



COMMUNITY MARKETS FOR CONSERVATION

Building carbon markets for
small-scale farming
communities

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Building Carbon Markets for Small-scale Farming Communities

Experts report that Zambia has among the highest rate of deforestation in Africa ranging, between 2500 and 3,000 hectares every year, with agriculture and charcoal-making being the leading causes. Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) works closely with local traditional leaders and their communities of small-scale farmers to help reverse these trends.

Through the help of cooperating partners, and in particular the Zambian government, COMACO is currently supporting 39 chiefdoms to generate carbon credits from the adoption of conservation practices by small-scale farmers. This support extends further by selling these credits for substantial revenues to finance community development needs and ways community can enhance their conservation efforts for continued carbon sales. COMACO uses its technical skills to assist communities earn carbon credits from two categories: Sustainable Agriculture and Land Management (SALM) and Reduced Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).

SALM is based on farmer adoption of minimum tillage, non-burning of crop residues, composting and agroforestry (or farming with trees) to enhance soil health and replace the need for chemical fertilisers. this is a farming approach referred to as regenerative farming and over 250,000 of our COMACO farmers are adopting it.

REDD is based on the collective will by community members to set aside local forests for long-term protection through the development and enforcement of community conservation plans. These protected local forests are called Community Conservation Areas (CCAs), and to date over 1.5 million hectares have been mapped and designated as CCAs. Aside from carbon credits, additional market incentives that these forests generate include sale of wild honey, mushrooms, caterpillars, medicinal plants, and potentially tourism from wildlife over the long-term.



A closer look at the steps involved

The process of securing REDD credits starts with the Forest Act No. 4 of 2015, which not only guides the establishment of CCAs but also provides the basis for cooperation and technical requirements with the Forestry Department to legally qualify communities to earn and sell REDD credits. This can be a great challenge for rural communities, and to facilitate the process, a technical partner works closely with communities to ensure these requirements and those of the international validation and verification authority are met. They can be arduous and time-consuming and there are no short-cuts. COMACO plays a role to make them easier for farming communities by applying the following steps with the ultimate goal of helping communities recognize the true value of their land when it is cared for properly.

COMACO begins the process by having its senior staff meet with local community leaders in the presence of the Royal Highness of a given chiefdom to discuss the need and potential benefits of a Community Conservation Plan (CCP) as a guideline for accepted conservation practices the community needs to follow to qualify for carbon credits.

If the traditional leader supports the idea to proceed with a CCP, the Royal Highness then arranges for another meeting, at which he convenes all other key community leaders, including indunas (senior advisors) and village headpersons. Representatives from the Forestry Department, Department of National Parks and Wildlife, and COMACO are also present to help explain and answer some of the concerns that may be raised by members of the community.

It is at this meeting that a map is drawn as a participatory exercise to explain what natural resources are found in the chiefdom and to propose suitable sites for the creation of a CCA. A technical GIS person from COMACO or the Forestry Department offers more detailed explanation of how resources, particularly forests and wildlife habitat, have changed over time because of human activities and what communities can do to reduce land use disturbances. These discussions bring out the linkages between the way farmers cultivate their land and the pressures they exert on surrounding resources resulting from wrong practices and lost opportunities that cannot be easily reversed.

Assuming the Royal Highness is in favour of moving forward with these ideas, he then instructs village headpersons to hold a general assembly in their respective Village Area Groups (VAGs) to explain the need for a CCP and a CCA to residents throughout the community. Again, COMACO and the department of Forestry are invited to the assembly to help with possible questions. Following this sensitization exercise, representatives of the VAG express their views the Royal Highness on formulating a CCP and CCA in the form of documented minutes. These become the basis for the Royal Highness and his/her advisors to formalize an agreement for the entire Chiefdom.

Following this agreement, selected headmen who are familiar with the proposed CCA boundary participate in the formal marking of its boundary with GPS points for later mapping. This is to ensure the boundary does not violate an existing protected area, such as a national forest or international boundary.

After this, a separate exercise is carried out to map the locations of each household that resides inside the CCA bearing in mind that specific regulations for land use and farming practices to be followed for residents in the Community Conservation Area are set forth in the CCP. This approach is designed to promote good stewardship of the CCA by those residents already settled in the area.

Upon completing the two parallel exercises, a map is produced to show the locations of the CCA and its beacons with a table listing their coordinates. The Indunas and headmen living around the boundary consent to the accuracy of the map by signing.

Once the draft is complete, the document is then presented to the Royal Highness who reviews it with his advisors and unless any changes are made, the Royal Highness provides his signature for its endorsement.

Thereafter, a final map that follows an approved template is produced as part of the CCP and the approval process by the District Commissioner and other relevant District Officers and stakeholders.

Through these CCAs and the enforcement of their respective CCPs, COMACO was able to verify 883,068 carbon credits in 2022 for nine chiefdoms in Eastern Province, which resulted in direct payment of \$3.1 million payment to these chiefdoms and represented the third verification with other payments made in 2016 and 2019. Over this time, we have seen wildlife numbers begin to recover where they once occurred, families able to collect wild mushroom following year where fires had suppressed their growth, and honey production improved from beehives installed in the CCAs.



To ensure funds comply with developmental and conservation priorities as agreed through public assemblies and that the funds are accurately accounted and reported on, COMACO employs a full-time team to develop financial literacy and accounting skills for designated people in the community responsible for these tasks. Quarterly audits are undertaken by the same team to confirm transparency and accountability of these carbon funds based on the skills taught.

The Impact

COMACO recognized at an early stage the transformation impact carbon benefits could bring to rural communities and the change in attitudes and practices toward living with the land, supporting the land, and caring for it. Traditional leaders communicate among themselves, and the knowledge flows downward to village head persons and eventually to individual farmers, making it easier and quicker for COMACO to mobilize the above approach to be adopted by more chiefdoms in Zambia. To date, it is now supporting carbon markets for 38 chiefdoms and this number will surely grow in the years to come.

Carbon Benefits

The table below summarizes some of the community projects undertaken by using their carbon funds to date.

1	The project managed to sink 31 boreholes in 6 participating chiefdoms for community use
2	The project procured 2 oil expeller machines Local cooking oil production stations operated by the Producer Group Cooperative (PGC)
3	The project procured 6 hammer mills and established mealie meal grinding stations managed by CFMG in 5 chiefdoms
4	The PGC procured 600 village chickens and established poultry businesses in 4 chiefdoms
5	Procurement of 270 goats and 150 pigs for distribution to transformed charcoal makers on a pass-on basis to scale this effort to reduce deforestation in 3 chiefdoms.
6	Increasing of Forest area under community management by 118,957ha in four Chiefdoms and 9,758 hectares of additional agriculture land committed to adopting Climate Smart Agriculture.
7	97 identified and engaged honorary forest guards
8	Procurement of 146 bicycles for honorary forest guards, CFMG and lead farmers in 9 chiefdoms.
9	Procurement of 4 light trucks and 2 motor bikes in four chiefdoms. The trucks are being used during charcoal sweeps and transporting fresh garden produce for sale to the town market for a good price.
10	Cooperatives in the 9 Chiefdoms procured 36 rippers and 20 oxen to support conservation farming
11	The project supported renovation of 4 community schools in 3 chiefdoms by painting of classroom blocks.
12	The project under the Royal Highness and the CFMG built and renovated 4 office block as operational centres.
13	The project supported the purchase of motorized tricycle in Chikomani chiefdom to speed up the rate of agroforestry tree planting.
14	The project supported purchase of a 15-ton truck in Zumwanda chiefdom to help farmers transport their crops to market

Conclusion

The COMACO carbon project is largely community-driven through the help of more informed and skilled community leaders and local managers who train and promote the adoption of conservation-based skills.

It is cost-effective and emphasizes livelihoods, not law enforcement or punitive threats. Instead, it relies on financial incentives to adopt better practices. The approach reinforces price incentives that COMACO offers farmers when buying crops who adopt regenerative farming. In parallel but different to carbon markets, our commodity prices are sustained from the sale of *It's Wild!* branded products manufactured by COMACO to help drive a farming system that helps to keep farmers sedentary by maintaining healthy soils. By doing so, less disturbances to local forests result and farming becomes a pathway to more carbon credits while supporting Zambia with more nutritious food products grown without chemical fertilizers.

In short, COMACO is demonstrating how carbon markets and agricultural markets can reinforce each other, giving Zambia a healthier, more protected environment with an economy that gains value from conservation.