



Summary



The Chyulu Hills are a volcanic mountain range in south-eastern Kenya and are part of the greater Tsavo Conservation area (TCA), forming a critical wildlife corridor between Tsavo and Amboseli National Parks. The area is home both to Maasai pastoralists and Kamba agriculturalists who have utilized the land for decades. The cloud forest on top of the hills is a unique feature and the landscape provides important ecosystem services to the communities including water provision, carbon sequestration and storage, medicinal plants, cultural heritage, and biodiversity.

The 1 billionth Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) credit was issued to the Chyulu Hills REDD+ project following the finalization of the project's second verification. The team has been collaborating with local community members for biomass sampling and restoration of grasslands. The drought in Kenya has been very challenging, resulting in extensive food security issues and wildfire threats, mitigated in part through emergency school meal programs and enhanced firefighting training and equipment.

HIGHLIGHTS

Verra Issues 1 Billionth Credit from Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project

During the COP27 conference at Sharm el-sheikh in Egypt last year, Verra issued the one billionth carbon credit from the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Program - the world's leading standard for certifying activities that address greenhouse gas emissions. This announcement represents one billion fewer tonnes of CO2 in the atmosphere, a major achievement that occurred during COP27.

"The Maasai communities have been funded by the carbon credit revenue to develop a sustainable local economy based on protecting the natural environment while maintaining our cultural link to the land, building a better future for generations to come." - Samson Parashina, Maasai leader and Chairman of the Chyulu Hills Conservation Trust.

"I am incredibly proud that Verra has achieved this milestone, especially because it means we have mobilized billions of dollars, improved thousands of lives, and conserved precious ecosystems. And yet, we must realize that one billion tonnes is just a down payment on the work ahead of us all, given the scale of the climate emergency. We look forward to supporting the market as it grows and generates even more climate action through carbon finance." - David Antonioli, CEO, Verra.

The Forest Plan Pillar



Sustainable Development Goal



The Second Verification has been finalized

The Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project Office finalized its second verification this year, resulting from two years of hard work which was assisted by all the partners, with important technical support from Conservation International (CI) and South Pole. The team was deployed into the field for a period of eight months to visit 400 biomass plots with a new, expanded team of botanists. As a result, 3.1 million newly verified credits have been issued by the project to the voluntary carbon market, hence successfully terminating the second verification.

This second verification was a very different experience compared to the first, given changes in market conditions and community awareness of project activities and benefits. Communication with the communities has improved significantly as they are experiencing the rewards of successful conservation. The communities have decided to participate in biomass sampling as part of the verification under the guidance of the CI team.

Land restoration has been an important part of project activities, though it is not integrated into the carbon crediting. The team has been restoring various sites across the project area using seed bank materials; thus far finding good improvement with previously degraded grasslands. The health and vitality of these grasses are particularly important to the Masaai community to ensure healthy livestock. These communities have been hired to assist with the regeneration whilst being educated on the importance of utilizing rest periods between grazing.

The Forest Plan Pillars



Sustainable Development Goals



CHALLENGES

Drought mitigation through the school meals program

This year, Kenya faced one of its worst droughts since 2009, resulting in failed harvests across the project area and food insecurity for the local wildlife. Severe droughts affected the availability of water and food for every animal across the ecosystem and led to many deaths of livestock and wildlife. Local populations who depend on livestock were significantly affected by the loss of their main source of livelihood and were not able to afford health care, food, and education among other basic needs.

The drought has also challenged the Chyulu Hills beekeeping program in the last year as the dry environment was not favorable for bees, forcing migration to more optimal areas. As a result, no honey was harvested from the project beehives during this period.

The hunger-related challenges led to a drastic drop in school attendance. Students face difficulty concentrating, have collapsed in classrooms, and are often unable to travel the many kilometers on an empty stomach to attend. As a response, the Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project acted promptly to establish an emergency meal program for 59 local primary schools for two months (until the rainy season). Project partners agreed to mobilize emergency funding and roll out necessary food supplies to support 24,000 students.

Each school benefited from enough rations for two months with the facilitation of cooks to guarantee the smooth delivery of the program. The meals program was accompanied by outreaches with the aim to educate the parents and students that this support was possible because of the conservation effort through the implementation of the REDD+ project. During the outreach, the project team highlighted the significance of keeping the forests and landscape free of fires, and the potential risks fires have on the longevity of the project.

The Forest Plan Pillars



Sustainable Development Goals



Fires rage during the dry season

During the dry season of 2022, Chyulu Hills faced a series of fires occurring throughout the project area; mainly due to arson. To mitigate the threat, the project developed and implemented the Fire Management Plan (FMP) for a second year in a row, wherein partners can brainstorm strategies to control potential fires. Through the FMP, the project delivered training to 300 rangers and created a rapid response unit of 40 rangers for emergency support. Furthermore, supplementary firefighting equipment was distributed to support every field team in tackling fires on the ground.

One of the biggest investments the Project Office made this year in the FMP was the decision to hire an air tractor for 60 days to mitigate fire spreading within the landscapes. It proved to be a significant factor in reducing fire intensity and preventing expansion into neighboring landscapes.

In Q3, the Air Tractor responded to 15 of the reported 16 fires around the REDD+ Project area. A total of 38.7 flight hours were covered, 105 flights were made to drop water onto fires, and a total of 216,500 liters of water dropped.

In Q4, a total of 97 flight hours were covered by the air tractor. The air tractor fought fires over the landscape for 22 days in October. The longest flight was taken on 24th October as the air tractor flew for about 11.3 hours.

The Forest Plan Pillars



Sustainable Development Goals



Government Staff Rotation

In the last half of 2022, the Chyulu Hills REDD+ project experienced several staff rotations within the Kenya Forestry Service (KFS) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

Although this is a common practice that the government of Kenya has adopted for many years, it remains an issue and creates challenges for the Project Office to carry out development and implementation tasks.

The main challenge is that the rotations have not been undertaken in an organized manner and there is little to no sufficient handover to the next person. This has delayed the Project Office activities, as additional effort is required to re-establish relationships and provide repetitive briefings to re-align partners on the pending tasks.

