



LEAF COALITION AND TREES STANDARD





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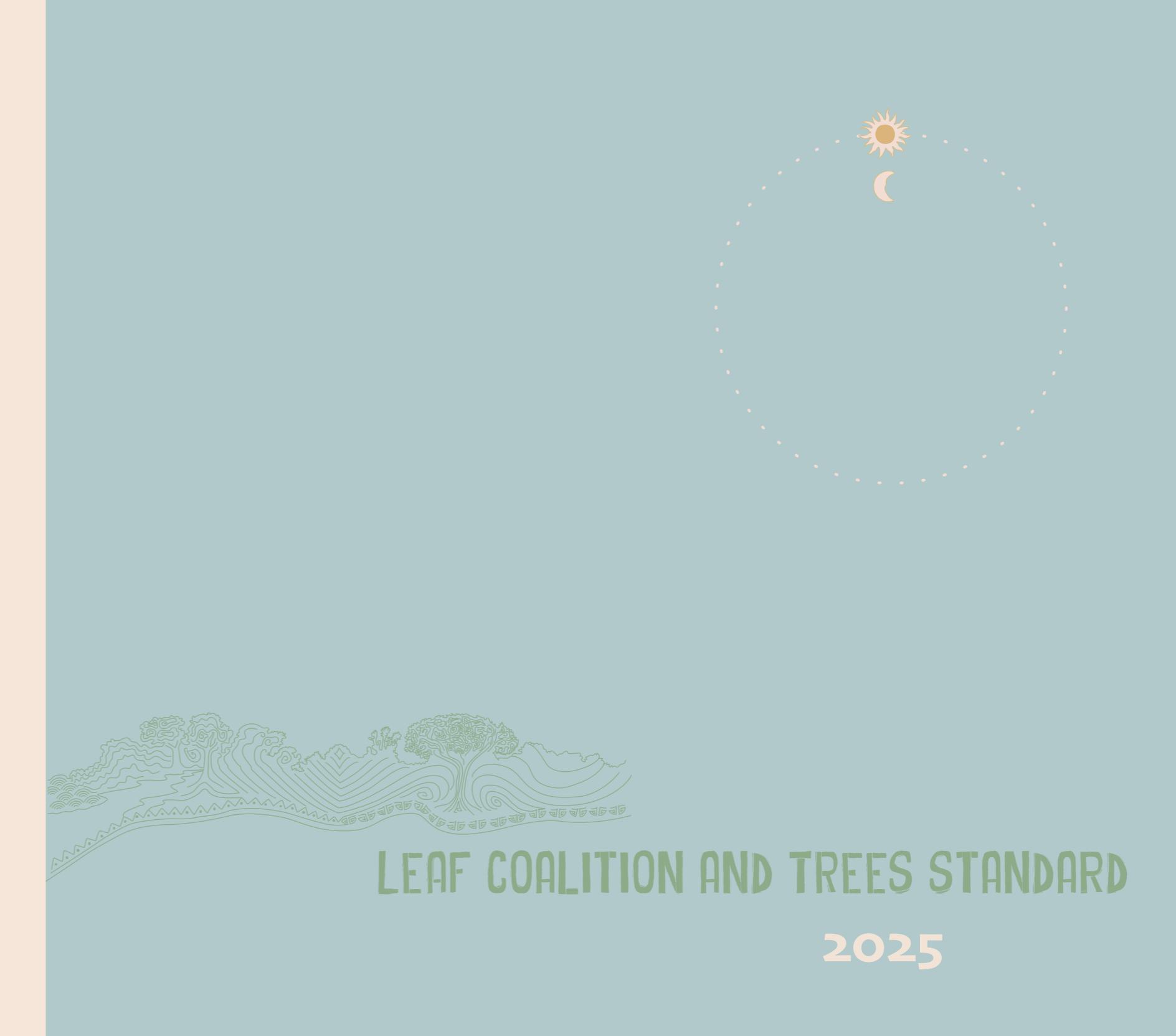
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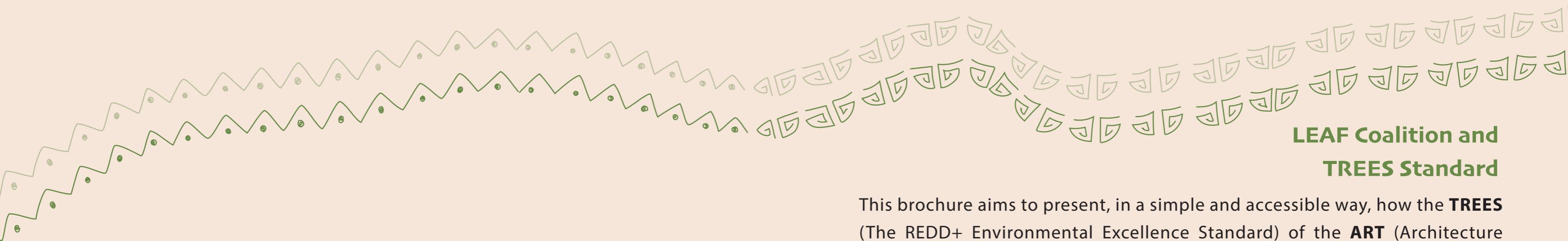
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LEAF COALITION AND TREES STANDARD
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LEAF Coalition and TREES Standard

This brochure aims to present, in a simple and accessible way, how the **TREES** (The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard) of the **ART** (Architecture for REDD+ Transactions), as well as the **LEAF Coalition** (Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance), works. We will learn and understand the differences between these two instruments and how they aim to ensure that large-scale forest conservation programs—called jurisdictional programs, such as those carried out by countries, states, or provinces—receive financial and technical support while respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), protecting biodiversity, and helping to combat climate change.

BROCHURE 4

This brochure is the fourth volume of the series “Understanding Climate Finance,” produced by the Forest Trends’ Communities and Territorial Governance Initiative in partnership with Greendata and with support from the Walmart Foundation. To access the other chapters, visit the [Forest Trends website](#).



Introduction to the LEAF Coalition and the TREES Standard



LEAF Coalition

The **LEAF Coalition** (Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance) was launched in 2021 and operates as a **public-private partnership** between governments, the private sector, and civil society, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs). It aims to **stop tropical deforestation by 2030**. This partnership, coordinated by the non-profit Emergent, seeks to mobilize more than one billion dollars for **large-scale forest conservation actions** at the national or subnational level (called jurisdictions).

LEAF supports initiatives in forest jurisdictions, encouraging the reduction of deforestation and the protection of ecosystems through the **purchase** of jurisdictional REDD+ (also known as JREDD+, as discussed in [Brochure 3](#) of this series) credits **certified under the TREES standard by ART**, which we will learn more about below.

Examples of participating forest governments include countries such as Ghana, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, as well as the state of Pará in Brazil. These jurisdictions already have **Emission Reduction Purchase Agreements** (ERPAs), which are formal contracts in which governments commit to reducing deforestation and, in return, receive funds when they demonstrate verified results. Other jurisdictions participate by signing **Letters of Intent** (LOIs), which express their interest in joining and starting the process that may lead to a future ERPA. According to the Coalition's website, jurisdictions currently in this phase include Vietnam, Nepal, Kenya, and the Brazilian states of Mato Grosso, Amazonas, and Amapá.

TREES Standard

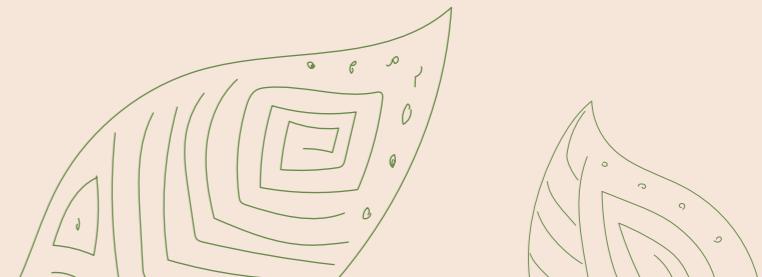
The **ART** (Architecture for REDD+ Transactions) is an international initiative that certifies carbon credits and has its own certification standard known as **TREES** (The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard).

The TREES standard, managed by ART, functions as a **quality seal** ensuring that certified carbon credits truly represent measurable, verifiable, and trackable reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. These TREES-certified credits are then purchased by the LEAF initiative or other buyers to ensure that jurisdictional-level forest protection programs **deliver real climate results and meaningful benefits for IPs & LCs**.

Both the creation of the LEAF Coalition and the development of the TREES standard by ART are initiatives that emerged at a critical time, as deforestation is accelerating and the climate crisis is worsening. The tropical forests of the Amazon, the Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia, for example, are extremely

important because they store billions of tons of carbon and help maintain the planet's climate balance. However, these regions are under severe threat from activities such as mining, large-scale agriculture, and logging, which clear vast areas for their operations. It is estimated that deforestation accounts for about 15 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

The alignment between LEAF Coalition financing and the purchase of TREES-certified credits aims to **strengthen forest policies, develop monitoring systems, and support the IPs & LCs who protect these areas**. The TREES standard allows CO₂ reductions (or removals) to be certified under strict transparency, participation, and rights protection criteria—especially the territorial and cultural rights of forest guardians.





What are CARBON CREDITS?

Carbon credits are a way to measure and reward the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that cause global warming. Here's how it works: when a person, company, community, or jurisdiction avoids emitting GHGs (such as CO₂) or helps capture them from the atmosphere—for example, by restoring forests or using renewable energy—they can certify that reduction as credits. Each credit represents one metric ton of carbon dioxide that has been prevented from entering the atmosphere or has been removed from it. These credits can be sold to other companies or countries that need to offset their emissions, creating a financial incentive to protect the environment.



REDD+ Projects and JURISDICTIONAL REDD+ PROGRAMS (JREDD+)

To encourage forest conservation, carbon markets were created to transform environmental protection into economic benefit. In these projects, those who avoid greenhouse gas emissions or remove carbon from the atmosphere can generate carbon credits, which are purchased by companies or countries that wish to offset their own emissions.

One of the best-known mechanisms in this process is REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). This mechanism, created under the United Nations, financially rewards actions that prevent deforestation and forest degradation, promotes conservation, sustainable management, and the recovery of degraded areas, reduces CO₂ emissions, and increases stored carbon.

REDD+ values standing forests and recognizes the central role of IPs & LCs in their protection. It establishes safeguards—rules and protections that ensure respect for human, social, cultural, and environmental rights and guarantee a fair distribution of benefits achieved through these projects.

REDD+ projects are local initiatives, generally carried out in specific territories by communities, governments, or organizations. Jurisdictional REDD+ Programs (JREDD+), on the other hand, operate on a broader scale—state, regional, or national—and aim to coordinate different projects under a single governance framework aligned with public policies and climate goals.

To learn more about REDD+ carbon markets, see [Brochure 2 - Carbon Markets and REDD+](#) and [Brochure 3 - Jurisdictional REDD+.](#)

COMBINED APPROACHES TO ADDRESS DEFORESTATION IN JREDD+ PROGRAMS ACCORDING TO THE LEAF COALITION



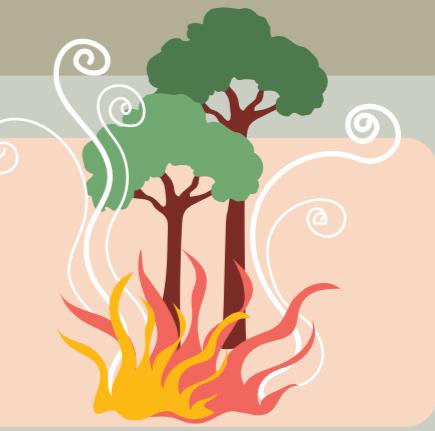
**POLICIES AND
LEGISLATION THAT
ADDRESS THE CAUSES
OF DEFORESTATION.**



**ACTIVE PARTICIPATION
OF IPs & LCs, ENSURING
THAT THEIR RIGHTS ARE
RESPECTED AND THAT
THEY RECEIVE A FAIR
SHARE OF
THE BENEFITS.**



**PROVISION OF
FINANCIAL INCENTIVES
TO LANDOWNERS TO
PROTECT FORESTS.**



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS
AND REGULATIONS
TO PREVENT ILLEGAL
DEFORESTATION.**



**How the
LEAF Coalition and
the TREES
Standard work**





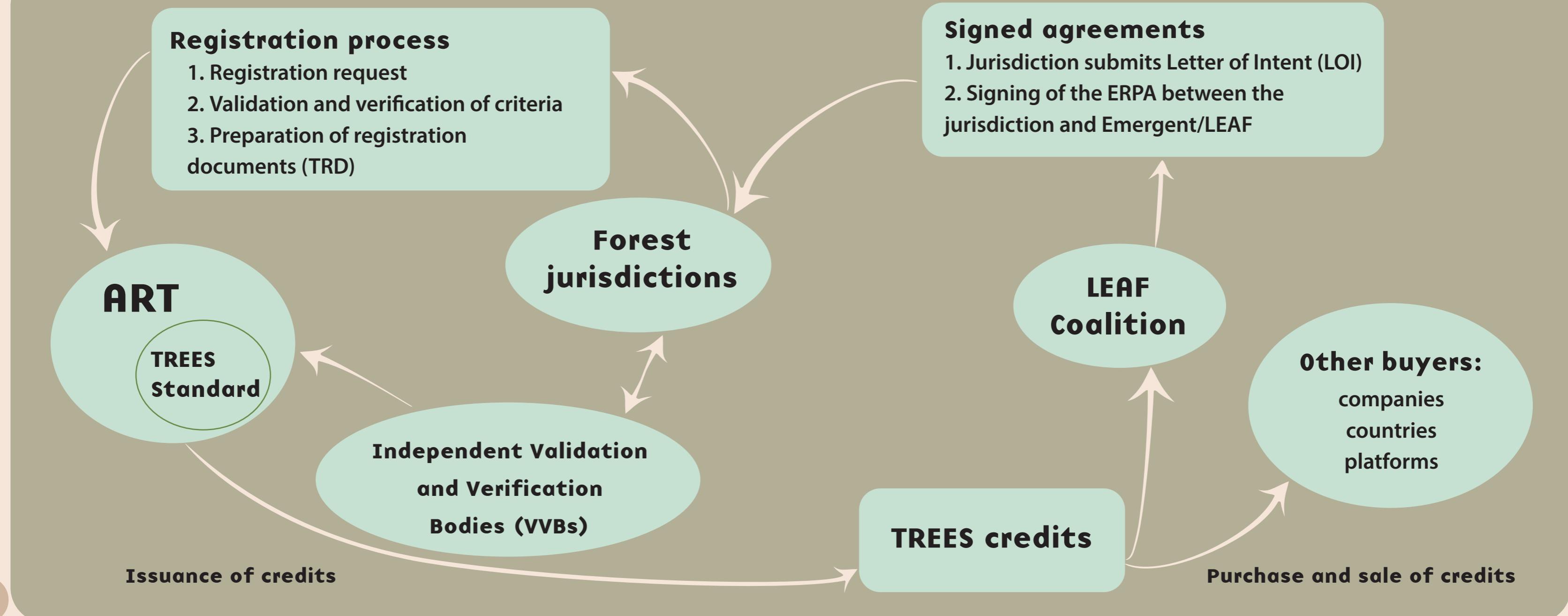
The LEAF Coalition functions as a platform that brings together **financial resources from governments and major companies**—such as the governments of Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and companies like Amazon, Unilever, and Nestlé, among others—to support forest conservation programs. These resources are directed to jurisdictions (which can be national, meaning entire countries, or subnational, meaning states or provinces) that make concrete commitments to reduce deforestation and protect their forest territories.

This funding is not automatic: **it is only released when the jurisdiction can prove that it has actually avoided greenhouse gas emissions**, including CO₂. To do this, a Measurement/Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) system is used. This system gathers information on how the territory is being protected, whether the forests are standing, and how much CO₂ has been prevented from being emitted or has been captured.

This is where the TREES standard comes in. It is an international standard that **guides how data should be organized and evaluated**. It defines, for example, which information must be included, how to calculate the amount of emission reductions (measured in tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, or tCO₂e), and which social and environmental safeguards must be followed, in accordance with the Cancún Safeguards. For more information on how carbon markets work and what the Cancún Safeguards are, see [Brochure 2](#) of this series.

Certification under the TREES standard is carried out by independent auditors (known as Validation and Verification Bodies, or VVBs) who assess whether the reported results are real and reliable. The process verifies whether all TREES requirements have been met. Additionally, the TREES standard requires that data and results be made public and that the **participation of involved communities be ensured**.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART (AND THE TREES STANDARD) AND THE LEAF COALITION





Financing and benefits

The **LEAF Coalition** model is based on **results-based payments**, with **TREES certification** as a prerequisite. This means that jurisdictions only receive financial resources after they have demonstrated that they have reduced greenhouse gas emissions—through certified, validated, verified, and transparent processes that respect the rights of local populations.

TREES credits can be sold to any buyer in the voluntary carbon market, including companies, governments, and other organizations or individuals. LEAF acts as one of the main buyers through Emission Reduction Purchase Agreements (ERPAs) signed with jurisdictions. The voluntary carbon market is a space where companies and organizations purchase credits to offset part of their emissions, contributing to forest protection and supporting local communities.

TREES credits represent a valuable option for both companies and governments to support jurisdictional emission reduction programs that **protect forests and benefit IPs & LCs in those territories.**

Among the possible uses of the funds generated from the sale and purchase of these credits are: strengthening public conservation policies, supporting IPs & LCs, and investing in monitoring technologies, such as satellites, drones, and remote sensors, among others.

However, it is essential that the resources generated by these jurisdictional programs be **distributed fairly among the peoples and communities who care for the forests. This process is known as benefit sharing.** These benefit-sharing systems must be clear, participatory, and respectful of the ways of life of forest peoples. They ensure that IPs & LCs receive their share in a transparent and equitable manner.

When correctly implemented, these mechanisms not only contribute to forest conservation but also strengthen territorial autonomy and security. More information on this topic is available in [Brochure 7](#) of this series.



Practical implementation

To participate in the LEAF Coalition, a jurisdiction—such as a country or state—must demonstrate its commitment to reducing deforestation and degradation and to respecting the rights of forest peoples. Joining LEAF involves meeting technical and social criteria, certifying emission reductions under the TREES standard, and signing agreements that ensure results-based payments, strengthening public policies and generating direct benefits for those who protect the forest.

To participate in LEAF, a jurisdiction must:

1. Demonstrate formal interest

The jurisdiction (national or subnational) must express its intention to participate in LEAF, generally through a Letter of Intent (LOI).

2. Meet LEAF's basic criteria

- Be committed to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
- Present public policies and action plans to combat deforestation, such as legal frameworks, action plans, or climate strategies
- Guarantee respect for the rights of IPs & LCs, in line with the Cancún Safeguards

3. Develop a results-based payment proposal

The jurisdiction must prepare a technical proposal demonstrating its capacity to achieve measurable and verifiable emission reductions. This proposal must align with the TREES standard, which is the certification system required by LEAF.

4. Start the TREES certification process

Jurisdictions begin the process by submitting a Concept Note to ART, followed by a TREES Registration Document. These documents must include a range of information following the official templates available on ART's website, such as:

- Historical emissions series (to define the baseline or reference level)
- A robust and transparent MRV system
- Benefit-sharing mechanisms
- Evidence of safeguards, governance, and clarity regarding carbon ownership and forest management

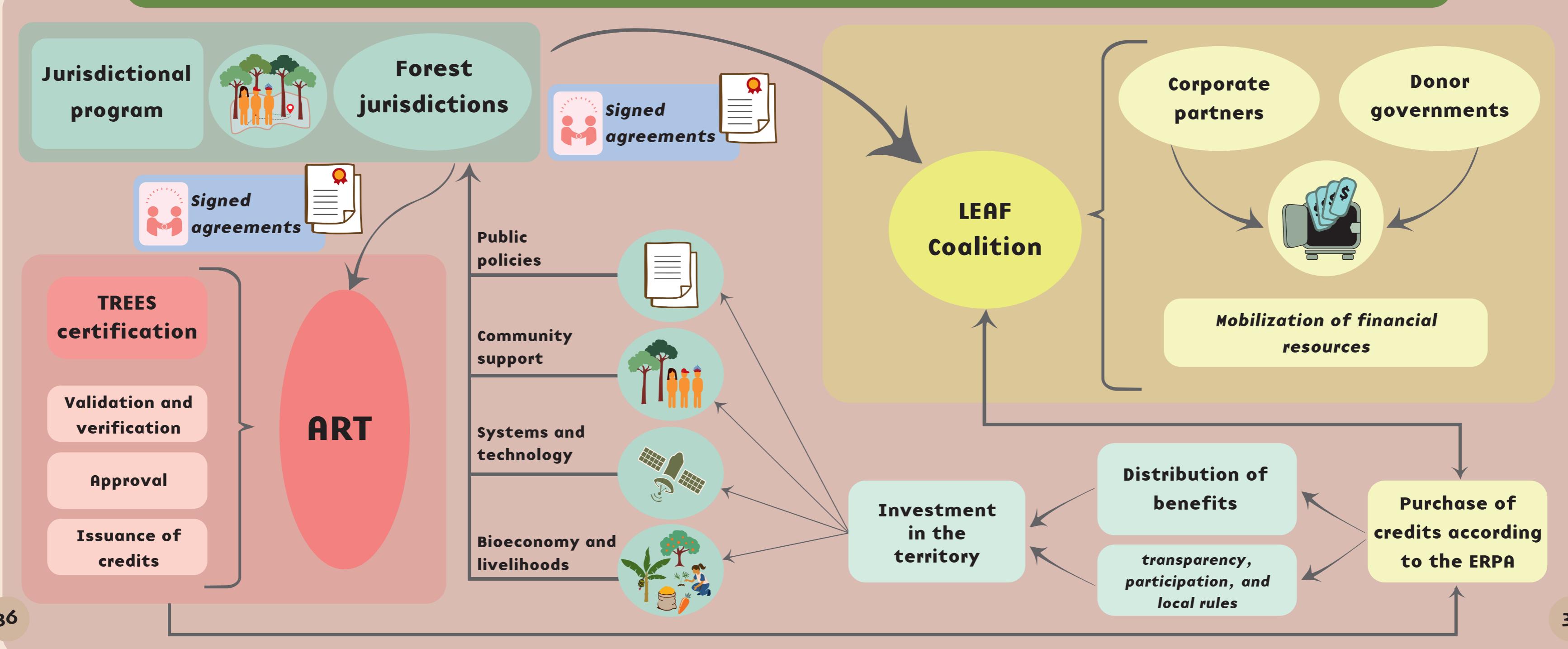
5. Sign the Purchase Agreement (ERPA)

If the proposal is approved, the jurisdiction signs a contract with the LEAF Coalition called the Emission Reductions Purchase Agreement (ERPA), formalizing the sale of carbon credits based on results.

6. Implement, monitor, and report

From that point, the jurisdiction implements its emission reduction actions and submits periodic reports to ART, which are verified by third parties. After successful verification, carbon credits are certified by ART and results-based payments are released.

DIAGRAM OF JREDD+ PROGRAMS UNDER THE LEAF COALITION WITH TREES CREDIT GENERATION





The challenges



Despite the transformative potential of the LEAF Coalition, aligned with the certification of TREES credits carried out by ART, there are still many challenges to ensuring that these mechanisms work in a **fair, effective, and lasting way**.

Among the main challenges are:

- The complexity of implementing large-scale programs that involve many actors and different interests
- The need for robust MRV systems, which require technology, reliable data, and trained people

- Ensuring that the benefits reach the communities that protect the forests in a fair and transparent manner
- The persistent economic pressure to exploit natural resources—such as timber, minerals, and land for agriculture—which continues to threaten many territories

For these reasons, it is essential that processes be conducted with great **care, listening, and dialogue, respecting the times, traditions, and ways of life of forest peoples**.





Future perspectives



The future of jurisdictional REDD+ programs is closely linked to how these instruments will align with and respond to the evolution of the international framework for climate mitigation—particularly within the context of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

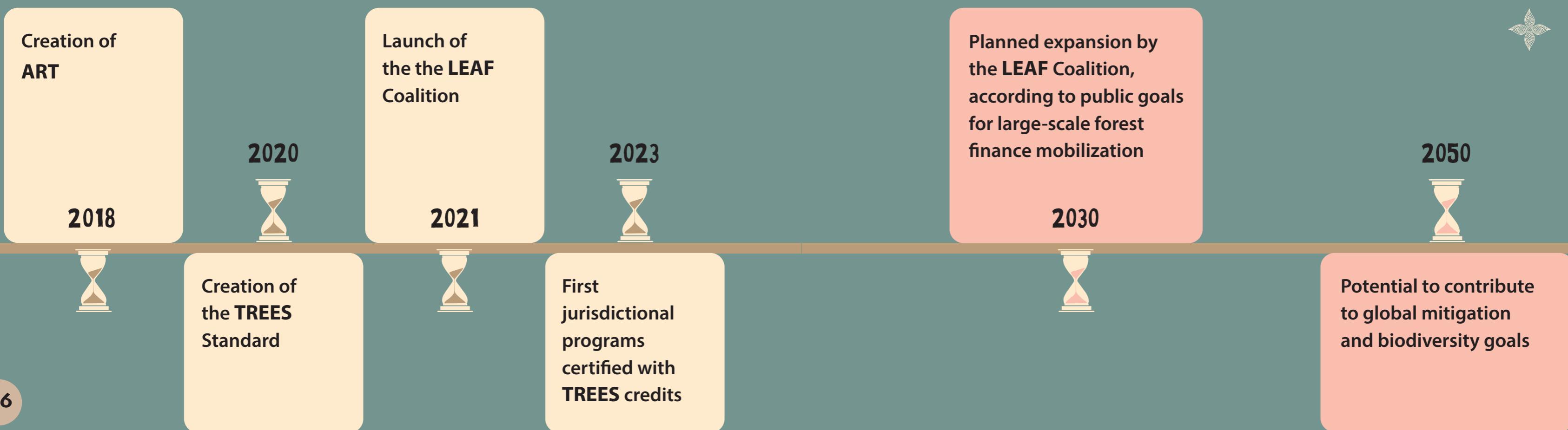
Some strategic paths to strengthen their contribution include:

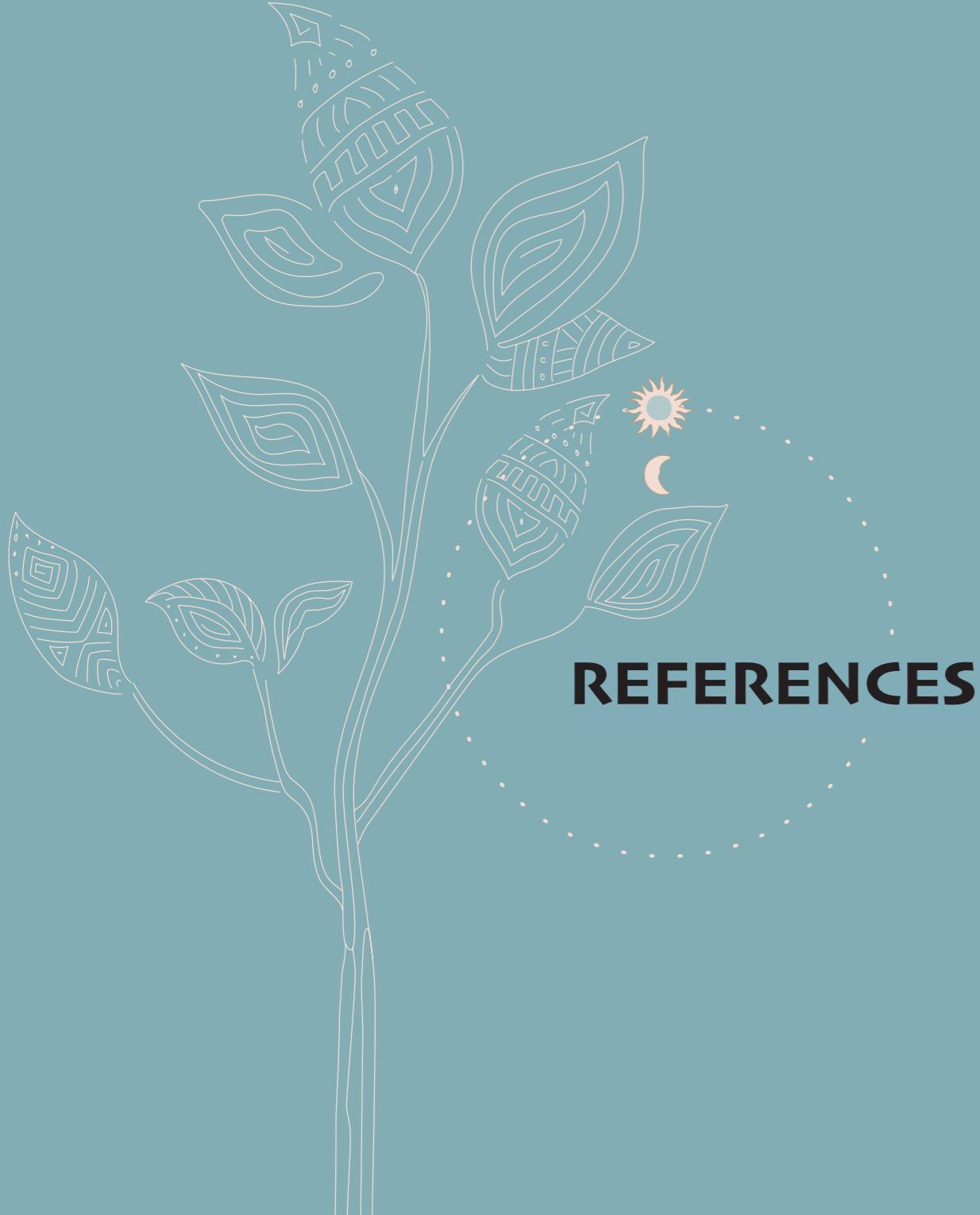
- **Expanding partnerships among governments, companies, and communities** to ensure that financial resources effectively reach those who protect the forests
- **Advancing the use of monitoring technologies**—such as artificial intelligence and remote sensing—to make the system more accurate, transparent, and accessible
- **Increasing the number of certified jurisdictions**, ensuring the participation of IPs & LCs from the beginning of the process
- **Integrating REDD+ actions with bioeconomy, ecological restoration, and sustainable development policies**, reinforcing the connection between climate, forest, and quality of life

Aligning these programs with initiatives such as the LEAF Coalition and ART with its TREES standard—while also taking into account Article 6 and the Cancún Safeguards—can facilitate the generation and transfer of credits with higher environmental integrity and alignment with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), contributing to global climate and biodiversity goals by 2050.

The processes developed by ART and LEAF have the potential to contribute not only to reducing emissions but also to **strengthening the autonomy of forest peoples and the conservation of their territories**.

TIMELINE OF THE LEAF COALITION, TREES CERTIFICATION, AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES





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