



Improving carbon initiatives aimed at smallholders: Addressing opportunities and challenges through better communication



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This guide for practitioners will help you to better understand different ways one could:

- Communicate carbon project messages to different audiences
- Support communications between actors
- Provide information on complex concepts around climate change, carbon sequestration and carbon markets to farmers.

The challenge

New opportunities for farmers in the developing world to benefit from carbon payments for improved agricultural practices and planting trees on their farms now exist. However, engaging farmers in such carbon finance schemes is challenging, due to the need to establish ways of measuring, monitoring and verifying how much carbon is being sequestered, uncertainties surrounding the carbon market, barriers related to language and media access and participation in information flows, and unclear risks and unrealistic expectations about benefits of carbon schemes to farmers.

The approach

In order to understand these challenges and find ways in which to improve communication techniques to better inform farmers about carbon projects, a workshop dubbed Communicating Carbon brought together carbon project practitioners who are already working closely with farmers to ensure they benefit from these new payment opportunities. The main aim of the event was to share lessons learned with other carbon project practitioners (and potential project teams), agriculture and forestry extension service providers, farmers' organizations participating in carbon or other ecosystem service payment projects, along with investors and national apex climate change organizations.

The carbon project practitioners, many of whom work with non-governmental organizations, act as 'brokers' between carbon buyers and farmers in Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Farmers are urged to plant more trees or conserve water and soil in order to sequester carbon in the soil to help offset greenhouse gas emissions.

At the Communicating Carbon workshop practitioners analysed the type of language used; cultural and institutional factors that influence how information is communicated; and psychological factors that determine how information is accepted. Over a period of three-days in November, the participants consolidated their experience on how to communicate abstract concepts such as “carbon finance” to farmers through sharing their success stories and the challenges of communication.

This brief is one of the outputs of the workshop. We hope that through this publication, all target groups will learn from ongoing successes (and failures) and contribute to more efficient and effective future efforts towards ensuring fair, equitable and widespread benefits reaching smallholders from carbon-related initiatives.

Introduction – defining the problem

Experienced project practitioners have learnt that there are a number of communication failures that can affect how important messages about carbon sequestration are received and interpreted by farmers and their communities. These include:

- Using terms that are difficult for farmers to understand or are unfamiliar
- Talking exclusively to representatives or powerful actors instead of all the affected farmers
- Not briefing media partners before they cover a carbon payment project’s story
- Using only one way of communicating (e.g. words without pictures) or not enough information
- No follow-up messaging after initial communication
- Assuming that a ‘local’ language is preferred for communication
- Using insensitive or patronising examples/ metaphors to illustrate a point

We understand that a critical step that needs to be considered immediately in existing projects to help inform future initiatives is to adopt the principle of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). FPIC is an internationally recognized principle, supporting the rights of local communities to give or withhold their consent to proposals that may affect the lands they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use. It is a decision-making process that is:

- **Free:** does not involve coercion/manipulation
- **Prior:** is made before activities are undertaken
- **Informed:** is founded upon an understanding of the full range of issues and potential impacts
- **Consent:** involves granting or withholding

Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) is:

A **principle** that a community has the right to give or withhold its consent to a proposed project that may affect the lands they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use.

A **practice** of informed, non-coercive negotiations between researchers, development agencies, investors, companies or governments and indigenous communities prior to any undertaking, research, development or business on their customary lands.

A **right** to allow indigenous communities to reach consensus and make decisions based on their customary systems of decision-making.

A **tool** for achieving greater equity and a natural pathway to a co-management role for local communities in large development projects.

consent.

Although FPIC has been adopted in international law, the principle is only now beginning to be systematically applied to development projects. However, thoughtful communication processes and tools that incorporate the FPIC principle can provide local people involved in carbon payment projects the right to choose the extent to which they would like to be involved in a free, informed and consensual manner. The FPIC approach provides a framework for developing effective communication with farmers and their communities that helps avoid communication failures that can put carbon sequestration projects at risk. Application of the FPIC principle is particularly important for carbon payments where free, prior, informed consent is crucial for the project to function, be sustainable over the long run, and provide benefits to participants in an equitable manner.

Importance of FPIC in communicating carbon finance

This brief highlights various communication strategies and tools that help to provide farmers and their communities with the complete information they need to make their own decisions in terms of participating and engaging in a project based on the FPIC concept.

The practitioners identified several communication-related questions and prioritized the most critical ones. These are discussed below.

How to popularize and translate carbon sequestration messages without losing or confusing the essential meaning

Principles

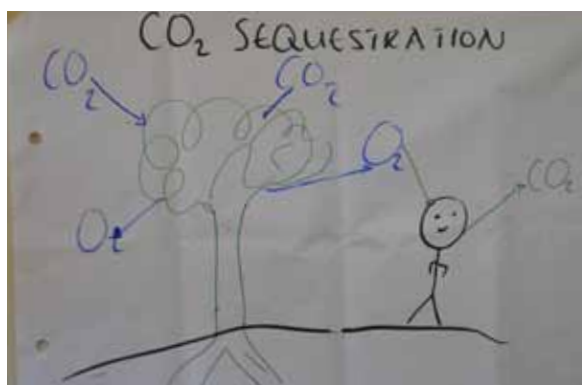
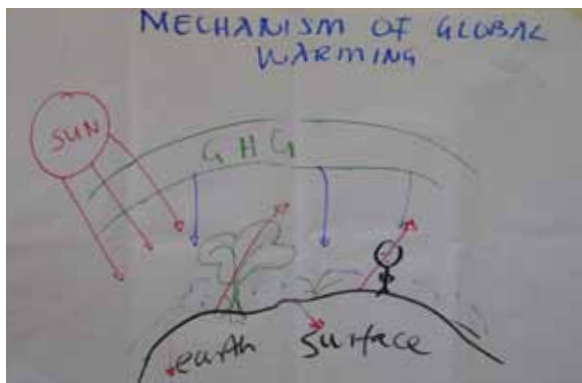
- Start from the perspective of the community, i.e. through an understanding and respect for their own knowledge and experience; things that they can relate to
- Define carbon sequestration in the local language(s) and context, using terms that farmers are familiar with
- Dramatize the reason it is important for them to sequester carbon

Tactics and tools

- Use metaphors and proverbs
- Use drawings and diagrams, giving concrete examples
- Use film clips, documentaries and plays
- Use local examples of weather-related events farmers have dealt with, such as diseases, flood, drought, change in seasonality, etc

Examples

Diagrams



Explanation of global warming and carbon sequestration to villagers, Vi Agroforestry Tanzania

Video Clips

For an example of how the importance of tree planting to mitigate climate change can be communicated to women, see TIST's video <http://vimeo.com/15880359>.

How to tailor messages to audiences in the same location who differ in literacy, gender, age and risk attitudes

The diverse social relations that make up farming communities require the development of a basket of messages and tools designed for various actors. This is because individuals and groups within communities have different desires and needs that motivate them, ways of assimilating information, and developing strategies to deal with the challenges they face, including, but by no means limited to, a changing climate.

Principles

- It is important to acknowledge diversity within the community and target and tailor messages to specific audiences. The first three steps are:
- Map the social structure of the community
- Identify the needs of key individuals and each group within it
- Target the message using communication tools that are appropriate for each group

Tactics and tools

- Identifying distinct groups - along with key players or actors within these groups that can facilitate communication - is one tactic that has been successfully employed by practitioners. Some suggested methods and tools, targeted to different community groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Different approaches and tools for different groups within communities

Group	Possible needs & motivation driving message content	Method	Tool
Elderly	Support, peace and contentment	Verbal, one-on-one	Proverbs, metaphors
Women	Security, food for the family	Verbal, group	Demonstrations, drama, songs, music
Youth	Jobs	Written and verbal, newsletters	Social media, pamphlets, mobile phones, sports
Children	Secure future	Interactive, posters	Drama, extracurricular activities
Men	Revenue	Verbal group meeting	Direct interaction



The International Small Group & Tree Planting Program TIST-India newsletter

How to support two-way communication and learning between farming communities and external actors

There are many different actors involved in carbon projects, coming from various backgrounds and angles, and two-way communication and learning is crucial. Experienced carbon project practitioners have identified the following principles, tactics, tools and examples of how to support this process.

Principles

- Communication of complex carbon payment messages, and learning about them takes time and regular repeated sharing of the same messages
- Inclusive and transparent participation is key
- Using a wide spectrum of communication/publishing outlets and tools is advised
- The 'supply chain' (see example) should be shared, discussed and known by all actors
- Reach out to many actors, particularly public sector and farmers' organizations
- Additional dedicated resources need to be allocated for greater communication capacity and efforts

Tactics

- Different actors describe their roles to other actors (e.g. not just project team)
- Create opportunities that encourage different groups of farmers to give feedback
- Increase awareness among public sector
- Farmers themselves can be trained to carry out monitoring for reporting and validation
- Investors from carbon markets should visit projects/farmers
- Document the co-benefits (incomes, food security) of the project

Tools/approaches

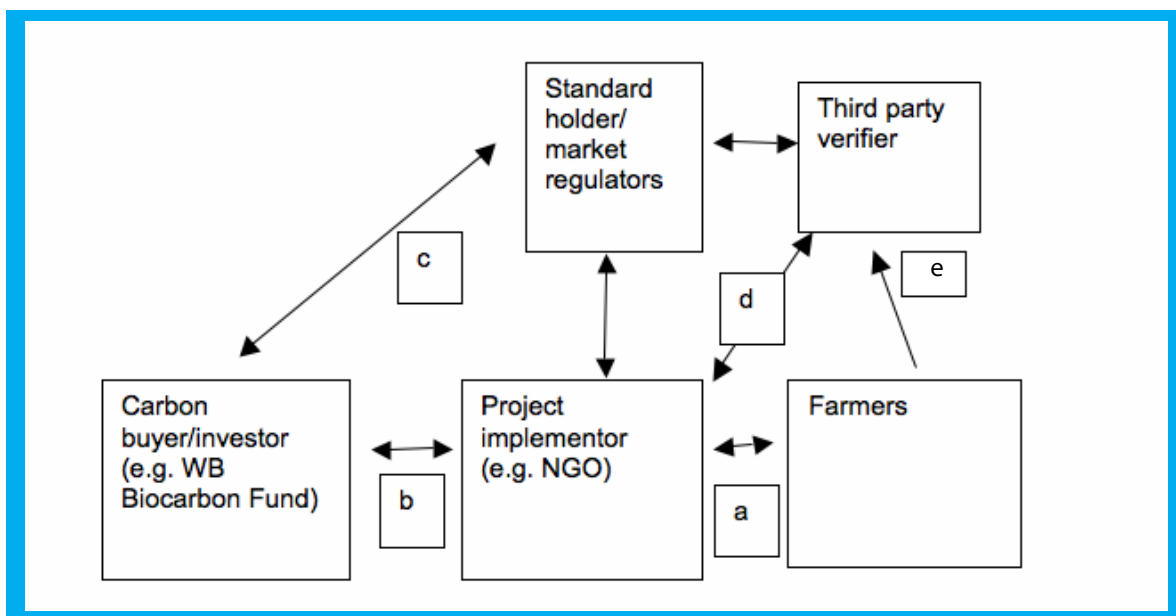
- Visits and meetings
- Organizational diagram/drawing
- Farmers' days, exhibitions, demonstrations, exchange visits
- Monthly cluster meetings with rotational leadership
- Photos, short films (taken by farmers)

- Seminars/trainings
- Website, blogs, benefit-cost analyses
- Different people, including farmers, contribute to newsletters translated in different languages
- Encourage personal communication through radio, churches, temples and mosques
- Prepare concise/short presentations on programme benefits; email exchange (between buyers, market regulators, project implementers and public officials)

Tactics pursued along various communication channels

- Monthly meetings, newsletters, extension services, training sessions, farmer meetings
- Marketing strategies, websites, international workshops, presentations, films
- Project Design Document (PDD), verification reports, validation reports
- PDD, data sharing through website, database, report recommendations
- Farmer visits

Example



Ecotrust Uganda programme actors and communication channels (Arrows show direction of flow of communication and tactics for channels a-e above)

What do investors and national organizations need to know?

Benefits of communicating carbon using FPIC

Given the challenges and principles outlined for communicating carbon, a Free, Prior, Informed Consent approach (see FPIC box) is potentially very useful, especially when integrated into communication methods and tools. Communication strategies that incorporate FPIC principles will contribute significantly to:

- Respecting the rights of local people to be able to reach consensus and make decisions based on their customary systems of decision-making
- Achieving greater equity and a natural pathway to a co-management role for local communities in development projects
- Farmers and their communities negotiating fair, equitable, and enforceable terms of revenue – and other benefit-sharing
- Poverty alleviation becoming a more sustainable co-benefit of carbon sequestration projects
- Blocking unacceptable exploration and investment in contested resources and ancestral domains.

Policy implications

National apex climate change bodies within government and their collaborating investment partners who wish to explore opportunities through better communication about carbon sequestration should consider the following actions:

- Make FPIC a legal pre-condition for all financing, investment, or regulatory decisions regarding carbon and other greenhouse gas sequestration-related initiatives.
- Include within carbon projects the resources needed to improve/adapt and use various communication tools and approaches that are sufficiently diverse and flexible to meet the needs of community stakeholders with different literacy levels, gender, age and risk attitudes
- Include guidance on good communication planning in requests for proposals for carbon sequestration project funding
- Encourage buyers in the carbon market to request details on how the projects are implementing FPIC principles
- Increase awareness of the need for information from farmers' and communities' experience of carbon sequestration projects as a resource for two-way learning about how to innovate actions for low carbon climate compatible development.

For more information

International workshop on methodologies regarding FPIC and indigenous peoples, New York, 17-19 January 2005. PFII/2005/WS.2/10.

Empowering Communities Through Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. In: World Resources 2005 -- The Wealth of the Poor: Managing ecosystems to fight poverty

Goodland, R. 2004. Free, and Prior Informed Consent and the World Bank Group. Sustainable Development Law and Policy, Special Issue: Prior Informed Consent IV(2):66-74.

Shames S, Masiga M, Byamukama B, Buck LE, Wollenberg E, Kristjanson P. 2011. Institutional Innovations for Engaging Smallholder Farmers in Agriculture Carbon Projects. CCAFS Research Report 6. Available at:<http://ccaafs.cgiar.org/resources/reports-and-policy-briefs>

We encourage readers to visit the websites of the following organizations to learn more about these innovative projects.



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