



Communication Strategy - Blueforest Project Ecuador

Standardized Methodologies for
Carbon Accounting and Ecosystem Services Valuation of Blue
Forests in Ecuador

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I. Introduction

In Ecuador mangrove forests have decreased by 27.7% from 1969 to 2014, which represents a loss of 157,094.28 hectares of this valuable ecosystem. The situation is even more critical for salt marshes, which show a loss of 90% in the same period.

The main causes of mangrove deforestation and salt marsh transformation have been the expansion of shrimp ponds for aquaculture, the expansion of urban areas, especially Guayaquil and Machala¹, and the solid and liquid pollution affecting the water and soil of mangroves.

In the effort to prevent this effects, the Government of Ecuador established a legal framework to enforce the conservation of mangroves and salt marshes. Through the adoption of legal instruments and policies, several mechanisms to promote mangrove conservation were established. One of this is the “Agreements for Sustainable Use and Custodial of Mangroves”, also referred as “mangrove concessions”. A mangrove concession is a conservation instrument applied since 2000, which grants communities and traditional users the protection of areas. By this, members of fishermen associations have the right to use natural resources as long as they comply with sustainable practices established on the concession management plan in supervision by the Ministry of Environment. The beneficiaries have become the main guardians of mangrove swamp, who protect from logging and prevent the extraction of resources with non-permitted fishing gear.

Although much progress has been made, there is still a need to strengthen mangrove management through adequate regulations, governance and the promotion of sustainable practices. In order to achieve a better management, it is essential to count on a solid base of scientific information that allows either decision makers or citizens to understand the importance of conservation and value of the ecosystem’s services for human wellbeing and development. The need to have reliable data on mangroves carbon storage capacity, biodiversity or productive activities related to its resources for example, is crucial to value the need of protecting it. This information is key to promote scientific-based policies on national and local governments in charge of its management.

¹ Guayaquil is the most populated city in Ecuador and Machala is the fifth most populated city.

In addition, one of the biggest challenges facing local institutions in order to address mangrove ecosystem management is related to the lack of technical capacity. Therefore, capacity building is of utmost priority, and represents an important opportunity of work for international and national organizations.

In these two areas of work, communication plays an essential role to promote mangrove conservation. Having scientific studies is a great achievement. However, its fundamental to have communication tools to ensure this information is used by key decision and policy makers. Accurate messages delivered by effective communication channels, have the power to influence the way mangrove conservation is addressed by either governmental institutions, associations or communities.

II. Project description

a) Project objective

The focus of the GEF Blue Forests Project small-scale intervention titled ‘Ecuador Blue Forest Project’ is the application of blue forests methodologies and approaches for valuing carbon and other ecosystem services (ES). The intervention aims to improve the understanding of ES and carbon storage and sequestration for mangrove ecosystems in Ecuador, and to develop improved ecosystem management founded on that understanding.

The intervention is applicable to an area covering a total of 41,000 ha in the Gulf of Guayaquil. This project will help meet national priorities in coastal management, especially pertaining to the protection of mangrove ecosystems, and priorities in national climate change policy. There are two specific objectives to achieve the application of Blueforests approaches:

Objective 1: Improving the understanding of blue forests carbon storage and other ecosystem services.

Objective 2: Improving blue forests capacity and ecosystem management.

This project considers Blueforests as the promotion of better coastal ecosystem management by harnessing the values associated with carbon and ecosystem services (coastal protection, nursery services, support marine biodiversity habitat, scenic beauty and others). With this consideration, the project will develop information of mangroves and their ecosystem services to improve the knowledge of decision makers, community leaders and the conservation community.

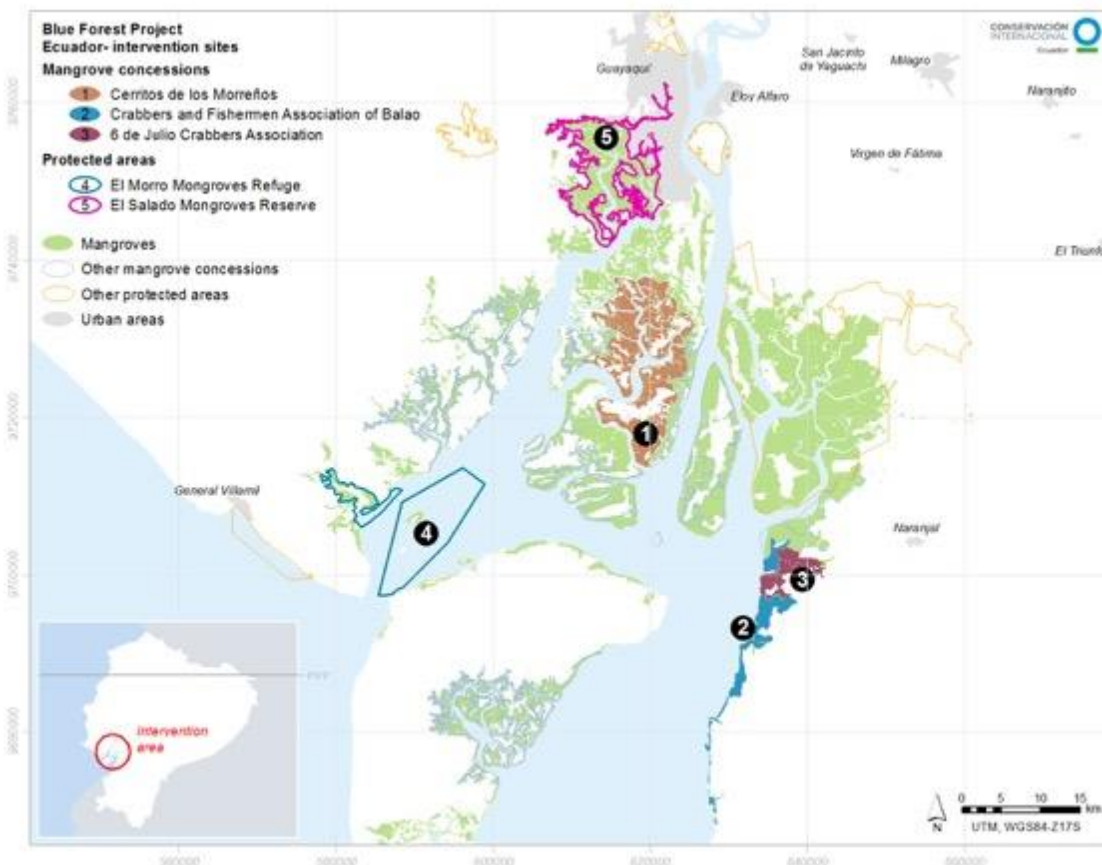
The three main outputs of the project are:

1. Ecosystem service information developed and delivery to main decision makers, including carbon assessments and other key service.
2. Enforce the management of 41,000 ha of mangrove forests at five sites through the mangrove concessions and the implementation of Socio-Manglar incentive.
3. Assess the implementation of the Ecuadorian policy framework for mangrove conservation.

b) Areas of intervention

In figure 1 the areas of intervention of the project are presented. These five areas are a good portfolio of the multiple governance structure and the multiple challenges of mangrove conservation in the Gulf of Guayaquil.

Figure 1 Areas of intervention of Blueforests Project:



The 41,000 hectares that the project will work are composed by:

1. Cerritos de los Morreños Mangrove Users Association: 10,869.53 ha

2. Balao Crabbers and Fishermen Association: 3157,51 hectares
3. 6 de Julio Association: 2036,27 hectares
4. El Morro Wildlife Reserve: 10,130 hectares
5. El Salado Wildlife Reserve: 15,497.42 hectares

c) Project components

The Ecuador Blue Forests Project has three main focal areas, described as follows:

1. **Valuation of ecosystem services** – Activities focused on the valuation of ecosystem services include the following:
 - An assessment of the information gaps related to ES valuation and the production of an ES assessment report.
 - The production of a national report raising the profile of mangrove ES in a national context in particular services as carbon storage, coastal protection, food security and scenic beauty.
2. **Mangrove concessions** – Activities focused on mangrove concessions include the following:
 - Evaluating the effectiveness of existing management plans and concession agreements to protect mangrove ecosystems.
 - The creation of new mangrove concessions that are effective in protecting mangrove ecosystems and include ES valuation.
3. **Carbon and ES Mangrove Policy** – Activities focused on mangrove policy include the following:
 - Engagement with the national government to support the inclusion of mangrove values (carbon and ES) in political instruments that address climate change. In particular a Bluecarbon NAMA, The evaluation of the effectiveness of 056 resolution. .
 - Engagement with the national government to support the inclusion of mangrove values (carbon and ES) in national instruments related to conservation, biodiversity and sustainable development (e.g. legal framework for mangroves, National Biodiversity Strategy).

III. Communications strategy

Considering Blueforest is focused on developing information of mangroves and its ecosystem services to improve knowledge, communication is a key aspect on the project intervention. Information gathering and analysis is the central part for a better understanding of mangroves ecosystemic values. Therefore, that information needs to reach decision makers, leaders, communities, and anyone who has an impact on how the ecosystem will be managed. Planning how that information is used in order to increase knowledge, capacity or consciousness in people is the main goal of the communications strategy.



This strategy aims to involve several actors in a common understanding of mangrove's ecosystem values and the services. Through a stakeholder analysis, the information gaps and needs upon each audience will be identified, to define the objectives, products and activities for the communication's plan.

a) Communications goals

The purpose of the plan is to contribute to the project's achievements, and so the communication goals need to be in line with the projects objectives. In this case, the communication strategy will be directly related to increasing knowledge among key actors through a mx of tactics in order to reach target audiences effectively.

General objective: Convey relevant information in a strategic way to inform and influence key stakeholders on the promotion of a sustainable management of mangrove ecosystems.

The idea is to reach an improved understanding of the values blue forests provide, in order to transform perceptions, behaviors and influence decision making process to promote a sustainable management of the ecosystem.

In line with this vision, specific objectives are the following:

1. Translate science into accessible, accurate and understandable information to guide effective decision-making processes.
2. Provide communication tools to support capacity building efforts to empower actors to compromise and take action.
3. Create a conscious, committed and informed digital network that claims and advocates for mangrove protection.
4. To inspire science development by demonstrating the value of the mangrove ecosystem as a natural solution to climate change, biodiversity and human well-being.

b) Target Audience

According to the communication workshop, there were five groups of audiences identified on the Blueforest project in Ecuador: international partners, national government, local authorities, civil society and local communities. Each group of audiences is related in a different way and level to the work of the project. Therefore, there is a different objective depending on the target.

Chart.1 Key Stakeholder Map



c) Target audience categories

Communications tactics have different stages of influence. It will depend on the target audience to determine the level of effort allocated to each group. Therefore, audiences are classified into ‘primary’, ‘secondary’ and ‘peripheral’ to resolve what approach is required in each group.

1. **Primary:** Those audiences that are essential because of their direct relation and high influence on the project’s success. These are the ones in biggest need of information and capacity building.

Audience group	Target Audience
National governmental institutions	Marine and Coastal Undersecretary (Ministry of Environment)
	Climate Change Undersecretary (Ministry of Environment)
	Provincial Direction of the Ministry of Environment
Local governments	Guayaquil Municipality
	Balao Municipality
	Naranjal Municipality
	El Morro Parish Council
	Guayas Province Direction of Environment

2. **Secondary:** This group has a second level of influence on the aim of increasing knowledge regarding mangroves ecosystem’s services. Even though these are not involved directly in the decision making, their roles are crucial to influence perceptions in the long term. This target doesn’t need capacity building, but it is very important to keep them well informed.

Audience group	Target Audience
International audiences	Grid Arendal & partners
	CI – Global
Civil society	Academic institutions
	Environmental NGOs
	Media
Local communities	Mangrove concessions
	Fisherman associations

3. **Peripheral:** A broader target audience which has an indirect relation to the projects objectives. The communication tactics will then have a general reach through public platforms with a broader scope.

Audience group	Target Audience
Tourist & productive sector	Tourists and visitors
	Hotels, restaurants, transportation sector.
	Private companies (aquaculture sector)

c) Activities and products

	Activities	Objectives	Audiences	Channels	Due date
1	Blog	Tell short stories about the people, the benefits from the mangrove and the challenges of mangrove conservation activities.	International Community	Web page	Quarterly
2	Newsletter for an email distribution list	Share relevant information and data to increase knowledge among key actors.	Governmental authorities, academia, NGOs, etc.	Email	Monthly
3	Policy Brief (English)	Spread important data about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mangroves and carbon Mangroves and coastal protection 	Workgroup	Email Web page Basecamp	Quarterly
	(Spanish)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mangroves and food security 	National and local authorities	Printed copies Email Facebook	
4	Mangroves Day Celebration	Promote de mangrove conservation with several activities	National and local authorities	Facebook	July 26 th
5	Training Toolkit	Develop material for training workshops. Power point presentation about ecosystem services of mangroves. Guidelines to enforce the management of the ecosystem.	Local Communities	Workshops	Biannual
6	Social network campaigns	Digital campaigns to talk about mangroves focus in communities, partners and decision makers. Promote local and national discussions on these topics.	Digital community	Facebook y Twitter	Once a year.
8	Thematic discussions in Academia + publication	Organize discussions with experts in a specific topic of ecosystem services. Edit the presentation in a publication for many audiences.	Academia, partners and national authorities	Direct delivery	Year 2 and Year 3

d) Key messages

Audience	Messages
National authorities	Mangroves have a high value because of the ecosystem services. It's important to implement the public policy to protect and conserve biodiversity, and mitigate climate change through mangrove conservation.
Local authorities	Mangroves are crucial for coastal development, therefore its conservation should be an essential matter to consider on local development planning and normative.
Local partners	Mangroves are highly important for local growth, however several risks make it vulnerable. We need to empower our leaders to promote a sustainable management of our mangroves in order to guarantee life quality for our future generations
Donor	Ecuador is taking relentless efforts to improve mangrove management through a transformative legal framework and innovative mechanisms for communitarian management with the support of CI Ecuador Program.
International partners	Ecuador is taking big steps towards a mangrove sustainable management, and the results evidence the importance of implementing procedures involving local users. We are ready to share the experience in order to promote local empowerment throughout the mangroves of the world.
Local communities	Coastal people are fortunate to have the biggest natural wealth in earth on their backyard, from which to obtain their food, biodiversity, tourism. A paradise of life which needs to be protected by its own people. Associativity is key to empower the people and joint efforts to conserve the mangrove ecosystem effectively.

IV. Budget

Products		Activities	Resources	Budget
1	Blue Forests Blog	Gathering key information, research, and content development to create stories related to our work for the Blueforest blog.	In-house	\$0,00
2	International Policy Briefs	Research, developing content, writing and editing.	In-house	\$0,00
		Template design.	External supplier	\$1.100,00
3	Newsletter for an email distribution list	Create a template for the newsletter.	External supplier	\$100,00
		Update each newsletter and send.	In-house	\$0,00
4	National Policy Briefs	Policy brief translations.	In-house	\$0,00
		Printing (200 units per each Policy Brief)	External supplier	\$1.500,00
5	Social media campaign	Research, data synthesis, developing content and messages.	In-house	\$0,00
		Infographic design	External supplier	\$1.500,00
7	Mangrove Day celebration event.	Organize an event with key actors to celebrate Magroves Day	In-house	\$0,00
8	Training toolkit	Gather information and synthesize data.	In-house	\$0,00
		Power point presentation.	In-house	\$0,00
		Graphic design	External supplier	\$1.500,00
		Printing	External supplier	\$1.000,00
9	Theme talks & publications	Organize talk	In-house	\$0,00
		Coffe break and extras	External supplier	\$300,00
		Gathering information	In-house	\$0,00
		Publication graphic design	In-house	\$0,00
		Publication	External supplier	\$1.100,00
		Printing	External supplier	3.000,00
Total				\$12.000,00

IV. Schedule

		Year 1 – 2016				Year 2 – 2017				Year 3 – 2018			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
ACTIVITIES													
1	Blog												
2	Newsletter for an email distribution list												
3	Policy Briefs in English and Spanish translation												
4	Mangroves Day Celebration												
5	Training Toolkit												
6	Social network campaigns												
7	Thematic discussions in Academia + publication												