

Webinar

Unlocking Carbon Credit Opportunities in Africa: The Role of Cooperatives in Driving Climate Action and Sustainable Livelihoods

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International Cooperative Alliance
Africa - 1992
Promoting the development of cooperatives in Africa



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NARRATIVE REPORT: Webinar on Carbon Credits in Africa and the Role of Cooperatives

Organizers:

International Cooperative Alliance – Africa (ICA-Africa) and Fairtrade Africa (FTA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Cooperative Alliance – Africa (ICA-Africa), in partnership with Fairtrade Africa (FTA), convened a virtual webinar on **"Unlocking Carbon Credit Opportunities in Africa: The Role of Cooperatives in Driving Climate Action and Sustainable Livelihoods."** Specifically, EU Projects under ICA and FTA organised the webinar from start to completion as an extra intervention beyond capacity development they are offering to farmers and producer organizations on sustainable agriculture with a focus at environmental protection. The webinar brought together cooperative leaders, producer organizations, staff from ICA and FTA, climate finance experts, development practitioners, government representatives, and private sector actors from across Africa and beyond to explore the growing opportunities within carbon markets and the role cooperatives can play in enabling smallholder farmers to benefit from climate finance.

The webinar was organized in recognition of the increasing impacts of climate change on agricultural systems and rural livelihoods, as well as the emerging opportunities presented by carbon credit markets as a source of financing for climate action. Discussions focused on enhancing participants' understanding of carbon credits, carbon market mechanisms, and the practical pathways through which cooperatives can engage in carbon projects while promoting environmental sustainability and improving farmer livelihoods.

The first technical session provided participants with an overview of carbon credits, the differences between compliance and voluntary carbon markets, and the processes involved in developing carbon projects. Participants learned about key concepts such as carbon sequestration, additionality, permanence, monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV), and benefit-sharing mechanisms. The presentation highlighted Africa's significant potential in carbon markets, particularly through agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture, forest conservation, and ecosystem restoration initiatives.

Subsequent presentations focused on practical implementation experiences. Acorn demonstrated how smallholder farmers can be connected to international carbon markets through agroforestry projects and presented a transparent benefit-sharing model where farmers receive the largest share of carbon revenues. Solidaridad shared practical experiences from implementing climate-smart agriculture and carbon initiatives with thousands of farmers across East Africa, emphasizing that carbon finance should complement

productivity improvement and climate resilience efforts rather than serve as a standalone livelihood strategy.

The webinar generated considerable interest among participants, particularly regarding financing opportunities, project eligibility requirements, governance structures, monitoring systems, and equitable distribution of benefits. Discussions highlighted the importance of strong partnerships among cooperatives, governments, development organizations, and carbon market actors to overcome barriers related to technical capacity, financing, and certification costs.

Overall, the webinar reinforced the strategic role of cooperatives in aggregating smallholder farmers, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, facilitating access to carbon markets, and ensuring that climate finance reaches grassroots communities. It also underscored the need for continued capacity building, policy support, and investment in farmer-centered carbon initiatives to maximize the developmental and environmental benefits of carbon markets across Africa.

INTRODUCTION

On 29 May 2026, the International Cooperative Alliance – Africa (ICA-Africa), in partnership with Fairtrade Africa (FTA), successfully convened a virtual webinar on “**Unlocking Carbon Credit Opportunities in Africa: The Role of Cooperatives in Driving Climate Action and Sustainable Livelihoods.**” The webinar brought together cooperative leaders, producer organizations, climate finance experts, development practitioners, government representatives, and private sector actors from across Africa and beyond to explore emerging opportunities within the carbon market and discuss how cooperatives can leverage these opportunities to enhance climate resilience and improve livelihoods for smallholder farmers.

The webinar was organized against the backdrop of increasing global attention to climate change and the growing recognition of carbon markets as a mechanism for financing climate action. While Africa contributes minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, the continent bears a disproportionate burden of climate change impacts, particularly among smallholder farmers whose livelihoods depend heavily on natural resources and agriculture. Recognizing the strategic position of cooperatives as people-centered enterprises capable of organizing farmers and communities, the webinar sought to increase awareness and understanding of carbon credit systems and provide practical guidance on how cooperatives can participate in and benefit from carbon markets.

The event attracted participants from various sectors, including cooperative organizations, Fairtrade-certified producer groups, Staff from ICA and FTA, development agencies, government institutions, environmental organizations, and climate finance practitioners. The discussions focused on building knowledge around carbon credits, understanding carbon market structures, exploring opportunities for cooperatives, and sharing practical experiences from organizations already implementing carbon projects with smallholder farmers.

OBJECTIVE OF THE WEBINAR

The webinar intended to:

- Build awareness on carbon credits and their relevance in Africa
- Explain how carbon markets operate (compliance and voluntary markets)
- Highlight opportunities for cooperatives in carbon credit generation
- Share practical examples and success stories
- Provide guidance on how cooperatives can get started

PARTICIPANTS

The webinar brought together around 150 cooperative leaders, producer organizations, climate finance experts, development practitioners, government representatives, and private sector actors from across Africa and beyond to explore emerging opportunities within the carbon market and discuss how cooperatives can leverage these opportunities to enhance climate resilience and improve livelihoods for smallholder farmers.

WEBINAR PROCEEDINGS

SESSION1: OPENING REMARKS

The webinar commenced with welcoming remarks from the organizers. Speaking on behalf of ICA-Africa, Mr. Erick Obongo underscored the urgency of addressing climate change and emphasized the central role cooperatives can play in ensuring that smallholder farmers are not left behind in emerging climate finance opportunities. He highlighted that climate change is no longer a distant concern but a present reality affecting millions of African farmers through declining agricultural productivity, erratic rainfall patterns, and increasing environmental degradation.

Mr. Obongo observed that although global carbon markets continue to expand and attract billions of dollars in investment, smallholder farmers remain largely excluded due to technical, financial, and institutional barriers. He emphasized that cooperatives provide a practical

solution to this challenge through aggregation, allowing individual farmers to collectively participate in carbon markets, share monitoring and certification costs, and access climate finance that would otherwise remain beyond their reach.

In his remarks on behalf of Fairtrade Africa, Mr. Agapeters Kubasu highlighted the growing importance of climate finance and sustainability within global agricultural value chains. He stressed that while carbon markets offer significant opportunities, participation must be structured in a manner that ensures fairness, transparency, and dignity for farmers. He noted that climate action should not only focus on environmental outcomes but also contribute directly to improved livelihoods and resilience for farming communities. He further emphasized that cooperatives are uniquely positioned to create accountability, trust, and collective action, making them ideal vehicles for engaging farmers in carbon market initiatives.

Both speakers reaffirmed the commitment of ICA-Africa and Fairtrade Africa to supporting cooperatives in understanding and accessing carbon finance opportunities while ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed among participating farmers.

SESSION 2: INTRODUCTION TO CARBON CREDITS AND CARBON MARKETS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICA

The session was facilitated by Mr. Amos Wekesa, a Senior Carbon Finance and Climate Resilience Expert, who provided a comprehensive introduction to carbon credits and carbon markets.

Mr. Wekesa began by explaining the concept of carbon credits, describing them as tradable units representing one metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent either removed from or prevented from entering the atmosphere. He clarified the distinction between emission reduction credits and carbon removal credits, emphasizing that both contribute to global climate mitigation efforts.

The presentation outlined the processes involved in generating carbon credits, beginning with project design and baseline assessments, followed by monitoring, reporting, verification, certification, and eventual sale of credits to buyers. He explained that successful carbon projects require evidence that activities result in measurable climate benefits beyond what would have occurred under normal circumstances. Concepts such as additionality, permanence, and leakage were discussed in detail to help participants understand the integrity requirements associated with carbon projects.

A significant portion of the presentation focused on the differences between compliance and voluntary carbon markets. Compliance markets were described as government-regulated systems where organizations are legally required to offset emissions, while voluntary markets involve companies and institutions voluntarily purchasing carbon credits to meet sustainability commitments or net-zero targets.

Mr. Wekesa highlighted Africa's enormous potential within the global carbon economy. He pointed to opportunities in agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, forest restoration, renewable energy, waste management, and soil carbon enhancement. According to the presentation, Africa possesses vast land resources, extensive smallholder farming systems, and significant opportunities for ecosystem restoration, all of which position the continent favorably within emerging carbon markets.

Despite this potential, several challenges were identified. These included limited access to financing, inadequate technical expertise, weak monitoring systems, complex land tenure arrangements, and uncertainty in carbon pricing. He emphasized that successful carbon projects require strong governance structures, community engagement, transparent benefit-sharing arrangements, and robust monitoring and verification systems.

The session provided participants with a foundational understanding of carbon markets and set the stage for subsequent discussions on practical implementation.

SESSION 3: ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN CARBON MARKETS AND HOW COOPERATIVES CAN GET STARTED

The second session was delivered by Ms. Mary Chege, Project Developer at Acorn, who focused on the practical role of cooperatives in carbon markets and explained how farmer organizations can begin participating in carbon credit initiatives.

Ms. Chege presented Acorn's experience connecting smallholder farmers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to international carbon markets through agroforestry projects. She explained that Acorn was established in response to the growing challenges facing smallholder farmers, including climate change, land degradation, and food insecurity. Through agroforestry interventions, the organization supports farmers to improve soil health, increase productivity, diversify incomes, and generate carbon credits.

The presentation demonstrated how cooperatives can act as implementing partners by organizing farmers, facilitating data collection, supporting project implementation, and ensuring ongoing monitoring. Through partnerships with local organizations, Acorn

aggregates carbon sequestration activities undertaken by thousands of farmers and converts these into certified carbon removal units that can be sold to international buyers.

Particular attention was given to Acorn's benefit-sharing model, which allocates seventy percent of carbon revenues directly to farmers, fifteen percent to local implementing partners, and fifteen percent to Acorn for technical and operational support. This model was presented as an example of transparent and equitable benefit sharing designed to ensure that farmers receive the majority of financial benefits generated through carbon projects.

Ms. Chege further highlighted several barriers preventing smallholder farmers from accessing carbon markets independently, including high monitoring costs, limited financing, and insufficient technical knowledge. She explained how Acorn addresses these challenges through digital monitoring systems, satellite-based biomass measurement, and innovative financing mechanisms that provide upfront support to local partners and farmers before carbon revenues begin to flow.

The session generated significant interest among participants, particularly regarding opportunities for cooperatives to partner with carbon project developers and access financing for climate-smart agricultural initiatives.

SESSION 4: CASE STUDIES / PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

The final technical presentation was delivered by Ms. Sweeny Binsari of Solidaridad, who shared practical experiences implementing climate-smart agriculture and carbon projects with smallholder farmers across East Africa.

Ms. Binsari emphasized that while carbon markets offer promising opportunities, they should not be viewed as standalone solutions to poverty reduction. Instead, carbon finance should complement broader efforts to improve agricultural productivity, strengthen resilience, and enhance livelihoods. She stressed that farmers are more likely to adopt climate-smart practices when they see tangible improvements in productivity and farm performance.

Drawing from Solidaridad's Climate Heroes Project, she explained how the organization integrates agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture, and carbon finance into a holistic approach aimed at improving both environmental and economic outcomes. The project works with thousands of farmers in Kenya and Uganda, encouraging the adoption of sustainable farming practices while simultaneously generating opportunities for participation in voluntary carbon markets.

One of the key lessons shared was the importance of starting with small pilot initiatives before scaling up. This approach allows organizations to test methodologies, build farmer confidence, identify challenges, and refine implementation models before expanding to larger populations.

Ms. Binsari also highlighted the critical role of partnerships among farmer organizations, governments, technical experts, and carbon market actors. Such partnerships help address technical challenges, facilitate access to finance, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

Importantly, she reiterated that carbon payments should be viewed primarily as incentives that reward good environmental stewardship rather than as the primary source of household income. Long-term sustainability, she argued, depends on integrating carbon initiatives with broader agricultural development objectives.

SESSION 5: PANEL DISCUSSION & Q&A

The interactive discussions and question-and-answer sessions revealed strong interest among participants in understanding how cooperatives can access carbon markets. Participants sought clarification on eligibility requirements, partnership opportunities, financing mechanisms, and revenue-sharing arrangements.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the need for transparency and fairness in carbon projects. Participants expressed concern about ensuring that farmers receive a meaningful share of benefits generated through carbon credit sales. The importance of strong governance structures, clear contracts, and inclusive decision-making processes was repeatedly emphasized.

Another key issue concerned the high costs associated with monitoring, reporting, verification, and certification. Participants acknowledged that these costs often exceed the capacities of individual farmers and highlighted the value of cooperative structures in aggregating farmers and reducing transaction costs.

The discussions also underscored the need for capacity building and awareness creation. Many cooperatives remain unfamiliar with carbon markets and require technical support to understand project requirements, regulatory frameworks, and implementation processes.

SESSION 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING REMARKS

Based on the presentations, discussions, and participant feedback, the following recommendations emerged:

1. Strengthen Capacity Building for Cooperatives

There is a need for continuous training and awareness creation on carbon markets, carbon project development, monitoring and verification systems, carbon accounting, and climate-smart agricultural practices. Cooperatives require technical knowledge to effectively participate in carbon market opportunities and support their members throughout the project lifecycle.

2. Promote Transparent Governance and Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms

Carbon projects should establish clear governance structures and transparent benefit-sharing arrangements to ensure that participating farmers receive a fair proportion of revenues generated from carbon credits. Cooperatives should actively engage members in decision-making processes and maintain accountability throughout project implementation.

3. Increase Access to Climate Finance and Investment

Development partners, financial institutions, and carbon market actors should develop innovative financing mechanisms that address the high upfront costs associated with carbon project development. Access to pre-financing and investment facilities will enable cooperatives and farmer organizations to implement carbon projects more effectively.

4. Support Cooperative-Based Carbon Aggregation Models

Given the fragmented nature of smallholder farming systems in Africa, cooperative-based approaches should be promoted as an effective mechanism for aggregating farmers, reducing transaction costs, facilitating monitoring processes, and increasing bargaining power within carbon markets.

5. Strengthen Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Successful carbon projects require collaboration among governments, cooperatives, private sector actors, certification bodies, development organizations, and technical service providers. Stakeholders should establish stronger partnerships to facilitate knowledge sharing, technical support, and market access.

6. Enhance Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

Governments should continue developing clear and supportive carbon market regulations that encourage investment while protecting community interests and environmental integrity. Regulatory clarity will increase investor confidence and facilitate greater participation by local institutions and cooperatives.

7. Promote Climate-Smart Agriculture and Agroforestry

Cooperatives should integrate carbon initiatives with broader climate-smart agriculture and agroforestry programs to improve productivity, strengthen resilience, restore ecosystems, and generate additional income opportunities for farmers.

WAY FORWARD

To sustain the momentum generated by the webinar and translate the knowledge gained into practical action, the following way forward was proposed:

Continued Knowledge Sharing and Learning

ICA-Africa and Fairtrade Africa should continue organizing knowledge-sharing platforms, webinars, and capacity-building sessions to deepen understanding of carbon markets among cooperatives and producer organizations. Future sessions should focus on technical topics such as project design, carbon accounting, MRV systems, and carbon project financing.

Development of Cooperative Carbon Readiness Programs

Cooperatives interested in participating in carbon markets should undertake carbon readiness assessments to evaluate their institutional capacity, governance structures, farmer organization systems, and potential carbon project opportunities. This will help identify areas requiring support before entering the carbon market.

Facilitation of Strategic Partnerships

Interested cooperatives should be linked to experienced carbon project developers, investors, technical service providers, and certification bodies to facilitate practical engagement and project development. Partnerships with organizations such as Acorn and Solidaridad can provide valuable technical and operational support.

Pilot Carbon Projects

Cooperatives are encouraged to begin with small-scale pilot initiatives focusing on agroforestry and climate-smart agriculture. Pilot projects will allow organizations to gain

practical experience, build farmer confidence, and develop evidence-based approaches for future scaling.

Documentation and Sharing of Best Practices

Organizations implementing carbon projects should document lessons learned, success stories, and challenges encountered to facilitate peer learning and inform future interventions. Knowledge products generated from these experiences will contribute to strengthening cooperative participation in carbon markets across Africa.

Advocacy for Inclusive Carbon Markets

Stakeholders should advocate for carbon market systems that are inclusive, transparent, and accessible to smallholder farmers. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that communities receive equitable benefits and that carbon projects contribute to sustainable development outcomes beyond carbon sequestration.

Monitoring Progress and Follow-Up Engagement

ICA-Africa and Fairtrade Africa should maintain engagement with participating cooperatives through follow-up discussions, mentorship programs, and technical support initiatives to track progress and support organizations interested in pursuing carbon market opportunities.

The webinar marked an important milestone in advancing understanding of carbon markets among cooperatives in Africa and laid a strong foundation for future engagement, partnership development, and practical action toward climate-resilient and sustainable livelihoods.

CONCLUSION

The webinar successfully achieved its objective of increasing awareness and understanding of carbon credits and carbon markets among cooperative stakeholders across Africa. Through expert presentations and practical case studies, participants gained valuable insights into how carbon markets function, the opportunities available for cooperatives, and the challenges that must be addressed to ensure successful participation.

The discussions demonstrated that cooperatives have a unique opportunity to serve as vehicles for aggregating smallholder farmers, facilitating climate-smart agricultural practices, and connecting rural communities to emerging sources of climate finance. At the same time, the webinar highlighted the importance of transparent governance, equitable benefit-sharing arrangements, strong partnerships, and continuous capacity building.

As global demand for high-quality carbon credits continues to grow, African cooperatives are well positioned to play a significant role in delivering climate solutions while simultaneously improving livelihoods and strengthening resilience among farming communities. The webinar therefore marked an important step toward building the knowledge, partnerships, and institutional capacity required to unlock these opportunities and ensure that smallholder farmers benefit fairly from the evolving carbon economy.

LIST OF ANNEXES:

Annex 1: Webinar agenda

Time	Topic	Moderator / facilitator
3:00- 3:10 Pm	Session 1: Opening and Welcome Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome remarks from ICA Africa Remarks from Fairtrade Africa and Overview of webinar objective 	Dr. Rose Karimi ICA-Africa Regional Director Mr. Agapeters Kubasu , Head of Region- East and Central African Network
3:10 – 3:40 Pm	Session 2: Introduction to Carbon Credits and Carbon Markets and Opportunities in Africa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are carbon credits? Types of carbon markets (compliance vs voluntary) Global and African context Key sectors: agriculture, forestry, energy, waste management Emerging trends and opportunities Policy and regulatory considerations 	Mr. Amos Wekesa Senior Carbon Finance and Climate Resilience Expert
3:40 – 4:10 Pm	Session 3: Role of Cooperatives in Carbon Markets and how Cooperatives can get Started <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why cooperatives are well-positioned Aggregation of smallholder farmers Governance and accountability advantages Steps to develop carbon projects Partnerships and technical support Accessing finance and certification 	Mr. Jelmer van de Mortel Chief Executive Officer ACORN & Ms. Mary Chege ; Project Developer at Acorn
4:10- 4:30 Pm	Session 4: Case Studies / Practical Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of successful cooperative carbon projects – Leade Case-Solidaridad Lessons learned and challenges 	Ms. Sweeny Binsari , Climate Change and Natural Resources Management Lead, Solidaridad
4:30 -4:55 Pm	Session 5: Panel Discussion & Q&A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive discussion with participants 	All Participants
4:55- 5:00	Session 6: Wrap-up and Closing Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key takeaways Closing remarks from organizers Next steps and follow-up actions 	Dr. Rose Karimi ICA-Africa Regional Director Mr. Agapeters Kubasu , Head of Region- East and Central African Network

Annex 2: PPT Link

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZkxiGsz1BRke02NYjet42IsAZRFgBmVm?usp=sharing>

Annex 3: Photo link

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UdlenF9N-h5Mq0ocsKt4OZKkNi3MhJ1q?usp=sharing>

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