

CommunitySpirit

ANTHROTECT IS WORKING WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, IN COLOMBIA TO DEVELOP AVOIDED DEFORESTATION PROJECTS. **ROBIN LANCASTER** REPORTS

Efforts to develop market mechanisms for avoided deforestation are often criticised by green groups for failing to take into account the wishes of local people. But one Colombia-based company has set out to show that projects that reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) can engage indigenous communities successfully.

AnthroTECT, which has an office in Medellin, is working on a REDD pilot scheme in the Darien region near the Colombia-Panama border. About 50,000 voluntary emissions reductions are expected to be created in 2011. Fifty percent of all profits from sales will go to local communities, said Brodie Ferguson, the company's founder and managing director.

"Land tenure is the underlying issue, along with whether or not local stakeholders hold the carbon rights for activities on their land," he said. "We're fortunate to be working in a region where the Colombian government has enacted ambitious land reforms over the last two decades. This allows our model to ensure that local interests are closely aligned with those of other stakeholders," he added.

AnthroTECT is looking to expand its activities in Colombia. "We've begun to offer the model to additional community landowners. We hope to ultimately conserve over 5 million hectares in the Colombian Pacific, generating up to 20 million (carbon credits) a year," Ferguson said.

Although the company's work is centred on Colombia, he added that it could be replicated elsewhere in Latin America, such as Brazil, Mexico and Peru.

AnthroTECT was established in 2007 in Palo Alto, California – the Colombia office opened in 2009. Ferguson was motivated by the pace of deforestation, which he witnessed while conducting on-the-ground research for his doctorate in anthropology.

"My fieldwork in the Darien left me concerned about the world's tropical forests and everything they provide. Throughout the tropics, poor planning and inefficient land use activities are wiping out much of the world's last great wildlife and ecosystems, with all of the knowledge and ways of life that go with them," he said.

AnthroTECT was set up to provide "ecosystem services ... in order to explore new market-based approaches to conservation and to make a more viable economic alternative for rural communities in the tropics," said Ferguson.

The company has formed an alliance with Fondo Para la Accion Ambiental, a Colombia-based environmental trust fund (ETF), which offers several benefits, Ferguson said.

"They're a non-profit ETF with excellent financial and



administrative oversight. This creates possibilities with respect to bilateral and multilateral financing, and more flexible project implementation via open and competitive tendering processes," he said. "(It) also allows us to monitor and build local administrative capacity so that community landholders can assume increasing responsibility for the project over time," he added.

But, with many communities elsewhere vocal in their concerns about REDD projects, how difficult was it to convince the locals in Darien that carbon finance could benefit them? "It's not an easy process," said Ferguson. "It takes time to gain the trust of local stakeholders and ensure they have the knowledge and understanding necessary to take informed decisions," he said.

"Working with indigenous and collective landholders adds an additional layer of complexity, because of the internal governance structures they entail. Lastly, carbon finance simply may not be an attractive option compared with more profitable land use alternatives, like agriculture and ranching," he added.

The AnthroTECT project in Darien is being pursued through the voluntary carbon market – using the Verified Carbon Standard and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity standards. Work on a global REDD framework is ongoing under the auspices of the United Nations (U.N.), which could result in a compliance market for avoided deforestation.

However, U.N. climate talks are stalled on a range of issues, which could slow the development of global rules for REDD. Ferguson said a regulated market for REDD would drive "unprecedented levels of investment" to forest conservation.

But, he added, "Our main concern at the moment, is ensuring the right structures and incentives are in place in order to achieve meaningful emissions reductions." ●