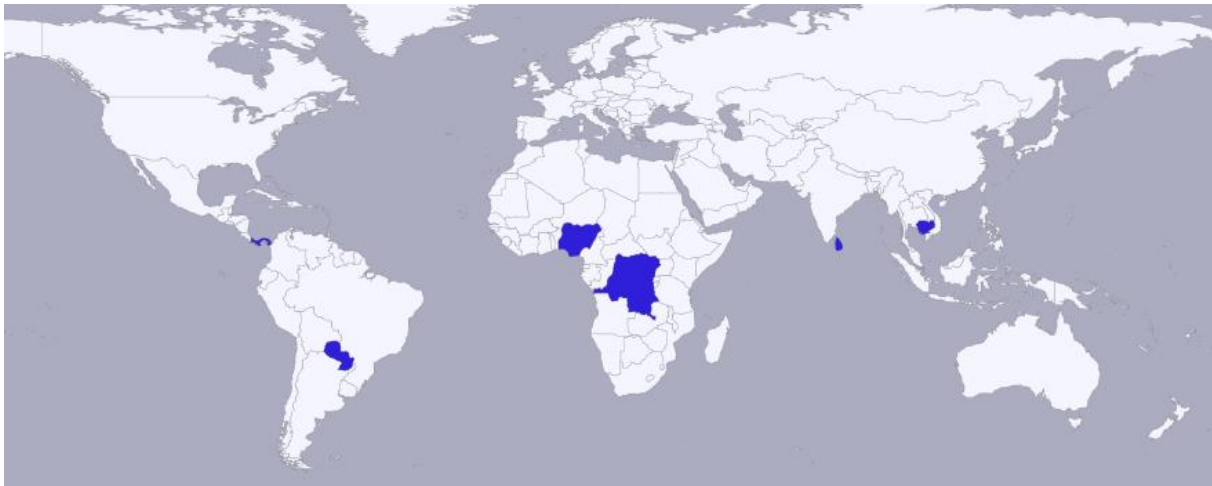
- Development of a suite of knowledge products to share findings and inform new phases of CBR+.
- Policy dialogues at the country level in order to ensure that CBR+ lessons inform and improve national forest & climate policies.
- Promotion of CBR+ results at the international level, including knowledge products and debriefing events, such as at the annual meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (May 2017) and the forthcoming Executive Board of UN-REDD (2nd quarter, 2017).
- Leveraging more co-financing from SGP, guided by lessons and results achieved.
- Resource mobilisation, as various countries have expressed interest in a CBR+ programme.

Based on the initial successes and the growing demand from partner countries, UN-REDD is seeking to secure more funding for a second phase. CBR+ proves an instrument for grassroots engagement in REDD+ as well as a means to enhance national policy with the insights and experiences of communities.

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR

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CBR+ PILOT COUNTRIES



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