

Photo: Soraia Ribeiro/Regions4

Cultivating Just Resilience

Integration of cultural and ancestral knowledge into the biodiversity plans of Pastaza

Case Study Database

A compilation of good practices and lessons learned to bring innovative subnational solutions to global problems

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Introduction

The conservation of forests and biodiversity is key in the fight against climate change, but their management must ensure the participation of those who have protected these ecosystems for generations. REDD+ has been a global tool to curb deforestation, but it has also raised concerns about the exclusion of indigenous communities and the commodification of nature. To avoid these risks, the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), recognised in ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, establishes that any action affecting indigenous peoples must be consulted with them, ensuring their effective participation. The province of Pastaza, Ecuador, has developed the first subnational REDD+ plan in the country, ensuring that the seven indigenous nationalities of the region are not only consulted, but also lead decisions about their territories.

Summary

The province of Pastaza, Ecuador, has developed the first subnational REDD+ plan in the country, ensuring that the seven indigenous nationalities of the region are not only consulted, but also lead decisions about their territories. Its REDD+ plan integrates the knowledge and consent of indigenous communities in the management of biodiversity and forests. Through a participatory process, a strategy has been designed to reduce deforestation, strengthen territorial governance and promote sustainable production models that balance environmental conservation with the well-being of local populations. This effort contributes to building just resilience, ensuring that communities not only protect their ecosystems, but also benefit from them in an equitable and sustainable manner.

Key information

Location: Pastaza, Ecuador.

Focus areas: Just resilience; climate change and biodiversity; participatory governance; ecosystem restoration

Carried out in: 2021-2022

Investment: $23,252.50

Sustainable Development Goals addressed:

SDG 10, 13, 15, 16 and 17

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets addressed:

Targets 14 and 22

Special Collection

This case study is part of a special collection developed within the framework of Regions4's work on **Subnational Just Resilience**, with the support of the **Government of Scotland**. Its objective is to identify, highlight, and analyze experiences led by regional governments in the Global South that exemplify approaches and actions integrating environmental sustainability with social and/or economic justice. Each case is analyzed based on Just Resilience criteria (available here).

Just Resilience criteria addressed:

1.1.1.; 1.1.2.; 1.1.3.; 1.1.5.; 1.2.1.; 2.2.2.; 2.1.3.; 2.1.4.; 2.1.5.; 2.2.1.; 2.2.2.; 2.2.4.; 2.2.5.; 4.1.4.; 5.1.1.; 5.1.3.; 5.2.1.; 5.2.3.

Author

Regions4, in collaboration with the Prefecture of Pastaza and with the support of the Scottish Government

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The province of Pastaza, located in Ecuador's Amazon region, is home to one of the largest tracts of tropical forest in the country, as well as a rich cultural diversity represented by seven indigenous nationalities: Shuar, Shiwiar, Andwa, Kichwa, Waorani, Sapara and Achuar. These communities have maintained an ancestral relationship with their territories, based on the sustainable management of natural resources and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge about biodiversity.

Ecuador recognises the collective rights of indigenous peoples in its Constitution, in line with international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In this framework, the state is obliged to carry out consultations ensuring free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) before the implementation of projects that affect the territories of these communities.

This is particularly relevant in the case of REDD+. The acronym REDD+ stands for "reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries", and the '+' stands for additional activities that involve climate protection, the sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks. This international framework, established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), aims to curb the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation through actions such as strengthening forest governance, community forest management and biodiversity conservation. REDD+ seeks to create financial incentives for countries by encouraging them not to clear their forests in exchange for compensation for the ecosystem services they provide, such as carbon sequestration. These offsets may take the form of direct payments or 'carbon credits', which aim to allow countries to offset their own emissions by reducing emissions elsewhere.

In this context, the provincial government of Pastaza (GAD Provincial Pastaza), in collaboration with the Governors' Climate and Forests (GFC) Task Force, obtained funding from the Government of Norway to develop the Implementation Plan for Measures and Actions to Reduce Deforestation and Forest Degradation (PdI REDD+). This plan was the first in Ecuador to be proposed by a subnational government, under the framework of Ministerial Agreement 056 and the National REDD+ Plan "Forests for Good Living".

The PdI REDD+ seeks to reduce deforestation in the area of intervention and transition as well as the interior of the Pastaza province through the promotion of sustainable development and the conservation of biological and cultural diversity. Its cross-cutting actions are:

- **Strengthening organisation and institutional operation as well as human talent at all levels (sections of government, nationalities).**
- **Focusing on gender and interculturality in all actions.**
- **Carrying out activities for dissemination, communication and citizen education.**

KEY ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIONS

Participatory building process of the PdI REDD+

The PdI REDD+ was designed through a process of local stakeholder consultation and participation, with special emphasis on the seven indigenous nationalities living in Pastaza. It was developed in coordination with the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition of Ecuador, ensuring that REDD+ actions are culturally relevant and respectful of territorial rights.

The first step in the FPIC process involved identifying the different groups of the area in which REDD+ actions were to be implemented. This included compiling the following information:

a) Identification of the community, people, or indigenous nationality, commune or other groups.

b) General description of the area where the group lives.

c) Total number of members in the group.

d) Their representative institution, i.e. which organisation or association(s) legitimately represents the collective, and their positions.

e) The way in which decisions are made, including the processes used and the time required to reach consensus

f) The language spoken by the group.

g) Own mechanisms for resolving disputes, i.e. the way in which problems are solved within the group.

h) Title deed or document of recognition of rights to the land or territory where they live.



Photo: OIDP

This process ensured that decisions on REDD+ implementation were taken directly by communities according to their own organisational structures and deliberation times.

Once an implementer has informed and worked together with a group on the design of REDD+ actions, the collective is given a space for discussion and decision-making according to their own internal processes, with a reasonable amount of time for them to issue a response. The highest internal representative body is the one that will consult the group on the implementation of REDD+ actions in their land or territory. As the group is consulted by its highest representative body, a space for discussion and decision-making is created.

Similarly, during informational meetings, the implementer is to have a list of group members attending and participating in the discussion and decision-making space to corroborate this activity in the territory. Participants in this process included:

-Indigenous nationalities.

-Representatives of GAD Provincial Pastaza.

-Representatives of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition.

-Representatives of national and international development cooperation organisations..



Photo: OIDP

Priorities of the plan

Among the plan's specific objectives is the development of regulations and mechanisms that ensure coordination between the different levels of government within the province, such as biosecurity strategies, regulations for the sustainable use of forest resources and the organisational strengthening of indigenous communities.

It also includes the promotion of productive alternatives such as agroforestry and agro-ecological systems, which combine ancestral knowledge with modern techniques to minimise environmental impact and guarantee the food security of communities. Economic and technical incentives are also established for those communities that actively contribute to forest conservation. This ensures the strengthening of ancestral knowledge as a key tool for climate change mitigation.

The experience was submitted as a candidate to the IOPD Distinction "Good Practice in Citizen Participation" in 2022.



Photo: OIDP

How does the project promote just resilience in the territory?

We define Subnational Just Resilience as a conceptual and operational framework that enables the development of climate and ecosystem adaptation and transformation strategies in the face of environmental and climate shocks in an equitable and inclusive manner. Based on the principles of environmental justice, community participation and multi-level governance, just resilience seeks to ensure that climate and biodiversity responses not only integrate the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable communities, but also address the root causes of vulnerability, such as poverty, discrimination and lack of access to resources, by creating just, inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Checklist of principles and criteria for Just Resilience available here

REDD+ implementation in Pastaza has contributed to the creation of sustainable economic opportunities, benefiting local communities through financial incentive programmes and training in forest management. Furthermore, it has enabled the inclusion of indigenous communities, women and youth in environmental decision-making processes, promoting gender equity in territorial governance.

1. Social Equity and Inclusion

Does the action specifically address the needs of communities? Are attempts being made to reduce existing inequalities rather than reinforce them? **Criteria adressed: 1.1.1.; 1.1.2.; 1.1.3.; 1.1.5.; 1.2.1.**

Consultation with free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) has ensured that the indigenous nationalities of Pastaza are involved in decision-making on the implementation of the PdI REDD+. Their organisational structures, languages and traditional forms of governance are respected, ensuring that their worldview and knowledge are an integral part of territorial planning. In addition, by involving the seven indigenous nationalities of the province, representation of historically marginalised groups has been promoted, helping to reduce inequalities.

2. Participatory Governance and Decision-Making

Did the affected population participate meaningfully in the decision-making process? Are the governance structures transparent and accountable? **Criteria adressed: 2.2.2.; 2.1.3.; 2.1.4.; 2.1.5.; 2.2.1.; 2.2.2.; 2.2.4.; 2.2.5.**

The PdI REDD+ has followed a structured consultation process that respects the timing and internal decision-making procedures of each community. Legitimate representatives, conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional forms of deliberation have been identified, ensuring that actions are culturally relevant. Furthermore, the consultation has allowed communities to exercise their right to decide on their territory.

3. Fair Distribution of Resources

Are funding mechanisms accessible to all communities, including those with fewer resources, and does the action prevent financial burdens falling disproportionately on disadvantaged groups?

The scheme has promoted financial incentives for communities contributing to forest conservation, ensuring equitable access to funds. It also promotes sustainable production models such as agroforestry and agro-ecological systems, which generate income without compromising ecosystems.

However, there is no detail on how resources are distributed among communities or what percentage of funding is allocated to grassroots organisations compared to larger entities. To ensure fair distribution, it would be useful to include information on equity in budget allocation and mechanisms to remove barriers to accessing funds.

4. Intergenerational Justice

Does the action consider the long-term impacts on future generations? Is there a strategy for sustaining resilience over time? **Criteria adressed: 4.1.4.**

The consultation has ensured that the ancestral knowledge of indigenous nationalities is recognised as a central pillar of the PdI REDD+, contributing to the transfer of knowledge to future generations. Furthermore, by including indigenous peoples in territorial planning, their autonomy and capacity to adapt to climate challenges is strengthened. However, the plan does not mention specific strategies to ensure that the future generations continue to be actively involved in environmental decision-making.

5. Social, Economic, and Ecological Sustainability

Does the action promote sustainable environmental practices while addressing resilience? Where possible, is priority given to nature-based solutions? **Criteria adressed: 5.1.1.; 5.1.3.; 5.2.1.; 5.2.3.**

The PdI REDD+ prioritises sustainable environmental practices, combining ancestral knowledge with modern strategies to restore degraded areas and mitigate deforestation. In addition, the plan promotes environmental education and the transfer of local knowledge as key tools. It has enabled the reduction of deforestation by protecting primary forests, the restoration of degraded areas and the implementation of community-based environmental monitoring strategies. It has also strengthened forest governance, promoting territorial monitoring by communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this project, contact us by email at info@regions4.org to schedule an informational meeting, clarify your questions, and receive support for the implementation of similar projects.

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ABOUT REGIONS4

Regions4 (formerly known as nrg4SD) is a global network that exclusively represents regional governments (states, regions, and provinces) in UN processes, European Union initiatives, and global discussions on climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents more than 40 members from 20 countries across 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation, and capacity building, Regions4 empowers regional governments to accelerate global action.

For more information, visit: www.regions4.org
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