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CAQUETÁ'S LOW-EMISSION RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: AMBITIOUS TARGETS AND STRONG COLLABORATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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Caquetá, known as the Golden Gate of the Amazon, is a biodiversity hotspot with unique ecosystems transitioning from the mountainous Andes foothills into the Amazon, with 71% forest cover. Despite ongoing challenges from the active presence of illegal armed groups and a lack of incentives for forest conservation, the local population remains committed to creating better, forest-friendly livelihoods. In an effort to responsibly develop and manage the department's pathway to growth, the government rolled out a Low-Emission Rural Development Strategy (LED-R) in December 2019, aiming to transform the Caquetá into a model of sustainable development by 2035.

The strategy, spearheaded by the Departmental Environmental and Agricultural Secretariat, promotes a jurisdiction-wide approach to rural development that significantly reduces emissions, and it is an important instrument for Caquetá's rural population. As Marlin Molina, a member of Florencia's Municipality Cocoa Farmers Committee, stated: *the Caquetá LED-R strategy is a guiding instrument for the sustainable production of agricultural commodities in the region.*

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TARGETS:

Following the strategy, an Action Plan was developed, outlining 41 key targets to foster sustainable practices and enhance the region's economic stability that include:

1. **Converting 3,000 Hectares of forest to Conservation and Sustainable Production** by implementing conservation practices and promoting sustainable production methods that protect forests and enhance biodiversity.
2. **Restoring 15,000 Hectares of degraded land with Agroforestry Systems** to increase biodiversity and provide additional income sources for local communities.
3. **Providing Agricultural Extension Services to 8,000 farmers** to adopt sustainable practices, improve productivity, and reduce environmental impact.
4. **Strengthening Six Low-Emission Sustainable Value Chains** by connecting them with local, regional, national, and international markets. Commodities include coffee, cacao, guadua bamboo, aquaculture, panela cane, and livestock).
5. **Shifting 350,000 Hectares of grazing land to Sustainable Livestock Production**, through improved pasture management and reduced deforestation impacts.
6. **Establishing Payment for Environmental Services (PES) Programs in all 16 Municipalities**, incentivizing landowners to engage in conservation and restoration activities and rewarding environmental stewardship, focusing on maintaining and improving water resources.
7. **Achieving Zero Net Deforestation by 2035,** ensuring restoration activities offset any forest loss.

Collaborating and Looking Forward

The targets set by Caquetá's LED-R strategy are backed by a clear action plan (as mentioned above) and the commitment of stakeholders and allies.

Among those invested in the success of Caqueta's LED-R strategy are Earth Innovation Institute and Solidaridad, who are partners in Amazonia Connect, a five-year partnership to scale up the adoption of low-emission agricultural practices and biodiversity conservation.

Since 2014, Earth Innovation Institute has directly supported the Department of Caquetá in the design and implementation of its LED-R strategy. It has provided technical support to the Department since the inception of the LED-R strategy in 2019 and continues to find ways to strengthen it.

This support evolves and adapts to regional needs, including (1) determining the costs of implementing the LED-R prioritized targets; (2) partnering with the Public Administration School to train the government and key stakeholders to develop proposals and projects to secure funding towards the LED-R prioritized targets; (3) further developing Caquetá's Sustentable platform to monitor the progress of the LED-R strategy in partnership with the Department; (3) assisting the current government in strengthening and officializing the role of the Climate Change Subnode - the governance structure that oversees the implementation of Caquetá's LED-R strategy (see below), among others.

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Strategic Implementation

Caquetá's government is deploying a comprehensive approach to achieve its LED-R targets, including:

- **Collaborative Implementation:** Engaging multiple stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and private sector partners, to ensure inclusive and effective planning processes (Boyd et al, 2018). Caquetá's Climate Change Subnode serves as the multistakeholder governance space overseeing the implementation of the LED-R strategy, including providing critical inputs to prioritize its targets.

- **Incentives for Transition:** Through dialogues with leaders from six prioritized commodities, the Department recently identified challenges and opportunities to shift its production models towards Low-Carbon Agriculture (LCA) and Deforestation-Free Production (DFP) to secure access to formal markets, including international markets. These include access to technologies, better and cheaper agricultural inputs, and favorable credit lines to support the transition towards LCA/DFP. Caquetá is seeking investors and partners to facilitate the transition, which can be challenging but also an opportunity (Stickler et al, 2024).
- **Market Integration:** Caquetá is advancing its strategies to produce and market its sustainable agricultural commodities locally and globally. The *Caquetá Sustentable* platform promotes these products effectively (e.g., Caquetá's Cheese). However, there is room for improvement in maintaining current markets and expanding their outreach. For example, through professionalizing farm operations, enterprises, and cooperatives, better logistics for storing and distributing products, agreements with long-term buyers, and securing spaces and support for selling products in local markets.
- **Monitoring Progress and Adaptive Management:** Caquetá monitors progress toward implementing its LED-R goals through the platform Caquetá Sustentable. More recently, it began tracking partners' activities and projects that support its LED-R strategy's goals. The platform is transparent and allows for adaptive management and continuous improvement.

Solidaridad also plays an important role in the transition to LCA/DFP in Caquetá, providing capacity-building services to cattle and coffee producers in the region. To date, over 744 families of producers have received training, and the organization aims to train an additional 1,100 families of producers in LCA/DFP agricultural practices. Solidaridad is also developing market connections through partnerships with Nestle (2022-2024) and Siruma Coffee (2024-onwards) to ensure farmers transitioning to LCA/DFP models can

access markets. In collaboration with Earth Innovation Institute, Solidaridad is looking into financial models and the design of special credit lines to support these farmers transitioning to LCA/DFP in the Department.

Achieving transition at the scale of an entire department requires significant collaboration from multiple partners. For example, the recently launched Strategy for Regional Integration (RIS) is part of USAID's overall effort to increase regional collaboration and coordination. The RIS seeks to identify synergies and collaboration areas, avoid duplication, and reduce potentially contradictory efforts among the 12 USAID-funded projects in the Department, including Amazonía Connect and its partners.

This coordination is critical to maximizing impact through enhanced efficiency and effectiveness. It is an example that can be replicated by other funders with multiple projects in Caquetá to improve coordination among those invested in Caquetá's transition to LED-R.

The bold targets in Caquetá's LED-R strategy are driven by the local population's dream of achieving better forest-friendly livelihoods. While Caquetá has a significant journey ahead, it is moving steadily toward a sustainable, prosperous future for its people, making a critical contribution to Colombia's climate commitments.

More detailed information on the targets and progress of Caquetá's LED-R strategy is available at Caquetá Sustentable.

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Amazonia Connect is a partnership between USAID, Solidaridad, Earth Innovation Institute, National Wildlife Federation, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Together with USAID's Amazon Regional Environment Program, producers, companies, local governments and financial institutions, Amazonia Connect promotes and scales the adoption of low-emission commodity production to improve biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru.

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