

ECO CUENCAS: BASINS AND FINANCIAL REDISTRIBUTION IN ACTION

Pilot Project for Payment for Environmental Services (PES) in the Riogrande II reservoir watershed

OVERVIEW

- Organization data:
 - ✓ Name: **CuencaVerde corporation**
 - ✓ Organization type: **NGO**
 - ✓ Year of foundation: **2013**
 - Beneficiaries : **142 people, 25 rural families and 3,316,370 inhabitants of the city of Medellin and other municipalities**
 - Donors and financing: **European Union within the framework of the Regional Program for the Management of River Basins - 262 610 €**
- Location: **Watershed supplying water to the Rio Grande II reservoir, Antioquia department, Colombia**
- Beginning date: **December of 2015**
 - Motivations: **Improve water quality, sediment retention, ecological connectivity and quality of life**



CONTEXT AND ACTION

Summary | The 103,786-hectare watershed, located on the Central Cordillera, is supplying water to the Rio Grande II reservoir. Partially due to the agricultural dynamic of the populations, this basin shows deterioration in the water quality of its main rivers: Rio Chico, Rio Grande and Quebrada Las Animas, as well as its tributaries. Most of the owners living in the basin produce milk and beef.

In order to protect this affected environment and improve the living conditions of the inhabitants, the CuencaVerde Corporation has sought to initiate a sustainable transformation of the territory through the implementation of Payment for Environmental Services (PES) mechanism combined with protection measures and good production practices. Thanks to funding, financial rewards are given to peasants implicated in the project. On the hillside areas, banks, wetlands and water sources of the basins, the owners are committed to conserving 888 hectares of forest that are threatened by agricultural activities, mainly livestock. By recovering basin functions such as water infiltration, resilience to climate change improves. To reduce agricultural pressure on the land, production plans adapted to each farm ("agricultural plans") are set up, at the initiative of the families involved in the CuencaVerde project. For example, silvo-pastoral systems have been set up with local species to care for the soil and water by providing nutrients and organic matter. Moreover, the pasture has also been enriched by planting new seeds.

Sharing this experience strengthens regional dialogue and cooperation on river basin management in neighboring countries in the context of climate change adaptation.

Local challenges |

- Location of basins in private property: productive or domestic activities generating deforestation that is progressing at high speed;
- Poor environmental practices impacting water resources: diversion of river beds, drying of wetlands, which affect water quality;
- The lack of education of the peasant population in the supply basin.

Local responses |

- Agreements with landowners to improve their environmental practices and impacts through the Payment for Environmental Services;
- Structuring sustainable projects with "Agricultural Plans": agroforestry with silvo-pastoral systems and seedlings of good quality pasture, improvement of livestock practices...;
- Training in good practices and actions for the protection and restoration of watershed forests.

BENEFITS

Environmental | The actions carried out in the field as part of the Payment for Environmental Services have had a positive effect on the territory in the long term. Deforestation has been stopped. Ecological corridors have been established, reducing ecosystem fragmentation. The preserved ecological zones have improved water infiltration and sediment delivery to river beds, while improving water quality.

Social | Improving environmental and productive performance allows homeowners to improve their quality of life. In addition, beneficiaries of training and advice develop skills and knowledge that enable them to manage their land in a sustainable manner.

Economic | The agricultural plan improves milk and meat production for farmers, both qualitatively and quantitatively, which increases the producer's remuneration.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Interdisciplinary team to understand and manage complex problems that require diverse expertise;
- Participatory awareness-raising work on environmental and ecosystem protection;
- Flexibility in the face of an evolving process that requires adjustments and many opportunities for feedback.

OBSTACLES

- Legal validation of properties should be the first step, in order to identify legislative obstacles;
- For good land practices to be sustainable and viable, long-term advice and financial support are needed;
- There are no public policies that support these initiatives and their sustainability over time: the project is not known by all stakeholders in the territory.



«This project is very important because we are protecting not only the forest but also air and waters of the entire region, which are becoming increasingly scarce.»

Humberto Rave, land owner

- Contact:
 - ✓ Name: **Eduardo MERCADO**
 - ✓ Status: **Member of CuencaVerde team**
 - ✓ E-mail: eduardo.mercado@cuencaverde.org

- Related link(s) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sthhj10A150>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHSE52r93JE&t=15s>

<http://www.cuencaverde.org/>