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Costa Rica A pioneer in forest restoration

Costa Rica owes much of its extraordinary natural wealth to its privileged location. Positioned along the Central American isthmus — the great bridge between two continents and their once isolated species — this small yet prolific nation contains an astonishing 6% of the planet’s biodiversity.

A vast majority of Costa Rica’s 500,000 species thrive in its abundant forests, though this wasn’t always the case. In the 1990s, the country had one of the world’s highest deforestation rates. In the three decades since, pioneering conservation efforts led by both the government and private owners (among which Indigenous Peoples were particularly proactive) have dramatically doubled forest cover in Costa Rica, making it the first tropical nation to have halted and reversed its deforestation.

Concurrently, this rapid restoration drove an ecotourism boom, tripling Costa Rica’s GDP per capita. This tremendous success story has earned the country worldwide acclaim as a 21st century environmental leader. It recently received a “Champions of the Earth” Award, the UN’s highest environmental honor, for its exemplary policy leadership in the conservation realm.

Today, its rainforests cover over half of its land. However, Costa Rica has no intention of stopping its forest protection there. The nation’s ambitious **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** aim to protect remaining forests from threats like climate change, urbanization, rural poverty and illegal logging. Given the substantial stock of 1.03 MtCO₂ held by Costa Rica’s trees, it is critical that small and medium agricultural producers as well as forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples fully participate in Costa Rica’s forest protection programs.

NDC TARGETS BY 2030

- **60%**
Forest cover
- **0 deforestation**
Rate maintained for mature forests
- **+1M hectares**
Managed to halt degradation



Carlos Manuel Rodriguez
Former Costa Rican Minister
of Environment & Energy

“Costa Rica is proving that the protection and restoration of nature is not a burden for growth and prosperity. I believe it can be a powerful model for countries that still aren’t listening to what their rainforests have to say.”

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Adopted as early as 1996, Costa Rica’s **Payments for Environmental Services (PES)** is the first national level program in the region to grant landowners (including Indigenous Peoples) direct cash rewards for sustainable forest management efforts such as carbon capture and the protection of biodiversity and water resources. Predominantly financed by a fossil fuels tax (alongside carbon credits and public-private agreements), this government scheme has secured more than 1.3 million hectares of forest through PES contracts.

\$500M
in PES funding to
landowners since
2002

\$1.4B
of GDP generated
annually by
ecotourism

2019
“Champions of the
Earth” awardee, the
UN’s environmental
honor*

LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Costa Rica's eight remaining Indigenous groups have developed, with the support of the government, a consultation plan that enables their engagement in national REDD+ strategy. The plan includes a Cultural Mediators Program which introduces REDD+ related topics to communities in a culturally contextualized manner. To further include Indigenous Peoples in the country's forest management plan, Costa Rica will also incorporate all territorial rights in the expansion of its PES program, in compliance with FPIC (Free, Prior,

and Informed Consent) established by ILO Convention 169. One of the first countries in the world to prepare a Gender Action Plan (GAP) for its REDD+ strategy, Costa Rica also aims to address gender inequalities around access to and control over forest resources by increasing indigenous and rural women's participation in sustainable landscape initiatives involving reforestation, cocoa cultivation, plant nurseries, and the collection of non-timber forest products.

A WEALTH OF BIODIVERSITY

Since 1998, Costa Rica's National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) has divided the country into 11 large conservation areas, including state-owned national parks, biological reserves and wildlife refuges.

SPOTLIGHT: THE OSA REGION

Esteemed by National Geographic as "the most biologically intense place on Earth," the renowned Osa Peninsula and its crown jewel — Corcovado National Park — are a refuge for roughly half of the country's plant and animal species. The region's long history of isolation, varied topography and surviving megafauna have made its flora among the richest in Costa Rica, and perhaps the world.

Despite the country's commitment to environmental protection, habitat loss and illegal poaching continue to endanger the Costa Rica's jaguars, great green macaws, squirrel monkeys, giant anteaters and tapirs, making further provision of conservation finance crucial.

EXPERIENCED IN REDD+ FINANCE

- First country in the world to access large-scale, performance-based payments for forest conservation and land regeneration.
- Engaged with two jurisdictional REDD+ programs, securing more than \$114 million in REDD+ finance from the World Bank and Green Climate Fund.
- This sizable REDD+ finance will primarily be used to strengthen PES programs and increase the participation of women and youth in forest restoration.

LEAF COALITION

The LEAF Coalition uses the independent ART/TREES standard, which specifies requirements for the quantification, monitoring, reporting and verification of GHG emission reductions and removals from REDD+ activities at a large jurisdictional scale. In line with the Cancun Safeguards, ART/TREES upholds the right of Indigenous stakeholders to participate in the design and implementation of REDD+ actions.



SUMMARY



Legal Framework

According to Costa Rican authorities, private landowners who engage with forest protection efforts receive compensation for the transfer of carbon rights to the government.



Stakeholder Consultation

According to Costa Rican authorities, consultation processes were undertaken with stakeholders to develop the National REDD+ Strategy Benefit Sharing Plan.



Global Role Model

Having simultaneously reversed deforestation and increased its GDP per capita, Costa Rica is an example of how conservation and growth can coexist.