

UK collaborates with Mexico to reduce deforestation

Since March 2021, UK PACT has been addressing the deforestation that takes place in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas by supporting eco-friendly, sustainable economic activities.

Deforestation in Chiapas is a significant problem. According to Global Forest Watch, the state lost 574 thousand hectares of rainforest between the years 2001 and 2018, representing an average of 32 thousand hectares cleared every year. The main causes that drive deforestation are cattle ranching and farming, which local populations need to subsist. This is the reason why it is important to promote non-timber activities in the state, especially in protected areas.

Resin is the natural liquid produced by some tree species such as the ocote pine, endemic to Chiapas. It is used in the production of a variety of natural chemical products like varnish, adhesive and cleaning agents. Sustainable harvesting of resin helps preserve the rainforest in two ways. First, it recognises the long-term value of this tree species and, second, communities act together to protect these trees and their habitat.

UK PACT is supporting four municipalities in Chiapas to harvest sustainably the resin while substantially increasing the output and raising annual incomes. Currently, 200 local producers are participating in trainings to improve their technical skills in resin tapping, collection and storage, tool conservation and maintenance, and management of resin production areas. They also receive financial education to improve their business skills. In addition, resin producers from the state of Michoacán provide workshops to share their expertise and experience on forest care and resin harvesting.

A key market barrier in the resin value chain is the requirement to produce a minimum of ten tonnes. The capital outlay for this quantity is very high and was discouraging individuals and communities alike from participating in resin production. In response, UK PACT set up a credit facility called the "Resin Producers Fund" to cover up to 90% of their production expenses. Upon payment from the buyer, the producers return the loan plus a small amount to cover costs. Rising demand, including from Guatemala, has made the new system so cost-effective that it is attracting neighbouring communities to enter the resin business.

Alonso B, a resin producer from the 'Corazón del Valle' community, explains:

I have been producing resin for three years. At the beginning, I had enough production to fill four buckets. Now, thanks to the training I have received, I am producing 14 of them." In 2019, the communities of California and Nuevo Vicente Guerrero abandoned resin harvesting, as it was no longer profitable. With UK PACT

support, the situation has changed with resin production reaching an estimated ten tonnes.

For the next year, this project will continue to strengthen the business and technical skills of the resin producing communities in Chiapas. This partnership between the UK and Mexico will continue to improve the livelihoods and incomes of resin harvesters while reducing deforestation in the south of the country.

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