# Performance Evaluation of “Promoting Long-Term Sustainability of *Parque Nacional Cordillera Azul*” project

# Executive Summary

## Evaluation Design

### Evaluation Purpose and Evaluation Questions

The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the results of the Promoting Long-Term Sustainability of *Parque Nacional Coordillera Azul* project. In addition, USAID/Peru is interested in learning from this experience, as some lessons may be useful to similar Parks or projects. Therefore, this performance evaluation will answer the following questions:

1. Was the *Parque Nacional Cordillera Azul* effectively protected?
2. Has the project contributed to the long-term sustainability of the Park and its management?
3. What are the key elements of this project that can be replicated in future initiatives to preserve biodiversity and avoid CO2 emissions?

### Methodology

This evaluation uses the results of previous efforts to assess project results to conduct a desk review of the project’s performance with regards to the evaluation questions. As a result, the evaluation relies on the logical framework from the project’s Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP), which includes two main goals:

1. Protection of the 1.35 million hectares Park; and
2. Long-term sustainability for the Park and its management infrastructure

From the project monitoring system, two indicators served as principal results measures for the evaluation: the Index of Conservation Compatibility (ICC) and the sustainability benchmarks.

To complement the findings from secondary data sources, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. The main purpose of these interviews was to provide detail on information from the desk review and to inform the third evaluation question. These key informants were:

* Debra Moskovits, Chief of Party
* Maria Lourdes Bacigalupo, project Agreement Officer Representative
* Cinthia Mongylardi, CIMA’s Program Director
* Frank Oyola, Park Chief – SERNANP

### Limitations

This evaluation is based on the project monitoring system and is limited to the information provided by the project monitoring reports and the documentation supporting the PNCAZ REDD project.

## Project Background

The Parque Nacional Cordillera Azul (PNCAZ) protects what is known as the tropical Andes –1.35 hectares of pristine, continuous mountain forest in Peru and home to an invaluable biodiversity. Located between the Huallaga and Ucayali rivers in the departments of Loreto, San Martin, Ucayali, and Huánuco, PNCAZ is Peru’s third largest national park and is critical to the conservation of the tropical Andes.

Despite successful efforts, also under USAID support –to build protection infrastructure, train and implement patrols, remove illegal logging, and involve communities living in the buffer zone in Park-related activities– this remains a threatened region. People and their main activities are rapidly expanding in the buffer zone. In 2008, deforestation in the Huallaga valley was estimated at a 1-2% rate per year and was increasing in the Ucayali valley. Oil and mining concessions were (and still are) being planned in the Ucayali valley. Colonization, illegal logging, and poaching may result as a product of new roads in the area.

The project has been implemented through a partnership. With USAID funds, the Field Museum of Natural History (FMC) has partnered with the *Centro de Conservación, Investigación y Manejo de Áreas Naturales* (CIMA) –a local NGO that has worked on the Park’s management since 2002 and has been granted a 20-year full management contract for the Park in August, 2008- in order to implement the activities planned in the project’s Work Plan.

The original cooperative agreement was approved for three years: August 2008 – March 2011, for a total of $2,800,000. However, in January 2011, it was extended for two years with an additional budget of $2,017,491. Subsequently, a six month no-cost extension was approved.

## Was the *Parque Nacional Cordillera Azul* Effectively Protected?

Yes. Despite minimal infractions reported inside the Park, the Park as a whole has been successfully protected from threats and drivers of deforestation. As reported by the ICC, during the execution of the project, the deforestation rate inside the Park has approached zero and the vast majority of the Park, more than 1.35 million hectares, is under active protection.

This conclusion is consistent with other assessments conducted by other institutions. During the validation and verification process to enter the REDD carbon market, Scientific Certification Systems –a company globally renowned in third-party environmental and sustainability certification– found that had the PNCAZ REDD project not been operating between August, 2008 and July, 2012, greenhouse gas emission reductions would be 2.1 million metric tons lower than what was estimated for that period of time. Similarly, SERNANP –the government of Peru organization responsible for overseeing the Park protection– estimates that the probability of finding an infraction only reaches 0.05% of the Park.

## Has the Project Contributed to the Long-Term Sustainability of the Park and Its Management?

Yes. The project has made important contributions towards the Park’s financial sustainability: the approval of the Park’s Business Plan, the selection of the fiscal agency that will administer the endowment, the validation and verification of PNCAZ REDD project, and the offering of carbon credits –over 5.7 million– on the REDD+ carbon market are noticeable accomplishments consistent with the expected results for the project. The project has helped put the Park in a position where it may be able to generate sufficient revenues to achieve financial sustainability.

## What Are the Key Elements of This Project That Can Be Replicated in Future Initiatives to Preserve Biodiversity and Avoid Co2 Emissions?

* Protecting a park requires a comprehensive set of interventions that reach beyond the borders of the Park. A team of trained park guards and a system of patrols has to effectively detect and repel any illegal incursion into the Park, as well as mitigate the impact of such activities. Guard activities must be complemented by activities that address threats before they result in incursions to the Park. This means that working on the buffer zone is critical to the Park’s protection.
* Ensuring that neighboring communities understand the benefits they obtain from the Park makes it is easier to involve neighboring communities in protecting the park. The approach used in PNCAZ aims at having communities care for the Park while cultivating a sense of ownership and an understanding that the Park is crucial to improving their quality of life.
* One way that CIMA has found to involve the neighboring communities is through progressive training in useful knowledge that targets residents of the buffer zone: the use of a compass and GPS devices, climate monitoring, data collection, etc. Through this training, neighboring communities learn to value the Park and its benefits while forming a favorable opinion about the work done in the Park.
* Involvement in the Park protection is also achieved via the system of communal park guards. If the neighboring communities are trained and work regularly in patrols, the force protecting the Park widens and spreads out through the buffer zone when they are off duty. A trained communal park guard may tend to adopt eco-friendlier habits and detect threats and report them to authorities when they are approaching the Park.
* To reach financial sustainability a project must diversify its fundraising approaches and avoid reliance on donations, especially in times of economic downturn. After internalizing that donor funding was not producing the needed results, the project had success pursuing other avenues. The recent sale of carbon credits by the Alto Mayo Forest shows that the REDD+ market may be a viable option to reach financial sustainability. Although it may be more limited in scope and funds, applying for grants has also been effective.
* Generating income from the park or natural resource’s conservation can help reinforce incentives to preserve the park or natural resource. If stakeholders see that it is possible to obtain resources through protection of the Park, and that the resource level is directly correlated to the level of the Park’s preservation, they may be more incentivized to support the park’s preservation as a core source of income for their communities and themselves.
* Projects need to manage stakeholder expectations as they venture into new approaches, such as the REDD+ market, to raise funds. Local stakeholders have overestimated the benefits from the REDD+ market and expect results that cannot be achieved, whereas individuals sometimes even expect direct cash compensations. These unfounded expectations can seriously affect the Park managers’ credibility, downplay the actual results of such initiatives and hurt the project results.

## Recommendations

* CIMA should periodically update, every three years at most, the Park’s map of risks and threats. This would help to refine the intervention and guide any geographical extension of the project. This should be done with the participation of neighboring communities. CIMA should consider dividing the Park into a number of sectors and holding workshops with the communities residing in each sector.
* CIMA and SERNANP should closely follow the legal proceedings against the Suarez brothers. Although the process may be very slow, it is important to set a precedent to this kind of infractions. Also, it is the only way to regain this land and achieve total forestation of the Park in the future.
* CIMA and SERNANP should closely follow the plans to build the *Ferrovía Interoceanica Peru-Brazil*, a railway and road that cut through the “neck” of the Park. After advocating for rerouting this project, the construction has been slowed down. However, it remains a permanent threat due to its categorization as a National Priority by law.
* CIMA should continue applying for grants, a source of funding that has proved to be more effective than searching for donors. This strategy can support the expansion of work in new areas and to support ongoing activities.
* The FMC, CIMA, and SERNANP should implement in full the communication strategy they designed to inform local stakeholders of the sale of credits in the REDD+ market and the distribution of this revenue. FMC and CIMA recognize the enormous importance of correcting existing and potential misunderstandings related to REDD+. This communication strategy will also reinforce the recognition that protecting the Park today will provide more revenues and quality-of-life benefits in the future, which could provide additional incentives to these stakeholders to commit to the Park’s protection.