Final Evaluation Report

Mid-Term Review (MTR) for the “Inclusive Conservation Initiative” project

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Prepared by EarthEmpower Ltd. Co.
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Key Project Details

GEF Project ID	10404
Project Name	Inclusive Conservation Initiative
Implementing Agencies	Conservation International International Union for the Conservation of Nature
Executing Agencies	Conservation International International Union for the Conservation of Nature
GEF Financing	$22,535,780
Planned Co-Financing	$90,384,856
Materialized Co-Financing	$11,007,319
Key Objectives	Enhance Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' (IPLCs) efforts to steward land, waters and natural resources to deliver Global Environmental Benefits.
GEF, Agency	CI, IUCN
Project Countries	Guatemala, Panama, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Kenya, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Thailand, the Cook Islands, and Fiji.
Project Start Date	February 15, 2022
Governance and Staffing Structure	A Global Steering Committee (GSC) leads the governance of the ICI. The project established a global Project Management Unit (PMU) across CI's Center for Communities and Conservation and IUCN's Global Programme on Governance and Rights to serve a Global Execution Agency function. Executing Agencies (EAs): Ten project EAs (also referred to as ICI subproject lead organizations) lead subprojects under ICI Component 1.

1. Executive Summary

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) is a landmark effort in global conservation finance. Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by Conservation International (CI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the initiative supports IPLC-led conservation strategies. By empowering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) with direct access to large-scale funding, the ICI is shifting the paradigm from treating IPLCs as beneficiaries to recognizing them as primary leaders and decision-makers in conservation. This approach is central to the project's success, positioning Indigenous governance and rights-based outcomes as the core pathway to achieving sustainable, long-term environmental benefits. The findings of this evaluation highlight that by centering Indigenous leadership, the ICI is not only protecting biodiversity but also generating durable, systemic change that strengthens communities from within. This Mid-Term Review (MTR) was conducted to assess the project's progress at its midpoint and provide insights to guide its adaptive management for the remainder of its term.

The evaluation adhered to the rigorous standards of the GEF M&E Policy and the project's Terms of Reference. A mixed-methods approach was used, including a comprehensive document review and in-depth data collection with diverse stakeholders. From April 14 to May 28, 2025, the evaluation team conducted remote and in-person interviews in Chile and Tanzania, engaging over 180 key stakeholders across all 10 subprojects. This wide-ranging participation, which included community members, project leaders, and global staff, ensures the evaluation's findings are representative of diverse experiences and perspectives.

The evaluation was guided by a commitment to objectivity, impartiality, and the highest ethical standards. All data collection and analysis were conducted with transparency and accountability, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation from all stakeholders. The evaluation team used triangulation of information between sources to ensure an unbiased and integrity-driven analysis of the project's performance. Key results are organized by evaluation topic.

Project Design

The project design of the ICI initiative reflects a comprehensive and inclusive approach. Stakeholders highlighted that the design process incorporated a strong governance component through the involvement of Indigenous leaders in key decision-making stages, including the establishment of the Interim Steering Committee and the creation of criteria for subproject selection. This participatory structure was essential to ensure alignment with IPLC priorities and increase project legitimacy. The design is generally perceived as

coherent and realistic, particularly given its unique structure, strong alignment with Indigenous Peoples' priorities, and emphasis on participatory governance.

The evaluation reflects a generally positive perception of the subproject design process, highlighting the success of the planning grants and the extended timeline provided to prepare detailed impact strategies. Many respondents affirmed that the subprojects were co-designed with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), ensuring alignment with local priorities, values, and cultural practices.

Theory of Change

The ICI Theory of Change includes the environmental challenges, root causes, and barriers which are organized into the project's four components. While the outcomes defined for each component are logical, they do not capture the diverse outcomes generated by the subprojects, however subproject has individual theory of changes that capture these outcomes. The original theory of change does not highlight the importance of centering Indigenous knowledge, strengthening Indigenous governance, and securing rights and recognition despite the centrality of these concepts in how the project is designed and managed. The key assumptions underpinning the project design are largely valid.

Project Results and Impact

During the evaluation, assessment of outputs and outcomes was complicated, as quarterly reports provide advances from the quarter based on the annual work plan but not cumulative progress toward the output from previous years or quarters. The Annual PIR provides a cumulative review of outputs; however, the latest PIR is almost 1 year old. A review of the 2024 PIR, Q2 2025 report, and the indicator progress tracking table were used to assess advances in outputs. Evaluation data reveals notable progress in advancing project outcomes, particularly in strengthening Indigenous governance systems, engaging communities, and promoting co-management frameworks.

In Component 1, all outputs are fully achieved or on schedule for implementation that is still underway. While the advances to outcomes were delayed by the startup of subprojects, but now subprojects are up and running and important progress is being made.

In Component 2, multiple outputs are in progress, two outputs have been completed, while other outputs have minimal advances. Outcomes for Component 2 are delayed, but they are on track to be completed. Other outcomes in the component, such as greater capacity for IPLC-led conservation, while observed, have not been measured yet.

In Component 3, all outputs are either in progress or complete. In this component, the outcomes are advancing as planned. In Component 4, one output has no advances reported, two are complete, and the rest are in progress. Outcomes for the component are also behind schedule, but changes in the communications team are expected to help progress towards these outcomes.

Outcomes were assessed for relevance, efficiency, efficacy, and sustainability. Across components, the evaluation generally assessed the outcomes as highly relevant, as the design is highly aligned with GEF priorities and country priorities. While certain outcomes were found to be implemented with effectiveness, especially those in Component 1 and 3, outcomes for components 2 and 4 were found to be mildly unsatisfactory to satisfactory. Almost all outcomes were rated to be likely or mildly likely to sustain the results.

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) has demonstrated that strengthening Indigenous governance and securing rights-based outcomes are not just co-benefits but are foundational for achieving long-term environmental impacts. By enabling Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) to lead conservation efforts through their traditional governance systems and legal frameworks, the project has created the necessary conditions for sustainable resource management. The rights-based approach of ICI fosters community ownership, increases the likelihood of lasting change, and positions IPLCs as key partners in meeting national and global conservation commitments. The principal factors delaying the achievement of outputs and outcomes is associated with insufficient staff time allocated for the amount of work and high turnover rates in key positions.

Key Risks and Sustainability

The key risks as project approval were reviewed and an updated assessment of risks was completed through stakeholder interviews. While some risks remain the same (climate and natural disasters), others, like COVID-19 are less relevant than at project inception. The overall risk rating is Moderate. The risks are being monitored and mitigated by the project, though some opportunities remain to strengthen risk management, such as further support for Indigenous land defenders who are at risk for violence from governments and private sector.

The project has prioritized sustainability through targeted mechanisms at the institutional, technical, and policy levels. According to project documents, financial sustainability is pursued by developing financing plans tied to subproject impact strategies. These include avenues such as trust funds, private sector investment, and impact investing in IPLC-led enterprises. Complementary to these financial efforts are some, but not sufficient, capacity-building activities that aim to ensure IPLC organizations are prepared to pursue and manage such funding independently. Stakeholders consistently identified securing

sustainable funding beyond the project period as a critical risk. While some subprojects are exploring future proposals or external donors, many depend on ICI's financial and technical support due to a lack of political interest in their countries, raising concerns about continuity once GEF funding ends.

Project Governance and Project Management

The ICI governance structure was designed to have the Global Steering Committee as the project's formal governance body; however the PMU is also a key component of project governance. While the GSC ensures alignment with global priorities and facilitates coordination at the highest level, implementation and executing agencies are responsible for day-to-day management, technical direction, and ensuring compliance with operational standards. The PMU, co-led by executing agencies Conservation International (CI) and IUCN, is responsible for day-to-day coordination, technical support, financial oversight, and reporting. It acts as the operational hub, ensuring that subprojects receive guidance, tools, and support aligned with the overall project framework.

While the governance structure of the ICI Initiative is built on collaboration between the Project Management Unit (PMU) and the Global Steering Committee (GSC), the evaluation revealed some challenges in the coordination between these two bodies. One recurring issue is the lack of clarity regarding their respective roles in decision-making. In addition to the global project governance structure, each subproject has designed a governance structure for IPLC-led conservation.

The ICI Project has implemented a multi-layered communication approach intended to bridge the distance between local territories and global learning spaces. Across levels significant efforts have been made to ensure transparency, foster learning, and build visibility. Concerns about communications were expressed regarding inconsistency, limited follow-up, and lack of clarity in messaging.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The M&E plan included output and outcome indicators with corresponding targets at the design time. These were organized by components and allowed for some consistency in quarterly reporting. The indicators selected prioritized biological and quantifiable outcomes, such as the number of hectares conserved or the number of participants as these are the outcome indicators defined by GEF. Evaluation interviews noted that several indicators did not track progress toward higher-level outcomes adequately, which is an opportunity to integrate indicators that measure systemic change in combination with the required GEF indicators.

Stakeholders highlighted that the global and subproject frameworks often operated like separate 'micro-universes,' making aggregation between subprojects difficult. Although the M&E plan served as a common reference point, implementation diverged due to

varying capacities, understandings of M&E processes, and priorities among project partners. Ownership of the M&E system was often perceived to reside with the global coordinating agencies, with subprojects viewing their role as more of a data provider than co-designer or user of M&E outputs.
Subprojects highlighted a high reporting burden, with redundant formats and overlapping information requests. The quarterly reporting structure was perceived as time-consuming and detracted from implementation activities. Some subprojects implemented digital tools such as KoboToolbox and cloud-based data sharing to strengthen M&E, but these efforts were largely local innovations rather than guided by the global plan. As such, their benefits were not uniformly realized or supported.

Project Implementation and Execution

The quality of work by the GEF Implementing Agencies—CI and IUCN—at the global level has been widely seen as supportive, responsive, and essential to the progress of the ICI. Across subprojects, CI was frequently recognized for providing structured guidance and close accompaniment throughout the design and implementation phases. Together, CI and IUCN GEF Implementing Agencies have played their anticipated role in enabling the ICI's success. The collaborative relationship between the agencies has helped ensure alignment across systems and strategies, and ongoing reflection continues to strengthen their shared approach to inclusive conservation.

Component 1 of the ICI has been executed highly across the subprojects, as evidenced by substantial progress in institutional, technical, and community-level activities. The execution has been characterized by strong ownership among IPLCs, intensive support by EAs, and measurable results in rights recognition, training, and local governance. Despite initial delays, the subprojects have built momentum, delivering outputs aligned with the project's goals.

The execution of Components 2-4 faced challenges in execution and these challenges caused significant delays in Component 2 and 4, reducing the overall quality of the work being delivered.

Environmental and Social Safeguards

The data shows diverse familiarity with the ESS Plan among global-level stakeholders. While a foundational level of ESS awareness exists at the global level, sustained training, simplified guidance and reporting, and broader dissemination of safeguard responsibilities would help ensure more consistent application. The ESS plan has been implemented in the subprojects. Implementation was strongest where safeguards were viewed as aligned with Indigenous governance and support from consultants or regional teams was available.

At the global level, the implementation of Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) mitigation measures has been guided by the ESMF, Impact Strategies, and the ESMP for Components 2-4, with the Project Management Unit (PMU) playing a central role in coordination, capacity building, and oversight. ESS mitigation at the global level has contributed to risk management through capacity building, tool development, and promotion of inclusive frameworks. However, implementation effectiveness is uneven and reliant on subproject-level adaptation, emphasizing the need for stronger systems of global-to-local feedback, monitoring, and institutional learning.

The evaluation identified both meaningful efforts and persistent gaps in advancing gender equity across the project. Organizational development efforts and capacity-building activities for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) around gender have yet to be fully established. Global-level governance and event representation did not always reflect gender parity, despite agreed-upon targets. Moreover, cultural and ideological resistance within organizations presented a significant barrier to gender integration. Despite the challenges faced in implementing the gender mainstreaming activities, incremental gains were made, notably where organizational culture and leadership showed genuine commitment to gender equity, through ongoing internal reflection and adaptations to improve practice.

The SEP demonstrates a strong commitment to the meaningful participation of IPLCs, including through culturally appropriate consultations and the application of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols. M&E, and administrative/financial roles, reported a high level of satisfaction regarding the extent to which their views and concerns were considered by the ICI project at the global level. Multiple testimonies confirm that IPLCs influenced project planning and implementation at the global level (i.e. Interim steering committee). Stakeholders recognized the project's effort to integrate traditional knowledge into management plans and decision-making tools, especially at a subproject level, where IPLCs developed a sense of ownership over the initiative through their participation at the local level.

The ICI project established a formal grievance mechanism as part of its ESMF, aimed at ensuring accountability and addressing stakeholder concerns. This mechanism outlines a two-tier system where grievances can first be raised locally with the Executing Agency (EA) and subsequently escalated to the CI EthicsPoint platform if unresolved. The process includes multiple entry points, email, phone, postal mail, and online submission, and is designed to be accessible to IPLCs. In addition, each subproject had a locally adapted grievance mechanism.

Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated the critical importance of centering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in conservation planning and implementation. Designing frameworks, processes, and strategies around Indigenous worldviews, including integrating traditional knowledge, languages, and governance systems, fostered stronger ownership, trust, and relevance of the project. However, standardized global reporting and indicators often failed to reflect local priorities, underscoring the need for flexible, context-specific approaches that are able to be integrated and consolidated to show the project's progress. Lessons learned related to project management include the need for clear communication channels, adaptive financial systems, and early, tailored capacity-building support.

Gender equality emerged as a priority, with effective strategies requiring structural integration of gender indicators, context-specific tools, and dedicated technical assistance. Inclusive approaches framed gender not just as women's empowerment but as part of broader social transformation within IPLC contexts.

While the initiative advanced knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation, opportunities to scale successful practices may be limited by sustained access to funding. While many subprojects strengthened community governance and conservation capacity, institutional fragility, financial dependency, political resistance, and land tenure insecurity continue to threaten long-term outcomes.

Recommendations

To strengthen the project's ability to achieve its objectives, the evaluation provides several key recommendations. At the project design and management level, we recommend implementing adaptive management milestones and dedicating a "Year Zero" for future initiatives to ensure sufficient time for trust-building and to highlight Indigenous systems in the project's theory of change from the outset. We also suggest that future multi-institutional projects move away from a 50/50 budget split in favor of a clear lead institution with delegated roles, and ensure that key staff roles have adequate time allocation to prevent delays and staff turnover.

Additionally, to foster lasting impact and address existing challenges, we recommend shifting to an equity-based approach to gender rather than a parity-focused one and allocating dedicated resources for gender-specific responsibilities. The project should continue to prioritize activities that support land titling and tenure security as a cornerstone of sustainability and invest in targeted training on climate finance and fundraising to reduce financial dependency. Finally, to improve efficiency and relevance, the project's M&E system should be redesigned to reduce reporting burdens, integrate

qualitative indicators, and adopt a co-created, participatory approach that aligns with local realities and values.

2. Introduction

This inception report aims to define the objectives, scope, and conceptual framework for the evaluation, including details about the methods, key questions, information sources, indicators, the MTR report structure, and a timeline. It will guide the development of the evaluation process and serve as a reference for the evaluators throughout it.

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) represents a landmark effort to elevate the role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in achieving global biodiversity and climate goals. Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by Conservation International (CI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the initiative supports IPLC-led conservation strategies across diverse landscapes and seascapes. This MTR was conducted to assess the progress of the ICI at its midpoint, identify emerging outcomes, and generate insights to guide adaptive management for the remainder of the project. Grounded in participatory and mixed-methods approaches, the evaluation explores both global and subproject-level dynamics, with particular attention to equity, environmental impact, and institutional sustainability. This report presents the evaluation findings, highlighting what has been achieved, what challenges remain, and how the ICI can continue strengthening IPLC leadership in conservation.

2.1. General Project Information

The ICI, part of the GEF-7 Programming Directions Strategy's Biodiversity focal area, was endorsed by the GEF CEO in January 2022. It is built upon the principle that inclusive conservation requires IPLC to be the main authors and implementers. At the same time, the project does not aim to define the concept of inclusive conservation and recognizes that IPs and LCs also determine it.

With over US$ 22.5 million invested in project financing and over US$ 90 million of expected co-financing, ICI is designed to support the leadership of IPs and LCs in stewarding lands, waters, and natural resources. By combining substantial investments in specific locations with support to magnify local results through global capacity building, policy influence, and demonstration of large-scale impacts, ICI will catalyze the transformational changes needed to secure and enhance support for the contributions of IPs and LCs to biodiversity and other GEBs.

2.2. Expected Results of ICI

The ICI project expects to contribute to Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) in three specific areas.

- **Terrestrial Protected and Conserved Areas:** The project supports improved management and conservation of 7,603,336 hectares of landscapes and seascapes across 9 globally significant ecosystems, managed by IPLCs.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigation:** The ICI is projected to mitigate 20.9 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalent over the project's lifetime through reduced deforestation, improved forest and land management, and sustainable livelihoods aligned with conservation.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** The project contributes directly to conserving threatened species and habitats, including ecosystems within biodiversity hotspots and Key Biodiversity Areas.

Additionally, the project expects to generate short- and long-term benefits and results, including:

- Increased livelihood benefits, such as increased incomes or increased livelihood resilience.
- IPLC organizations increase capacity for securing funding, increase access to funds, and sustain funding for their work.
- IPLC organizations increase capacity to implement projects and lead conservation initiatives.
- IPLC organizations create benefits for women and youth.
- IPLCs have increased land tenure security.
- IPLCs have stronger governance.
- IPLC-led conservation models are more widely accepted in national policies and priorities and international policies and priorities.
- IPLCs have increased capacity and involvement to influence policy locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Increased collaboration and knowledge exchange between IPLC organizations.

2.3. Evaluators Project Understanding

The ICI recognizes the urgent need to elevate IPLCs in leading biodiversity conservation due to their knowledge, connection to the territory, and interest in conservation. The project acknowledges barriers IPLC organizations face in leading conservation initiatives due to their persistent exclusion and marginalization, inadequate financial support for IPLC-led conservation, capacity barriers to accessing funding, and underutilized potential for IPLCs to conserve biodiversity and mitigate climate change. The project intends to

provide direct access to financial resources, build capacity to administer funds, and draw attention to and demonstrate IPLC leadership in delivering GEBs.

The ICI seeks to have IPLCs and IPLC-led organizations define the work carried out on their lands, which in some cases are part of protected natural areas and other territories of ecological importance. The different IPLCs carry out diverse activities ranging from agriculture, livestock, tourism, fishing, forestry, and other activities that are part of their culture, survival, and the future of their communities. With this in mind, a call was issued to different groups of IPLC organizations to submit Expressions of Interest to be part of the larger project. While the subprojects collectively work towards the same general objectives (generating environmental benefits through financing and capacity building for IPLCs), each subproject faces different conservation, political, and social challenges and thus has designed its subproject according to its specific needs. Each subproject has a governance structure and a theory of change that responds to its unique circumstances.

The project supports 10 IPLC-led subprojects that, while independent from each other, work together to strengthen their decision-making, financing, and organizational capacities for a common goal. By placing decision-making and leadership in the hands of IPLCs, the goal is to combine ancestral knowledge with scientific expertise to implement a series of best practices that will lead to a larger area of land under environmentally sustainable management and support the families and lives of the people who live in that territory.

The ICI is broken into four components.

1. **Component 1** directly funds 10 IPLC organizations to support IPLC-led initiatives for enhanced biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. Component 1 works through these 10 subprojects across the globe.
2. **Component 2** focuses on capacity building (technical, administrative, financial, fundraising) and learning exchanges among IPLCs and IPLC-led organizations.
3. **Component 3** builds capacity and funds IPLCs' participation in international and regional meetings to influence policy and governance that impacts their rights and lands.
4. **Component 4** works to develop a Community of Practice for IPLC organizations working in conservation and promotes knowledge exchange. In this component, communications materials are developed to promote IPLC-led conservation.

3. Mid-Term Evaluation Details and Methodology

3.1. Objectives of the Mid-Term Evaluation

The objective of the MTR is to promote accountability and transparency and facilitate synthesis of lessons to date for the ICI project; identify any project design problems; assess progress toward project outcomes and outputs; and draw lessons, recommendations and guidance to strengthen the project and strengthen the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the project, including examples of good practices in project design and implementation. Also, the MTR will provide feedback to allow the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) to identify recurring issues across the GEF portfolio and contribute to GEF IEO databases for aggregation and analysis. The evaluation design and implementation will follow the GEF M&E Policy.

3.2. Evaluation Details

3.2.1 Evaluation Purpose

According to the GEF Evaluation Policy, midterm evaluations must be conducted for full-size projects and programs to support the adaptive management of projects. The purpose of the midterm evaluation for the ICI is to understand why, how, and to what extent the project's intended results are accrued, what unintended results have emerged, and the impact of these results on stakeholders. The results of the evaluation will be shared and discussed with GEF, CI, and IUCN implementing teams, CI and IUCN execution teams, and leaders from the IPs and LCs across the ICI land and seascapes to inform the adaptive management of the project and the subsequent phases of project implementation. The primary audience includes the project leaders (PMU), the GSC, and GEF implementing agency teams; however, a summary of results will be available to subproject leaders and teams. The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation can be found in Annex 1.

The evaluation is being conducted by the consulting team EarthEmpower. The Evaluation team can be found in Annex 2. which has expertise in participatory and utilization-focused approaches, as well as specialized knowledge in environmental programs, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), gender, and climate resilience.

3.2.2. Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions were designed to address the GEF Evaluation Policy and the specific details to be shared in the report. They were divided into the key topics of the evaluation and the associated sections of the planned evaluation report. The full list of questions can be found in the Evaluation Matrix, which is in Annex 3.

3.2.3. Geographic and Thematic Scope

The midterm evaluation includes a comprehensive review of the ICI Project across the nine targeted landscapes and seascapes in twelve countries. The evaluation will include all executing partners and their geographies and review all planned and implemented activities to date. Field visits were conducted in Chile and Tanzania together with IPLC executing partners.

Figure 1: ICI Project Landscapes



3.2.4. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria for this MTR are Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability. Additionally, M&E design, M&E implementation, project implementation, and project execution will be rated separately. A brief definition of each criterion is provided below, as defined by OECD DAC:

- Effectiveness: The extent to which the intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be completed, considering the timeliness of achievement.
- Impact: The extent to which the project has generated or will generate positive and negative effects, whether directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.
- Efficiency: A measure of how economic resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, equipment, etc.) are converted into results cost-effectively.
- Relevance: The extent to which the objectives of an intervention are consistent with recipients' requirements, country needs, global needs, and global and partners' policies.
- Coherence: Seeks to understand how well the intervention fits internally and externally.

- Sustainability: Defined as the ability of key stakeholders to sustain intervention benefits after the cessation of donor funding.

3.2.5. Evaluation Matrix

An evaluation framework has been developed based on the topics, key questions, rating scales provided in the terms of reference, and planned research methods (see Annex 3). Based on the key questions, the evaluation team developed sub-questions designed to be used in diverse research tools and directed to different stakeholders. These sub-questions are distributed among research tools based on the type of tool and question. Each category has a rating scale defined to summarize the results. The details of the rating scales are explained in Annex 4.

Table 1: Evaluation Matrix

Topics	Rating Scale
1. Project Design and Theory of Change	HS[1], S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
2. Project Communications	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
3. Project Results	Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
4. Progress to Impact	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
5. Project Key Risks and Overall Project Sustainability (GEF Risk Appetite)	High, Substantial, Moderate, Low
6. GEB Benefits	
7. Monitoring and Evaluation	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
8. Project Governance and Management	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
9. Implementation and Execution	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
10. Environmental and Social Safeguards	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
11. Stakeholder Engagement	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
12. Gender	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
13. Financial management and Co-financing	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
14. Knowledge Management, Collaboration and Learning	HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU, UA
15. Follow-up	Rating not applicable
16. Lessons Learned	Rating not applicable, but the recommendations will be categorized according to GEF Evaluation categories in the signed service agreement.

3.2.6. Evaluation Values and Ethical Standards

EarthEmpower is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards throughout the evaluation process. All data collection and analysis will be conducted with transparency, honesty, and accountability. Our team fully discloses to participating communities and

[1] HS - Highly Satisfactory, S - Satisfactory, MS - Moderately Satisfactory, MU - Moderately Unsatisfactory, U - Unsatisfactory, HU - Highly Unsatisfactory, UA - Unable to Assess.

stakeholders, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation at all evaluation stages.

This evaluation is grounded in objectivity and impartiality. Evaluation leaders had no prior engagement with the project, ensuring no preconceived notions or conflicts of interest. Data will be anonymized and analyzed blindly using unique identifiers to maintain neutrality. Results will only be interpreted after triangulation, protecting against unconscious bias and preserving the integrity of our conclusions.

In this evaluation and all our work, we honor the knowledge, practices, and sovereignty of the Indigenous Peoples and organizations we work with. Our work is rooted in the principle that all forms of discrimination must be dismantled. We will follow international guidelines for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. All interviews with Indigenous Peoples will only occur after they have received an introduction about the evaluation, have had time to decide if they would like to participate in the activities, and have provided consent to participate.

This evaluation follows GEF and EarthEmpower's ethical guidelines and prioritizes respect, safety, and confidentiality in all stakeholder interactions. Specifically, we've highlighted some key considerations:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants will be informed of the evaluation's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality. Consent will be obtained before participation in interviews, group interviews, and surveys.
- **Data Privacy:** Personally identifiable information will only be collected when possible, follow-up is needed, and any data with personal information will be anonymized prior to analysis and reporting.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion:** All engagements will be planned and conducted considering cultural diversity and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders. The research will be carried out with respect for Indigenous Peoples, project protocols, and languages. Local partners will be engaged to support culturally appropriate research approaches.
- **Avoiding Harm:** The evaluation will be planned to respect people's time and diverse responsibilities. Sensitive questions will be handled with discretion and care by the EarthEmpower team, which has been previously trained in inclusive field research.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The consulting team has had no prior involvement in the project's design or implementation and maintains complete neutrality and independence in the analysis and reporting.

3.3. Challenges and Limitations of the Evaluation

Several challenges and limitations arose during the Midterm Evaluation.

Stakeholder Availability: Many of the key stakeholders identified to participate in the MTR, including IPLCs, were busy or unavailable due to project-related international travel, holidays, or project fieldwork. This resulted in a delay in data collection to ensure all key voices were captured.

Long-term impacts: Measuring long-term environmental impacts was challenging as the subprojects delivering GEBs have only operated for a short time (1-2 years), which is too short to measure many environmental benefits.

Subproject evaluation: The evaluation was designed to conduct a review of the global ICI project, which includes a review of the subprojects and seeks to understand the interrelation between the global project and the subprojects. However, there was neither time nor budget allocated for a complete evaluation of each subproject. Given the diversity of subproject designs, to conduct an evaluation of each would imply significantly more resources.

Geographic Scope: Due to costs and time, field visits were limited to **Chile** and **Tanzania**, yet the project includes a diverse range of ecosystems and partners. As a result, the evaluation may not represent the full diversity of experiences across geographies and partners. While diverse stakeholders were engaged, we cannot guarantee that all experiences or opinions are fully represented.

Language Diversity: While the consulting team is fluent in English and Spanish, many languages are spoken across the project and subprojects, including French, Spanish, Thai, Nepali, and extensive Indigenous Languages. The evaluation was carried out across over six languages: English, Spanish, Thai (survey), French (survey), Swahili (field visits), and Maa (field visits). Though we engaged with community and project-level resources to ensure effective translations in field visits, and professionals to provide effective translation of research questions, we are limited to less direct communication with stakeholders by working through translators. Also, it is always possible that critical information is mistranslated or misunderstood. This is a challenge when conducting evaluations, data analyses, and reports.

3.3.2. Mitigation Strategies

To address these challenges and risks, the consultants implemented the following mitigation strategies:

Flexible Scheduling: The evaluation team adapted to the stakeholders' availability and extended the data collection period to ensure field visits and interviews could be scheduled with key stakeholders.

Multiple Data Collection Methods: The triangulation approach helped fill data gaps, using a combination of document review, remote and in-person interviews, group interviews, surveys, and field observations, since we were unable to visit all project areas.

Stakeholder Database: We worked with CI and IUCN to create a stakeholder database that guided intentional outreach and engagement strategies to ensure inclusive participation in the evaluation.

Use of KoboToolbox: A survey was designed for mobile access and configured to function offline, with translated versions for diverse audiences. The survey was designed to efficiently collect data without requiring too much time from participants.

Translations and alternative data collection options: The consulting team mapped the stakeholders' languages with the support of the MTR team and PMU. EarthEmpower created tools in English and Spanish and conducted interviews in both languages.

3.4. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation was structured to explicitly define whether a question is oriented towards the project at a global level or the subproject level. While the MTR is focused on the global project, to understand best how the overall project is working, we must also understand the dynamics of the subproject. The evaluation process is divided into five phases.

Phase 1 - Design evaluation framework and matrix: The matrix was designed by determining the key topics and key evaluation questions, guided by the initial project document review and the evaluation terms of reference.

Phase 2 - Evaluation tool design: Following the matrix, the key evaluation questions and sub-questions are organized into data collection tools that were designed and adapted to each key stakeholder group.

Phase 3 - Collect evaluation data: The evaluation was carried out, collecting data from document review, key stakeholder interviews, a digital survey, and field observations.

Phase 4 - Analyze data and develop report: The data was coded, analyzed, and synthesized into a series of conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations.

Phase 5 - Reflect, validate, and finalize: The results of the evaluation will be shared with key stakeholders to reflect and validate the report. A final evaluation report will be completed with feedback from the validation exercises.

Each evaluation research tool was designed to answer the key evaluation questions and triangulate the information between multiple sources - document review, key stakeholder interviews, a digital survey, and field observations. The questions used in these tools are derived from the key evaluation questions through specific sub-questions adapted to the project participants' roles. The sub-questions used in the research tools were designed to address the project overall, the three global components, and the subprojects that form part of Component 1. In the evaluation matrix, each sub-question was assigned a focus, either on the subproject or the project.

3.4.1. Systematized Desk Review of Project Documents

A set of guiding questions was designed to systematically review the project documents and support answering the key evaluation questions. The list of questions can be found in Annex 5. Evaluation team members examined the records and answered the evaluation questions accordingly, citing key texts or documents in the process.

3.4.2. Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interview tools were developed to guide semi-structured interviews with key project stakeholders. Each tool was adapted to address the stakeholders' role in the project. Questions were designed to address key topics at the global project level, and other questions were developed to address key topics within the subprojects. While the interview tools serve as a guide for conducting interviews, the interviewers are trained to adapt the tools in the interview process. This is done by skipping questions that were already answered during different questions in the interview; adapting the specific language of the question to reflect prior knowledge or context of the topic; asking questions in a different order to promote the flow of conversation and topics discussed; or adding additional questions that follow-up on the information shared to explore a topic in more depth.

In total, 78 people participated in individual and small group interviews. Additionally, eight group interviews were conducted with community members in Chile and Tanzania, representing over 100 community members participating in ICI initiatives.

3.4.3. Digital Survey

A digital survey was developed in Kobo Toolbox and available in different languages (Spanish, English, French, and Thai). The survey was designed to reach subproject team members who were not visited during field visits to Chile and Tanzania. It addressed key evaluation questions by generating questions based on the respondents' role (e.g.,

finance, gender, technical, or communications). Before sharing the survey, EarthEmpower completed a quality assurance review and received final approval from CI and IUCN GEF Implementing Agencies.

Sixteen subproject team members responded to the digital survey, with respondents representing key stakeholder types from diverse subprojects.

3.4.4. Field Observations

Field observations were conducted at each project site visited for the evaluation. For this methodology, a printed document was taken on each field visit. The document included questions the field research team answered based on their observations and from informal discussions (i.e., not during the group interviews), such as while driving between sites and walking and eating during field visits. This is meant to reduce the burden of extended interviews. The field research team will be provided with a list of questions to make observations about the community, project activity implementation, and participation of diverse community members. These field observations will provide complementary context to the data collected in each location. The format and questions can be found in Annex 6.

3.4.5. Triangulation and Validation Methods

Data was triangulated between interviews, surveys, document review, and field observations to identify and assess the project's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, adaptive capacity, sustainability, strategies, and activities. Conclusions were formed by comparing the results between different data sources and between different evaluation stakeholders.

3.4.4. Evaluation Dates

The evaluation began on March 11, 2025, and data collection began on April 14, 2025. Data was collected from April 14 to May 28. While the project continued advancing towards outputs and outcomes during and after the data collection, the scope of the evaluation is limited to the progress reported in interviews and in documentation shared and analyzed between April 14 and May 28. The exact locations visited in each country can be found in Annex 7.

Table 2: Evaluation Dates

Activity	Date Started	Date Finished	Location	Participants
Design framework and matrix	March 11, 2025	April 11, 2025	Remote	EarthEmpower

Activity	Date Started	Date Finished	Location	Participants
Design evaluation tools	March 17, 2025	April 15, 2025	Remote	EarthEmpower
Field Visit Tanzania	April 14, 2025	April 18, 2025	Tanzania	EarthEmpower, UCRT, Communities
Remote Interviews	May 1, 2025	May 28, 2025	Remote	EarthEmpower, IUCN/CI Implementing Agencies, PMU, subproject leaders
Field Visit Chile	May 5, 2025	May 9, 2025	Chile	EarthEmpower, Parlamento de Koz Koz, Mesa Txawun Winkulmapu, Observatorio Ciudadano, Communities
Digital Survey	May 8, 2025	May 23, 2025	Remote	Subproject team members
Data Analysis	May 23, 2025	June 2, 2025	Remote	EarthEmpower
Evaluation Validation	June 9, 2025	June 20, 2025	Remote	Key project stakeholders
Final Report	June 20, 2025	July 3, 2025	Remote	EarthEmpower

3.5. Data Analysis and Management

3.5.1. Data Analysis

Before data analysis, transcriptions of remote and on-site interviews, group interviews, field observation notes, and survey results were reviewed and cleaned. Each document was identified using descriptive variables of the participant or participants (i.e., region, stakeholder type). Evaluation team members uploaded the documentation to Dedoose, a cloud-based software for coding and analyzing qualitative and mixed data. The data was coded according to the key evaluation question addressed. The list of questions can be found in Annex 3. Data were coded to separate information about the global project or subprojects when applicable. One EarthEmpower team member coded each data source,

and the evaluation leader made random quality control checks throughout the coding process.

While the initial goal was to complete a quantitative analysis of the survey results, the sample size was insufficient to conduct a quantitative analysis. The survey responses were added to Dedoose for qualitative analysis, and the data from on-site and remote interviews, group interviews, field observations, and the document review.

Once coding was completed, the consulting team exported all memos and coded excerpts, separated by each key evaluation question. For each key evaluation question, the qualitative data were reviewed, organized, and synthesized into a narrative response to the key question, highlighting specific examples from the project and subprojects as relevant. Additionally, for each key evaluation question, the excerpts were reviewed, and excerpts were highlighted to be used in the evaluation report to highlight our findings with the direct voice of the stakeholders. Those excerpts are highlighted in purple bold text.

3.5.2. Data Management

As part of this mid-term evaluation, our team is fully committed to complying with the IUCN Data Protection Policy. All data collection, processing, storage, and sharing activities were conducted under the principles outlined in the policy, including lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, data minimization, accuracy, and accountability. We ensured that personal data was handled with the utmost care and confidentiality and that appropriate technical and organizational measures were in place to protect the rights and privacy of all individuals involved.

Data management for the MTR of the ICI was overseen using EarthEmpower's centralized digital infrastructure on Google Drive. This cloud-based system ensures secure, real-time collaboration among evaluation team members while maintaining proper version control and access permissions. Each data type, such as interview transcripts, group interview notes, field visit observations, survey responses, and supporting documentation, was stored in dedicated folders clearly labeled by research instrument and geographic or thematic focus. When paper notes were taken, they were scanned and digitized for use in data analysis.

Access to sensitive data (e.g., personally identifiable information or confidential stakeholder feedback) was restricted to authorized team members and protected through sharing settings. All data were anonymized during analysis, reporting, and submissions to maintain participant confidentiality. The team followed standardized naming conventions and documentation protocols to maintain quality and consistency. Raw and processed datasets were backed up regularly to protect all data during and after the evaluation.

3.6. Evaluation Stakeholder Engagement

Diverse communication strategies engaged stakeholders to participate in the evaluation. Depending on the type of stakeholder, we communicated via email, virtual meetings, and, in some cases, directly in the field. With the support of subproject leaders and teams, field visits were coordinated with community members involved. Efforts were made to engage with diverse stakeholders by sending multiple email reminders and reminders from the PMU to schedule interviews or respond to the digital survey.

Over **180** key stakeholders were engaged through field visits, interviews, group interviews, and a digital survey (Table 3). Thirty-one subproject team members were interviewed during field visits in Chile and Tanzania. Additionally, we estimate over **100** people participated in group interviews in Tanzania and Chile. We do not have individual names of participants, as consent to participate was given through discussion, a group vote, and the signature of consent by one community leader of their choice. Twenty-nine people participated in remote interviews, and 16 responded to the digital survey. All subprojects participated in the evaluation, either through a remote interview, in-person visit, or survey response (Table 4).

Table 3: Stakeholder groups and number of participants according to method

Project Level	**Stakeholder Type**	**In-person interviews**	**Remote interviews**	**Survey**	**Total participation**
Global project	ICI GSC[2]	2	4	0	6
	ICI Implementing (GEF)	0	4	0	4
	PMU / global team	0	16	0	16
	Institutional leaders	0	2	0	2
Sub-projects	Subproject leaders	5	6	0	11
	Subproject technical	10	0	4	14
	Subproject M&E	2	0	3	5
	Subproject Comms	3	0	1	4
	Subproject Gender and Safeguards	6	0	3	9
	Subproject Admin/Finance	3	1	5	9
	Community leaders and project participants	~100	0	0	~100
Total stakeholders		> 131	29	16	180 people

[2] Despite their role in sub-project leadership, GSC members interviewed were only counted in the stakeholder category GSC to avoid double counting participants in the evaluation. A separate set of questions were used to interview GSC members and other subproject team members.

Table 4: Evaluation participants according to subprojects.

Subproject	#
Consolidation of Territories of Life and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Madre de Dios River Basin (Amazon, Peru)	3
Enhancement of Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Practices on Sustainable Natural Resources Use and Biodiversity Management (EIPRP-SNRBM) in Tailandia.	1
Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) in Kenya	3
Paq'uch: Gestión Biocultural de Territorios Indígenas Ru K'ux Abya Yala (Guatemala, Panama)	8
Promoting Equity and The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and local Communities in Biodiversity Conservation in The Democratic Republic of The Congo.	1
SAINO: Revitalizing Nature-Culture Relationship and Recollection of Indigenous Peoples in the Annapurna Area of Nepal	5
Scaling Community Natural Resource Management for Improved Livelihoods in Northern Tanzania	23
Strengthening the protection and governance of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory in Chile	22
Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory, Argentina	2
Strengthening traditional governance for effective management of natural resources and increased resilience to climate change in Fiji and Cook Islands	2

The evaluation team surpassed the minimum number of interviews required by the MTR consulting contract (20 interviews), reaching over 180 people, across all subprojects, and across diverse roles in the PMU. While there was not 100% participation from subproject teams, to have achieved participation from all subprojects and from all key stakeholder categories establishes the basis for an evaluation that accurately represents diverse experiences and diverse perspectives.

4. Project Design and Theory of Change

Understanding how a project is designed to achieve its intended outcomes is fundamental to evaluating its progress and effectiveness. This section reviews the ICI's project design and Theory of Change (ToC), which together serve as a conceptual and operational roadmap for achieving impact. The project design outlines the strategic structure, including key components, partnerships, and delivery mechanisms, while the ToC illustrates how these activities are expected to contribute to broader environmental and social goals. Rooted in the premise that IPLCs are essential stewards of biodiversity and climate resilience, the ToC highlights the pathways, outcomes, and assumptions that underlie ICI's approach. As requested in the Midterm Review Terms of Reference, the evaluators assess the relevance and validity of the project's Theory of Change and its underlying assumptions, providing recommendations for any necessary revisions.

4.1. Project Design

4.1.1. Global Project Design

The project design of the ICI initiative reflects a comprehensive and inclusive approach. Stakeholders highlighted that the design process incorporated a strong governance component through the involvement of Indigenous leaders in key decision-making stages, including the establishment of the Interim Steering Committee and the creation of criteria for subproject selection. This participatory structure was essential to ensure alignment with IPLC priorities and increase project legitimacy. The design is generally perceived as coherent and realistic, particularly given its unique structure, strong alignment with Indigenous Peoples' priorities, and emphasis on participatory governance.

The ICI project has not changed its design on paper, but as planned, an adaptive approach to project implementation has been necessary. The evolution of expectations, from quantifiable metrics to transformative processes, reflects a mature, if challenging, response to complex realities for each subprojects reality and the structural inequality faced by Indigenous Peoples worldwide[3].

The most evident shift has been softening expectations in components two and four. Capacity-building targets assumed a baseline of institutional readiness that many subprojects did not have, and communication goals were set without sufficient human resources. Consequently, many expected results are now seen as aspirational or long-term processes, rather than near-term deliverables.

4.1.2. Subproject Design

The evaluation reflects a generally positive perception of the subproject design process, highlighting the success of the planning grants and the extended timeline provided to prepare detailed impact strategies. Many respondents affirmed that the subprojects were co-designed with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), ensuring alignment with local priorities, values, and cultural practices.

Most subproject stakeholders believe that the project designs remain broadly relevant and effective, though many reported the need for practical adjustments due to evolving local conditions, contextual challenges, or operational lessons learned. Overall, while no systemic design flaws were encountered, numerous stakeholders underscored the

[3] Structural inequality “describes disparities in wealth, resources, and other outcomes that result from discriminatory practices of institutions such as legal, educational, business, government, and health care systems (UPen).” In the context of the ICI project, historical and present day discriminatory practices of Indigenous Peoples by government institutions (i.e. land grabs, erasure of Indigenous languages and cultures, lack of access to basic services) influences organizational capacity and conditions for implementation.

importance of maintaining design flexibility to accommodate emerging needs, economic pressures, and the dynamic nature of community engagement processes.

There is also a growing recognition across subprojects that formal outcomes (e.g., increased income, expanded market access) are difficult to achieve without more addressing deeper structural changes, like land tenure security, language-adapted tools, and access to infrastructure. In response, the subprojects have emphasized more flexible, localized strategies: practical exchanges, cultural mapping, and traditional knowledge programs have emerged as critical success pathways. While the ICI project does not directly intervene in market systems, many subprojects have acknowledged market barriers as critical constraints to long-term livelihood sustainability. As a result, they have responded by emphasizing more flexible and localized strategies that strengthen community capacity and resilience. These include practical exchanges, cultural mapping, and traditional knowledge revitalization, which have emerged as effective entry points for building foundations that could, over time, enable broader economic participation. This adaptive approach reflects a clear awareness of economic challenges, even if the project's design limits direct engagement with market infrastructure.

4.2. Theory of Change

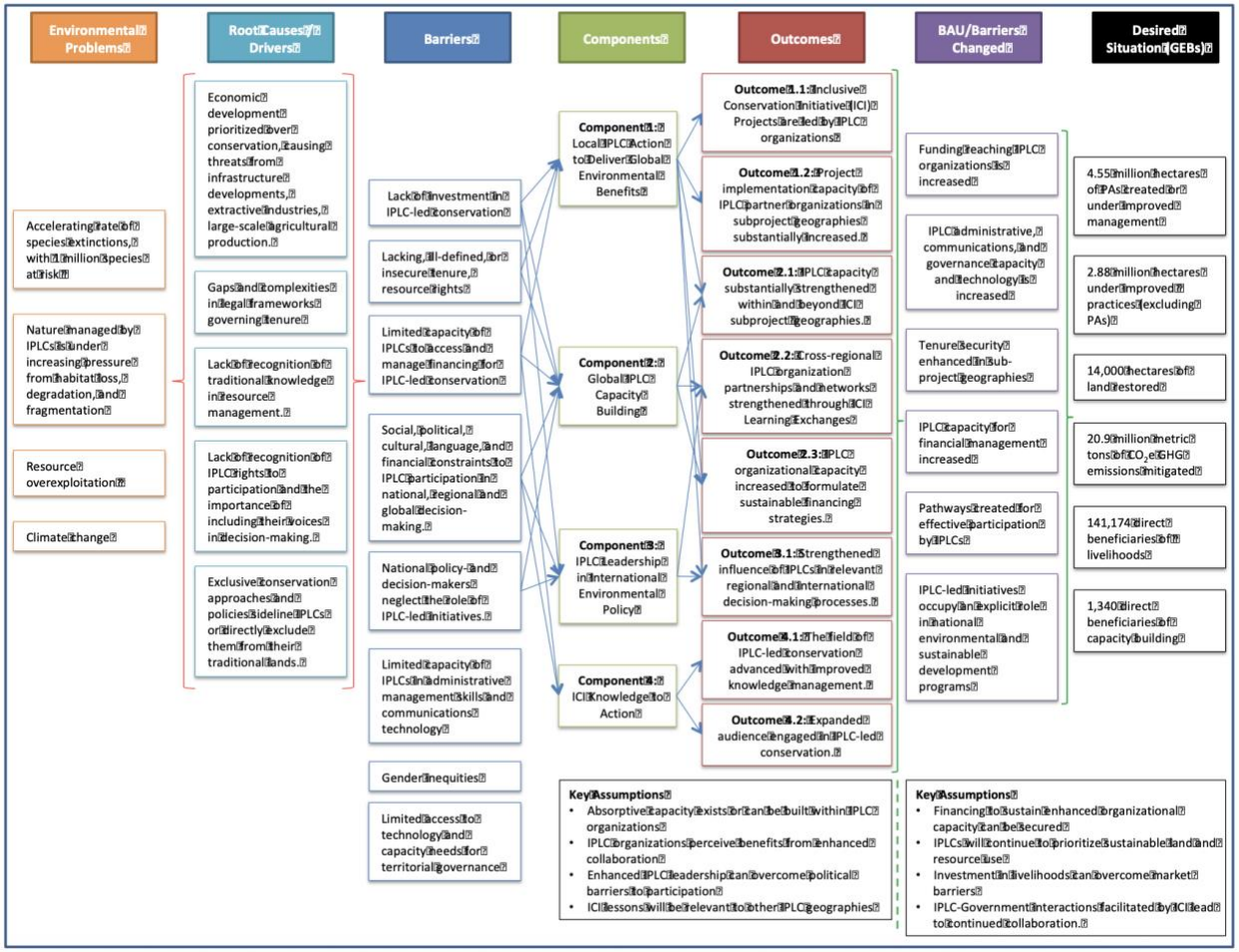
4.2.1. Global Project Theory of Change

The narrative Theory of Change from the CEO endorsed proposal document is, "based on the premise that IPLCs, when able to fully exercise land- and resource-use rights, can deliver enormous contributions to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. Assuming that IPLC organizations are interested in the collaborative opportunity offered by the ICI, this Theory of Change posits that if the ICI, a) through the set of pre-identified subprojects, enables IPLCs to develop and implement site-based Impact Strategies for enhanced conservation and natural resource management; b) strengthens the capacity of IPLC leaders and organizations to plan and deliver sustainable development interventions, including long-term financing solutions; and c) facilitates enhanced IPLC participation in regional and global processes; then participating IPLC organizations and leaders will exhibit enhanced capacity in key areas (administrative, financial management, communications, governance and technological); IPLC tenure security will be strengthened; financing for IPLC resource stewardship will increase; and IPLCs will have a stronger voice in policy- and decision-making processes relating to environment and sustainable development. By addressing these barriers to effective IPLC resource stewardship, the ICI will catalyze improved management of land and resources both inside and outside Protected Areas, land restoration, and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, while improving the livelihoods of IPLC beneficiaries. Assuming that lessons from the ICI subprojects will be relevant to other IPLC geographies around the world, the global impact of these

changes will be amplified through ICI Knowledge to Action efforts that advance the field of IPLC-led conservation and grow the audience for knowledge products that help expand and strengthen IPLC-led conservation."

The ICI Theory of Change is presented visually in the approved project documents (Figure 2).

Figure 2: ICI Theory of Change



The figure highlights the environmental challenges, root causes, and barriers to resolving the challenges. These barriers are organized into the project's four components. While the outcomes defined for each component are logical, they do not capture the diverse outcomes generated by the subprojects. For example, while tenure rights and security are mentioned as a barrier and barrier change, no outcome measures explicitly measure the impact of IPLCs securing land tenure (Document Reference - Approved GEF Project Document and all Annexes, GEF Approved Results Framework). This is an intermediate outcome that is essential to long-term environmental impacts.

Additionally, the original theory of change does not highlight the importance of centering Indigenous knowledge, strengthening Indigenous governance, and securing rights and recognition. Thus, the evaluation team developed a revised theory of change to underscore these key components of the ICI and the impact the project is generating. These suggested changes can be used to guide documenting lessons learned about generating global environmental benefits and can guide the incorporation of results-based reporting.

Table 5: ICI Theory of Change Original vs Adjusted

	Original Project TOC	**Adjusted TOC**
If the ICI	● Supports IPLCs in designing and implementing site-based conservation strategies, ● strengthens IPLC capacities in leadership, governance, and sustainable finance, ● and promotes IPLC engagement in regional and global policy platforms	● Centers Indigenous Leadership and Knowledge to support the design and implementation of inclusive conservation strategies and initiatives to secure land rights, ● Strengthens traditional and hybrid governance[4] systems, builds local capacity for financial management and sustainable resource management, ● and supports IPLCs to collaborate and exchange learnings and influence conservation and policy agendas,
The IPLC-led organizations will gain		● Stronger institutional and technical capacities, ● Increased capacity to access sustainable financing,
The IPLCs will gain	● stronger institutional and technical capacities, ● more secure land and resource tenure, ● increased access to sustainable financing, ● a stronger voice in environmental decision-making.	● Stronger land, resource, and territorial recognition, ● More inclusive and effective local governance, ● Deeper cultural and ecological stewardship.

[4] Refers to the combination of traditional governance systems that work together or are intertwined with non-traditional governance.

	Original Project TOC	Adjusted TOC
Which will result in	● improved land and resource management, ● biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation, and ● enhanced livelihoods for IPLC communities.	● Improved biodiversity and natural resource management ● Ecosystem restoration, climate change mitigation, ● Greater resilience to climate and environmental threats, ● Sustainable, culturally relevant livelihoods.

4.1.2 Assumptions

The assumptions defined in the theory of change are:

- Absorptive capacity exists or can be built within IPLC organizations
- IPLC organizations perceive benefits from enhanced collaboration
- Enhanced IPLC leadership can overcome political barriers to participation
- ICI lessons will be relevant to other IPLC geographies
- Financing to sustain enhanced organizational capacity can be secured,
- IPLCs will continue to prioritize sustainable resource land and resource use,
- Investment in livelihoods barriers can overcome market barriers, and
- IPLC-Government interactions facilitated by ICI lead to continued collaboration.

The evaluation explored whether these assumptions are correct or need to be updated. The results indicate that key assumptions underpinning the project design are largely valid. The assumption that IPLC organizations would be interested in participating in ICI was confirmed by the submission of over 400 applications, affirming strong engagement. Similarly, the belief that knowledge and lessons learned from ICI subprojects would be relevant across geographies has been validated through stakeholder feedback expressing demand for increased peer learning and exchange opportunities by diverse stakeholders.

The assumption regarding IPLC organizations' absorptive capacity—either existing or buildable—was generally upheld, although the wide range of technical and fiduciary capacities among partners created varying implementation speeds. Tools like the organizational capacity assessment and planning grants helped address these gaps.

Considering the shifts in international cooperation funding
commitments, and other political shifts in subproject regions, assumptions about sustained financing are now in question. Since the project was designed, the funding landscape has shifted, and securing long-term co-financing may present a challenge in some landscapes.

Finally, while many subprojects include components aimed at strengthening local livelihoods and economic initiatives, the evaluation found that although several subprojects are promoting sustainable production, agroforestry, and community enterprises, most do not directly address structural challenges related to market access, such as infrastructure, pricing, supply chains, value chains, or intermediary networks. Some subprojects have taken more explicit steps in this direction. For instance, the Paqu'ch subproject in Guatemala led by Sotz'il promotes an Indigenous Green Economy model focused on the cacao value chain, integrating strategies for certification, market access, and commercialization. Similarly, the Lau Seascape subproject in Fiji is supporting income-generating initiatives based on coconut oil and smoked fish, informed by business surveys across 47 communities and supported by efforts to strengthen local value chains and enterprise management. These initiatives illustrate promising steps toward connecting production with market systems. However, across the portfolio, many efforts remain at the level of sustainable production and food security, with limited integration into broader market frameworks. This highlights the importance of coupling livelihood strategies with more comprehensive market engagement approaches where feasible, or aligning with external programs that can fill these gaps.

4.2.2. Sub Projects Theory of Change

Each subproject developed a theory of change as part of its overall Impact Strategy. The evaluation reviewed the relevance of the theory of change with diverse subproject staff through interviews and the survey; however, due to time limitations, a full, detailed revision of each theory of change was not possible for all 10 subprojects. Most ToCs demonstrated alignment in values and general outcomes with the overarching ICI Global ToC, such as Indigenous governance, biodiversity protection, and cultural revitalization. However, the levels of coherence varied in terms of the specificity of causal pathways and the articulation of how subproject-level activities contribute to ICI's global outcomes. While some subprojects clearly mapped their strategies to ICI's four impact pathways, others remained more localized in focus, emphasizing community priorities without always explicitly linking them to global or systemic change.

Some stakeholders found the development of a theory of change meaningful and representative of their vision for territorial and cultural restoration. Others found it too abstract or lacking tangible applicability in specific subnational contexts. Still, many teams reported internal mechanisms to periodically review and adjust their strategies, suggesting a degree of adaptability in practice.

Subproject stakeholders provided mixed but largely affirmative assessments of the validity of the assumptions documented in their project strategies. Several participants affirmed that the assumptions remained relevant and had not required major revisions since the project's inception. However, other stakeholders highlighted that some

conceptually sound assumptions were idealistic in practice. In some cases, changes in administrative contexts, such as permitting or institutional restructuring, necessitated unanticipated shifts in managing the project, thus testing the flexibility of initial assumptions. For example, one team reported that a single implementation plan had to be split into two due to external administrative hurdles, requiring continued coordination across sub-units. Despite these adaptations, the underlying strategy remained cohesive.

Additionally, some stakeholders noted that the theory of change still reflects current realities, though shifts in timing, resource availability, and policy contexts might require ongoing review of certain operational assumptions. Others pointed out the importance of grounding even idealistic goals in flexible, locally adapted mechanisms, especially in territories facing rapidly shifting conditions.

5. Assessment of Project Results and Impact

Evaluating project results provides insights into whether the ICI is on track to achieve its objectives. This section analyzes the delivery of outputs and the realization of outcomes against targets established at the design stage. It also considers what factors have influenced project trajectories, revealing patterns of effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment with overarching goals. While each components' leadership is divided between CI and IUCN, both organizations contribute to all components. According to project documentation and global stakeholders, components 1 (governance and institutional strengthening) and 3 (global knowledge and learning) are progressing as scheduled. In contrast, components 2 (IPLC capacity building) and 4 (knowledge sharing and capacity building) have faced implementation delays.

While the scope of the evaluation did not include a detailed review of progress towards outputs and outcomes in each subproject, a brief review of advances can be found in Annex 8.

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) represents a landmark effort and an innovative model in global environmental finance. By directly empowering Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) with direct access to large-scale funding, the ICI moves beyond the traditional conservation approach of treating IPLCs as mere beneficiaries. Instead, it recognizes them as primary leaders and decision-makers in stewarding their lands, waters, and natural resources. This strategic shift is at the core of the project's success, as it positions Indigenous governance and rights-based outcomes not just as complementary goals but as the **primary pathway** to achieving sustainable, long-term Global Environmental Benefits. The evaluation's findings underscore that by centering

Indigenous leadership, the ICI is not only protecting biodiversity but also generating systemic, durable change that strengthens communities from within.

5.1. Project Progress to Outputs

During the evaluation, assessment of outputs and advances was complicated, as quarterly reports provide advances from the quarter based on the annual work plan but not cumulative progress toward the output from previous years or quarters. The Annual PIR provides a cumulative review of outputs; however, the latest PIR is almost 1 year old. A review of the 2024 PIR, Q2 2025 report, and the indicator progress tracking table were used to assess advances in outputs (Table 6).

Table 6. Assessment of project progress toward outputs[5]

Outcome	Output	Year	End of project target	Status[6]
Component 1: Local IP and LC Action to Deliver Global Environmental Benefits (GEB): Established on-the-ground projects led by IP and LC organizations.				
Outcome 1.1.: Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) subprojects are led by IP and LC organizations.	Output 1.1.1: IP and LC organizations in ICI Subproject Geographies contracted to lead subprojects.	Y1	Target 1.1.1.: 10 lead-contracting organizations	100% and ongoing
	Output 1.1.2: Subproject Impact Strategies finalized to guide project implementation	Y1	Target 1.1.2.: 10 Impact Strategies	100% and ongoing
	Output 1.1.3: Activities implemented for enhancing IP and LC rights and governance of natural resources.	Y5	Target 1.1.3.: priority actions in 10 subprojects	100% and ongoing
	Output 1.1.4: Activities implemented for improving management of natural and cultural resources in IP and LC Lands and Territories.	Y5	Target 1.1.4.: priority actions in 10 subprojects	100% and ongoing

[5] Based on indicator tracking data, PIRs, and the last report uploaded on SharePoint Platform (Q2_ICI-FY25-GEF Agency Quarterly Progress Report_ Oct - December 2024).

[6] The percentage of advance is calculated based on the number of activities completed, with the maximum score being the number of activities proposed (not counting ongoing activities, such as monitoring).

Outcome	Output	Year	End of project target	Status[6]
	Output 1.1.5: Activities implemented for addressing the drivers of environmental degradation affecting IP and LC sustainable development.	Y5	Target 1.1.5.: priority actions in 10 subprojects	100% and ongoing
	Output 1.1.6: Activities implemented to support the economic and financial sustainability of IP and LC-led conservation.	Y5	Target 1.1.6.: priority actions in 10 subprojects	100% and ongoing
	Output 1.1.7: ICI subproject governance structures designated and supported.	Y5	Target 1.1.7.: 10 ICI subprojects with designated IP and LC-led governance structures	100% and ongoing
Outcome 1.2.: Project implementation capacity of ICI subproject lead organizations in subproject geographies substantially increased	Output 1.2.1: Capacity assessments and capacity building plans of ICI subproject lead organizations in subproject geographies prepared.	Y1	Target 1.2.1.: 10 assessments and plans	100%
	Output 1.2.2: Capacity-building activities delivered to ICI subproject lead organizations in subproject geographies	Y5	Target 1.2.2.: 90 people trained (10 per subproject)	>100% and ongoing
Component 2: Global IP and LC Capacity Building: IP and LC capacity strengthened to improve management of lands, territories, waters, and natural resources and increase access to public and long-term sustainable financing mechanisms.				
Outcome 2.1.: IP and LC capacity substantially strengthened within and beyond ICI subproject geographies.	Output 2.1.1: ICI Learning Academy Curricula designed.	Y3	Target 2.1.1.: 1 Curriculum designed.	100%
	Output 2.1.2: IP and LC Inclusive Conservation Learning Academy established.	Y4	Target 2.1.2.: 1 Learning Academy established.	100%
	Output 2.1.3: Organizational Development and Capacity Building of IP and LC	Y4	Target 2.1.3.: 10 ICI subproject lead organizations, at least 20 additional organizations	In progress

Outcome	Output	Year	End of project target	Status[6]
	organizations delivered through the ICLA.			
	Output 2.1.4: Learning Evaluation completed of IP and LC Inclusive Conservation Learning Academy.	Y3	Target 2.1.4.: 1 evaluation	0%
Outcome 2.2.: Cross-regional IP and LC organization partnerships and networks strengthened through ICI Learning Exchanges	Output 2.2.1: IP and LC organizations mapped to strengthen collaboration within and beyond subproject geographies.	Y1	Target 2.2.1.: 1 mapping report, incorporating subproject/regional information and global scan of additional organizations.	In progress
	Output 2.2.2: Inclusive Conservation Learning Exchanges delivered.	Y5	Target 2.2.1.: 8 learning exchanges	62.5%
Outcome 2.3.: IPs and LCs organizational capacity increased to formulate sustainable financing strategies.	Output 2.3.1: Financial Opportunity Analysis completed.	Y2	Target 2.3.1.: 10 Financial Opportunity analyses completed.	0%, in progress
	Output 2.3.2: Capacity Building in Sustainable Financing delivered.	Y4	Target 2.3.2.: 10 organizations trained.	0%
Component 3: IPs and LCs Leadership in International Environmental Policy: Building the pathway from local action to global impact through targeted engagement in international environmental policy and relevant international platforms.				
Outcome 3.1.: Strengthened influence of IPs and LCss in relevant regional and international decision-making processes.	Output 3.1.1: ICI Policy Coordination Mechanisms strengthened to support IPs and LCs engagement across Rio Conventions and other fora.	Y4	Target 3.1.1.: 2 mechanisms	In progress
	Output 3.1.2: ICI International Environmental Policy Negotiations Curriculum developed and delivered	Y4	Target 3.1.2.: 1 curriculum	In progress
	Output 3.1.3: ICI International Environmental Policy Fellows	Y4	Target 3.1.3.: 15 fellows (5 per year in years 2-4	50% and in

Outcome	Output	Year	End of project target	Status[6]
	Program established and supported.		of project, at least 50% women)	progress
	Output 3.1.4: IPs and LCs representation and recognition increased at the Rio Conventions and other relevant international conventions and platforms.	Y5	Target 3.1.4.: 5 events (at least 1 event to include focus on gender issues/topic)	>100%, in progress
Component 4: ICI Knowledge to Action: Transforming Inclusive Conservation Knowledge and Lessons Learned into demonstration models that expand support and advance field of IPs and LCs-led conservation				
Outcome 4.1.: The field of IPs and LCs-led conservation advanced with improved knowledge management.	Output 4.1.1: ICI Knowledge Management Platform established.	Y5	Target 4.1.1.: 1 KM platform established.	100% and in progress
	Output 4.1.2: ICI Knowledge Products developed with IPs and LCs organizations.	Y5	Target 4.1.2.: 7 products (reflecting gender-inclusivity)	29%, In progress
	Output 4.1.3: ICI Community of Practice established and supported.	Y5	Target 4.1.3.: 1 community of practice	In progress
Outcome 4.2.: Expanded audience engaged in IPs and LCs-led conservation.	Output 4.2.1: ICI communications strategy developed based on needs assessment.		Target 4.2.1.: 1 communications strategy (reflecting gender mainstreaming)	100%
	Output 4.2.2: ICI Communications Program executed.	Y5	Target 4.2.2.: 1 program	50% and in progress
	Output 4.2.3: ICI communications training provided to project partners, reflecting gender mainstreaming.	Y5	Target 4.2.3.: 90 people trained (10 per geography)	0%
Component 5: Monitoring and evaluation				
Outcome 5.1.: Monitoring and evaluation conducted to verify effective	Output 5.1.1: A gender-sensitive M&E system developed to collect, analyze and synthesize data and information generated during project implementation.	Y5	Target 5.1.1: One Project M&E system	100% and ongoing

Outcome	Output	Year	End of project target	Status[6]
project execution				

5.2. Progress to Outcomes

Evaluation data reveals notable progress in advancing project outcomes, particularly in strengthening Indigenous governance systems, engaging communities, and promoting co-management frameworks. Table 7 reviews the advances or successful delivery of each outcome and how its achievement is related to the achievement of outputs. While the achievement of outputs is advancing according to schedule, the outputs reported do not always contribute to advances in the outcomes, despite outputs being on schedule.

Table 7: Advances in achievement of project outcomes[7]

Outcome	Indicators	Progress toward target	Summary of Advances	Dependent on achievement of outputs
Outcome 1.1.: Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) subprojects are led by IPLC organizations.	Target 1.1.A: 141,174 direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender.	Total: 70,547 - 50% progress	Certain aspects are complete, and the others are on schedule for implementation. Progress to targets are behind the project schedule, but rapid increases are being shown, with expectation to reach the goal.	The outputs associated with Outcome 1.1, while delayed slightly by a slow start up, have either been achieved or are in progress, which has contributed to successful advances in achieving the outcome.
	Target 1.1.B: ≥50 % of beneficiaries of ICI projects report increased livelihood benefits (50% of those beneficiaries will be women).	0%		
	Target 1.1.C: 100% of ICI projects integrating Gender Responsive strategies	100%		
	Target 1.1.D: 10 subprojects have secured additional funding (in addition to GEF allocation)	12% of co-financing		

[7] Based 2024 PIR, Quarterly reports, and stakeholders opinions.

Outcome	Indicators	Progress toward target	Summary of Advances	Dependent on achievement of outputs
Outcome 1.2: Project implementation capacity of ICI subproject lead organizations in subproject geographies substantially increased.	Target 1.2.A: At least 10 ICI partner organizations show at least 20% improvement in organizational capacity assessments.	0% - only pre- ICI assessment has been completed.	Progress is being made but it hasn't been measured yet	Output 1.2.2: Capacity-building activities delivered to ICI subproject lead organizations, yet organizations report there is need for more targeted training and support.
	Target 1.2.B.: At least two youths (one male, one female) involved in the execution team in each subproject.	2023 - 70% of subprojects 2024 - 80% of subprojects	There is significant progress toward the outcome indicator.	
Outcome 2.1: IPLC capacity substantially strengthened within and beyond ICI subproject geographies.	Target 2.1.A: At least 400 IPs and LCs trainees successfully complete ICI Learning Academy training modules. At least 50% are women, and at least 25% are from outside the subproject geographies.	0%	This outcome is behind but can still be completed. Modules are still under development. A partnership was secured for hosting the modules with UNDP.	While the curriculum has been designed and academy platform established, module development is delayed, reducing the learning outcomes.
	Target 2.1.B: At least 8 capacity building modules are developed with support of GEF Inclusive Conservation Learning Academy, including sections on gender	25%		
Outcome 2.2: Cross-regional IPLC organization partnerships and networks strengthened through ICI Learning Exchanges.	Target 2.2.A: At least 4 cross-regional collaborations documented to strengthen collaboration outside subproject geographies and build linkages with the ICI Community of Practice.	4, 100%	Sub-Saharan Africa, Pacific Islands, Asia, and Latin America	Stakeholders reported satisfaction with their learning exchanges and requested more learning exchanges be facilitated, which illustrates that the exchanges have been valuable for strengthening networks.
	Target 2.2.B.: At least 75% of IPs and LCs Organizations report greater capacity to advance IPs and LCs-led conservation after participating in Learning Exchanges (disaggregated by gender, affiliation, country, theme)	0	This has not yet been measured.	

Outcome	Indicators	Progress toward target	Summary of Advances	Dependent on achievement of outputs
Outcome 2.3: IPLC organizational capacity increased to formulate sustainable financing strategies.	Target 2.3.A: At least 10 ICI subproject lead organizations have a fully developed sustainable financing strategy.	0	The targeted results are expected to be generated later in the project. Additional progress has not been made at the last available report (Q2 2025). Terms of reference were made to hire a consultant.	No outputs have been achieved in this outcome and just one is in progress. This is an urgent need as sustainable financing is one of the biggest risks to project sustainability.
	Target 2.3.B: At least 60% of ICI subproject lead organizations report greater capacity in proposal development, fundraising, and implementation of sustainable financing strategies.	0		
Outcome 3.1: Strengthened influence of IPLCs in relevant regional and international decision-making processes.	Target 3.1.A.: At least 400 IPs and LCs leaders, 50% of whom are women, report greater opportunity to influence international environmental policy with support of ICI.	Total: -W: 19 -M: 31 12.5%	Trainings are under development which are being designed to increase capacities and opportunities.	The outputs are being achieved on time and facilitated progress toward the outcome.
	Target 3.1.B.: 40 ICI delegates (of whom 50% are women) engaging with and providing technical support to national delegations at international policy meetings (disaggregated by gender, affiliation, country, convention).	Total: -W: 19 -M: 31 >100%	In the 2025 FY, the GSC and the fellows have participated in international policy meetings, which will contribute towards this goal, but a specific number was not provided in report.	
Outcome 4.1: The field of IPLC-led conservation advanced with	-Target 4.1.A.: At least 7 lessons learned, and flagship reports prepared to advance the global field of knowledge regarding IPs and LCs-led conservation.	2 Reports, 29% advance	Two reports completed and prioritization completed with the GSC.	While one output is completed, (branding and website development), most continue to

Outcome	Indicators	Progress toward target	Summary of Advances	Dependent on achievement of outputs
improved knowledge management.	Target 4.1.B.: At least 2 multiregional partnerships established to strengthen collaboration outside subproject geographies and build linkages among the ICI Community of Practice.	100%	UNDP and IIFB partnerships have developed.	be under development. Progress is expected to accelerate now that there is a lead for Component 4 that is aligned with the project mindset and goals.
	Target 4.1.C.: At least 75% of IPs and LCs Organizations Report greater collaboration after participating in Community of Practice	0%	While the Community of practice exists as a list serve, measurements of interactions and collaboration benefits have not been documented.	
Outcome 4.2: Expanded audience engaged in IPLC-led conservation.	Target 4.2.A.: At least 500 average monthly visits to ICI Knowledge Platform.	100%	The outcome indicators defined for Component 4 are more associated with output-level indicators and do not highlight changes in behaviors or impacts with the engaged audiences. Minor advances have been made in the indicators reported. The participants reported for the community of practice are members of a list serve. No advances were	Delays in completing outputs and frequent staff turnover has delayed advancement toward achieving the outcome.
	At least 500 members of ICI Community of Practice (disaggregated by gender, IPs and LCs status, county, field of expertise).	100%		
	Target 4.2.C.: At least a 10% annual increase in project communications index. 20% increase in Instagram followers and 10% increased followers on X social media platform.	Twitter: 56.12% decrease followers; 29.3% decrease in impressions; 8.8% increase engagement; 38.9% increase in mentions. Instagram: 14.3 decrease in posts and		

Outcome	Indicators	Progress toward target	Summary of Advances	Dependent on achievement of outputs
		18.8 decrease in followers	reported for events or interaction.	

5.3.1. Relevance of Outcomes

The outcomes were rated for relevance (see section 5.4) to understand if the project outcomes were congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, country priorities, and mandates of the Agencies and if the project design was appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes.

The outcomes of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) demonstrate strong alignment with GEF focal areas, agency mandates, and country priorities. Component 1, which supported IPLC-led planning and subproject design, was particularly relevant due to its inclusive and culturally appropriate approach. The project's decision to dedicate the first year to participatory planning enhanced community ownership and ensured that subproject strategies, governance structures, and capacity-building efforts responded directly to the priorities of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). These efforts align well with GEF's Indigenous Peoples Focal Area and the broader objective of promoting community-driven conservation.

Component 2's design is also relevant, as it sought to strengthen IPLC leadership, gender inclusion, and financial sustainability, core priorities of the GEF. The Fellows Programme in Component 3 is highly valued and demonstrate appropriate targeting of needs. Component 3's international policy training directly supports national and global biodiversity and climate commitments by amplifying IPLC voices in international forums such as the CBD and UNFCCC. Meanwhile, Component 4's development of a knowledge management platform, ancestral knowledge products, and a communications strategy supports national biodiversity strategies and global knowledge exchange objectives, though late roll-out has constrained immediate relevance in some areas.

5.3.2. Effectiveness of Outcomes

Effectiveness of the outcomes was reviewed to understand whether the project's actual outcomes are commensurate with the expected outcomes. The evaluation data demonstrate that ICI has made substantial progress toward achieving its expected outcomes, particularly in promoting IPLC leadership, strengthening governance structures, and facilitating community-based conservation. Subproject leaders across Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa emphasized the impact of project activities on community organization and cultural reaffirmation. Examples include mapping culturally

significant sites, expanding participatory land-use planning, and enhanced collaboration across territories.

The project has demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness across its components. Under Component 1, the project exceeded expectations by mobilizing over 400 IPLC applications and successfully launching 10 subprojects across 12 countries. Despite early delays in administrative processes, implementation caught up, and progress is on track. Subproject strategies were co-designed with IPLCs, enhancing their alignment with community priorities, and indigenous governance structures have been established to support inclusive decision-making. Capacity-building activities were implemented in culturally relevant formats and reached high levels of participation.

Component 2 showed a mixed picture in terms of effectiveness. Outcome 2.1, the Makanisi Learning Academy, has been slow to advance, due to slower participatory design processes and reliance on UNDP's timeline. However, the delivery of Outcome 2.2, including global and regional exchanges, while facing initial delays, has made significant advances in the last year. Outcome 2.3, focused on sustainable finance and global mapping, showed the least progress, with key tools still under development and stakeholders reporting limited practical value to date.

Component 3 has been effective in building IPLC visibility and skills in international policy processes. In Component 3, the Fellows Program stands out as a transformative experience for participants. The Fellows program is on track to reach its outcomes. The International Environmental Policy Fellows Program, webinars on multilateral environmental agreements, and mentorship opportunities were widely appreciated and provided tangible skills and exposure to IPLCs. However, the broader impact on policy influence has yet to be fully captured or documented.

Component 4 also demonstrated progress, particularly through the launch of the knowledge platform (website), which recorded over 10,000 views and featured multilingual resources. Knowledge products integrating ancestral knowledge were positively received. Yet, the Community of Practice remains underdeveloped. Indicator monitoring reports that over 1000 people are in the community of practice, but these are individuals on an email list serve and it does not reflect dynamic interactions by this group of people. While communications products such as social media content and visual identity elements have increased IPLC visibility, the communications training component is behind schedule, limiting the full effectiveness of the component. Challenges faced in Component 4 have limited the realization of specific expected outcomes. These difficulties were linked to staffing gaps, complex coordination demands, and difficulties meeting communication targets.

Nonetheless, many interviewees pointed out that the processes have yielded significant gains even when formal outputs and outcomes are still under development. Stakeholders reported increased awareness of Indigenous identity, greater organizational autonomy, community cohesion, and improved visibility in policy dialogues.

5.3.3. Efficiency of Outcomes

Efficiency was assessed based on the cost-effectiveness, time use effectiveness, and how cost and time use to achieve outputs and outcomes compares to similar projects.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, Component 1's approach to inclusive planning, although time-intensive, proved to be an efficient investment, as it helped avoid common pitfalls such as low ownership or the need for mid-project redesigns. The allocation of time and resources toward community-led processes laid a solid foundation for effective implementation and is likely more cost-effective over the long term compared to top-down models. By IPLC-led organizations leading conservation efforts and 80% of project funding being dedicated to IPLC-led organizations, the project is highly efficient in generating global environmental benefits. Interviewees compared ICI favorably to similar initiatives, particularly its emphasis on IPLC leadership and organizational strengthening.

The depth of engagement and foundational work with communities justified the timeline and expenditures for implementation. In regions where challenges included remote access or high levels of socio-political complexity, the project's adaptation and flexibility were crucial for efficiency. The co-design process, multi-level engagement, and attention to context-specific needs contributed to higher costs and slower implementation in some areas. Nonetheless, these investments are seen as essential to achieving lasting impact. The administrative burdens and insufficient technical staffing were common concerns, often stretching local teams and delaying outputs. However, many respondents emphasized the cost-efficiency of local coordination mechanisms, noting that community-based logistics and knowledge-sharing helped offset broader operational challenges. Financial reports and monitoring tools also allowed for effective tracking expenditures and course corrections.

In contrast, Component 2 faced efficiency challenges. The delays in launching learning modules and other activities, coupled with uneven rollout of capacity-building services, required repeated adjustments. While the partnership with UNDP for the learning academy increased efficiency in the long-term, in the short term the dependence on UNDP's timelines has delayed advances, reducing efficiency. Some capacity-building services, like the IPFAF and FLACSO trainings, were highly effective and well-targeted, but overall participation was limited to only 6 subproject team members.

Component 3 demonstrated greater efficiency. Despite the small scale of the Fellows Programme (15 fellows between 13 countries and across five years), it leveraged modest investments to create significant exposure and outcomes, with fellows presenting at international events and building transnational networks. This relatively low-cost intervention generated substantial value for IPLC representation and leadership development.

Component 4's delays in finalizing the communications strategy and rolling out the website and visual identity affected efficiency. Without centralized branding and clear messaging tools in the early phases, subprojects and partners developed ad hoc materials, sometimes duplicating effort. However, the eventual launch of outreach tools and increased uptake by partners suggest that the efficiency of this component is improving as implementation progresses. The staff turnover in Component 4 reduced efficiency, as progress was made by each new team member and then in a short period of time those advances were lost due to their departure.

While a few stakeholders questioned whether four years was sufficient to meet all objectives, the consensus is that the project's resource use was commensurate with its innovative scope and expected results.

5.3.4. Sustainability of Outcomes

Sustainability is assessed based on the risks to continuation of benefits from the project and how those risks may affect the continuation of benefits after the project ends. **More details about Sustainability can be found in Section 6.2.**

The ICI project has laid important groundwork for the long-term sustainability of its outcomes, though risks to that sustainability do exist and require continued monitoring and mitigation. Component 1 contributed significantly to sustainability by investing in IPLC-led governance structures, leadership development, and context-specific capacity building. These locally anchored structures increase the likelihood that project benefits will endure beyond the GEF funding period. Subprojects in places like Tanzania and Chile illustrate how community-led approaches foster local ownership and continuity.

Across regions, stakeholders highlighted the importance of investments in land tenure security, governance structures, and culturally rooted planning tools such as life plans and territorial maps. In Tanzania, rotational grazing practices and community leadership training were cited as drivers of ongoing conservation and resource management. These tools support immediate project objectives and equip communities to continue managing and defending their territories after the project's conclusion.

Interviewees reported that cultural mapping, community-level learning, and the ability to

access additional funds have strengthened autonomy and sustainability. While context-specific challenges remain, such as access to resources and follow-up support, the project's integrated, participatory design and capacity development components indicate that many outcomes will persist post-project.

The commitment of subprojects to sustainability is not in question since most organizations in the field have been doing this before the ICI project; what worries them is continuing to have access to large-scale funding.

Component 2's limited progress in developing sustainable finance strategies poses a threat to the financial durability of subprojects. Without clear post-project funding pathways, the continuation of benefits may be compromised.

Component 3's outputs, including the fellows' networks and their participation in global policy spaces, hold promise for continued influence, though institutional mechanisms to support ongoing engagement remain underdeveloped. The longevity of this impact may depend on external partnerships and continued mentoring support. While the Fellows Programme created strong individual leadership, participants noted that the benefits often remained concentrated among a few individuals and were difficult to disseminate across teams, limiting broader institutional sustainability.

Component 4 has contributed to sustainability through the development of lasting knowledge resources and increased visibility of IPLC voices. However, further work is needed to systematize learning and ensure that communication tools are institutionalized within IPLC organizations. Staff turnover and delayed training implementation risk undermining these gains. Communication efforts under Component 4 aim to scale these experiences by connecting IPLC knowledge with broader systems and financing opportunities. Global stakeholders emphasized that mechanisms like partnerships for funding and participation in international events (e.g., COPs) enable IPLC actors to access new opportunities and continue their work.

5.3. Outcome Ratings

Project outcomes were assessed based on the four rated GEF evaluation criteria. 1) Relevance, 2) Effectiveness, 3) Efficiency, and 4) Sustainability. See Annex 4 to understand more about the rating system. The rating for each criterion for each outcome is provided below with a brief justification of the rating. Table 8 provides the ratings and justification of ratings for each criterion is made.

Table 8: Outcome Ratings[8]

Outcome	Rel[9]	Efft	Effic	Sust[10]	Justification
Outcome 1.1.: Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) subprojects are led by IPLC organizations.	HS	HS	HS	ML	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities and country priorities and the project is designed to achieve the outcome. The outcomes achieved are commensurate with expectations, with an expected slower start to adjust to capacity differences, now accelerating toward the target. The direction of 80% of funds to IPLC has been an efficient way to fund this outcome. While some subproject partners are prepared to continue their work after ICI, some have not yet developed the necessary capacity to sustain the results.
Outcome 1.2: Project implementation capacity of ICI subproject lead organizations in subproject geographies substantially increased.	HS	S	S	L	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities and country priorities, and the project is well designed to achieve the outcome. The outcomes achieved are slightly lower than expectations, as capacity advances are only 25% progressed at the Midterm of the project. The completion of the capacity assessments and plans were effective and cost-efficient, however the advances in the capacity building are slower than expected due to key technical team members recently joining the team or yet to be hired. Given the strong collaborations being built and the quality of administrative and financial support being provided as one-on-one support for capacity development with subprojects, the results are expected to be sustained after project end.
Outcome 2.1: IPLC capacity substantially strengthened within and beyond ICI subproject geographies.	HS	MU	S	L	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities and country priorities, and the project is well designed to achieve the outcome, however the advances to outputs and outcomes are significantly delayed. The outcomes achieved are not commensurate with expectations at the point of assessment. The outcome remains efficient as very little costs are being executed and little staff-time is allocated to the outcome, yet this is also driving the delays. The online modality and

[8] Based on document review of key documents for each component, PIR, quarterly reports, advances to date, expected completion date, and interviews opinions.

[9] In terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, a six-point rating scale is used: Highly satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), and Unable to Assess (UA).

[10] In terms of sustainability a four- point scale is used: Likely (L), Moderately Likely (ML), Moderately Unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U), and Unable to Assess (UA).

Outcome	Rel[9]	Efft	Effic	Sust [10]	Justification
					collaboration with UNDP increase cost-efficiency, however no results have been measured yet, so the overall efficiency is unknown. Given the online nature of the modules and the partnership with UNDP, the results are likely to be sustained after the project ends.
Outcome 2.2: Cross-regional IPLC organization partnerships and networks strengthened through ICI Learning Exchanges.	HS	S	S	ML	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities, and the project is well designed to achieve the outcome. The results achieved are commensurate with expectations at the point of assessment, but no results have been shared about changes in capacity. While there were some delays to organize the exchanges, stakeholders reported satisfaction with their learning exchanges and requested more learning exchanges be facilitated. The focus on regional exchanges maintained cost-efficiency for the outcome. While learnings were documented from the exchanges that are expected to be carried on into the work of the IPLCs, without an ongoing mechanism for continued interchange and shared learning, these results may not be sustained.
Outcome 2.3: IPLC organizational capacity increased to formulate sustainable financing strategies.	S	MU	MU	MU	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities, and the project is somewhat well designed to achieve the outcome. Since the project was designed to foment these capacities later in project implementation, there may not be sufficient time to secure additional funding before ICI ends. No substantial results have been achieved for this outcome at the time of the evaluation. The efficiency is low as progress has been delayed and no results can be measured with the indicators. Sustained results are unlikely since no results have been generated yet.
Outcome 3.1: Strengthened influence of IPLCs in relevant regional and international decision-making processes.	HS	S	S	L	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities, and the project is well designed to achieve the outcome with a blend of support and programs to increase capacity, opportunity, and influence. The results are commensurate with expectations at this point in the project. The outcome has been efficient in generating impact with direct participants in the fellowship program but there is no mechanism for ensuring that impact is shared by the whole IPLC. Sustained results are likely, as IPLCs will have new skills to use to create

Outcome	Rel[9]	Efft	Effic	Sust [10]	Justification
					opportunity and influence as a result of their participation in the fellowship program and other ICI activities.
Outcome 4.1: The field of IPLC-led conservation advanced with improved knowledge management .	S	MU	MU	UA	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities, but the design does not clearly lead to the expected results (i.e. listserve as a community of practice or reports as an adequate mechanism for knowledge management in an IPLC context). The results are not commensurate with expectations at this point in the project. The frequent turnover on the Component 4 team has led to inefficiency in advancing toward the outcome. The sustainability of this outcome could not be assessed as the results are not likely to be generated until year five of the project. Once the leadership of the component is stabilized and progress is made, this could be reevaluated.
Outcome 4.2: Expanded audience engaged in IPLC-led conservation .	HS	MU	MS	MU	The outcome is highly aligned with GEF priorities, but the design does not clearly lead to the expected results (i.e. list serve as a community of practice or website visitors does not guarantee engagement). The results are not commensurate with expectations at this point in the project. The activities in the outcome have been efficient in driving visitors to the project website, but there is not a measurable result for advancing knowledge management in IPLC-led conservation. in generating impact with direct participants in the fellowship program but there is no mechanism for ensuring that impact is shared by the whole IPLC. Thus far the advances made in having a web presence and social media presence are not sufficient to ensure the likelihood of improved knowledge management in IPLC-led conservation after the project ends.
Outcome 5.1: Monitoring and evaluation conducted to verify effective project execution	MU	S	MU	UA	The outcome is moderately aligned with GEF priorities, as reporting has been designed not around GEF reporting requirements (annual) but around project management unit preferences (quarterly). The design of outcome 5.1 does not currently support progress toward achievement of the project outcomes but instead hinders it by creating higher workloads for subprojects and the PMU. The results are somewhat commensurate with expectations, but there are opportunities to

Outcome	Rel[9]	Efft	Effic	Sust [10]	Justification
					improve effectiveness of the M&E system. The outcome has been inefficient due to the high and repetitive reporting burden that does not effectively highlight the important results of the project. Sustainability of the M&E system is not assessed as it is not expected to continue after the project end.
Overall average rating	S-HS	MS	MS	ML	
Weighted rating based on funding proportions between outcomes.	HS	S	S	ML-L	

5.4. Progress to Impact

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) has demonstrated that strengthening Indigenous governance and securing rights-based outcomes are not just co-benefits but are foundational for achieving long-term environmental impacts. By enabling Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) to lead conservation efforts through their traditional governance systems and legal frameworks, the project has created the necessary conditions for sustainable resource management. The rights-based approach of ICI fosters community ownership, increases the likelihood of lasting change, and positions IPLCs as key partners in meeting national and global conservation commitments.

5.4.1. Environmental Impact

Despite making advances in laying the groundwork necessary for long-term benefits, evaluation respondents generally noted that it was too early to evaluate environmental outcomes at this project stage. In areas where activities have focused on planning and governance reform rather than field-level interventions, first partners create the enabling conditions for sustained long-term conservation. Across regions, the project has laid the groundwork for measurable and lasting ecological improvements through improved governance and securing land tenure rights, precursors to sustained conservation. Although measurable changes in indicators of long-term environmental impacts may not

yet be measurable, the barriers to reach these impacts are being directly affected by the project, enabling the possibility of long-term impacts. For example, numerous subprojects have directly facilitated collective land rights for IPLCs. Additionally, the project has directly addressed capacity and governance of IPLC-led organizations, which have previously been a barrier to long-term conservation impacts.

Several regions reported tangible environmental benefits stemming from ICI activities. In Tanzania, restoration efforts have focused on holistic rangeland management: a total of 13 seasonal grazing plans have been developed, with 46 dry season and 35 wet season grazing blocks established, integrating indigenous knowledge with ecological best practices. Rotational grazing has improved rangeland productivity and animal health, and communities are gaining knowledge on the importance of sustainable land use and wildlife corridors. Though the more concrete environmental benefits, such as improvements in biodiversity and soil carbon sequestration, will be measurable in the longer term, the initial impacts are observed.

Progress is being made in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the ANAPAC subproject has led to the identification, documentation, and mapping of the Mpembe Community Conservation Area, advancing legal recognition of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) in the Western Landscape.

In Thailand, the Indigenous Peoples' Foundation (IPF) has finalized land-use mapping with Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and conducted participatory GIS training to support the documentation of Indigenous ecological knowledge. In Nepal, the NEFIN subproject has focused on environmental advocacy and awareness-raising through eight workshops and seven radio programs, strengthening Indigenous engagement in biodiversity protection and promoting sustainable natural resource management. These examples reflect the diverse yet interconnected efforts across ICI sites to restore ecosystems, reinforce Indigenous governance, and lay the groundwork for long-term conservation outcomes.

In Latin America, communities have established nurseries and advanced reforestation, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem restoration practices, particularly through Indigenous-led governance structures and conservation agreements. Measurable reforestation (22 ha) and improved land management across over 475,000 hectares were documented in Guatemala, including high-resilience management and biodiversity conservation efforts. In Chile, the Observatorio Ciudadano project has strengthened Mapuche-Lafkenche communities' governance over coastal and forest ecosystems through legal mechanisms such as the Espacio Costero Marino de Pueblos Originarios (ECMPO). These efforts have enhanced the protection of culturally and ecologically vital marine-coastal areas and native forests. In Peru, the FENAMAD-led initiative in the Madre

de Dios region has mapped and monitored over 600,000 hectares of Indigenous territories, supporting sustainable resource management plans and the protection of territories of Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation. Meanwhile, in Argentina, the Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN) has worked with Mapuche communities in the Futa Mawiza region to advance intercultural governance, secure ancestral territories, and promote biodiversity conservation rooted in traditional practices. Across these countries, ICI is enabling Indigenous Peoples to restore ecosystems, exercise territorial rights, and play a central role in achieving global environmental goals. Marine and forest ecosystems have benefited from enhanced community participation and conflict mitigation related to land and resource use. Further examples include zoning for land security and enhanced connectivity between livestock and wildlife. The project has also facilitated knowledge sharing and skill development around nature-based solutions and land rights, contributing indirectly to conservation.

The indicator measurements by year and cumulative for global environmental benefits are presented in Table 9. Due to the planning process and slow startup of subprojects, GEB outcome indicators showed little advance in FY23 and FY24, but advances in FY25 show progress to most targets on track for project midterm[11]

Table 9: Core Indicators Achievement

Indicators		**Target**	**Achievement**			**Cumulative**	
			FY23	**FY24**	**FY25**	**Achieved**	**%**
1	Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (ha)	4,551,701	-	-	2,088,713	2,088,713	46%
2	Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (ha)	-	-	-	119	119	
3	Area of land restored (ha)	14,314	-	-	10,231	10,231	71%
4	Area of landscapes under improved practices (excluding protected areas) (ha)	2,883,851	-	-	965,839	965,839	33%

[11] Indicator values are reported at the time of the MTR but subject to change as the project advances.

Indicators		Target	Achievement			Cumulative	
			FY23	FY24	FY25	Achieved	%
5	Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (excluding protected areas) (ha)	165,200	-	-	119	119	0%
	Total area under improved management (ha) (sum of indicators 1 through 5)	7,615,066	-	-	3,064,902	3,064,902	40%
6	Greenhouse gas emissions mitigated (MtCO2e)	20,862,368	-	-	-	-	0%
11	Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment (number)	142,514	6,000	17,123	47,424	70,547	50%
11.1	Women	71,257	3,085	8,791	23,237	35,113	49%
11.2	Men	71,257	2,915	8,332	24,187	35,434	50%

5.4.2. Systems, Governance, and Policy

Systematic changes driven by the ICI project are evident across multiple geographies and thematic areas. In Latin America, particularly among Mapuche communities, the project has led to territorial mapping, recovery of cultural toponymy, and enhanced advocacy for land rights. These tools document ancestral claims and assert indigenous governance over protected areas. The transition from co-management to co-governance represents a deeper level of autonomy and policy influence, which creates the necessary conditions for long-term impact.

Project processes such as biocultural documentation, legal empowerment initiatives, and women-led governance mechanisms across subprojects also support long-term impact. These outcomes reflect systemic transformation and community ownership, critical to durability beyond the end of GEF funding. The convergence of policy engagement, knowledge systems, and capacity-building efforts enhances the likelihood of long-lasting change.

Examples from Fiji and Kenya demonstrate increased administrative capacity, leadership visibility, and access to complementary funding. The evolution of project fellows and

leadership roles is foundational for sustained institutional development. Community engagement in national conservation policies in Peru, such as co-governance over communal reserves and forest value chains, signals long-term institutional and environmental benefits. The strengthening of governance bodies and increased community participation in national frameworks are key sustainability indicators.

At the organizational level, many subprojects report improved collaboration among previously fragmented indigenous groups, promoting unity and long-term cooperation. These governance improvements are reflected in establishing local organizations with inclusive leadership. In Fiji, support from ICI helped revive governance structures and reestablish official indigenous leadership bodies. In Chile, the co-governance agreement for Villarrica National Park represents a formal policy milestone, granting Indigenous territorial recognition and advancing collaborative conservation. Similarly, new community governance structures have been established, increasing the participation of women and youth.

In some subprojects stakeholders noted behavioral changes, especially around gender inclusion and youth participation. For example, women's involvement in decision-making increased in areas where capacity-building and leadership training were offered. Youth-led environmental campaigns and cultural mapping also signaled an increased presence of younger generations in territorial governance.

Actions and initiatives by ICI, such as the GSC having rules and procedures for gender parity, and promoting female fellows for the fellowship program, have helped normalize women's leadership roles in Indigenous governance.

Indigenous actors have used ICI platforms to influence national and international debates in the policy sphere, advocating for biodiversity protection and territorial rights grounded in traditional knowledge systems. The project's support for youth political engagement has further seeded long-term institutional renewal. Together, these outcomes reflect that ICI activities yield results and transform underlying systems in lasting ways.

5.5. Unexpected Impacts

5.5.1. Unexpected Positive Impacts

The evaluation reveals several unanticipated positive impacts across IPLC communities. In Chile, the project contributed to a resurgence in Mapuche language use and cultural pride, helping participants overcome internalized shame and reclaim Indigenous identity. Similarly, communities' development of cultural maps empowered them to document and defend culturally significant sites, increasing autonomy and collective self-determination.

From a gender perspective, in some subprojects, new dialogues emerged in response to gender-focused programming. One interviewee noted that men began requesting their own gender spaces, recognizing that emotional and social well-being issues also affect them, an unanticipated but meaningful shift.

Other positive unexpected impacts that are not visible in the global-level results framework included high levels of community participation and engagement, exceeding typical levels in comparable NGO or government projects. These elements suggest the subproject's participatory and culturally grounded approach fostered stronger-than-anticipated local ownership and initiative. Among the positive impacts, communities reported greater social cohesion, primarily through joint planning activities and communal participation in project events. Some stakeholders observed that improved land use organization enabled children to attend school more consistently, and enhanced health practices, such as increased visits to dispensaries by women, emerged as indirect benefits of territorial interventions.

5.5.2. Unexpected Negative Impacts

Overall, the positive impacts of the project outweigh the minor negative impacts. No significant or harmful negative impacts were observed on IPLCs due to unanticipated risks. The evaluation identified a few minor side effects of the project that were perceived as only mildly negative.

Particular challenges surfaced in the form of community concerns about future expectations and dependency. Some interviewees expressed that the project's visibility created rising demands for additional resources (i.e. more communities requesting they be included in the project or pressure to include more activities or provide more support to communities given the success of the initial work) or infrastructure (i.e. urgent need for bore holes) that were outside its original scope. In other instances, disagreements arose over land demarcation or consultation participation, sometimes linked to existing conflicts or tensions.

In Asia, IPLC organizations expressed that transitioning to non-governmental organizational structures brought unexpected stress due to their high administrative, financial, and technical expectations. While these new responsibilities offer growth, they have also presented steep learning curves and required significant adaptation.

Concerns were raised regarding data ownership and how community images and information were shared, particularly on public platforms. Although these effects were not widespread, they reflect the complex dynamics that can emerge when external actors and local governance intersect.

Administrative and reporting burdens, particularly for community-based leaders and women, have imposed significant time constraints, limiting their ability to participate in strategic planning and advocacy. Stakeholders expressed concern that the excessive workload has forced many to outsource key tasks, diluting community ownership and reducing meaningful engagement.

Additionally, challenges related to documentation and the absence of tailored support mechanisms, such as language adaptation and clear administrative guidance, have hindered inclusive and effective implementation, especially in regions facing bureaucratic complexity or lacking adequate infrastructure.

Safeguard mechanisms have also presented limitations. Their generic formats often fail to reflect the specific needs and cultural realities of IPLC communities, especially when developed by institutions not embedded in or led by Indigenous groups. This disconnect has undermined their practical utility in some contexts.

Several respondents raised concerns about the legitimacy of IPLC representation in project processes, particularly when participation occurred through government agencies or NGOs rather than direct community mandates. In some cases, individuals involved in consultations or decision-making were perceived as lacking authentic territorial or cultural ties to the communities they were meant to represent. This disconnect, stakeholders warned, can undermine the principle of self-determination and lead to decisions that do not reflect the priorities or realities of the territory misalignment between official IPLC representation and actual territorial linkage. Participation through government or NGO channels sometimes lacked legitimacy, increasing the risk of individuals making decisions without strong connections to the community.

Cultural misunderstandings and the underappreciation, by staff or community members, of women's contributions were consistently raised as barriers to inclusive participation and long-term sustainability. Interviewees from Latin America, highlighted that women-led initiatives—particularly those rooted in cultural continuity, traditional knowledge, and community-based conservation (e.g., seed preservation, community nurseries, and educational programs)—were often overlooked in favor of more technical or externally visible interventions now of deciding the activities. This perceived undervaluation not only limited recognition of their impact but also sometimes led to insufficient support within communities. In some cases, women reported being left to manage activities alone due to health or structural constraints, with minimal engagement from men. The issue was not limited to project staff; rather, it reflected broader gender norms within communities, as described by stakeholders from both Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.6. Factors influencing the achievement of outputs and outcomes

The factors influencing the achievement or delay in achieving outputs and outcomes are explored in this section.

5.6.1. Administrative and Institutional Capacity

Regarding Component 1, the capacity of subproject lead organizations varied, influencing their pace and effectiveness in leading implementation. Well-established organizations like FENAMAD in Peru and IMPACT in Kenya, showed stronger administrative performance due to pre-existing experience in project management and monitoring. In contrast, o ther organizations, particlularly those newly etablised or with limited prior access to large-scale funding, faced significant capacity gaps in areas such as financial management, technical design, gender integration, and institutional governance. These gaps frequently caused delays in early implementation, as seen in Fiji and the Cook Islands, where teams first had to focus on establishing financial systems, trust structures, and operational procedures before engaging in direct community work.

However, this variability was not only expected but also central to ICI's theory of change. Given the Initiative's emphasis on Indigenous-led implementation, the Project Management Unit (PMU) played a critical role in providing sustained, "learning-by-doing" accompaniment tailored to each organization's needs. Through site visits, virtual mentorship, and tools co-developed with partners, the PMU actively supported subproject teams in designing impact strategies, navigating administrative systems, and building long-term institutional capacity. This intentional approach seeks to ensure that IPLC organizations are not only able to implement their current subprojects, but are also better positioned for future direct access to climate and conservation finance at scale. Despite these efforts, administrative and reporting requirements remained burdensome for some. Several IPLC partners found project reporting tools overly technical and duplicative, often pulling them away from fieldwork. The frequency and rigid format of quarterly reporting, combined with limited feedback from the PMU, generated frustration and underscored the need for more adaptive and culturally responsive reporting mechanisms.

The achievement of outcomes of Component 2 was influenced by significant administrative challenges, particularly the assignment of only 14% staff time to the person leading Component 2 . The PMU had to revisit and revise several objectives and approaches mid-implementation to improve alignment with institutional needs. Moreover, the division of responsibilities between CI and IUCN introduced complexity, requiring internal harmonization efforts and additional layers of coordination to define how each institution would implement activities.

For Component 3, a clear Strategic Policy Engagement Calendar approved by the Global Steering Committee, plus a three-phase design for the Fellows Programme, gave CI the administrative backbone to guide IP and LC representatives through multiple Rio-

Convention processes. The strong leadership without turnover has been an essential factor for advancing in Component 3.

In Component 4, some delays were reported in processes such as validating knowledge products and executing the communications strategy due to unclear workflows and lack of internal alignment between implementing agencies.

5.6.2. Financial and Procedural Constraints

In Component 1, financial challenges affected at least two subprojects, where delays Delays arose due to a misalignment between the PMU's standardized financial procedures and the diverse financial practices of IPLC organizations. For example, one subproject experienced difficulties aligning global reporting instruments with local administrative requirements, while another faced delays in spending funds because community organizations needed to formalize bank accounts or complete internal governance processes before receiving disbursements.

Although the planning grants and implementation agreements were thorough and participatory, considerable time was required to implement it . In some cases, delays in fund disbursement were noted, slightly pushing back initial implementation. Funding to subprojects was mobilized in a staggered approach and in two different trenches. Planning grants first disbursements to subprojects began on month 6 after CEO endorsement. Teams unfamiliar with multilateral donor processes encountered difficulties reallocating budgets or adjusting timelines. These challenges were especially acute in contexts requiring rapid responses to emergent needs or where bureaucratic procedures conflicted with local governance models. While some flexibility was introduced by implementing agencies, procedural misalignments continued to affect timeliness and responsiveness.

Component 2 was not strongly influenced by financial or procedural issues. In Component 3, micro-budgets earmarked for each fellow’s case study and travel, and straightforward nomination procedures, meant financing largely enabled rather than restricted progress; no significant procedural bottlenecks were reported for this Component 3.

While no direct funding shortages were reported for Component 4, procedural issues, such as delays in finalizing key terms of reference or procurement for consultants, affected the timely delivery of knowledge products and the communications program. These procedural bottlenecks slowed down the rollout of activities like communications training and the update of strategic documents.

5.6.3. Human Resources and Staffing

Staffing gaps in PMU, turnover, and insufficient time allocation at the global level, particularly in technical, communications, and the gender lead, were a consistent barrier to achieving the outputs and outcomes. This has been a particular challenge at IUCN, specifically in Component 2 and 4. Sustaining momentum and effective coordination proved difficult in the absence of stable leadership or dedicated expertise, and turnover further disrupted continuity in key roles. Vacant positions and staff transitions affected the development of several deliverables, including the learning modules and sustainable financing components. To address these gaps, the project undertook a staffing model revision and introduced additional technical and communication roles, which helped re-establish momentum.

Advances in Component 1 have also been impacted by human resources and staffing at the subproject level. Many subprojects operated with lean teams, often with individuals managing multiple responsibilities.

At subproject level, gender-related activities were often assigned exclusively to women, exacerbating existing burdens and reinforcing inequities. Assigning the gender lead to women is not inappropriate because the work that the project is doing is focused on women, however it must be taken into account that gender is not only working with women, but also with men and other gender identities, and that the work should not only be assigned to people solely because they are women leaders, but also because of their training and experience in the subject. Also, the evaluation detected low capacity to conduct the tasks assigned due to the limitation to find indigenous gender specialist staff. Sustaining momentum and effective coordination proved difficult in the absence of stable leadership or dedicated expertise, and turnover further disrupted continuity in key roles.

Several subproject teams lacked dedicated M&E staff with the technical capacity to manage reporting demands. The responsibility often fell on a few coordinators who split their time between field implementation and preparing complex reports.

In Component 3, culturally competent staffing, led by former fellows and Indigenous experts who facilitated webinars, provided consistent mentoring and technical support, accelerating curriculum delivery and fellows' readiness for high-level negotiations.

Regarding Component 4, one of the most critical challenges was the transition of key staff within IUCN's communications team. The departure and delayed replacement of the communications lead resulted in missed FY24 targets across multiple outputs, including translations, webinars, and the development of the Flagship Report.

5.364. External and Environmental Conditions

Some contextual challenges affected implementation of Component 1. For example, in Nepal, the project needed to comply with Social Welfare Council procedures, and in Tanzania and the DRC, field missions had to navigate geographical and logistical complexities such as land boundary conflicts and ICCA mapping in remote areas.

Subprojects were frequently affected by climate-related disruptions, such as floods, snow, or drought, which delayed activities and limited access to communities, particularly in Latin America and Nepal. Remote locations with poor road infrastructure and dispersed populations created logistical hurdles that slowed delivery. In addition, political dynamics, ranging from electoral disruptions to resistance from state actors regarding IPLC rights, complicated governance-related outcomes and required extensive negotiation.

For Component 2, the participatory planning approach, which was important to center IPLC needs and priorities, took longer than anticipated. Additionally, since the trainings are hosted on the UNDP platform, the ICI team could not always control the timing of activities.

In Component 3, no significant external challenges prevented the advancement towards the desired results. In Component 4 the coordination of translation efforts and sourcing of Indigenous translators for key reports proved time-consuming, delaying their publication and dissemination.

5.3.5. Cultural and Contextual Fit

In some cases, misalignments between project frameworks and community expectations slowed implementation. Concepts such as gender mainstreaming or GEF indicator monitoring did not always resonate with local worldviews, leading to misunderstandings or delays in uptake. Strong local leadership and adaptive approaches during the elaboration of the impact strategy, allowed constructively subprojects to respond, aligning global goals with community-defined priorities, such as gender training and tailored assistance. When the subprojects effectively centered Indigenous beliefs and worldviews into the project activities and governance, subprojects were widely accepted and this facilitated the achievement of outputs and outcomes.

Community-specific dynamics also influenced outcomes. In some cases, traditional values and localized understandings of gender equality created tensions with externally driven gender targets (for more details, go to section 11.2). In others, innovative strategies like cultural mapping and youth engagement in biodiversity protection fostered strong local ownership and contributed to success.

A key strength of Component 1 was its strong alignment with Indigenous governance and cultural systems. Subprojects were designed and led by IP and LC organizations, respecting traditional knowledge, community timelines, and territorial visions. This ensured local legitimacy and relevance, for instance, through biocultural mapping in Argentina and co-governance agreements in Chile.

The project made deliberate efforts to ensure that content and processes were culturally appropriate and locally relevant for Component 2. The collaboration with the Indigenous Women Biodiversity Network (IWBN) ensured that the Gender and Environment Linkages learning module addressed specific cultural and gender-related challenges. Language accessibility was also prioritized: learning modules were developed in English, French, and Spanish, with plans to include Swahili and Thai, responding to feedback from the GSC. These adjustments enhanced inclusivity and resonance with diverse Indigenous audiences.

Co-design with Indigenous leaders, gender-balanced selection rules, and multilingual, context-specific content ensured that training materials and engagement strategies resonated with participants, boosting uptake and confidence for Component 3.

For Component 4, efforts were made to ensure cultural relevance, especially in translating the Phase One Report into French and Spanish and integrating Indigenous stories and practices into knowledge products. This attention to context strengthened the credibility and local utility of the knowledge shared. Subprojects also highlighted the importance of ancestral knowledge, intergenerational learning, and Indigenous languages as part of the knowledge outputs.

In Component 5, many stakeholders found the language and format of M&E tools overly technical and disconnected from community realities. Reports were often produced in terminology unfamiliar to local teams, making it harder to translate data into practical learning or share findings with communities in a meaningful way. This is perceived as a colonial practice by the subproject teams.

5.6.6. Project Ownership and Participation

In Component 1, a key enabling factor across subprojects was the high level of IPLC ownership. Participatory design processes, including stakeholder mapping, impact strategy development, and inception workshops, fostered deep commitment. IPLC actors emphasized that trust-building, co-creation, and flexibility made it possible to navigate challenges and sustain momentum. The development of regional and global governance structures, such as the Global Steering Committee (GSC), enhanced accountability and supported alignment across scales.

High levels of ownership were fostered through the development of community-led impact strategies and governance structures in Component 1. IP and LC organizations were the primary decision-makers in design and execution, and this participatory approach increased their commitment and long-term investment in the project's success. Gender inclusion was also emphasized, with many activities engaging both men and women equally.

In Component 2, initial strategies for delivering certain outputs relied heavily on consultant-led studies, which may have limited stronger ownership by the PMU.

For Component 3, fellows, alumni, and GSC elders jointly refined programme content and nomination processes, fostering strong ownership and peer mentoring that translated into more assertive representation of IPs and LCs in international fora.

Subproject leaders were actively involved in identifying the purpose and content of exchanges and communications outputs, which enhanced ownership and relevance in Component 4.

Related to Component 5, subprojects expressed that reporting felt extractive rather than participatory. While some orientation sessions were delivered, there were few mechanisms for ongoing dialogue or adaptation of the M&E process to reflect field realities. This limited the sense of ownership over the monitoring system and the perceived usefulness of collected data.

5.6.7. Coordination and Institutional Culture

While the joint implementation structure between CI and IUCN was considered an asset by most stakeholders interviewed, differences in institutional cultures, priorities, and workflows occasionally caused coordination delays. These tensions required proactive management and clearer role delineation.

In Component 1, strong coordination between the PMU, CI, and IUCN was essential for ensuring support across subprojects. The PMU's accompaniment and learning by doing approach, through in-person and virtual technical assistance, helped reinforce implementation. However, the intensity of this support highlights the need for sustained coordination efforts to maintain momentum and responsiveness.

Differences in institutional culture and procedures between CI and IUCN created early friction in the implementation of Component 2. Coordination required significant effort, particularly in aligning methodologies, timelines, and deliverables across organizations. While this affected the rollout of some outputs, constructive collaboration, such as joint planning with UNDP for the Makanisi Learning Academy, ultimately strengthened inter-

institutional coherence. These adaptations took time but were necessary to build a more integrated and effective implementation culture.

Close collaboration between CI (technical lead and Fellowship coordinator), IUCN partners and the GSC, combined with cross-regional mentoring among fellows, created a cooperative culture that kept Component 3 on track and avoided the delays seen in other components.

Coordination challenges across institutions related to Component 2 and 4, particularly between CI and IUCN, were noted as slowing the progress of some outputs in Component 4. The differences in staffing timelines, institutional procedures, and communications priorities led to fragmentation in execution. However, partnerships with global platforms like UNDP and participation in joint events such as women's exchanges show growing alignment and shared values around inclusive conservation.

6. Key Risks and Project Sustainability

The sustainability of project achievements is a critical consideration for long-term environmental and social impact. This section explores the extent to which the benefits generated by ICI are likely to endure beyond the GEF funding period. Drawing on the GEF Risk Appetite Framework, it examines financial, institutional, socio-political, and environmental risks, while identifying strategies that enhance or threaten project durability. The GEF risk appetite guidelines did not exist at the time of project proposal design, so a comparison cannot be made between the risk appetite between project launch and project midterm. Nonetheless, a risk appetite was developed analyzing current project risks.

6.1 Project Risk

The key risks as project approval were reviewed and an updated assessment of risks was completed through stakeholder interviews. While some risks remain the same (climate and natural disasters), others, like COVID-19 are less relevant than at project inception. The risks in the approved project document did not follow the GEF risk appetite format as these guidelines from GEF did not exist at the time of project development and approval, however, it was used for the MTR.

Organizational capacity remains uneven across regions, with some IPLC organizations facing challenges in administrative systems, financial management, and human resource retention. While some organizations demonstrated strong administrative and financial capacity, others, particularly those newly established or with limited prior access to large-

scale funding, faced significant challenges in managing complex programming and compliance tasks. The risk of burnout and overextension was also flagged, particularly for subprojects operating in remote or resource-limited areas.

Security was another primary concern, particularly for Indigenous leaders working in territories marked by extractive conflicts, political volatility, or organized crime. Interviewees from Asia and Latin America stressed the limitations of project safeguards and the continued threat to IPLC actors promoting environmental justice and territorial protection.

Political risks were also highlighted. In some countries, changing administrations or nationalist policies have weakened institutional support for Indigenous rights and community-led governance. As a result, some gains in policy influence and legal recognition remain fragile and vulnerable to rollback.

Several anticipated risks have materialized and significantly influenced project execution, particularly political instability in a number of subproject countries. The evaluation confirmed that initially identified risks, including political instability, funding continuity, coordination challenges, and security concerns, remain relevant and have become more complex. In one subproject, ongoing political volatility, coupled with active illicit economies, have posed serious legal and institutional threats to both environmental protection and Indigenous rights.

The project faces the risk of weakened project continuity and delays in knowledge product delivery, particularly under Components 2 and 4. This risk is primarily caused by staff turnover and limited time dedicated to the ICI project among Project Management Unit (PMU) team members. In contrast, some anticipated risks, such as challenges in partner coordination (GEF Project Document, p.56: “Coordination of many partners becomes unmanageable”), have not materialized to the extent expected.

While gender risks were integrated into the safeguards work, limited time and staffing restricted proactive engagement at project and subproject levels. Similarly, stakeholders noted that rigid administrative structures at the global level sometimes limited local flexibility.

Lastly, there is a risk that the project’s progress in gender and youth inclusion could stall if deliberate support mechanisms are not maintained. While there is enthusiasm and leadership at the community level, broader support systems, such as policy protections, funding, and networks, are still developing.

The project risk rating was developed according to the criteria and definitions in the GEF Risk Appetite.

Table 10: Project Risk Rating

Risk Category	Rating	Justification	Mitigation Measures
Content			
Climate	Substantial	Climate disasters and other climate irregularities (droughts) continue to impact the IPLC organizations and their implementation.	Adaptive management training
Environmental and Social	Modest	The ESS is a C category and is effectively tracked. Major risks have not emerged.	Various - reviewed in Section 11
Political and Governance	High	IPLCs and environmental defenders are at high risk for violence. Political shifts are affecting co-financing availability and project sustainability. Government-backed land grabs continue to be a big risk for IPLC land and livelihoods.	Provide training on safety and security for IPLC teams. See other ideas for environmental defender security here.
Innovation			
Institution and Policy	Low	ICI works to influence policy through the fellows program and IPLC participation in international climate and biodiversity policy dialogues. The only risk identified is resistance from governments or the private sector toward IPLC participation.	No additional mitigation needed.
Technological	Low	While there is an integration of modern technology and practices with traditional and Indigenous practices, there is not a strong focus on technology development, testing, or use.	No additional mitigation needed.
Financial and Business Model	Low	The subprojects may work in parallel with diverse financial mechanisms; development of alternative mechanisms is not part of ICI.	No additional mitigation needed.
Execution			
Capacity for Implementation	Substantial	While subprojects continue to improve capacity, the delays in Component 2 and 4 suggest limited	Hire additional consultants or dedicate additional staff time to accelerate

Risk Category	Rating	Justification	Mitigation Measures
		capacity and an urgent need to address these limitations. The turnover in technical leadership in the IUCN PMU increases risk, as there is less continuity in providing support to subprojects.	advances in Component 2 and 4. Continue to provide targeted capacity building to subprojects.
Fiduciary	Modest	Significant advances have been made with subprojects to strengthen financial systems and ensure transparency.	Continued monitoring and support.
Stakeholder	Low	Significant efforts have been made by the global project and subprojects to ensure ongoing engagement with diverse stakeholders. In many subprojects, the community stakeholders are co-leading and co-implementing with the organization.	Continue engagement and participatory work with communities.
Other			
Overall	Modest	Though the specific risks range from low to high, the average risk across categories is modest.	See above

6.1.1. Risk Mitigation

Findings from interviews and project documentation indicate that while many risks have been effectively mitigated through strategic, context-sensitive actions, financial risks remain a prominent concern throughout the project. For example, since co-financing targets are behind schedule, it has had to be addressed through forward-looking financial planning and retroactive documentation of co-financing secured.

Stakeholders also reported improvements in financial oversight and prioritization mechanisms to enhance resource efficiency, alongside deliberate pacing of activities and component-specific adjustments to offset early delays. However, shifting funding landscapes (i.e. US withdrawal from Paris Agreement and pause on climate finance contributions[12] and speculations around shifting donor policies after US cuts aid[13]), and no prospects for follow-up financing through ICI2 have introduced significant uncertainty

[12] https://www.climatechangenews.com/2025/01/21/trump-orders-us-to-quit-paris-agreement-and-pause-all-foreign-climate-finance/

[13] https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/22/health/usaid-who-trump-china.html

to subprojects seeking continuity in funding for their work. These factors have made the risks associated with co-financing particularly evident, reinforcing the need for continuous monitoring and adaptive financial strategies to maintain project continuity and ensure long-term sustainability.

Security threats were highlighted in multiple territories, including increased pressure from illicit economies like coca cultivation and illegal mining. These threats contribute to the vulnerability of Indigenous defenders and populations living in or near protected areas. The project has taken steps to protect environmental defenders and safeguard sensitive community data, particularly in politically sensitive or conflict-prone regions where the risk of state backlash or association with contentious narratives is high. Specific safety protocols have been developed and implemented in response to persistent and severe security threats, especially in Latin America and the DRC, where environmental defenders and IPLC actors face ongoing risks. Despite these efforts, the volatile and context-dependent nature of the security environment means that threats remain very real and continue to affect implementation timelines.

At the same time, cultural and ideological risks, such as transitioning communities from extractive practices to conservation-based approaches, have been approached with caution. Facilitators and local leaders have emphasized gradual, culturally appropriate engagement to support these transitions respectfully and effectively. Together, these dynamics underscore the need for constant vigilance, flexibility, and responsiveness from project teams to navigate the complex and evolving risk landscape.

Across all ICI subproject proposals, risk identification and mitigation planning are present and generally aligned with the initiative's Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF). All subprojects have articulated potential environmental, social, and governance risks as identified in the ESMPs. Common risks identified include land tenure disputes, limited access to basic infrastructure, threats to biodiversity, and challenges related to community health or internal governance. While some subprojects provide highly detailed risk mitigation plans with monitoring indicators and stakeholder responsibilities, others address these areas more generally. Overall, the inclusion of Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) or equivalent frameworks demonstrates a strong baseline of awareness and risk preparedness.

Moreover, community feedback indicated that contributions tied to cultural heritage were frequently sidelined, overlooked by project implementers or community decision-makers, in favor of externally imposed priorities. This disconnect risks alienating key actors, particularly women, and undermines the depth and cultural legitimacy of conservation outcomes.

6.2. Sustainability

The project has prioritized sustainability through targeted mechanisms at the institutional, technical, and policy levels. According to project documents, financial sustainability is pursued by developing financing plans tied to subproject impact strategies. These include avenues such as trust funds, private sector investment, and impact investing in IPLC-led enterprises. Complementary to these financial efforts are some, but not sufficient, capacity-building activities that aim to ensure IPLC organizations are prepared to pursue and manage such funding independently.

Stakeholders consistently identified securing sustainable funding beyond the project period as a critical risk. While some subprojects are exploring future proposals or external donors, many depend on ICI's financial and technical support due to a lack of political interest in their countries, raising concerns about continuity once GEF funding ends. The uncertainty and hope, followed by disappointment that subprojects are not available to access ICI2 funding and uncertainty surrounding funding from other initiatives (i.e. carbon market projects) further exacerbate this vulnerability.

Financial dependency is another area of concern. Many subprojects rely on the ICI-GEF, with few alternative sources secured. This vulnerability is compounded by slow or delayed disbursements, limited training in financial autonomy, and a lack of institutional arrangements to sustain funding post-project. Without external support, there is concern about their ability to maintain operations, especially in territories with high turnover or complex governance layers.

Several subprojects are exploring complementary funding sources. For instance, stakeholders reported connecting with IUCN and other donors to extend support[14], while some organizations utilize staggered projects to bridge funding gaps. Fundraising efforts and donor engagement were mentioned as critical steps toward long-term sustainability. Nonetheless, some interviewees noted that efforts to sustain project impacts remain constrained by institutional capacity, limited time, or challenges accessing state-aligned funding frameworks. In such cases, sustainability relies heavily on the initiative and resilience of local actors and the ability to form strategic partnerships.

Community-level implementation reflects similar principles. For example, in Guatemala, subprojects like Paq'uch in Guatemala and Panama have focused on strengthening community forestry and agroforestry systems, including investments in cacao production and nursery expansion. These tangible outputs, alongside the transfer of knowledge and

[14] PMU has reported that IUCN through its PODONG Indigenous Peoples Initiative is providing CAD$7 million to ICI project partners in Guatemala, Panama, Tanzania and Nepal. This is funding to directly scale-up what they have started through ICI.

technical training, remain in place beyond the project's duration. Stakeholders emphasized that reforestation efforts are coupled with capacity development to ensure long-term care of planted areas.

Institutionally, the ICI supports policy engagement platforms and integration with national strategies. The subprojects build on pre-existing community governance systems and add value to ongoing local initiatives. This embeddedness increases the likelihood that community actors will continue their efforts after external support phases out.

Through engagement in international environmental frameworks and partnerships with programs such as GEF-SGP and the Dedicated Grant Mechanism, the project advances systemic sustainability through engagement. These partnerships provide continuity channels and policy support to institutionalize IPLC conservation models.

Stakeholders identified multiple structural and contextual risks to sustainability. One recurrent issue is the institutional fragility of local implementing partners. Some organizations, particularly newly established ones, face capacity limitations and rely heavily on the project's structure and funding.

Additionally, emerging financing mechanisms such as carbon markets and biodiversity credits are being promoted as potential long-term sustainability solutions. However, interviewees expressed uncertainty and caution about these options. This reflects a broader risk: entering long-term agreements without informed consent or adequate legal and technical review could undermine community autonomy and equitable benefit-sharing. Without clear safeguards, transparent contracts, and capacity-building, such mechanisms, rather than supporting sustainability, may instead create new forms of dependency or vulnerability for IPLCs.

Another key threat is the lack of secure land tenure, which impedes long-term investment and restricts communities' ability to assert control over their territories. Participants from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America indicated that unresolved land claims or bureaucratic barriers continue to undermine Indigenous governance and conservation planning efforts.

Sociopolitical resistance to Indigenous autonomy and rights also presents a systemic risk. Respondents noted that government actors in some regions remain hesitant to cede authority or formally recognize Indigenous governance systems. This undermines integrating IPLC-led plans into national development strategies, limiting scalability and institutionalization.

Finally, some subprojects face gaps in community understanding of sustainability strategies or expectations around continued external support. Without adequate communication and ownership, engagement may diminish once project funding ends.

Evidence shows that subprojects are implementing diverse sustainability mechanisms. Many initiatives focus on strengthening territorial governance structures, creating organizational capacities for decision-making, and integrating community priorities with legal frameworks. For example, Mapuche organizations in Latin America are working to align conservation strategies with traditional governance and developing new political spaces for Indigenous leadership.

Several subprojects have introduced tools and strategies to support long-term resilience, including land use plans, territorial mapping, and the formalization of protected areas. These strategies aim to consolidate local control and ensure continuity. In SSA, training on leadership responsibilities and capital reinvestment through community groups was highlighted as key enablers of sustainability.

Cultural sustainability mechanisms were also identified. Interviewees referenced efforts to document and preserve ancestral knowledge, revive Indigenous languages, and maintain women-led support networks in communities. These activities help embed project goals within social and cultural systems that outlast the funding period.

7. Project Governance and Management

Effective governance and management are essential for ensuring strategic alignment, coordination, and adaptive delivery in complex initiatives like ICI. This section explores how institutional roles, decision-making mechanisms, and implementation partnerships have influenced project progress. It reflects on collaboration among CI, IUCN, and executing partners and assesses the responsiveness of management structures to challenges and opportunities.

7.1. Project Governance

7.1.1. Project Governance Structure

The ICI governance structure was designed to have the Global Steering Committee as the project's formal governance body. According to this governance structure, the PMU is not considered a governance body but implements and coordinates the decisions made by the GSC. While the Global Steering Committee (GSC) is an important component of

project governance, providing strategic guidance, oversight, and high-level decision-making, it is not the only element of the ICI governance. According to the Association for Project Management, “governance is the framework of authority and accountability that defines and controls the outputs, outcomes and benefits from projects, programmes and portfolios”. In the context of this definition, the GSC and the PMU are a part of the project’s governance.

While the GSC ensures alignment with global priorities and facilitates coordination at the highest level, implementation and executing agencies are responsible for day-to-day management, technical direction, and ensuring compliance with operational standards. These agencies play a critical role in translating strategic decisions into practical actions, managing risks, and engaging stakeholders at regional and national levels. Together, these bodies form a governance structure, where responsibilities are distributed to ensure strategic oversight, operational efficiency, and accountability at all levels of the project. The responsibilities that guide the governance are found in the ICI GSC Rules of Procedures and Memorandum of Understanding between IUCN and CI, on implementation and execution of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative.

The PMU, co-led by executing agencies Conservation International (CI) and IUCN, is responsible for day-to-day coordination, technical support, financial oversight, and reporting. It acts as the operational hub, ensuring that subprojects receive guidance, tools, and support aligned with the overall project framework. This structure demands a dynamic balance between centralized guidance and localized decision-making, making effective collaboration, adaptive management, and culturally responsive support essential to the initiative’s success.

In addition to the global project governance structure, each subproject has designed a governance structure for IPLC-led conservation.

7.1.2. Memorandum of Understanding

A memorandum of understanding was signed by IUCN and CI in 2022 to guide the delegation of roles and responsibilities between institutions. The document provides very clear guidance to both organizations. However, there have been a lot of shifts in personnel since the MOU (Memorandum of understanding) was signed and an up to date overview of people, responsibilities, and time allocation has not been maintained.

7.1.3. Global Steering Committee

The GSC was established as the main governance and oversight body of ICI, however in implementation its role in project governance is limited. It brings together representatives from IPLCs, implementing partners, and global entities to provide strategic direction, review progress, and ensure accountability and inclusivity in decision-making. The PMU

and GSC aim to maintain coherence across diverse territories while promoting Indigenous leadership and cross-regional learning.

The GSC has served as the primary coordination and oversight body of the ICI Initiative, bringing together representatives from Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), with advisory and support from CI, IUCN, and other key stakeholders. Its core governance functions include endorsing strategic priorities, providing guidance to the Project Management Unit (PMU), and reviewing technical and financial progress at the global level, and endorsing or communicating strategic priorities related to componet 2 and 4. Meeting quarterly, the GSC has facilitated alignment across the initiative's diverse territorial and thematic scopes. Members report that the space has been valuable for building trust, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and advancing joint ownership of the ICI's vision.

While the governance structure of the ICI Initiative is built on collaboration between the Project Management Unit (PMU) and the Global Steering Committee (GSC), the evaluation revealed some challenges in the coordination between these two bodies. One recurring issue is the lack of clarity regarding their respective roles in decision-making. Though emphasized in the *Rules of Procedure* and confirmed in the consensus-based decisions made during the 2023 Global Meeting in Clayoquot Sound, Canada, interviews conducted in both English and Spanish revealed that some GSC members remain uncertain about the extent to which their recommendations are binding or meaningfully operationalized by the Project Management Unit (PMU). Despite documents that guide responsibilities and place decision-making authority with the GSC, GSC participants expressed concern that their input, while solicited, may not always translate into programmatic adjustments. Additionally, members reflected on missed opportunities for deeper involvement in implementation and noted the need for more consistent communication and collaboration within the GSC itself. These findings suggest the need to strengthen internal governance mechanisms to enhance transparency, clarify expectations, and better harness the collective leadership of the GSC. Additionally, communication gaps have been reported, particularly around the follow-up to GSC recommendations and the visibility of key decisions taken by the PMU. While the PMU cannot unilaterally make decisions, there is a sentiment among subproject teams that many decisions or protocols are guided by the executing entities, not the GSC. These challenges underscore the need for clearer governance protocols and improved feedback mechanisms to strengthen coherence between strategic oversight and operational execution.

7.1.4. Subproject Governance

Governance performance has varied significantly across subprojects, reflecting differences in organizational capacity, prior experience, and contextual challenges.

Subprojects led by organizations with previous experience in territorial management or project implementation tended to demonstrate more structured governance systems, clearer role assignments, and effective decision-making processes. These actors were generally able to manage administrative, financial, and field-level responsibilities with greater autonomy and consistency.

In contrast, other subprojects, particularly those led by organizations with a background primarily in advocacy or community mobilization, encountered difficulties transitioning to execution roles. These included delays in fund management, staff turnover, and unclear internal coordination structures. Several subprojects reported that governance was "learning by doing," with significant reliance on support from the global coordination team (PMU, CI/IUCN contracting offices). Additionally, while some subprojects established local governance bodies or used participatory structures to engage communities, others lacked formal mechanisms for inclusive decision-making. This uneven governance capacity has led to differentiated progress among subprojects and underscores the need for more tailored technical and administrative support.

7.2. Project Management

7.2.1. Project Management Unit

The ICI Initiative's management structure, coordinated by CI and IUCN, has struggled with gaps in human resource allocation and internal transitions. While both institutions co-execute, CI holds the project manager and overall lead role. Interviewees noted that key positions, such as technical and communications leads, experienced turnover or long vacancies, particularly on the IUCN side. Internally, teams have reported being overextended. The full-time MEL specialist with support from CI and IUCN technical leads are responsible for monitoring and evaluation, coordinating reporting, work planning, quality assurance, and partner follow-up tasks. The PMU were overburdened, with no well-staffed positions for critical cross-cutting areas such as gender or safeguards within the executing agencies. The governance of the ICI project at the global level has faced significant limitations that have impacted its overall effectiveness, while foundational coordination structures between CI and IUCN were established, their operational clarity and leadership were hindered by staff turnover, delayed appointments, and overlapping and insufficiently defined responsibilities.

7.2.2. Subproject Management

At the subproject level, interview data show that subprojects have adopted diverse strategies to navigate institutional and human resources challenges. The CI and IUCN grants and contracts units supported tailored capacity building for finance and administration.

Human resource challenges were often related to insufficient staffing or the need for greater technical expertise. Some subprojects operated with only one or two key people, limiting monitoring, reporting, and fieldwork time. Respondents also described the strain of working across geographically dispersed territories, often without sufficient logistical support.

Despite these barriers, local leadership and adaptability were evident. Interviewees highlighted using communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and shared cloud folders to coordinate work and share documents. In some cases, staff roles were clarified and reorganized to improve efficiency, and younger team members contributed digital skills to support implementation. Nevertheless, integrating traditional knowledge systems with technical reporting frameworks posed an ongoing challenge.

7.2.3. Project Communications

The ICI Project has implemented a multi-layered communication approach intended to bridge the distance between local territories and global learning spaces. Across levels significant efforts have been made to ensure transparency, foster learning, and build visibility. Yet the experience of communication differs markedly depending on where stakeholders sit. At the global level, ICI's communication relies on websites, social media, and international events to share progress and advocate for Indigenous-led conservation. At the subproject level, communication is decentralized and adapted to local contexts through print materials, radio, and face-to-face meetings.

At the global level, communication strategies within the ICI initiative have demonstrated both achievements and limitations regarding effectiveness and efficiency. However, interview data reveal notable constraints in the implementation of communication strategies. A recurrent challenge has been the lack of a consistent, dedicated communication focal point at the global level and communication focal points within some subprojects, leading to delays in disseminating information and key updates. Communication roles were often combined with other responsibilities, stretching resources and reducing the quality and consistency of engagement efforts. Furthermore, gaps were identified in adapting materials to local contexts, with concerns raised about accessibility in terms of language, literacy levels, and technological capacity. The availability of communication tools was also uneven, limiting the reach and impact of key project messages, particularly in remote or under-resourced areas. Specifically, tools included digital channels such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, which were useful but often inaccessible to people with limited internet connectivity or digital literacy. The style of communication and the communication strategy in ICI are different from traditional conservation project communications, as they center Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous world views, and co-creation, which required an internal learning process and finding team members aligned with this philosophy.

Stakeholder (i.e. subproject team members) satisfaction with ICI's communication efforts at the global level has been mixed, reflecting both appreciation for specific communication tools and frustration with gaps in support from the PMU Communications lead. Interview data indicate that stakeholders valued periodic updates, opportunities for shared reflection, and multilingual materials developed to support visibility and knowledge exchange. The use of storytelling to highlight IPLC leadership and including regional voices in global spaces were noted as positive steps toward inclusive communication.

Concerns about communications were expressed regarding inconsistency, limited follow-up, and lack of clarity in messaging. Several stakeholders expressed that communication between executing agencies and subprojects was not always timely or responsive, with delays in feedback and a lack of targeted support. This issue is currently being addressed and is expected to be resolved with the reincorporation of a team member involved in early project stages, who is familiar with the project and has a philosophy aligned to the needs of the ICI project. While the intent and partial implementation of a global communication strategy were recognized, stakeholders underscored the need for more structured, timely, and responsive communication mechanisms to enhance satisfaction across all levels.

Language was one of the most frequently discussed issues among stakeholders in regards to project communications. While it is recognized that the ICI operates with English, French, and Spanish, and that all formal and informal communication including documents, emails, Whatsapp messages, and updates are consistently shared in the three languages, some participants still feel that language poses a barrier to accessibility and participation. This concern was particularly evident in relation to external facing materials, such as social media content. Some stakeholders noted that although project materials were in official languages, they or other team members would have benefited from versions in additional languages, such as Kiswahili, Nepali, and Thai for team members who do not speak the main project languages, to support local engagement and understanding. These reflections point not to gap in multilingual protocol, but rather to evolving needs of a linguistically diverse network, and highlight the importance of continued efforts to support inclusive communications practices.

Technical and human resource limitations were also reported. Communications teams, especially at the local and subproject levels, faced staffing shortages and lacked the training to adapt messaging to their specific contexts. Several interviewees noted the challenge of 'landing' global-level information in local territories, citing the initiative's scale and complexity as a barrier to understanding and engagement.

Platform-related issues, including inconsistent use of the ICI website and difficulties

accessing SharePoint, further limited information flow. Some stakeholders expressed that despite these tools, they did not regularly access or use them due to time constraints, technical familiarity, or unclear navigation.

Lastly, distrust and perceived extraction of information without feedback were mentioned as deeper challenges in the communications activities. Some IPLC partners reported feeling that their stories or inputs were used for external communications without meaningful involvement in shaping narratives. These dynamics underscored the need for communication to be technically effective and grounded in respectful and inclusive engagement.

Communication efforts across ICI subprojects have been characterized by a diverse mix of formats, reflecting cultural sensitivity and logistical ingenuity. Subproject teams employed tools such as podcasts, community radio, printed bulletins, social media, and storytelling to engage IPLCs, particularly in areas with limited digital access or reading habits. Interview data confirms that messages were adapted to local languages and contexts, often led by community-based communicators. In regions like Latin America, this localized approach enabled creative outputs, such as murals, radio segments, and participatory workshops, that fostered community ownership and increased the resonance of project messages.

These challenges suggest that while communication strategies were responsive and community-driven, they would benefit from stronger coordination mechanisms and better resourcing to ensure clarity, coverage, and alignment across all subproject areas.

The project's communication strategy is a critical tool for sharing the lessons learned from Indigenous-led conservation. ICI has a key strength and opportunity to showcase the leadership and expertise of IPLCs, particularly through the ICI Knowledge Platform and social media. To fully realize this potential, communication efforts must be grounded in a co-creative, non-extractive approach that ensures Indigenous peoples help tell their own stories and give informed consent for how their information is used. This involves moving beyond a traditional top-down model and instead investing in communication strategies that respect Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems, and languages. By consistently elevating Indigenous voices, the project can influence donors and governments, demonstrating that Indigenous leadership and rights-based approaches are the most effective pathway for future conservation and climate finance

7.3. Financial Management

7.3.1. Project spending to date

An analysis of project spending to date (Table X), highlights …

The project received GEO CEO Endorsement on January 7, 2022.GEF Financing for the project is $22,535,780. Funding was granted to the agencies separately, $11,290,453 to CI and $11,245,327 to IUCN. As of the most recent annual financial report on December 31, 2024, CI has spent $3.4M, approximately 30% utilization, and IUCN has spent $2.8M, 21% utilization.

As of December 31, 2024, the project has utilized 27% of the total budget. Breakdown on spending by component can be found in Tables below.

IUCN	Budget	Spending	Balance	% Utilized
Component 1	8,613,789	1,957,501	6,656,288	23%
Component 2	1,065,219	263,235	801,984	25%
Component 3	90,267	33,549	56,718	37%
Component 4	717,690	229,453	488,237	32%
M&E	543,404	244,600	298,804	45%
PMC	214,958	60,032	154,926	28%
TOTAL	**11,245,327**	**2,788,370**	**8,456,957**	**25%**

CI	Budget	Spending	Balance	% Utilized
Component 1	8,866,002	2,907,275	5,958,727	33%
Component 2	448,000	76,791	371,209	17%
Component 3	855,052	201,180	653,872	24%
Component 4	337,109	17,493	319,616	5%
M&E	247,746	5,850	241,896	2%
PMC	536,544	149,066	387,478	28%
TOTAL	**11,290,453**	**3,357,655**	**7,932,798**	**30%**

ICI Total	Budget	Spending	Balance	% Utilized
Component 1	17,479,791	4,864,776	12,615,015	28%
Component 2	1,513,219	340,026	1,173,193	22%
Component 3	945,319	234,729	710,590	25%
Component 4	1,054,799	246,946	807,853	23%
M&E	791,150	250,450	540,700	32%
PMC	751,502	209,098	542,404	28%
TOTAL	**22,535,780**	**6,146,025**	**16,389,755**	**27%**

7.3.2. Subproject financial management

IUCN and CI have been working to support and build capacity for financial management in subprojects. The global finance teams reported that funds were disbursed on time and no issues were raised regarding cash flow. Annual financial targets, including allocations to external grants, have been met by the subproject.

Financial mobilization has faced delays at the subproject level, particularly in Latin America, due to account formalization processes that postponed expenditures. Subproject implementation teams acknowledged that, while initial disbursements were timely, limited knowledge of procurement procedures and the need to adapt financial instruments to local legal and logistical contexts slowed implementation. Activities sometimes had to be postponed until bank accounts were opened. Teams also reported difficulties accessing new funds due to technical criteria that exclude or complicate the participation of Indigenous organizations.

Although the early implementation phase involved several challenges, teams reported improved execution rates over time. Current projections suggest that full budget utilization by 2027 remains realistic.

In SSA, financial flows stabilized and became more predictable after the first year, supported by targeted technical assistance. Teams in the region also leveraged parallel projects to support related activities such as land tenure and ecological restoration. In some cases, they also received support from IUCN to engage new donors.

Despite the challenges, subproject teams acknowledged improved financial literacy and management practices. Capacity-building sessions and technical support were considered highly valuable in helping teams strengthen budgeting, reporting, and fundraising skills. However, they also noted that continued guidance and structural improvements are still needed. Also, heavy workloads and time constraints have limited their ability to engage more actively in financial planning or resource mobilization efforts.

7.3.2. Materialization of co-financing

The co-financing committed at the subproject level has been partially mobilized, using different strategies depending on each subproject or territory. Local organizations implementing the project often secured small cash or in-kind contributions through community-based partnerships, government donations, or voluntary efforts leveraging personal networks. These contributions were usually modest and used for refreshments and community activities. Some subprojects also reported voluntary labor contributions from community members without monetary compensation.

Many subprojects mobilized additional resources independently, outside the formal project framework. This reflects a strong commitment to achieving project objectives and a lack of consistent systems to track and document these contributions.

At the technical and administrative level, several challenges emerged in understanding and applying financial management procedures related to co-financing. Interviewees

noted the need to simplify financial language and make it more accessible for territorial teams, particularly for older community members or those with limited digital literacy.

In-kind contributions remain the most common form of co-financing, consisting of non-monetary support. In some cases, a portion of the budget allocated for the Indigenous Peoples component has not been executed due to unclear implementation criteria from funders.

Other cases included additional donor financing received by CI and IUCN, which supported ongoing and complementary activities led by NGOs. Some delays were reported at the start of project implementation, particularly among beneficiary organizations that first needed to establish financial systems and documentation procedures. Less experienced organizations required more time to align with co-financing requirements.

The global finance team has been actively working to document the co-financing commitments. While the project fell short of its co-financing targets last year, the team reported having strategies to retroactively claim co-financing from previous periods, which could improve overall financial performance.

Despite ongoing efforts to secure co-financing in various forms, some areas still experience limited donor participation or face economic constraints, which continue to affect the pace and scope of co-financing mobilization.

Table 11: Co-financing Table

Source of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount($) at CEO Endorsement	Actual($) at MTR Jan 22 - June 30, 2025 (USD)
GEF Agency	Conservation International	Grant	Investment Mobilized	18,000,000	$9,286,867
GEF Agency	Conservation International	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	7,000,000	$8,406,545
GEF Agency	IUCN	Grant	Investment Mobilized	14,574,060	$7,972,736
GEF Agency	IUCN	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	10,000,000	
Donor Agency	UNDP	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	3,000,000	
CSO	Global Wildlife Conservation	Grant	Investment Mobilized	4,200,000	-
Private	National Geographic	Grant	Investment Mobilized	3,000,000	
CSO	Tenure Facility	Grant	Investment Mobilized	5,000,000	

Source of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount($) at CEO Endorsement	Actual($) at MTR Jan 22 - June 30, 2025 (USD)
Donor Agency	NICFI	Grant	Investment Mobilized	10,000,000	
CSO	Nia Tero	Grant	Investment Mobilized	1,000,000	
CSO	Maliasili	Grant	Investment Mobilized	1,000,000	
Beneficiaries	NEFIN	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	150,000	$251,908
Beneficiaries	Tingaule Thakali Sewa Samaj (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	1,460,000	
Beneficiaries	Tamu Hyula Chhoja Dhin-Gurung Rastriya Parisad (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	1,460,000	
Beneficiaries	Nepal Magar Sangha (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	1,460,000	
Beneficiaries	NEFIN DCC Kaski (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	1,460,000	
Beneficiaries	NEFIN DCC Manang (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	1,460,000	
CSO	National Trust for Nature Conservation (Nepal)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	3,000,000	
Beneficiaries	ANAPAC-RDC	Grant	Investment Mobilized	359,440	$160,900
Beneficiaries	WFD-World Peace Service	Grant	Investment Mobilized	300,000	
Other	USIP-United States Institute of Peace	Grant	Investment Mobilized	97,500	
CSO	IWGIA-Indigenous working Group on Indigenous Affairs	Grant	Investment Mobilized	88,000	
CSO	Misereor	Grant	Investment Mobilized	35,000	
CSO	PFR-Partners for Resilience	Grant	Investment Mobilized	300,000	
Other	University of Birmingham	Grant	Investment Mobilized	24,000	
CSO	Mapuche del territorio de Kurarewe	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	500,000	$413,821

Source of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount($) at CEO Endorsement	Actual($) at MTR Jan 22 - June 30, 2025 (USD)
Beneficiaries	Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	112,622	
Beneficiaries	Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)	Grant	Investment Mobilized	793,834	$112,622
Beneficiaries	Sotz'il	Grant	Investment Mobilized	378,400	
Beneficiaries	Sotz'il	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure	172,000	$172,000
Beneficiaries	IPF Thailand	Grant	Investment Mobilized		$133,523
Beneficiaries	IPF Thailand	In-kind	Recurrent Expenditure		$27,853
	Total			**90,384,856**	**26,938,775**

7.4. Knowledge Management

7.4.1 Global Project Knowledge Management

ICI's knowledge management consists of the project website (internally called the ICI Knowledge Platform), social media platforms, and reports and publications. Additionally, a ICI Hub was created for internal knowledge management between the PMU and Subprojects. The ICI Hub is a group of SharePoint folders hosted by CI for uploading documents, reports, storing project documentation, financial records, territorial maps, and reports.

Despite the existence of these platforms, subproject teams reported limited access, with some able to view only their files (even though subprojects designed who had access) and others unaware that the platforms existed. This was seen as a key factor limiting cross-learning among subprojects, even though that was not the intention of the SharePoint.

ICI's communication strategy has supported knowledge management and sharing by generating and distributing content that reflects the voices, experiences, and leadership of IPLCs through the Knowledge Platform and social media platofrms. IPLC representatives have actively contributed to developing knowledge modules on gender and environmental linkages through blog posts written by Indigenous organizations and video documentation of regional exchanges, hosted on the project website. The project

has also connected with broader knowledge-sharing platforms such as UNDP's Learning for Nature and IUCN's Panorama, further expanding its reach.

7.4.2 Subproject Knowledge Management and Learning Between Subprojects

Interviewees also acknowledged that the project offered multiple opportunities for learning, such as regional meetings and technical orientations. However, a challenge identified for learning was the use of highly technical language in global project spaces. Representatives from local communities and Indigenous Peoples noted that they found it challenging to engage in discussions, which limited their participation.

Several interviewees also pointed out that while regional exchange events were intended to promote collaboration, they often fell short of that goal. Participants described the time allocated as too limited, with packed agendas that left little room to share lessons or learn from peers in similar roles (e.g., gender specialists with gender specialists, finance teams with finance teams) across subprojects, this limited opportunities to transfer effective practices between territories.

By contrast, the subprojects in Chile and Argentina have established regular coordination meetings, holding monthly sessions to align goals, share progress, and exchange lessons learned. Participants described these meetings as highly valuable for both sides.

8. Monitoring & Evaluation Systems

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems are central in generating evidence for decision-making, learning, and accountability. This section evaluates the adequacy, design, and operationalization of the ICI M&E system. It assesses whether the M&E system has been sufficiently resourced, methodologically sound, and effectively used to guide implementation and measure results.

8.1. Global M&E Design and Plan

The M&E plan was minimally developed at CEO endorsement, with few practical details or guidance on implementing a robust M&E system for a complex, multi-institutional project. It lacks key details that should be found in a strong M&E plan. The results framework and associated indicators do not capture the depth and dynamics of impact generated by the project and subprojects for two principal reasons - that subprojects were designed after the endorsement and that key intermediate outcome variables were not considered in the theory of change. The plan does not include details about how the global M&E and subproject plans fit together. It did not specify how global indicators would align

with subproject-level realities, nor did it provide practical steps for implementation across culturally diverse contexts. This lack of specificity made the plan challenging to operationalize, especially for partners without technical M&E expertise. Later (date unknown), an ICI Monitoring and Evaluation Operations Manual was developed that provides more details, including indicator fact sheets and detailed methods for data collection.

Additionally, the M&E plan present at CEO approval does not include a detailed schedule, clear delineation of responsibilities, or a budget associated with M&E activities. The plan specifies responsibility between the PMU and the Subprojects, but does not specify more specific tasks. A budget for M&E activities is in the global budget but the M&E plan does not provide details about this budget.

Interviewees from Indigenous and community-based organizations reported that the language and methodology of the M&E plan were heavily influenced by external GEF standards, without sufficient adaptation to local contexts. The design separated GEF core indicators (found in one tracking document “ICI GEF Core Indicator Progress Tracking Table 26_Feb_2025.xls”), reported at the overall project level, from the internal monitoring structure of outcomes and outputs (“ICI Indicator Progress Tracking Table 26_Feb_2025). Since each subproject has a unique set of indicators and localized monitoring plan, there is a challenge to synthesize aggregated results into a global framework that highlights key impacts at the subproject level that are intermediate outcomes towards generating the global environmental benefits. This has affected the visibility of collective progress.

Some global and subproject respondents affirmed that financial resources were allocated for subproject M&E activities; however, these allocations were often minimal, and the lack of dedicated M&E personnel for the subprojects limited the robustness of implementation. Subprojects expressed the need for technical support, simplified tools, and clearer templates.

Despite these limitations, the M&E plan does offer a starting point for accountability and reflection. Some stakeholders acknowledged that engagement with M&E processes has facilitated internal learning. However, the absence of a clear strategy to link subproject indicators to global impact measures weakened the system’s ability to provide strategic insights. For example, most subprojects have outcomes that are associated with mapping Indigenous territories and Indigenous knowledge, securing land rights or other legal rights, capacity building, and/or livelihoods. The combination of these outcomes are proving to be essential steps towards the global environmental benefits.

The ICI M&E plan at project endorsement included baseline data for outcome indicators in the results framework (ICI_Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.pdf, Appendix 1, page 95).

This reflected an intent to establish a reference point against which changes could be measured. However, the actual baseline values provided for outcome variables were frequently listed as 'none', suggesting that either data collection did not occur or was not systematically recorded. This is an issue for example, in Outcome 4.1. The field of IPLC-led conservation advanced with improved knowledge management - where the baseline is “No ICI publications, reports, communication materials or tools”. This suggests that there is currently no knowledge management supporting IPLC-led conservation, whereas in reality there is knowledge management, just not by the ICI project. It would be more valuable to seek to understand a baseline of existing knowledge management supporting IPLC-led conservation and how the ICI project contributes to strengthening that. Another example of this is the baseline of no beneficiaries for Outcome 1.1. While true that there are no direct beneficiaries of ICI at project start, all subprojects are building off existing work and some beneficiaries of ICI have already been involved with IPLC-led conservation prior to ICI’s existence.

The M&E plan included output and outcome indicators with corresponding targets at the design time. These were organized by components and allowed for some consistency in quarterly reporting. The indicators selected prioritized biological and quantifiable outcomes, such as the number of hectares conserved or the number of participants, over indicators measuring qualitative or systemic change - as these are the outcome indicators defined by GEF. Evaluation interviews noted that several indicators did not track progress toward higher-level outcomes adequately, which is an opportunity to integrate indicators that measure systemic change in combination with the required GEF indicators. While the M&E system includes output and outcome indicators, stakeholders expressed frustration that the system emphasized counting participants rather than assessing changes in capacity, inclusion, or empowerment. For example, global indicators for gender components were often limited to sex-disaggregated participation data rather than tracking shifts in access, agency, or rights.

Subproject-level targets and indicators were sometimes misaligned with the global project framework. Subproject leaders reported having to create separate reporting tools to bridge the gap between what was being implemented locally and what was required globally. This duplication created inefficiencies and confusion, especially when subprojects used more culturally relevant indicators. Also, this indicates that not all subprojects are fully aligned with the overall project objective.

8.2. M&E Implementation

Stakeholders highlighted that the global and subproject frameworks often operated like separate 'micro-universes,' making aggregation between subprojects difficult. In regions with strong technical capacity for M&E, the system functioned well. However, M&E

implementation struggled in other areas due to the plan's high-level nature and limited adaptability. Although the M&E plan served as a common reference point, implementation diverged due to varying capacities, understandings of M&E processes, and priorities among project partners. Ownership of the M&E system was often perceived to reside with the global coordinating agencies, with subprojects viewing their role as more of a data provider than co-designer or user of M&E outputs.

Originally designed to ensure accountability, the monitoring system has become a barrier to success - consuming valuable project time while not fully highlighting the impacts of the project.

Subprojects highlighted a high reporting burden, with redundant formats and overlapping information requests. The quarterly reporting structure was perceived as time-consuming and detracted from implementation activities. Calls were made to streamline reporting and align expectations with field realities, and while some adjustments have been made to reduce the requirements and further revisions are underway based on GSC decisions, several stakeholders expressed continued concerns about high reporting demands and unclear expectations. Some noted that critical information was not effectively shared across the project, hindering collective learning.

Some subprojects implemented digital tools such as KoboToolbox and cloud-based data sharing to strengthen M&E, but these efforts were largely local innovations rather than guided by the global plan. As such, their benefits were not uniformly realized or supported.

Stakeholders reported a lack of iterative feedback within the M&E system. While data collection occurred, there was limited evidence of how findings were used to adapt implementation. Additionally, the system did not sufficiently evolve to reflect the changing needs or challenges at subproject levels, resulting in a rigid structure that was occasionally disconnected from field realities. As a result, the global project is not fully reporting the depth and diversity of impacts created by the subprojects.

Stakeholders confirmed that the M&E plan underwent several revisions after the start of implementation. These included updates to the indicator tracking table, refinement of reporting tools, and changes in reporting frequency for particular sections, such as shifting safeguard and risk components to a semiannual basis. The creation of indicator fact sheets aimed to reduce ambiguity and promote consistent interpretation. However, this work was still in progress during the midterm evaluation and had not been fully integrated across the system. Although changes were eventually introduced, they were often delayed and inconsistently communicated. Subprojects expressed frustration over the lack of timely guidance and the burden of adapting to new templates without adequate notice or support. This led to inefficiencies and limited the impact of revisions.

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The PMU (CI and IUCN) developed standardized reporting packages and conducted orientation and training sessions for all 10 subprojects. These packages included quarterly reporting templates, an Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT), and data collection forms such as attendance sheets, activity templates, and meeting minutes. These efforts laid the foundation for systematic data collection aligned with GEF requirements.

Despite the systematic design, questions remain about data reliability and verification. There is still uncertainty about consistent data collection methods and indicator definitions. Field supervision missions were planned but not uniformly implemented, as there is only one person with that responsibility within the PMU. However, technical visits have included a review and discuss of indicators, data collection tools, and quarterly reports. Concerns were raised about whether the collected data were adequately validated, particularly when central agencies could not verify data sources. This underscores the importance of having strong subproject-level M&E staff and M&E plans that include means of verification.

Users at the subproject level noted that while systems were in place, the reporting platforms, as the ICI Project Hub in SharePoint, were not always intuitive, and even though there is a user guide for subprojects, there were difficulties understanding how to upload or access reports, and some tools were described as user-unfriendly. This affected consistent use and may have reduced data completeness or quality.

8.3. M&E arrangements

Interview evidence and document revisions showed that the project was designed with cost efficiency in mind to focus 80% of funding on the IPLC-led organizations, which resulted in a minimal staffing structure at the global level. According to these arrangements, the responsibility for M&E is held within IUCN, and one full-time staff member is responsible for the M&E activities as defined in the ProDoc. While this approach helped ensure a unified methodology and standardization while reducing costs, other factors as the subproject diversity, diverse geographies and languages, and Indigenous-centered philosophy, caused that the M&E arrangements have not adequately met the subproject's needs. Additionally, the delegation of reporting responsibilities to the M&E leader, with the support of PMU, coupled with the high reporting burden, has significantly reduced the availability of full-time and focus of employees to address the complex M&E needs of the project. Despite the clear dedication of existing staff, the findings indicate that further resources are needed for M&E to be accomplished, even when it has been reported that it was already a known constraint pointed at the MEL ICI week.

The ICI project developed matrices and digital tools to systematize territorial and conservation-related data. For example, some subprojects built integrated datasets using community mapping, census-type data, and geospatial layers to enable territorial analysis. These tools supported structured interpretation and decision-making at the project and community levels. Stakeholders noted that while conventional methodologies aligned with GEF reporting frameworks, they were not always suitable for capturing culturally grounded forms of knowledge or local definitions of success. This created tension between what was measured globally and what communities valued, such as traditional knowledge transmission or land stewardship practices. This highlights the opportunity to adjust the M&E framework in a way that can comply with GEF requirements while still prioritizing IPLC values. In the recommendations below at 13.16.1, we list some suggestions for contributing to this area of opportunity.

Global stakeholders recognized the need for methodologies that better align with Indigenous perspectives. For example, establishing traditional knowledge schools or education programs may represent successful conservation actions in IPLC terms, but are not always captured as such in conventional frameworks. Future analysis efforts may need to adapt definitions and indicators to accommodate these broader impact interpretations.

8.3.1. Reporting Responsibilities

Across the global project staff and subproject team members, stakeholders consistently voiced that they have clarity on their reporting roles and responsibilities. Also, the project staff understands global-level financial reporting responsibilities well. Nonetheless, the high reporting burden was mentioned across global and subproject stakeholders, and the dissatisfaction with reporting processes was mentioned across subproject stakeholders. Frustration or dissatisfaction with the reporting processes was mentioned appropriately 50 times in interviews with subproject teams, with members of the PMU, and GEF Implementing agencies. Based on these comments, the evaluation team summarized four key issues that were shared:

1. Excessive reporting length and complexity. The reports were described as too long, overly detailed, and too complex. The issue of report length was consistently identified as a challenge, both from subprojects and from a GEF focal point. The consulting team reviewed the 12 reports available and found that the average page count of these reports is 105 pages, however, seven of them have more than 105 pages, the highest being 152 pages. The length of the reports may have prevented a stronger focus on focusing on issues that were preventing the project from advancing in key activities.

2. Delays and bottlenecks in report reviews and submissions. Several stakeholders commented that the review process is long and involved, which delays project activities and prevents subprojects from focusing on execution. One subproject stakeholder mentioned that approval delays leave them with one or two weeks to implement a quarter's work. Another stakeholder shared their frustration with the PMU's redundant editing, with multiple PMU members editing the same section of the report instead of delegating responsibilities and dividing edits to ensure revisions can move along as planned.

3. Overloaded M&E Staff. In the ProDoc signed by IUCN and CI, reporting responsibilities are clearly specified as a shared responsibility of the PMU with both EAs. While the M&E position housed at IUCN has a title that includes reporting, no specific reporting responsibilities are documented; instead, the focus is on responsibilities for measuring and monitoring indicators and monitoring of the ESMS. Additionally, within the position descriptions, no position mentions reporting responsibilities. As the project progressed, the M&E staff person was assigned a lead role in reporting. Since the quarterly and annual reporting requires a lot of time from the M&E staff, they cannot focus on higher-level M&E responsibilities.

4. Reporting Requirements and Local Realities. Further investigation into the challenges of quarterly reporting revealed that while the GEF's official requirement is a single annual PIR, its Implementing Agencies are permitted to set their own additional reporting requirements. In practice, this has led to a high reporting burden for the project. The evaluation team found that many indicators reported on a quarterly basis could have been reported annually as per the M&E plan. This frequency, alongside the complex nature of the reports, has created a mismatch between what is expected by the global team and what is relevant to the local context.

8.3.2. M&E and Governance

Several key evaluation questions addressed the link between the monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the project and effective governance. First, whether M&E roles and responsibilities are well defined, implemented, and fully support the governance and management needs of the project. At the global project level, while team members understand their reporting responsibilities, they are not detailed in the MOU , causing the M&E staff person to be unable to give sufficient attention to the complex M&E needs of the project, as they are focused on reporting. This does not support the management needs of the project, as the reporting responsibilities weaken the M&E system.

Multiple stakeholders criticized the cost-sharing arrangement, as the budget was split 50%/50% between CI and IUCN, but the activities and responsibilities are not an exact 50/50 split. Instead of designing the cost-sharing based on responsibilities, a 50/50 split

was imposed. While this has not led to any major programmatic issues and both organizations are behind schedule on expenditures, the issue was highlighted to consider for future co-implementation and execution of the project and budget design.

Additionally, the evaluation explored whether the M&E functions are sufficiently resourced to fully support the governance and management needs of the project. The stakeholders interviewed and asked about this topic shared that with the current delegation of reporting responsibilities, the M&E team is not fully staffed to provide the project with sufficient M&E support. However, a proposal has been made by IUCN to shift these reporting responsibilities away from the M&E team to liberate time and resources for M&E activities.

8.4. M&E Capacity

The project hired an M&E specialist per the ProDoc's specifications, fulfilling the formal requirement for MEL capacity. However, stakeholder interviews reveal this capacity is inadequate for the project's scale and complexity. The single FTE dedicated to MEL is responsible for indicator tracking and evaluation, overall project reporting, and quarterly planning. This expanded role diverges from the original intent, placing excessive pressure on a single staff member and reducing their ability to perform core MEL tasks. Even though the PMU has reported that they have been supporting these tasks, and technical leaders are backing IPLCs organizations, the MEL role must accommodate the specific needs of working with IPLCs, requiring more tailored tools, indicators, and localized engagement strategies than originally planned. The design of having one M&E lead at the global level relies heavily on support from technical leads in CI and IUCN as well as institutional capacity in the subprojects, which is not always present.

Several stakeholders highlighted that although the project fulfilled the formal requirement of hiring an M&E specialist, the workload far exceeds the capacity of one FTE. The role has expanded to include project reporting and coordination, limiting the officer's ability to provide tailored support to IPLC partners. Moreover, adaptations to internal policies were necessary to align with the grant procedures and communication norms of Indigenous communities, such as adjusting language and processes to be more inclusive and comprehensible.

Field-level stakeholders noted that local communities often do not fully understand M&E requirements, and budget allocations did not prioritize capacity-building in this area. One stakeholder mentioned that the budgeting process prioritized action over monitoring, indicating a perception that M&E is less valuable. Others emphasized the inefficiencies created by uneven cash flow and reporting timelines and the need for decentralization to allow subproject teams more control over M&E management.

Subprojects vary significantly in their ability to secure the MEL capacity initially defined. In several instances, teams reported operating with limited personnel and insufficient time to implement MEL plans. Some leaders indicated being solely responsible for MEL activities, describing monitoring as a lower priority due to competing responsibilities. One respondent from Latin America stated that although a MEL plan exists, she often works alone on implementation and must balance it with other project demands.

Other interviews revealed that some subprojects did not designate a dedicated MEL staff member but divided responsibilities among existing team members. This fragmentation impacts the consistency and rigor of data tracking, even when tools like indicators and reporting templates are available. The complexity of bureaucratic and technical reporting requirements was also highlighted as a barrier for Indigenous-led organizations unfamiliar with such systems.

Despite these challenges, there are examples of subprojects with functional MEL systems. For instance, teams in Peru and Kenya were cited for their experience and active monitoring of indicators and schedules. Additionally, subprojects in Nepal and Tanzania reported having MEL resources and work plans aligned with their initial designs, though they noted constraints like insufficient budgets for community outreach and fieldwork.

Global M&E staff acknowledged the lack of standardized initial training for MEL and suggested that now, at midterm, is an appropriate time for follow-up sessions to strengthen capacity and address weaknesses.

8.5. M&E Rating

Table 12: M&E Design vs M&E Implementation

	M&E Design	M&E Implementation
Rating	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Justification	The design clearly outlines indicators, measurement frequency, and broad responsibilities. There are some shortcomings in providing more details to implement the M&E plan, but revisions have been made (improved formats) and are underway (indicator sheets).	The M&E system and reporting are burdening the project and subproject. There is uncertainty about whether indicator data is consistent and accurate. Insufficient support has been given to subprojects. The M&E team is limited in its capacity to support the subproject further due to the responsibility for reporting.

9. Assessment of Implementation and Execution

The effectiveness of project delivery hinges on the performance of implementing and executing agencies. This section examines how CI and IUCN, as GEF Implementing Agencies, and CI and IUCN as EAs have fulfilled their roles. It evaluates institutional oversight, operational execution, and responsiveness to risks, identifying strengths and areas for improvement in implementation processes.

9.1. Quality of Implementation

The quality of work by the GEF Implementing Agencies—CI and IUCN—at the global level has been widely seen as supportive, responsive, and essential to the progress of the ICI. Across subprojects, CI was frequently recognized for providing structured guidance and close accompaniment throughout the design and implementation phases. Their role in clarifying reporting systems, supporting safeguards, and helping both the CI and IUCN teams meet technical requirements was noted.

IUCN was also viewed as an important partner in the implementation process. While a few respondents noted a desire for more technical guidance from IUCN, they emphasized that differences in engagement styles and institutional structures were understood and manageable.

This reflects the sense that both agencies ultimately contributed in complementary ways. Importantly, several interviewees highlighted the strong collaboration between the agencies, noting that when they come together and try to see things from the same level, it helps in overcoming differences.

Direct engagement through site visits was cited as particularly valuable, allowing both agencies to better understand the diversity of local governance models and implementation contexts. For example, one project lead noted that the GEF agency has conducted at least one site visit, which was fruitful and supportive. While some respondents mentioned opportunities to address emerging issues more quickly, they also acknowledged the agencies' adaptability and openness to dialogue.
Additionally, the Implementing Agencies have made a concerted effort to understand the distinct context of an IPLC-led project, engaging in discussions and learning to adapt to this context.

Together, CI and IUCN GEF Implementing Agencies have played their anticipated role in enabling the ICI's success. The collaborative relationship between the agencies has

helped ensure alignment across systems and strategies, and ongoing reflection continues to strengthen their shared approach to inclusive conservation.

Table 13: Implementing Agency Implementation Quality

	CI GEF Agency	IUCN GEF Agency
Rating	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Justification	CI GEF has effectively delivered and complied with its roles and responsibilities.	IUCN GEF has effectively delivered and complied with its roles and responsibilities.

9.2. Quality of Execution:

9.1.1. Subproject Execution

Component 1 of the ICI has been executed highly across the subprojects, as evidenced by substantial progress in institutional, technical, and community-level activities. The execution has been characterized by strong ownership among IPLCs, intensive support by EAs, and measurable results in rights recognition, training, and local governance. Despite initial delays, the subprojects have built momentum, delivering outputs aligned with the project's goals.

Interview evidence highlights that Latin American subprojects showed strong early outcomes, especially in Chile and Peru. In Peru, the project's collaboration with the Tenure Facility exemplified effective alignment across donor initiatives, reducing administrative burdens on local partners and fostering more fluid implementation. This harmonization allowed ICI and the Tenure Facility to adapt shared tools and simplify procedures, reflecting positively on project coherence and efficiency.

In Chile, performance indicators and implementation pacing reflected well-coordinated execution. Similarly, Kenya was mentioned as demonstrating sound project management and progress tracking, particularly with consistent use of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas methodologies (ICCA). The biocultural mapping approach adopted across Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Kenya helped standardize practices and maintain coherent timelines across geographies, reinforcing implementation effectiveness.

Overall, the more successful cases were characterized by proactive coordination, effective stakeholder communication, and administrative flexibility that aligned project structures with local capacities and contexts.

9.2.1. Global Execution

Component 2 has progressed through the design and partial implementation of key initiatives focused on capacity building and learning. For instance, two learning modules on 'Indigenous Negotiations' and 'Gender and Biodiversity Linkages' were developed through participatory processes and validated via multilingual webinars. The project also partnered with academic institutions such as FLACSO and engaged networks like the Indigenous Women Biodiversity Network (IWBN), showing a commitment to inclusivity and knowledge co-creation. Additional steps, such as branding the learning academy as 'Makanisi' and preparations for regional and global learning exchanges, reflect forward movement. Also, stakeholders reported satisfaction with their learning exchanges and requested more learning exchanges be facilitated, which illustrates that the exchanges have been valuable for strengthening networks.

Nevertheless, implementation has encountered repeated delays, primarily due to administrative hurdles in finalizing consultancies and changes in staff. In some cases, such as mapping indigenous organizations and designing sustainable finance strategies, the intended outputs have been postponed or restructured. The ICI team adapted by redirecting responsibilities to subprojects and revising timelines through decisions by the GSC and PMU.

Component 3 centers on the ICI International Environmental Policy Fellows Program, which was designed in 2023, launched its first cohort in 2024 and has since implemented one full cohort with the second underway. The first cohort completed all three phases of the program, shared learning, application, and engagement, including participation in international policy forums such as the CBD convention in Colombia. Webinars and mentoring platforms supported their preparation, and fellows presented case studies aligned with biodiversity and climate objectives.

The second cohort builds on this foundation with refined methodologies and a broader geographical and gender representation—seven fellows from diverse countries. The participatory design, co-developed with Indigenous leaders, ensured the fellowship's relevance and adaptability to community needs. Leadership from former fellows and connections with the GSC created mentorship channels and aligned fellow activities with broader project governance. Including countries not previously represented further indicates responsiveness to equity and inclusion.

Beyond the fellow program, Component 3 has advanced in building capacity among Global Steering Committee members, which supports them, and prepare them for participation in international policy dialogues.

Interview data confirm that Component 3 is on track, with no major delays. Activities have been strategically timed with global policy events, enhancing the fellows' visibility and

engagement. Overall, the execution reflects a strong alignment between design, implementation, and impact, showcasing a high-quality delivery of this component.

Component 4 focuses on communications, knowledge sharing, and fostering learning exchanges among IPLCs. Progress has been observed in areas such as the development of the ICI Knowledge Platform, which reached over 10,000 views and supported regular updates on partner participation in international forums (e.g., UNFCCC COP28, CBD meetings). Social media outreach has complemented these efforts.

However, the component encountered implementation challenges largely tied to internal staff changes at IUCN. These affected the timely delivery of key outputs, including translations, webinars, flagship reports, and the updated communication strategy. To address this, a former team member was brought back to lead Component 4. Despite these delays, several interviewees highlighted the strength of the component's conceptual approach and its evolving community of practice models. Examples include collaborations with platforms like UNDP's Learning for Nature and gender-focused exchanges supported through DGM. The evidence suggests a dynamic space of knowledge generation, though not yet fully consolidated in deliverables. The foundational architecture for knowledge sharing is in place, but delivery has been hindered by operational transitions and resource constraints, thus affecting the quality of Component 4's execution.

Interview and evaluation data indicate that Component 3 has been relatively more successful in quality and timely delivery. Under CI's leadership, the Fellows Program has delivered clear outputs such as training modules, policy engagement, and mentorship opportunities. The alignment of fellow activities with global conventions and the creation of case studies demonstrate high impact and relevance. In contrast, Components 2 and 4, primarily led by IUCN with support from CI, have encountered implementation challenges. Stakeholders noted delays in developing learning modules under Component 2 and gaps in communications output under Component 4. These issues have been attributed to staffing transitions, slow consultancy recruitment, and a lack of clarity in coordination between IUCN and CI. Despite the conceptual strength of these components, their delivery has lagged behind expectations.

The disparities in performance suggest that effective execution is closely tied to institutional commitment, readiness, staffing capacity, and timely management of administrative processes (i.e. hiring and retaining team members).

Table 14: Executing Agency Implementation Quality

Executing Agency Implementation Quality

	Conservation International	International Union for Conservation of Nature
Rating	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Justification	The quality of CI's execution is moderately satisfactory. While CI is on schedule with Component 3, they share responsibility for the other global components. Additionally, as CI holds the overall project lead, they are co-responsible for the delays.	The execution by IUCN is marked by delays and challenges due to high staff turnover. While there are advances and the work will likely get back on track, the delays have prevented IPLC organizations from receiving the capacity-building and support they need in a timely manner.

10. Assessment of the Environmental and Social Safeguards

Environmental and social safeguards are integral to promoting ethical, inclusive, and sustainable development outcomes. This section reflects how ICI has incorporated safeguards throughout its design and implementation phases. It explores the extent to which these measures have minimized harm, supported equity, and enhanced stakeholder participation, with particular attention to IPLC perspectives.

10.1. Environmental and Social Safeguards Implementation

10.1.1. Global Project Environmental and Social Safeguards

The data shows diverse familiarity with the ESS Plan among global-level stakeholders. Some technical and leadership staff reported direct engagement in designing and implementing the ESS, including risk screening, mitigation planning, and monitoring processes. Several interviewees highlighted the role of consultants during the PPG phase and safeguard focal points from IUCN and CI in supporting ESS development.

Training and awareness-building efforts about the ESS were carried out, including webinars and online courses, which some stakeholders found helpful. Others indicated they had not received formal training or were unsure about the ESS framework. Some stakeholders emphasized the need to adapt safeguard tools and better align them with Indigenous knowledge systems. Others noted that while safeguards had been integrated into impact strategies and local protocols, there remained a need for more explicit guidance and institutional support for monitoring safeguard implementation across regions.

While a foundational level of ESS awareness exists at the global level, sustained training, simplified guidance and reporting, and broader dissemination of safeguard

responsibilities would help ensure more consistent application. The formats and framework for safeguards provided to subprojects had limitations, as expressed by subproject team members interviewed. Their generic guidelines often fail to reflect the specific needs and cultural realities of IPLC communities, especially when developed by institutions not embedded in or led by Indigenous groups. This disconnect has undermined their practical utility in some contexts, even though in their impact strategies they made the exercise of adapting them to their context.

10.1.2. Subproject ESS Systems

Subproject teams across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia reported implementing the ESS plan, often tailoring it to local priorities. Several respondents indicated they designed their safeguard protocols based on global ESS guidance but adapted them to Indigenous or community-specific contexts. In Latin America, leaders highlighted the challenge of applying externally framed safeguards to contexts where the project is community-led. This included difficulties translating technical language, reconciling reporting templates with local realities, and perceiving that safeguards often assumed an external implementer model.

Some stakeholders reported that safeguards had long been part of their practices before the formal plan, especially in land, knowledge, and cultural protection. In Asia, one team member noted that mitigation plans improved preparedness even if risks never materialized.

Overall, the ESS plan has been implemented in the subprojects. Implementation was strongest where safeguards were viewed as aligned with Indigenous governance and support from consultants or regional teams was available.

10.1.3. Risk Screening and Categorization

The evaluation team reviewed the initial screening from the Component 1 and Components 2-4 ESMF. The Table highlights the 10 safeguards and compares the original screening result with any relevant changes.

Table 15: Component 1 and Component 2-4 ESMF

Safeguards	Component 1 ESMF		Component 2-4 ESMF	
	Original Screening	**Changes needed**	**Original Screening**	**Changes needed**
ESS1: Environmental and Social Impact Assessment	Unknown at the time if subproject activities would trigger.	Continued monitoring	Not triggered. Activities are not anticipated to cause significant	No change

Safeguards	Component 1 ESMF		Component 2-4 ESMF	
	Original Screening	**Changes needed**	**Original Screening**	**Changes needed**
			environmental or social impacts.	
ESS 2: Protection of Natural Habitats and Biodiversity Conservation	Unknown at the time if subproject activities would affect species.	Continued monitoring	Not triggered. Not focused on activities that could directly result in adverse impacts on natural habitats.	No change
ESS 3: Resettlement, Physical and Economic Displacement	Not triggered. No subprojects have activities that could impact this.	No change	Not triggered. No activities relate to this safeguard.	No change
ESS 4: Indigenous Peoples	Triggered. Work is directly with IPs.	No change The IP partners pointed out that this safeguard is designed for non-IPs and is not helpful for IP-led projects	Triggered. There is work with and to promote indigenous practices and knowledge while involving Indigenous Peoples in international fora	No change
ESS 5: Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention	Unknown at the time if subprojects would trigger. Further monitoring is required.	No subprojects have triggered this safeguard.	Not triggered.	No change
ESS 6: Cultural Heritage	Triggered. Working to promote cultural heritage.	No change.	Triggered. Promote cultural practices, but have to protect Indigenous IP	No change
ESS 7: Labor and Working Conditions	Triggered: subproject organizations may not have policies and systems to guarantee.	No change	Triggered. Potential issues with contractors.	No change
ESS 8: Community Health, Safety, and Security	Triggered. Pandemic and hostility to environmental defenders. Working in areas with conflict	The pandemic is no longer relevant, but stakeholders highlighted the danger of	Triggered.	Additional support needed for safety of environmental defenders

Safeguards	Component 1 ESMF		Component 2-4 ESMF	
	Original Screening	**Changes needed**	**Original Screening**	**Changes needed**
	or crime.	defending and supporting IPs and conservation.		
ESS 9: Private Sector Direct Investments and Financial Intermediaries	Not triggered. The project does not work with private sector investments.	No changes.	Not triggered. Components 2-4 do not work with investments.	No changes needed
ESS 10: Climate Risk and Related Disasters	Could be triggered for specific subprojects.	All the subprojects identified Climate Risk as an issue, so it could be considered triggered for the whole component	Not triggered. Climate risk is most relevant to Component 1.	No changes.

10.1.4. ESS Implementation and Mitigation Measures

At the global level, the implementation of Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) mitigation measures has been guided by the ESMF, Impact Strategies, and the ESMP for Components 2-4, with the Project Management Unit (PMU) playing a central role in coordination, capacity building, and oversight. Under Component 1: Local IPs and LCs Action to Deliver Global Environmental Benefits, the PMU supported the creation of context-specific safeguard protocols for subprojects, including templates for environmental screening, gender-responsive risk assessments, and FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) procedures. Technical support was provided through training sessions and targeted follow-up, while multilingual tools and guidance materials were developed to help local organizations align with GEF safeguard requirements. However, the degree of implementation varied among regions, often reflecting differences in institutional capacity and staff continuity. Some territories faced delays in fully executing mitigation plans, though subproject teams managed to control localized risks through adaptive management and collaboration with Indigenous governance structures.

For Component 2: Global IPs and LCs Capacity Building, global actors contributed to ESS implementation primarily by reviewing safeguard documentation and supporting gender action planning. The PMU coordinated together with subprojects to facilitate regional learning exchanges in Nepal, Tanzania, and Panama and global exchanges in Colombia

and Canada with the GSC, where best practices in ESS application were discussed. A training module on IPLC, gender, and biodiversity was launched to institutionalize knowledge on gender, biodiversity, and safeguard integration. This component also contributed to building systems for reporting and compliance monitoring, although these remain dependent on local adaptation and follow-through.

Under Component 3: IPs and LCs Leadership in International Environmental Policy, ESS mitigation took a more indirect form. The inclusion of social and environmental considerations in international policy dialogues was promoted through the participation of ICI Fellows and the GSC in events at COP16. Additionally, best practices for safety during travel were implemented by the PMU. This served to elevate inclusive safeguard principles and Indigenous leadership in global biodiversity and climate policy arenas.

In Component 4: Knowledge to Action, ESS principles were integrated into knowledge products and case studies shared across the initiative. The global team contributed by translating and disseminating lessons learned related to environmental and social risks, such as those from community-based monitoring and governance systems. Communication strategies were developed to amplify messages around ESS and inclusive conservation. Still, systematic feedback mechanisms to assess the outcomes of safeguard practices across regions are an area identified for further strengthening.

In summary, ESS mitigation at the global level has contributed to risk management through capacity building, tool development, and promotion of inclusive frameworks. However, implementation effectiveness is uneven and reliant on subproject-level adaptation, emphasizing the need for stronger systems of global-to-local feedback, monitoring, and institutional learning.

Subprojects under the ICI Initiative have implemented a range of context-specific Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) mitigation measures, guided by the overarching ESMF. The application of these measures has a variety of activities, though their depth and formality vary across territories. In several subprojects, environmental safeguards were supported through participatory activities such as community-led territorial mapping (e.g., in Chile, Argentina, Tanzania, and Guatemala), for instance, in Tanzania and Guatemala, local organizations implemented participatory mapping and ecological assessments to ensure alignment with environmental priorities ecological assessments, and the validation of land use plans, particularly where legal recognition of Indigenous territories was at stake. UCRT in Tanzania secured 12 Village Land Certificates and applied holistic rangeland management strategies to reduce overgrazing and improve ecosystem resilience. In the Peruvian Amazon, FENAMAD integrated environmental training with community-led mercury monitoring in collaboration with research institutions, addressing health and ecological concerns.

On the social side, gender considerations were actively incorporated into safeguards, primarily by creating local gender protocols and women's forums (e.g., Mapuche Gender Committee's protocol on violence and FENAMAD's Women's Agenda). These efforts, although decentralized, reflected a consistent intent by local teams to adapt global gender guidance to their cultural contexts. While CI and IUCN provided safeguard training and templates, the uptake and consistent documentation of risk screening remained uneven, often delayed by staff transitions and limited technical capacity.

In Latin America, teams have struggled to adapt standardized safeguards frameworks to Indigenous-led projects. They described the safeguards templates as overly generic and better suited to external implementers. Despite having received training, many felt that reporting formats were too simplistic to capture their nuanced realities. This mismatch between global safeguards requirements and local governance structures has resulted in a burden. In Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the challenges were more related to uneven training and limited technical capacity. Some stakeholders in Asia reported receiving only short-term support, such as a week-long workshop, or no training at all, which left them viewing safeguards primarily as theoretical exercises rather than practical tools.

To mitigate institutional risks and strengthen accountability, many subprojects embedded community monitoring systems and consulted local councils and elders on ESS issues. Additionally, traditional governance mechanisms as in Chile or Women's Leadership Forums in Tanzania, contributed to implementing more culturally grounded safeguards. However, the need remains for more substantial harmonization and real-time technical support across subprojects, particularly to ensure that mitigation plans are aligned with evolving needs and updated to reflect this evolution in a timely manner, as well as stakeholders having clarity on the purpose of the plans and familiarity with the processes.

One key mitigation strategy that emerged was the use of community monitoring systems. In Latin America, for example, Indigenous territorial authorities oversee compliance with environmental safeguards, leveraging traditional knowledge and governance systems. This approach also reinforced Indigenous territorial governance itself.

In summary, ESS mitigation under ICI has mainly been effective in identifying and managing environmental and social risks at the local level, with strengths in participatory and culturally grounded approaches. Ratings are available in Table 16.

Table 16: ESS Rating.[15]

Rating	Justification
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	All subprojects confirmed that safeguards were included in impact strategies and aligned with the GEF and implementing agencies' policies. However, Indigenous-led subprojects consistently reported that the safeguards framework felt designed for external implementers rather than community organizations. Several interviewees stated that safeguards processes were resource-intensive, requiring extensive dialogue and reporting, sometimes disproportionate to the scale of activities. Capacity-building was uneven across subprojects. The project made substantial progress embedding safeguards, but persistent issues of contextual fit, administrative burden, and uneven capacity warrant a moderately satisfactory rating overall.

10.2 Gender

10.2.1. Gender Analysis and Project Design

The Gender Mainstreaming Framework for Component 1 as the Global Mainstreaming Plan for Components 2-4, were made before having specific details about the context of the local organizations and communities where the subprojects would be implemented. Based on this documents, each subproject must implement activities and meet minimum indicators already foreseen. These mandatory actions include: developing a Gender Action Plan (GAP), conducting a gender analysis and assessment to identify barriers and opportunities, with budget included and staffing for gender, capacity building assessment to identify gap in organization gender institutionalization, ensuring that activities address women's land and natural resource rights, guaranteeing their participation in decisions on economic sustainability and in project governance bodies with at least 50% female representation. In addition, gender capacity building actions must be implemented, e.g. leadership training for women, and sex-disaggregated data must be collected.

These requirements are minimum standards that must be met and reported annually; however, the goal of 50% of beneficiaries being women (GMF target) has not been easy to achieve at subproject level due to contextual differences, but this has not been taken into account by PMU to adjust the global targets to comply with the different realities.

The subprojects shared frustration with the focus on participation, as parity in participation will not always lead to equitable benefits. Jumping straight to gender parity skips key steps, such as the application of equity measures to level the playing field between men and women. Gender mainstreaming is present and clear in the GMF and GMP documents; however, this does not ensure that it is substantive in the project. Global targets are focused more on quantitative data which do not measure meaningful

[15] *Based in Outcome Ratings methodology (Section 5.4)*

involvement, institutional shifts, and decisions taken as qualitative data. Furthermore, the fact that the subproject organizations have carried out their gender assessment and planning does not ensure an understanding of the issue.

After receiving training and technical assistance, most of the subprojects moved from viewing gender analysis and planning as a mere requirement to understanding it as a necessary and valuable process. There were important advances in awareness and planning, although challenges remain for gender integration to be fully effective and sustainable.

10.2.2. Gender Mainstreaming Implementation

The evaluation identified both meaningful efforts and persistent gaps in advancing gender equity across the project. While some women have taken on leadership roles within subprojects, there remains a fundamental misconception equating gender mainstreaming with solely women's participation. In several subprojects, the individuals tasked with gender-related activities were women community leaders. While deeply committed and respected within their territories, they were not gender specialists and often lacked the technical training or institutional support needed to fully implement gender strategies. We also observed that organizations with prior experience managing international funds, such as those from GEF-type mechanisms, tended to demonstrate a stronger understanding of gender approaches aligned with global standards. This reflects a limited institutional (PMU) and organizational (subprojects) understanding of gender as a systemic issue, one that intersects with power, knowledge, and representation, not simply as the presence of women. Moreover, not all subproject staff have received adequate training in gender concepts and haven’t had adequate staff during the elaboration of the impact strategy even though it was advised by PMU, causing little clarity on the objectives or strategies for advancing gender equity in practice.

Organizational development efforts and capacity-building activities for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) around gender have yet to be fully established. The learning academy, which aims to support this work, is still in process. Critical tools for advancing gender-responsive programming, such as post-training assessments, and gender-sensitive budgeting, were not in use at the time of review.

Members of the Global Steering Committee (GSC) expressed frustration that gender equity in leadership at the international level is a challenge. While the GSC has a woman co-leading, her situation also reflects systemic challenges. She is simultaneously responsible for multiple roles, including monitoring and evaluation, safeguards, and leadership within her own subproject, as well as involvement in other initiatives apart from the ICI project. This heavy burden is emblematic of a broader reality for many women in the environmental field, where leadership often comes with “double and triple shifts”

rather than distributed responsibility or institutional support. Despite these constraints, the Project Management Unit (PMU) has taken steps to facilitate women's involvement in global learning opportunities. Notably, women from subprojects have participated in international spaces such as the Women's Global Training, and regional exchanges, offering moments of recognition and engagement beyond their immediate territories.

Global-level governance and event representation did not always reflect gender parity, despite agreed-upon targets. Moreover, cultural and ideological resistance within organizations presented a significant barrier to gender integration. Interviewees noted that gender institutionalization, including dedicated gender policies, budgets, and trained staff, remains weak in several partner organizations and is a critical area for strengthening. As one informant explained, it is difficult for institutions without a foundational equity commitment and trained personnel to advance gender integration. In some subprojects gender activities for the project were appointed by a woman just for being a woman, not for having gender experience.

In addition, many organizations (40%) do not completely agree with the gender focus of the global project. While several communities embraced the gender focus, concerns about the gender focus emerged in 4 of the 10 subprojects. These four subprojects articulated that their traditional gender systems, often based on principles of complementarity and interdependence, did not align with the project's externally-defined gender targets. The PMU has responded to these discussions with an open mind towards adapting gender actions to be in line with Indigenous values and world views, but some tensions on the topic remain. In some cases, gender strategies were perceived as promoting separatist feminism, where women are seen as needing to form exclusive spaces. While this perception may stem from misunderstandings about gender perspective and feminism, the creation of women-led spaces is often a necessary corrective, given that men in many communities already enjoy exclusive forums for decision-making. Importantly, several subprojects are actively working with both men and women to foster shared understanding, dialogue, and culturally appropriate pathways toward gender equity grounded in local realities rather than externally imposed models.

In Component 4, efforts to make Indigenous women leaders more visible through communications platforms represent a positive shift. Project activities have begun to integrate women's perspectives and representation into materials, as reports, guidelines, training resources, and communication tools; and participation in international programs has been highlighted, as GMP established. However, communication strategies explicitly addressing gender concerns have been unevenly implemented. While the 2023 communications plan included initiatives such as the "16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence," these efforts had not yet translated into visible outputs or public content at the time of evaluation.

The implementation of the gender perspective across subprojects faced a series of complex challenges. A prominent issue was the influence of cultural norms and traditional beliefs, which often defined leadership and decision-making roles as male-dominated. For example, traditional governance structures in Fiji and other Pacific islands restricted women's participation in key community meetings, despite their recognized differences in different societal domains. Similar tensions emerged in Latin American and African contexts, where women's involvement was sometimes seen as disruptive or questioned by male community members. However, several subprojects have shown significant progress in fostering women's leadership and participation. In the Mapuche territories of Chile and Argentina, current programs like the Escuela Itinerante and Guardianes de la Biodiversidad are further strengthening their visibility and involvement. In East Africa, women from the Women's Rights and Leadership Forum (WRLF) have begun securing leadership positions, while in SSA communities like LondnddIwo, women now exercise more decision-making power over finances, land, and community meetings.

Institutional and human resource constraints were also significant. Many subprojects reported that gender tasks were assigned to overburdened staff or lacked dedicated personnel and funding to implement gender plans effectively. Gender mainstreaming is also a big challenge for the assigned personnel since they must comprehend and participate in all subproject components. At the same time, they have little time for specific gender-dedicated actions.

Gender teams felt they had to remind other staff to integrate gender into activities constantly, and often faced limited understanding of gender beyond a focus on women alone. Even though IP were involved in the elaboration of the ICI project, the GMF, and GMP and during the elaboration of subprojects GAP there were adjustments to respond to community context, the high expectations for 50/50 participation of women and men in all activities was unrealistic in some cases, leading to frustrations and adjustments. Despite these challenges, subprojects implemented several adaptive strategies. These included participatory capacity building, community dialogue, efforts to build shared understanding of gender concepts, and adjusting plans to accommodate cultural contexts.

The gender focus also helped bring attention to the unpaid labor and structural disadvantages faced by women. In some regions, men began recognizing their roles in supporting gender equity, and discussions on masculinities and inclusion were introduced.

To overcome some of these challenges, the project adopted several adaptive strategies. These included respecting cultural frameworks and local epistemologies, such as

acknowledging the authority of traditional male chiefs while creating parallel spaces for women's engagement in Fiji and the Cook Islands, and strengthening gender content within safeguards training. The team also used institutional diagnostics, like the organizational capacity assessment tool, to map capacity gaps in gender policies, accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement across all subprojects. To build internal systems and close these gaps, the project supported planning grants that allowed partners to improve their operational readiness and hire staff, although often budgets remained insufficient to fund full-time gender specialists. Finally, to foster cross-organizational learning and shared standards, the project promoted communities of practice and learning exchanges, despite challenges like language barriers and the need for translation to ensure equitable participation.

10.2.3. Gender-Responsive Participation, Benefits, and Impact

Despite the challenges faced in implementing the gender mainstreaming activities, incremental gains were made, notably where organizational culture and leadership showed genuine commitment to gender equity, through ongoing internal reflection and adaptations to improve practice.

There is evidence of increased participation and leadership among women. In general, women report greater autonomy, such as making decisions on livestock sales and participating in savings groups, contributing to household income decisions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women trained through Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLF), where men have been sensitized in this space as well, have been elected into local leadership roles. In the Mapuche territory (LATAM), traditional female leadership was reinforced through culturally rooted programs like itinerant schools and biodiversity guardianship, fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange. In FENAMAD, the project's update of the Indigenous Women's Agenda increased visibility and participation of female leaders in project activities. Multiple women community members across subprojects expressed that now they don't have to ask permission to speak in public meetings.

However, some participants expressed uncertainty about the extent of women's involvement in decision-making, as in the Sotzil subproject, when asked whether women's organizations actively participated, indicating potential gaps in awareness or documentation. In other territories, leaders noted that although women were often visible in community spaces, their roles were sometimes framed more as support rather than decision-making leadership, and in several cases, cultural norms shaped expectations of complementarity rather than explicit leadership roles for women. Also, persistent barriers such as time poverty, isolation, or lack of support still affect women's ability to participate fully, for instance, in some Mapuche communities, women's participation was described as occurring largely because they had been "left alone" with responsibilities, rather than

as a result of deliberate empowerment, highlighting how isolation and heavy workloads can both drive and constrain engagement

Regarding capacity building and enabling conditions, women received training in leadership, conflict resolution, and financial management, which enhanced their confidence and decision-making abilities. Dedicated childcare spaces during multi-day events have facilitated the participation of mothers and caregivers. Also, mentorship between elder women and youth has promoted leadership continuity and the transmission of ancestral knowledge. Additionally, some subprojects pre-existing gender policies and institutions (e.g., the area of Indigenous Women) were strengthened and updated under ICI. In Guatemala, workshops targeted women and men, explicitly addressing patriarchal mindsets and the importance of shared decision-making at the household and community levels.

Women in subprojects received training in leadership, financial management, and their rights related to land and markets. In SSA, women highlighted their newfound ability to make decisions about livestock sales and market participation, which were previously reserved for men. This indicates a growing sense of agency and capacity to influence household and community economic decisions. Access to land ownership and awareness of land rights were significant outcomes, particularly in SSA. Reports of women receiving individual land titles or gaining institutional support to claim land highlight progress in shifting gender norms around asset control.

In several SSA and LATAM subprojects, women engaged in microenterprises supported by ICI. Interviewees reported that income from such initiatives was used for household needs like school supplies and fuel, reducing dependence on unpaid labor such as wood collection. These efforts generated income and supported time-saving, autonomy, and solidarity among women's groups. However, in some places communities, women felt judged negatively for being manly or a feminist for engaging in activities that do not historically correspond to women.

Subprojects reported varying degrees of success in shifting local gender norms. In Guatemala, for example, ICI helped consolidate and validate an Indigenous Women's Agenda and update local gender instruments. Similarly, in LATAM and SSA, women participated in training and project activities. They began implementing practical changes, such as collective ownership of projects and decision-making in natural resource management, which shifted perceptions of women's roles in communities.

The project recognized and revitalized traditional concepts of gender complementarity in Latin American Indigenous communities. It built capacities through intercultural training and recovering women's historical roles in conservation and economic life. These

approaches resonated more with local values and helped challenge colonial gender dynamics.

In Latin American subprojects, efforts to shift norms were grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. Women's roles as knowledge holders and guardians of biodiversity were uplifted in culturally respectful ways, promoting changes from within rather than imposing external models. The Mapuche subproject, for example, emphasized 'traülün' (dialogue) as a tool for inclusive decision-making, where two encounters, the last one of just women, resulted in a deep sharing of violence experiences, challenging their traditional view of complementarity.

Men's involvement was an intentional element in many subprojects. In Tanzania and Kenya, men participated in WRLF events and shared responsibilities in economic and governance initiatives. These joint actions helped challenge perceptions that women's participation is secondary or symbolic, promoting a more equitable division of roles and respect for women's contributions.

Despite progress, resistance was especially noted in places where gender equality was not traditionally framed as a collective value. In a few subprojects, interviewees indicated that not all men were comfortable with new expectations or shifts in traditional power dynamics. Additionally, resource limitations and a lack of sustained support mechanisms posed challenges for long-term norm change. In some areas, gender roles remain rigid, with limited access for women to conservation work or formal employment. Capacity-building efforts varied in depth and reach, and some women expressed the need for additional tools, training, and institutional gender policies. Persistent challenges include a lack of human and financial resources to address gender-based violence, internalized resistance among male stakeholders, and difficulty in transforming entrenched beliefs within communities.

Nonetheless, early-stage dialogues catalyzed by ICI laid the groundwork for longer-term shifts by opening safe spaces for women to express concerns and fostering cross-cultural learning on gender justice.

One prominent positive unintended outcome was the growing openness among men to reflect on and support gender equity. Several subprojects reported increased male participation in gender training and local governance. In some Indigenous contexts, men appreciated how women's traditional knowledge contributed to conservation outcomes. Though not initially planned, these shifts enhanced collaboration and mutual respect across genders.

Another notable result was the empowerment of youth through gender dialogues. Projects that engaged youth saw a cross-generational impact, where younger participants became

advocates for equity and inclusion. This has fostered a new generation of leaders grounded in gender-sensitive approaches.

As for the adverse outcomes, in some settings, gender-focused activities led to discomfort or skepticism. Participants noted that introducing gender agendas was sometimes seen as foreign or disconnected from local traditions. This caused tension, especially when changes in women's roles were perceived to undermine established hierarchies or customary practices. There were also reports of limited or tokenistic involvement of women in some governance activities. While nominal participation increased, the depth of engagement was uneven, and some community members questioned whether women's inclusion was symbolic rather than substantive. This calls attention to the importance of distinguishing between presence and influence.

These unintended outcomes are not being captured as results at the global level since the indicators of all projects are captured as quantitative, compelling the project targets. Even though Global Quarterly Reports have notes where details can be added, this is not equal to globally reported outcomes.

As with other concepts, women's leadership is sometimes viewed as foreign or externally imposed, though traditional female roles exist and are respected. This is especially true in Mapuche communities, where leadership is often viewed as horizontal and complementary rather than hierarchical; women and men contribute to decision-making. That's why some subprojects focused more on visibility and support than on structural changes in some communities with strong pre-existing female participation.

11.2.4. Gender-Disaggregated Data and Monitoring

ICI developed and applied diagnostic tools like the Organizational Capacity Assessment and gender policy mapping across all subprojects. These tools enabled the identification of institutional gaps in gender sensitivity, stakeholder engagement, and accountability. As the global staff described, these tools informed planning grants that helped strengthen gender capacity in line with GEF standards.

Gender data has been collected and reported accordingly. The quarterly reports include numerous data points with gender disaggregation. Since the data is primarily about women's participation it is difficult to use the data to make concrete steps or strategies to address topics related to gender in each subproject. While the monitoring of indicators has not been clearly used in the project, the gender requirements have raised discussions between subprojects, the GSC, and the PMU, which have generated important learnings about gender in IPLC-led projects.

As of the 2024 PIR, some of the gender indicators were reported complete or on track. For example, all subprojects completed their GMPs and approximately 50% of

participants in community activities were women. Despite near parity in participation, in leadership roles, only 36% were women. Some gender indicators are delayed due to delays in Component 2, however, as seen in Table 17, the overall rating of the gender component is moderately satisfactory

Table 17: Rating of the implementation of gender requirements.

Rating	Justification
Satisfactory (S)	The gender approach was consistent with GEF mandates, agency policies, and many country priorities. Subprojects often built on pre-existing local initiatives (e.g., Indigenous Women's Agendas), though some communities felt the frameworks needed cultural adaptation. The project achieved meaningful improvements: women's participation increased, some norms shifted, and new protocols were created. However, not all participation targets were met, and lack of gender specialists limited consistent implementation. Nonetheless, partial achievement of targets, efficiency constraints, and sustainability risks suggest a Moderately Satisfactory rating.

10.3 Stakeholder Engagement

10.3.1. Stakeholders' satisfaction with the level and mechanisms of engagement

The ICI project's Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), as outlined in the ESMF, establishes a robust and inclusive framework for engaging diverse actors throughout the project lifecycle. The SEP demonstrates a strong commitment to the meaningful participation of IPLCs, including through culturally appropriate consultations and the application of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols.

Civil society organizations are recognized as critical partners in ensuring transparency, monitoring, and advocacy, while private sector engagement is framed within the need for environmental and social due diligence. Overall, the SEP aligns with international standards and provides the necessary mechanisms for equitable and transparent engagement; however, its effectiveness depends on the consistency of implementation across regions and the continued monitoring of stakeholder inclusion and feedback processes.

The majority of stakeholders consulted, representing technical, gender, communications, M&E, and administrative/financial roles, reported a high level of satisfaction regarding the extent to which their views and concerns were considered by the ICI project at the global level. Out of 19 responses, 16 (84%) indicated satisfaction, suggesting that the project has successfully fostered an inclusive and responsive engagement process for most participants.

Technical staff in particular consistently expressed satisfaction, while a small number of stakeholders from M&E and administrative roles voiced dissatisfaction or uncertainty. These responses indicate that while the overall engagement process is perceived

positively, there is room to improve how feedback loops and responsiveness are experienced by staff working in more operational or oversight functions.

Among GSC members, satisfaction with the project's responsiveness to their views and concerns was generally limited. Of the five respondents, only one indicated full satisfaction, . While GSC members largely agreed that their perspectives were acknowledged there remain areas for improvement in how feedback is integrated into decision-making processes or follow-up actions. Interviews revealed that members sometimes perceived a lack of responsiveness, particularly in contexts such as meeting follow-ups, communication between regional and global levels, and opportunities for more proactive roles in project leadership . While the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure clearly define the GSC's leadership responsibilities, including providing strategic oversight, approving annual plans, and participating in governance decisions, some members noted that in practice, expectations around their level of influence were not always clear. Additionally, interviewees reflected on their own roles, acknowledging that more frequent informal engagement and inter-member communication could have enhanced the GSC's collective impact. These reflections suggest a need to strengthen internal communication channels and clarify how GSC input is translated into actionable outcomes, particularly through more interactive feedback mechanisms and transparent decision-making processes.

The results indicate a need for more consistent engagement, greater transparency in decisions, and clearer communication loops between regional GSC members and the global coordination bodies.

10.3.2. Indigenous people and local communities as stakeholders

Stakeholder feedback reflects a mostly positive assessment of the project's efforts to include IPLCs through various engagement mechanisms. Respondents appreciated the responsiveness of project staff, regular updates via newsletters and meetings, and the facilitation of spaces for participation and dialogue. For instance, some subproject leaders reported that queries were addressed promptly, and communication with global teams was generally effective, albeit sometimes slow due to coordination back and forth.

Multiple testimonies confirm that IPLCs influenced project planning and implementation at the global level (i.e. Interim steering committee). Stakeholders recognized the project's effort to integrate traditional knowledge into management plans and decision-making tools, especially at a subproject level, where IPLCs developed a sense of ownership over the initiative through their participation at the local level. However, as previously mentioned, some GSC interviewees felt that communication and clarity regarding their role could be improved.

Key contributors, such as GSC members and regional coordinators, noted that having Indigenous focal points within CI and IUCN facilitated communication and trust, with some voices being particularly instrumental in ensuring respect for Indigenous processes.

Participants in Latin America and Asia emphasized the importance of local timelines, self-determination, and deeper integration of Indigenous leadership. While positive outcomes such as shared governance frameworks were achieved, others expressed frustration with inflexible administrative structures and limited influence over budgetary decisions. In summary, meaningful engagement at the global level was recognized as a defining feature of the project. Yet, stakeholders underscored the need for continued improvement in responsiveness, direct involvement, and mutual learning between Indigenous and institutional actors.

The ICI project has made notable progress in advancing inclusive stakeholder engagement across culturally diverse contexts, particularly among IPLCs. Subprojects in regions like Tanzania and Chile have implemented participatory approaches prioritizing local knowledge, community-driven planning, and respect for traditional governance.

The establishment of an inclusive GSC represents a significant institutional innovation and an important step toward IPLC-led governance in global conservation programming. Stakeholders view the GSC structure as a strong foundation, yet interviews revealed ongoing operational challenges remain, particularly regarding clarity of roles, consistency in participation, and mechanisms to ensure that all members have an equitable voice in shaping decisions. While GSC members appreciated being part of a formal governance body, several expressed uncertainty about how their input translated into implementation and noted that opportunities for more active engagement—such as initiating meetings or influencing project components—were not always fully utilized. This indicates a need to strengthen ownership within the GSC by providing clearer guidance on members' decision-making roles and encouraging more proactive internal communication. Additionally, participants consistently highlighted the importance of expanding beyond regional discussions and holding multi-strategy meetings that bring together all subprojects, fostering cross-learning and alignment. To fully realize the Stakeholder Engagement Plan’s inclusive vision, further investments are needed in communication infrastructure, ongoing facilitation, and peer mentorship within the GSC to reinforce both its strategic and operational roles.

According to the field trips realized by the evaluation team, engagement efforts in Tanzania were community-initiated in many cases. Interviews reveal that stakeholders felt their voices were central to project decisions. Local structures, such as village councils, elders, and women’s groups, were actively involved in co-designing and implementing activities. Women’s participation grew significantly through leadership

training and financial inclusion strategies like savings groups (VICOBAs). Stakeholders report a strong sense of ownership and pride.

Similarly, in Chile, the evaluation research reflects how engagement with Mapuche women has empowered them to recognize their value and possibilities. The project supported intergenerational learning, the preservation of traditional knowledge, and local autonomy in decision-making. The participants noted that they were “not just included” but were “leading processes”, and their work reflects a strong community identity built around culture, food sovereignty, and land care. However, they also faced barriers, such as the need for technical accompaniment and the challenge of adapting institutional language to community realities.

Across regions, challenges emerged related to communication and role clarity. Despite these constraints, localized strategies, such as storytelling, radio, and separate dialogue spaces for women and men, have helped address barriers and build trust.

10.3.3. Private sector engagement

Evidence from interviews and documents indicates that the ICI project has pursued private sector engagement in specific cases, particularly through Indigenous-led economic initiatives. Additional efforts were made to connect subproject activities with other ongoing initiatives, seeking synergies in the broader landscape, including projects implemented by CI Peru. Despite these localized successes, stakeholders noted that private sector engagement was not a core component of the project's global strategy.

10.3.4. Government engagement

The ICI project envisioned meaningful engagement with government stakeholders as part of its Stakeholder Engagement Plan, particularly in enabling legal frameworks, facilitating recognition of IPLCs, and aligning subproject actions with national priorities.

At the global level, governments were not actively engaged in the design or governance of the initiative, as the funds did not flow through the national government GEF entities. Government participation was mostly restricted to information-sharing or ad hoc consultations. At the subproject level, some efforts were made to involve national, municipal or regional authorities, not all projects had success in governance engagement. Government involvement remained limited and uneven across some project sites, but in some others it was relevant and essential for enabling stronger recognition of Indigenous land rights and alignment with national conservation priorities.

Engagement with government institutions has been a critical component of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative’s implementation strategy, enabling stronger recognition of Indigenous land rights and alignment with national conservation priorities.

In Tanzania, the UCRT subproject has collaborated closely with local and district government authorities to resolve land boundary disputes and secure Certificates of Village Land (CVLs) across 12 villages—efforts that have involved participatory land surveys and high-level political support during regional project launches. In Peru, the FENAMAD subproject has coordinated with public agencies to safeguard over 600,000 hectares of Indigenous territories, including those of Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation, contributing technical expertise to national forest governance and conservation planning.

Similarly, in Guatemala and Panama, Sotz'il has engaged with municipal and cantonal authorities to support reforestation and agroforestry initiatives across 48 cantons, reinforcing Indigenous territorial governance within public environmental programs. In Argentina, the FARN subproject has promoted intercultural governance and dialogue between Mapuche communities and provincial and national authorities, including the formation of intercultural technical teams that help bridge traditional knowledge and public land management systems. In Chile, the Observatorio Ciudadano supported the historic signing of a Co-Governance Framework Agreement in Villarrica National Park between more than 13 Mapuche communities, the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF), and the Ministry of National Assets, marking the first time Indigenous territorial rights have been formally recognized within a State-Protected Wilderness Area. This agreement established a joint Governance and Management Council and represents a milestone for institutionalized Indigenous participation in the management of public conservation areas. These examples illustrate how effective government engagement strengthens the enabling environment for Indigenous-led conservation and fosters co-responsibility in protecting critical ecosystems.

At the global level, governments were not actively engaged in the design or governance of the initiative, and their participation was mostly restricted to information-sharing or ad hoc consultations. At the subproject level, some efforts were made to involve national, municipal or regional authorities, not all projects had success in governance engagement. I nterviews highlighted challenges including frequent staff turnover in government offices, limited political interest in IPLC-led conservation, and fears among some IPLC stakeholders of state interference. While this cautious approach aligns with the project's emphasis on IPLC autonomy and rights-based implementation, it also constrains broader institutional integration.

In a specific subproject, for example, shifts in government ideology created a hostile environment for Indigenous participation, undermining previous collaboration and state support.

In Asia and Africa, local government entities were occasionally more supportive than national counterparts, although bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays in obtaining letters of no objection, created significant operational challenges. Some Indigenous organizations relied on informal connections through traditional leaders or intermediaries, yet formal partnerships with the government remained weak.

Government engagement across the ICI subprojects has varied depending on context, with some initiatives focusing more on local institutions and others engaging national actors. While collaboration has been essential in many cases, political shifts and institutional turnover present ongoing risks to sustained engagement. Overall, the project maintained its strong commitment to IPLC leadership, with government relations approached strategically and selectively. Engagement with state actors remained modest, reflecting both contextual limitations and a deliberate emphasis on strengthening community-led governance. Importantly, the ICI has also served as an entry point to highlight IPLCs' contributions to national biodiversity goals, particularly through the integration of their voices in discussions around National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). This has helped position IPLCs not only as local stewards but as key partners in achieving national and global conservation commitments.

Table 18: Stakeholder Engagement Rating

Rating	Justification
Satisfactory	The project established a comprehensive and culturally appropriate stakeholder engagement framework, with strong participation from IPLCs and civil society. Most stakeholders reported high satisfaction with the mechanisms and responsiveness of engagement, particularly at the subproject level. However, uneven implementation across regions, limited feedback loops for some roles, and challenges in GSC and government engagement indicate areas for improvement.

10.4 Accountability and Grievance Mechanism

The ICI project established a formal grievance mechanism as part of its ESMF, aimed at ensuring accountability and addressing stakeholder concerns. This mechanism outlines a two-tier system where grievances can first be raised locally with the Executing Agency (EA) and subsequently escalated to the CI EthicsPoint platform if unresolved. The process includes multiple entry points, email, phone, postal mail, and online submission, and is designed to be accessible to IPLCs. In addition, each subproject had a locally-adapted grievance mechanism.

Despite the multi-layered AGM design, there are still some gaps. For instance, the Thailand subproject noted the existence of a grievance protocol, but documentation

emphasized the need for greater implementation guidance at the community level. In Chile, interviews revealed that some community participants were unsure about how and where to submit formal complaints, defaulting instead on verbal reports through local coordinators. In several regions, participants expressed that while they had concerns or conflicts, they often relied on informal resolution methods or direct contact with project implementers, rather than utilizing the formal process outlined in the ESMF. For example, the subproject in Guatemala has an approach that emphasizes community-based mechanisms, where territorial coordinators serve as the first point of contact for concerns. Grievances are primarily addressed through dialogue and community assemblies, aligning with Indigenous decision-making practices. If unresolved, issues are escalated to the organization's leadership.

While the communities visited were generally unfamiliar with a formal grievance mechanism established by the project, stakeholders in Tanzania described having locally-led protocols for conflict resolution. In order to understand the use of the subproject's AGM, the interviewers provided hypothetical scenarios. In cases where the implementing agency is the source of the grievance in the hypothetical scenario, community members indicated they have alternative channels to escalate concerns, including direct communication with CI or IUCN. This reflects context-specific practices for managing disputes.

These findings suggest that while each project has some form of grievance system in place, more work is needed to ensure that IPLC members—particularly at the community level—are fully informed about how to access and utilize these mechanisms effectively. At the same time, it is essential that these formal grievance systems respect and complement Indigenous Peoples' customary approaches to conflict resolution, how it was done in many subprojects, which often prioritize dialogue, consensus-building, and community-led processes over formal complaint procedures. Integrating these cultural practices can enhance legitimacy and trust in the grievance systems while reinforcing IPLC self-determination.

Each ICI subproject was required to establish its own culturally appropriate grievance mechanism, many of which are grounded in longstanding customary processes. These mechanisms were disclosed at project kickoff and are now operational. During the reporting period, no formal grievances were submitted to the global Accountability and Grievance Mechanism (AGM), as concerns were commonly resolved through informal community-based dialogue or traditional conflict resolution practices. These approaches should continue to be respected and recognized as legitimate forms of conflict resolution and could officially be recognized as part of the global accountability and grievance mechanism.To further strengthen the project's grievance architecture, it is recommended that these local mechanisms be better integrated with the global AGM structure to ensure

coherent documentation and oversight. Additionally, grievance systems should continue to allow for oral submissions—such as through trusted representatives or during community assemblies—to maximize accessibility. Implementing agencies (e.g., IUCN and CI) could also consider designating global focal points for grievances to serve as culturally sensitive liaisons between subprojects and the global mechanism.

Below, in Table 18, a rating of the Grievance Mechanism, based on the methodology for rating the Outcomes, can be found.

Table 19: Grievance Mechanism Rating

Rating	Justification
Satisfactory	Grievance mechanisms were included in project design, combining global procedures and locally adapted approaches (e.g., community-level resolution with escalation to global steering committee). This matches GEF and agency requirements. While mechanisms existed (some participants mentioned clear processes, e.g., Mecanismo de Rendición de Cuentas), many interviewees did not know how to use them or had not received any information on how to submit complaints, suggesting significant gaps in communication and accessibility.

11. Lessons Learned, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Drawing from the evaluation findings, this section distills lessons that can inform future projects within and beyond the GEF portfolio. These insights reflect operational successes, implementation challenges, and emerging innovations.

11.1. Lessons Learned

11.1.1. Project Design, Appraisal, and Planning

A key lesson from project design is the value of culturally rooted frameworks. Stakeholders emphasized that designing components such as education, economy, and language from the worldview of Indigenous Peoples ensured greater ownership and long-term relevance, even if it made the process slower and more complex. Design efforts that centered the voices of IPLCs from the beginning helped establish a foundation of trust and self-determination.

Additionally, several voices stressed the importance of recognizing, rather than merely integrating, traditional and Indigenous knowledge. Design processes that elevated local experts without formal credentials and valued their lived experience helped legitimize diverse forms of expertise in conservation and development planning. On the contrary, standardized reporting, indicators, and processes designed at the global level often did not reflect local priorities, needs, or contexts of IPLCs.

Another lesson revolves around the importance of continuity between project designers and implementers. Interviewees noted that disconnects between design and field teams created confusion and inefficiencies during rollout, since at project and subproject level, teams have been changing. Ensuring coherence across planning and implementation stages was highlighted as critical for long-term success.

Gender inclusion lessons also emerged from the design phase. Stakeholders noted that gender action plans must be fully embedded in project logical frameworks to avoid becoming secondary or disconnected from results management.

11.1.2. Project Management, including financial and human resources issues

At the global project level, project management, especially within IUCN, struggled during the first half of the project due to delays in hiring key personnel and high staff turnover in key roles. This highlights an important lesson learned: having the right team members, with a shared vision for inclusive conservation, with a diverse mix of skills, experiences, and identities[16], is essential for the success of the project[17]. An important lesson learned from financial and project management challenges is that budget allocations should reflect dynamic responsibilities and capacity at each organization, rather than a pre-determined percentage (i.e., 50/50 split).

Despite the detailed MOU that describes key positions and responsibilities, in practice, there are gaps for assigning key responsibilities (i.e., reporting), and there have been a lot of internal shifts with both CI and IUCN. The organization chart for the project does not provide enough detail to understand the flow of information, communication, and decision making, which has led to subprojects facing confusion about who they should contact or communicate with on numerous occasions.

At the subproject level, diverse financial and administrative capacities among subproject teams led to early implementation delays and project management challenges. The

[16] A person's identity is shaped not only by his or her sex assigned at birth and gender identity, but also by social and cultural factors such as race, language, religion, social class, ethnicity and traditions.

[17] The diversity of identities within an organization strengthens projects with indigenous peoples by enabling a deeper understanding of their contexts, improving cross-cultural communication, enriching solutions, building trust and ensuring an ethical, participatory and culturally relevant approach.

rollout of financial systems and procurement protocols took longer than anticipated for some grantees, especially those with limited experience with international donors. To address this, the project provided ongoing training and coaching on financial reporting and budgeting, significantly improving execution over time. The lesson learned in this case is that systems should be in place from project inception to support diverse capacities with personalized support and ensure there is sufficient time planned to work to address these diverse needs.

11..1.3. Integrated Approaches and Nature-Based Solutions

The importance of centering Indigenous Systems and Knowledge emerged as an essential theme across regions and stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. In many Indigenous Systems, there is no separation of human and nature, so an integrated approach that reflects their beliefs is aligned with their values and worldview. Accordingly, the subprojects effectively combined conservation, land tenure, and governance efforts and mobilized broader support and community engagement compared to conventional conservation approaches. Similarly, since there is a core belief that humans and nature are part of one intertwined system, by centering Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices, the project is, in effect, entirely focused on nature-based solutions.

11.1.4. Financial management and Co-financing

The lack of simplified processes for co-financing and fund disbursement has caused delays and confusion, particularly in areas where formal fiscal documentation is limited. Given the absence of formal fiscal documentation in some territories, alternative methods for verifying expenditures were developed, such as community-based records. These approaches enabled expenditure tracking adapted to the project's local context. Co-financing is highly variable by country and region, and availability can change quickly with changes in local or national governments.

11.1.5. Non-Grant Instruments/Innovative Financial Mechanisms

While not a direct result of the project, a subproject partner shared an innovative financial mechanism with the establishment of a regional fund with neighboring countries and other Indigenous organizations to provide unrestricted emergency financing to mobilize in case of land grabs or land conflicts. Separate fundraising has been carried out by the subproject organization and their partners to ensure IPLCs can access the necessary legal support in times of crisis (i.e. land grabs). This is an example of a flexible and culturally responsive financial mechanism that could be adapted more broadly, especially in regions at high risk for land conflicts.

11.6. Stakeholder Engagement

At the global level, stakeholder engagement has been focused on Components 2-4, as subprojects manage Component 1 stakeholder engagement. The GSC has effectively

supported stakeholder engagement in culturally appropriate communication and engagement.

At the subproject level, stakeholder engagement was very effective. Subprojects were led by IPLC organizations embedded in community governance systems and organizations with long-standing relationships in communities. In many subprojects, community members were not only participants but also drivers of subproject initiatives, in some cases even taking responsibility for fundraising from local authorities. Indigenous leadership was crucial in aligning project activities with traditional decision-making structures and priorities.

11.1.7. Capacity Building

While Component 2 was designed to focus on capacity building for IPLC-led organizations, the delays in project execution and the focus on developing modules in a digital platform have led to ad hoc individualized capacity support and gaps in capacities not being addressed. Additionally, the wide variation in capacity levels across subprojects may make online training ineffective. Considering the progress of module development, the training is likely to be available when the subprojects are in their final stages of implementation. While online learning is low-cost and has the potential to scale, technology barriers and learning style diversity may prevent IPLC from benefiting from online training.

11.1.8. Gender Equality

Regarding key lessons learned at the global level, it should be emphasized that effective gender mainstreaming requires systemic and structural integration. One critical lesson was aligning gender indicators with the project's results framework. Without this alignment, gender activities risk being sidelined in reporting and monitoring. Additionally, it was noted that many organizations lacked prior experience and knowledge in gender work and often did not initially allocate adequate resources or technical staff to implement gender-related activities. This gap highlighted the importance of having dedicated or trained gender specialists embedded in project teams, and the challenge of finding such specialists with relevant experience, especially in Indigenous and local contexts.

Several good practices were developed or reinforced through the project. One such practice was using gender Technical Assistance (TA) to support subproject teams in designing, implementing, and monitoring gender-responsive strategies. TA included reviewing gender capacity assessments, guiding the development of gender action plans, and providing context-sensitive tools and training.

Additionally, the project emphasized cross-cultural learning by organizing spaces where diverse stakeholders could exchange gender experiences and understandings, such as during COP-related meetings and communities of practice.

Global actors also supported the inclusion of men in gender work, recognizing the importance of challenging patriarchal systems and promoting shared responsibilities. There was a growing emphasis on framing gender work not merely as women's issues, but as part of a broader social transformation approach grounded in local realities and spiritualities. These reflections led to adaptive strategies, including context-specific indicators and hybrid approaches that combined Western gender frameworks with indigenous worldviews.

11.1.9. Knowledge, Collaboration, and Learning

The project benefited from strong internal coordination processes through frequent meetings, peer exchanges, and collaborative planning sessions. These mechanisms fostered problem-solving across teams. However, there were missed opportunities to systematize and scale up learning across subprojects and to systematize learning at a global level. There is a significant demand for more exchanges and collaborations at the subproject level, and the planned exchanges are insufficient to address this demand. The absence of regular cross-regional exchanges constrained broader institutional learning and documentation of good practices. At a global level, there are significant learnings about IPLC-led projects and inclusive conservation. However, due to the delays in Component 4, much of that learning is not fully documented or developed into knowledge products.

11.1.10. Communications and Outreach

Disconnects between subproject teams and the global EAs led to delays, miscommunication, and sometimes duplicated efforts. Communications between the global project and the subproject are not systematized, and there is confusion about who the subproject team member should contact. While the co-execution and co-leadership between CI and IUCN are highly collaborative, there are some limitations in streamlining processes due to separate institutional processes, which can be a challenge for streamlined project communication.

Component 4, which includes communications, is behind schedule, thus strategic communications to share global lessons and models remained underdeveloped. This is a significant area of opportunity. Some challenges to finding the correct team member for leading communications and component 4 for ICI relate to traditional top-down and extractive communication strategies, which are typical in larger conservation organizations. This role requires someone who understands how to work with Indigenous

Peoples, their worldview, and collaborative and inclusive strategies, not extractive. This should be a key requirement for hiring on the ICI project.

11.1.11. Innovation

The ICI represents a highly innovative model in global environmental finance by providing large grants directly to IPLCs, far exceeding the scale of traditional small grants programs. This approach marks a deliberate shift in conservation financing by recognizing IPLCs not as beneficiaries, but as lead implementers and decision-makers. The project emphasized the centrality of Indigenous voices, governance systems, and worldviews, embedding these in the strategic planning and operational delivery of subprojects and global components. Innovation occurred primarily through the revitalization and formal recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, with community-driven solutions such as land titling, territorial zoning, and ecological restoration tailored to local values and priorities. These activities were typically low-cost but generated high-impact outcomes. The scale and autonomy of funding allowed IPLC organizations to design and adapt interventions in real time, reinforcing Indigenous governance and fostering cultural resilience. However, despite substantial demonstration value, few innovations have been scaled beyond the initial territories. The absence of structured partnerships with government institutions or national networks has limited opportunities for broader replication and institutionalization, underscoring a key area for strategic investment in the initiative's next phase.

Given the innovative nature of the project, the demand for more IPLC-led conservation, and the early successes in generating impact, there is an essential and urgent opportunity to document the methods and approaches used and the results achieved, and use that documentation and the position of power that IUCN and CI have with donors, to influence strategies and policies with donors and governments to promote further and fund IPLC-led conservation.

11.1.12. Sustainability

The ICI has made important contributions toward sustainability at multiple levels—community, institutional, financial, and policy. Subprojects that aligned with pre-existing community initiatives, invested in local governance systems, and integrated technical training alongside tangible outputs (e.g., reforestation, cacao production) demonstrated stronger prospects for lasting impact. Embeddedness in Indigenous governance systems and partnerships with broader policy frameworks (e.g., GEF-SGP, DGM) enhanced the likelihood of continuity and influence.

However, sustainability remains vulnerable in several areas. Institutional fragility among newly formed IPLC organizations, financial dependency on GEF funds, and changing dynamics in global and national funds continue to threaten the sustainability of project

impacts. While sustainability plans exist on paper, many IPLC partners lack the technical, administrative, and political infrastructure to secure funding, assert territorial control, or maintain operations independently. Land tenure insecurity and political resistance to Indigenous governance also pose significant barriers. Moreover, limited understanding of carbon markets and externally driven sustainability mechanisms generates hesitation and potential risk at the community level.

11.1.13. Local Context

Remote geography, lack of internet infrastructure, language diversity, and bureaucratic delays were common issues across subprojects, and differences in subproject pace and capacity led to uneven implementation across geographies. This will likely be a similar challenge for future projects, so buffer times and additional personalized capacity building should be built into the project design and timeline. Relationship-building, mutual respect, and time-intensive participatory approaches were essential for fostering genuine IPLC leadership in conservation planning and implementation.

11.1.14. Political/Institutional Challenges

Changes in government leadership delayed project implementation in several countries, especially where approval processes were centralized or required inter-ministerial coordination. Current GEF Policies that require a letter of no objection from government officials are a barrier for some organizations, as national governments do not always recognize IP-led organizations. CI and IUCN GEF Implementing agencies should discuss this issue and look for alternative practices that are relevant and inclusive to IPLC organizations. Institutional processes for validation, especially in countries requiring inter-ministerial consultation, highlighted the fragility of relying on government support without well-defined contingency pathways.

11.1.15. Risk Management

The ICI has faced a complex and evolving risk landscape. While some risks—like those related to climate or COVID-19—were anticipated, others, such as long-term funding insecurity, political backlash, and security threats to environmental defenders, became more prominent. Despite mitigation efforts, financial risks, staff turnover, and administrative burdens persist as critical stressors. Operational flexibility was limited by rigid global systems that did not always reflect territorial realities.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of context-specific, culturally grounded mitigation strategies. In some territories, adaptive planning, trust-based relationships, and the presence of strong local leadership helped navigate risks effectively. However, administrative overload and mismatched safeguards systems weakened local ownership of risk monitoring and mitigation.

The project addressed financial and operational risks effectively, but security risks (especially for environmental defenders) were identified as a growing concern.

11.1.16. Monitoring and Evaluation

The M&E systems were sufficient to meet GEF reporting requirements, but many subprojects lacked the capacity to implement results-based monitoring at the outcome level. Subprojects that embedded M&E into community processes or aligned with local governance structures had more success in tracking impact and making course corrections. Indicator and project reports have been a consistent and frustrating burden to the global and subproject teams.

11.1.16. Results/GEBs/Cobenefits

Despite delays and logistical challenges, the project has laid the groundwork for significant conservation outcomes and improvements in community governance and land tenure. Subprojects have achieved tangible results in biodiversity protection, cultural revitalization, and co-management agreements. However, these contributions are not yet well captured in global environmental reporting. Stronger metrics and systematic outcome harvesting will be essential in the final project phases to fully reflect ICI's potential contributions to GEF goals.

11.2. Recommendations

Recommendations are presented as actionable guidance tailored to the needs of project stakeholders and decision-makers.

Category	Recommendation
Project Design, Appraisal, and Planning	Incorporate adaptive management milestones into planning cycles, ensuring both time and financial resources are available to adapt to emerging needs and situations.
	For future projects involving Indigenous communities, particularly pilot initiatives, it is recommended to incorporate a dedicated "Year Zero." Due to the inherent complexity of these contexts, additional time is required for adaptation, trust-building, and community engagement. Historical mistrust toward external actors necessitates intentional outreach, promotion, and dialogue to gain Indigenous peoples' confidence and active participation.
	When designing future projects, ensure the integrated approach and Indigenous Systems are clearly highlighted in the theory of change and results framework at the global level, not just the subproject level.

Project Management	Create a living document that accurately reflects team members and responsibilities without redesigning the MOU. Review gaps and ensure they are appropriately assigned. This living document should include a regularly updated and detailed organizational chart, updating key roles and including information and communication flows. Socialize with all subproject team members to ensure clarity of information and communication flow.
	Ensure key staff has significant time assigned to ICI to lead Components 2 and 4, as these areas are currently experiencing delays. Additionally, work with human resources to understand the specific needs of team members (i.e., inclusive approaches, anti-colonial mindset, experience in complex collaborations) and to identify internal issues related to employee turnover.
	For future similar projects, the finance, grants, and contracts team's time should be allocated with a sufficient travel budget to provide the necessary financial and administrative capacity building to IPLCs. Since organizational capacity development is a key outcome, budgets should be reflected accordingly.
	In future multi-institutional projects, a 50/50 approach to management and budgeting should not be used. It does not accurately represent the realities needed for complex project leadership and adaptive financial management. Ideally, one institution should lead a project with clear delegation of functions, responsibilities, and budgets between other key institutions.
Capacity Building	Consider offering quarterly training for subproject teams directly addressing urgent requests and capacity gaps. Use a simple online tool (i.e., Butter) for dynamic and inclusive sessions, including translation options for all project languages, not just official languages. The training should be offered across two or three time slots and days to ensure inclusive participation. Not all training will be relevant for all subproject staff. However, they can select and participate based on their needs. The sessions can also be used for learning reflections and exchanges between subprojects.
Gender	Rather than focusing on achieving gender parity (e.g., 50/50 representation), adopt equity-based measures that compensate for historical discrimination. Parity often assumes equality without considering gendered population distribution, existing gaps, or contextual dynamics, and may fulfill a numeric goal without producing meaningful change.
	Consider prioritizing the gender agenda not only with a cross-cutting approach, but also as a component of the overall project, not only as a separate action plan, but by adding the expected results and outputs to the overall matrix. This should also include, since the fact that it is separate detracts from its importance. Ensure that individuals responsible for gender mainstreaming at the global and subproject levels have sufficient time and resources dedicated to the gender-specific responsibilities.

	Facilitate dialogues between gender focal points, the GSC, and the global PMU to discuss gender-related topics and promote mutual understanding and adaptation of approaches at the global and subproject levels.
	To address male resistance and tensions present in some subprojects, a masculinities strategy should be developed in collaboration with community members. Implement risk mitigation measures to prevent and address potential violent backlash linked to women's empowerment. Positive outcomes may trigger adverse reactions, so it is essential to integrate complementary actions such as men's reflection groups or soft skills training, depending on the context.
Knowledge, Collaboration, and Learning	Connect proposed quarterly capacity-building sessions with learning discussions and exchanges, documenting the lessons learned and good practices.
	Consider more informal exchange spaces, such as WhatsApp groups, which have been successful with the fellows and could be a successful tool for collaboration across all subprojects.
Comunication and Outreach	Following the revised flow of information in communication as part of the updated organization chart, set up consistent communication loops among IPLC-led organizations and global PMU team members.
	To avoid one-sided or perceived extractive communication, ensure IPLCs help tell their own stories and give permission for how information is used. Use co-creation methods and informed consent to build trust and ensure respectful communication.
Sustainability	Develop and deliver targeted training on climate finance, carbon markets, biodiversity credits, as well as fundraising and grant writing training. Ensure training is adapted to all necessary languages and identify a format that is accessible for key IPLC partners. Support subprojects in developing donor outreach and long-term fundraising strategies.
	Continue to prioritize activities that support land titling, tenure security, and legal recognition of IPLC governance systems. Work with national governments and legal experts to advance formal protection of territories. CI and IUCN are positioned as global conservation leaders and have the possibility to support IPLC-led organizations in working with their national governments. For example, in the case in Tanzania where a nationally-backed land grab is underway, CI and IUCN should use their power, position, and privilege to support UCRT.
Risk Management	Invest in training, legal support, and safety protocols for high-risk areas and environmental defender protection.
	Given that the safeguards that have been used are focused on protecting indigenous peoples in general projects, and this one is led by indigenous peoples, work towards co-developing relevant safeguard standards, processes, and formats that are relevant for risk management for projects led by IPLC.

	Create a space or platform for sharing risk mitigation experiences across subprojects, particularly on managing political instability, funding sustainability, tenure disputes, and environmental conflict.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Reduce reporting even more - focus more on technical support than reporting - stick to GEF reporting requirements and any reporting that might be useful to the partner. We recommend shifting to focus on annual reporting and semi-annual reporting, moving away from quarterly reports if necessary. This could be achieved through a participatory, co-design workshop involving Indigenous organizations to create a more context-appropriate M&E system. Limit the length and frequency of reports, prioritize learning-focused reflection, and allow narrative flexibility over rigid templates.
	Focus on standardizing indicator measurement and implementing quality controls to ensure high-quality data aggregated at the global level. Subproject M&E personnel should receive targeted training to enhance their understanding of the technical content and the purpose of the data collection and reporting processes for which they are responsible.
	New indicators should be developed to allow qualitative reporting of progress and results, since the IPLC and gender approaches are closer to these methodologies.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Scope of Work Mid-Term Review

2.1 Mid-Term Review
The Global Environment Facility (GEF) requires Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) for full-sized projects and encourages Terminal Evaluations (TEs) for medium-sized projects. MTRs are conducted by independent consultants and are used as an adaptive management tool by GEF Agencies and as a portfolio monitoring tool by the GEF Secretariat. MTRs are primarily a monitoring tool to identify challenges and outline corrective actions to ensure that a project is on track to achieve maximum results by its completion. **All reports that are submitted must be in English.**

I. Scope of Work:
1. 2. Kick off meeting to introduce team, and provide project related documents for evaluations, based on the submitted proposal.
The evaluator will conduct a desk review of project documents (i.e. PIF, Project Document, plans related to the Environmental and Social Safeguards [including Accountability and Grievance Mechanism, Gender Mainstreaming, and Stakeholder Engagement], Work plans, Budgets, Project Inception Report, Quarterly Reports, PIRs, documents with project results, Finalized GEF Focal Area Tracking Tools, policies and guidelines used by the Executing Agency, CI-GEF Evaluation Policy, GEF Evaluation Policy, Project Operational Guidelines, Manuals and Systems, etc.), and develop draft Key informant Questionnaire and draft Mid-Term Review inception report to be reviewed by CI-GEF team. The report will contain the initial information on the following:
a. Initial subject of the review, and relevant context
b. Purpose of the evaluation: why is the evaluation being conducted at this time, who needs the information and why?
c. Objectives of the evaluation: What the evaluation aims to achieve (e.g. assessment of the results of the project, etc.)
d. Scope: What aspects of the project will be covered, and not covered, by the evaluation3. 4. 5. 6. e. Identification and description of the evaluation criteria (including relevance, effectiveness, results, efficiency, and sustainability)
f. Key evaluation questions
g. Methodology including approach for data collection and analysis, and stakeholder engagement
h. Rationale for selection of the methods, and selection of data sources (i.e. sites to be visited, stakeholders to be interviewed)
i. Proposal on the system for data management and maintenance of records
j. Intended products and reporting procedures
k. Potential limitations of the evaluation
The evaluator will host a workshop (in person/virtual) with the Executing Agencies to clarify understanding of the objectives and methods of the Mid-Term Review
The conclusion of the workshop will be summarized in a Mid-Term Review Workshop Report with the following information:
a. b. Final subject of the review, and relevant context
Purpose of the evaluation: why is the evaluation being conducted at this time, who needs the information and why?
c. Objectives of the evaluation: What the evaluation aims to achieve (e.g. assessment of the results of the project, etc.)
d. Scope: What aspects of the project will be covered, and not covered, by the evaluation
e. Identification and description of the evaluation criteria (including relevance, effectiveness, results, efficiency, and sustainability)
f. Key evaluation questions
g. Methodology including approach for data collection and analysis, and stakeholder engagement
h. Rationale for selection of the methods, and selection of data sources (i.e. sites to

be visited, stakeholders to be interviewed)
i. j. k. Final system for data management and maintenance of records
Intended products and reporting procedures
Potential limitations of the evaluation
The evaluator will undertake the evaluation of the project, including at least 20 individual/group interviews via in-person site visits in two countries (CI and IUCN Executing agencies will identify project locations for site visits) based on the Guidelines for the Evaluator/s section II.
The evaluator will Present initial findings to the Executing Agencies, CI's General Counsel's Office (GCO), CI-GEF and IUCN-GEF Agencies at the end of MTR mission.
Based on the document review and the in-country interviews/site visits, the evaluator will prepare a draft evaluation report following the outline in Annex 1. The report will be shared with the Executing Agencies and the CI-GEF Agency. Each party can provide a management response, documenting questions or comments on the draft evaluation report.
The evaluator will incorporate comments and will prepare the final evaluation report.The evaluator will submit a final evaluation report in word and PDF and will include a
separate document highlighting where/how comments were incorporated.II. Guidelines for the Evaluator(s):
• Evaluators will be independent from project design, approval, implementation and execution. Evaluators will familiarize themselves with the GEF programs and strategies, and with relevant GEF policies such as those on project cycle, M&E, co-financing, fiduciary standards, risks, gender, and environmental and social safeguards.
• Evaluators will take perspectives of all relevant stakeholders (including the GEF Operational Focal Point[s]) into account. They will gather information on project performance and results from multiple sources including the project M&E system, tracking tools, field visits, stakeholder interviews, project documents, and other independent sources, to facilitate triangulation. They will seek the necessary contextual information to assess the significance and relevance of observed performance and results.
• Evaluators will be impartial and will present a balanced account consistent with evidence.
• Evaluators will apply the rating scales provided in these guidelines in Annex 2.
• Evaluators will abide by the GEF Evaluation Office Ethical Guidelines

Outline for Draft and Final Mid-Term Review Report
The draft and final evaluation reports should at the minimum contain sections A to K as indicated below:
A. **General Information**
The Mid-Term Review report will provide general information on the project and conduct of the Mid-Term Review. This includes information such as:
• GEF Project ID
• Project name
• GEF financing
• Planned and materialized co-financing
• Key objectives
• GEF Agency
• Project countries
• Key dates
• Name of the Project Executing Agency(ies)
• Governance and staffing structure
The Mid-Term Review report will also provide information on when the evaluation took place, places visited, who was involved, the methodology, and the limitations of the evaluation. The report will also include, as annexes to the main report, the evaluation team's terms of reference, its composition and expertise.
Where feasible and appropriate, the Mid-Term Review reports should include georeferenced maps and/or coordinates that demarcate the planned and actual area covered by the project.
To facilitate tracking and verification, where feasible, the Mid-Term Reviews should include

geo-referenced pictures of the sites where GEF supported interventions were undertaken.

B. **Executive Summary**

The Midterm Review report will include an executive summary that presents the main findings in the evaluation process. This section provides a general overview of the results in sections C to K.

C. **Project Theory of Change**

The Mid-Term Review report will include a description of the project's theory of change including description of: the outputs, outcomes, intermediate states, and intended long-term environmental impacts of the project; the causal pathways for the long-term impacts; and, implicit and explicit assumptions. The project's objective(s) should also be included within the theory of change.

Some of the projects may already have an explicit theory of change. Where appropriate, after consultations with the project stakeholders, the evaluators may refine this theory of change. Where an explicit theory of change is not provided in the project documents, the evaluators should develop it based on information provided in the project documents and through consultations with the project stakeholders. The report should provide an explicit (or implicit) statement on project's theory of change - i.e. how through a causal chain project activitieswould lead to project outcomes and long-term impact. It should describe how causal links
among the outputs, outcomes and long-term impacts are supposed to work. The report should also include the assumptions made in the project's theory of change.

D. **Assessment of Project Results**

The MTR must assess achievement of project outputs and outcomes, and report on these. While assessing a project's results, evaluators will determine and rate the extent to which the project objectives – as stated in the documents submitted at the CEO Endorsement stage – have been achieved. The evaluator(s) should also indicate if there were any changes in project design and/or expected results after start of implementation. If the project did not establish a baseline (initial conditions), where feasible, the evaluator should estimate the baseline conditions so that results can be determined. Where applicable, the Mid-Term Review report will include an assessment of the level of achievement of the GEF corporate results targets/core indicators to which the project contributes and will also incorporate data from the focal area tracking tool and/or core indicator worksheet.

Outputs

The evaluator should rate the extent to which the expected outputs were actually delivered. An identification and assessment of the factors that affected delivery of outputs should also be included.

Outcomes

The evaluator should rate the extent to which the expected outcomes were achieved and the extent to which its achievement was dependent on delivery of project outputs. They should also assess the factors that affected outcome achievement, e.g. project design, project's linkages with other activities, extent and materialization of co-financing, stakeholder involvement, etc. Where the project was developed within the framework of a program, the assessment should also report on the extent the project contributed to the program outcomes.

Criteria for Outcome Ratings

Outcome ratings will take into account the outcome achievements of the projects against its expected targets. Each project outcome will be rated on four dimensions[1]:

a. Relevance: Were the project outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, country priorities, and mandates of the Agencies? Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Annex 2

b. Effectiveness: Were the project's actual outcomes commensurate with the expected outcomes?

c. Efficiency: Was the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?

d. Sustainability: The assessment of sustainability will weigh risks to continuation of benefits from the project. The assessment should identify key risks and explain how these risks may affect continuation of benefits after the GEF project ends. The analysis should cover key risks, including financial, socio-political, institutional, and environmental risks. The overall sustainability of a project outcome will be rated on a four-point scale (Likely to Unlikely) based on an assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of the risks to sustainability. Higher levels of

[1] From the document GEF/ME/C.56/02, "The GEF Evaluation Policy"risks and magnitudes of effect, imply lower likelihood of sustainability. Annex 2 describes the
rating scale for sustainability.
Rating Scale for Outcomes: An overall outcome rating will be provided on a six-point scale (highly satisfactory to highly unsatisfactory) after taking into account outcome relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability (See Annex 2).

Key Risks and Overall Project Sustainability

E. The assessment of sustainability will weigh risks to continuation of benefits from the project. The assessment should include key risks and explain how these risks may affect continuation of benefits after the GEF project ends. The analysis should cover key risks identified during the CEO Endorsement or Approval phase and should follow the GEF Risk Appetite accounting for three dimensions with nine sub-categories and an overall risk rating. Each risk will be rated, and a project sustainability rating will be determined (See Annex 2). The assessment aims to measure the sustainability of GEF interventions in the context of their contribution to global environmental benefits in GEF focal areas at the local and global levels.

F. **Progress to Impact**

It is often too early to assess the long-term impacts of the project at the point of project completion. This said, some evidence on progress towards long-term impacts, and the extent to which the key assumptions of the project's theory of change hold, may be available and it may be feasible to assess and report on the progress. The evaluators should also assess the extent to which the progress towards long-term impact may be attributed to the project.

The evaluators should report the available qualitative and quantitative evidence on environmental stress reduction (e.g. GHG emission reduction, reduction of waste discharge, etc.) and environmental status change (e.g. change in population of endangered species, forest stock, water retention in degraded lands, etc.). When reporting such evidence, the evaluator should note the information source and clarify the scale/s at which the described environmental stress reduction is being achieved. The value of the GEF core indicators at Midterm should also be included and assessed.

The evaluators should cover the project's contributions to changes in policy/ legal/regulatory frameworks. This would include observed changes in capacities (awareness, knowledge, skills, infrastructure, monitoring systems, etc.) and governance architecture, including access to and use of information (laws, administrative bodies, trust-building and conflict resolution processes, information-sharing systems, etc.). Contribution to change in socioeconomic status (income, health, well-being, etc.) should also be documented.

Where the environmental and social changes are being achieved at scales beyond the immediate area of intervention, the evaluators should provide an account of the processes such as sustaining, mainstreaming, replication, scaling up and market change, through which these changes have taken place. The evaluators should discuss whether there are arrangements in the project design to facilitate follow-up actions, and should document instances where the GEF promoted approaches, technologies, financing instruments, legal frameworks, information systems, etc., were adopted/implemented without direct support from, or involvement of, the project. Evidence on incidence of these processes should be discussed to assess progress towards impact.When assessing contributions of GEF project to the observed change, the evaluators should also assess the contributions of other actors and factors. The evaluators should assess merits of rival explanations for the observed impact and give reasons for accepting or rejecting them.

Where applicable, the evaluators are encouraged to identify and describe the barriers and other risks that may prevent further progress towards long-term impacts.

The evaluators should document the unintended impacts – both positive and negative impacts – of the project and assess the overall scope and implications of these impacts. Where these impacts are undesirable from environmental and socio-economic perspectives, the evaluation should suggest corrective actions.

G. **Project Governance, Management and Monitoring & Evaluation Systems**

The evaluators will include an assessment of the adequacy and appropriateness of the arrangements between CI and IUCN supporting ICI M&E including potential recommendations on how to improve the current set up. The following will be assessed by the evaluators:

a. Whether the cost sharing arrangements between CI and IUCN supporting ICI M&E and management is adequate and supports fully the governance and management needs of the project?

b. Whether M&E roles and responsibilities are well defined, implemented and fully

support the governance and management needs of the project?
c. Whether M&E and project management functions are sufficiently resourced to fully support the governance and management needs of the project?
The evaluators will include an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the project M&E plan and its implementation.
M&E Design. To assess the quality of the M&E plan, the evaluators will assess:
a. Was the M&E plan at the point of CEO Endorsement practical and sufficient?
b. Did it include baseline data?
c. Did it: specify clear targets and appropriate (SMART) indicators to track environmental, gender, and socio-economic results; a proper methodological approach; specify practical organization and logistics of the M&E activities including schedule and responsibilities for data collection; and, budget adequate funds for M&E activities?
M&E Implementation. The evaluators should assess:
a. b. c. Whether the M&E system operated as per the M&E plan?
Where necessary, whether the M&E plan was revised in a timely manner?
Was information on specified indicators and relevant GEF focal area tracking tools gathered in a systematic manner?
d. e. Have appropriate methodological approaches been used to analyze data?
How was the information from the M&E system used during the project implementation?
M&E capacity. The evaluator will assess:
a. b. Whether the project has sufficient FTEs, skills and experience for the work?
Whether the roles and responsibilities with regards to reporting are well defined and adequately shared?
c. Whether each project has secured MEL capacity as initially defined?d. Whether the project has sufficient resources M&E and reporting, taking into account specificities of working with local communities and indigenous leaders (translation, communication channels, etc.)?
Project M&E systems will be rated on the quality of M&E design and quality of M&E implementation using a six-point scale (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory). Annex 2 provides more details on the scale. Based on the assessments, the evaluator should provide recommendations on how to best move forward with the arrangement between IUCN and CI regarding MEL function which concerns ICI M&E and PM functions.

Assessment of Implementation and Execution

H. The assessment of the implementation and execution of GEF projects will take into account the performance of the GEF Implementing Agencies and project Executing Agency(ies) (EAs) in discharging their expected roles and responsibilities. The performance of these agencies will be rated using a six-point scale (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory). See Annex 2 for more information on the scale.
Quality of Implementation: Within the GEF partnership, GEF Implementing Agencies are involved in activities related to a project's identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation of detailed proposal, approval and start-up, oversight, supervision, completion, and evaluation. To assess performance of the GEF Agencies, the evaluators will assess the extent to which the agency delivered effectively on these counts, with focus on elements that were controllable from the given GEF Agency's perspective. The evaluator will assess how well risks were identified and managed by the GEF Agency.
Quality of Execution: Within the GEF partnership, the EAs are involved in the management and administration of the project's day-to-day activities under the overall oversight and supervision of the GEF Agencies. The EAs are responsible for the appropriate use of funds, and procurement and contracting of goods and services to the GEF Agency. To assess EA performance, the evaluators will assess the extent to which it effectively discharged its role and responsibilities.

I. **Assessment of the Environmental and Social Safeguards**

The evaluator will assess whether appropriate environmental and social safeguards were addressed in the project's design and implementation (See Annex 2 for more details on the rating scale). It is expected that a GEF project will not cause any harm to environment or to any stakeholder and, where applicable, it will take measures to prevent and/or mitigate adverse

effects. It is also expected that projects actively seek to do good, by identifying opportunities to advance gender equality, social inclusion and meaningful participation of stakeholders in project implementation. The evaluator should assess the screening/ risk categorization of the project along with the implementation of the safeguard plans that were approved by the GEF Agency. There should be an analysis of the implementation of management measures, as outlined at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including findings on the effectiveness of management measures and lessons learned.

In projects that include local communities and/or indigenous people as beneficiaries or key stakeholders, the evaluator should guarantee that their voices are adequately heard and represented in the evaluation, through primary data collection.*Gender:* The evaluator will determine the extent to which the gender considerations were taken into account in designing and implementing the project. The evaluator should report whether a gender analysis was conducted, the extent to which the project was implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits, and whether gender disaggregated data was gathered and reported on beneficiaries. In case the given GEF project disadvantages or may disadvantage women or men, then this should be documented and reported. The evaluator should also determine the extent to which relevant gender related concerns were tracked through project M&E, and if possible, addressing whether gender considerations contributed to the success of the project.

At the minimum, the evaluator should assess the progress towards achieving gender sensitive measures and/or targets as documented at CEO endorsement/approval in the Gender Mainstreaming Plan or equivalent. The evaluator should at least attempt to address the following questions:

a) How effective has the project being in reaching women and men, and integrating gender mainstreaming throughout its activities? were all activities planned in the GMP implemented? Yes/No Why?

b) Did the project face any challenges to implementing the GMP as initially proposed? Which challenges? How were the challenges overcome?

c) Compared to the original GMP, did the project had to implement any adaptations to promote meaningful participation of women and advance towards other gender sensitive targets?

d) Did the project team/stakeholders/beneficiaries observe any qualitative outcomes (either positive or negative) related to gender equality, that are difficult to capture in a quantitative project target?

e) Considering all the above, what are the recommendations for the remaining of project implementation to continue advancing towards gender sensitive targets?

d) Were there any key lessons learned and/or good practices identified in the project's efforts to implement gender sensitive measures?

In projects that include local communities and/or indigenous people as beneficiaries or key stakeholders, the evaluator could also explore:

• To what extent did the project enhanced women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes?

• To what extent did the project facilitated and enhanced the capacity of women and men to change negative gender norms, that could potentially prevent women from fully benefiting from project's Outputs and Outcomes?

• Are there any indications of the project influencing or enabling women's agency, access and control over assets, access to new economic opportunities or productive or conservation activities?

• Were there any unintended outcomes (positive or negative) related to gender equality at the community level?

Stakeholder Engagement: The evaluator should, where applicable, review and assess the Stakeholder Engagement Plan and project specific aspects such as involvement of civil society, indigenous population, private sector, etc. The evaluator should also indicate thepercentage of stakeholders who rate as satisfactory, the level at which their views and concerns are considered by the project.

At the minimum, the evaluator should explore the progress, challenges, the strategies advanced to overcome them, and outcomes on stakeholder engagement (based on the description of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan included at CEO Endorsement/Approval.

In projects that include local communities and/or indigenous people as beneficiaries or key stakeholders, the evaluator should also give an account on the efforts made by the project to enhance their meaningful participation in project implementation. It should also explore if there were any additional efforts implemented to promote the participation of vulnerable or marginalized groups present in the prioritized communities.
Accountability and Grievance Mechanism: The evaluator should review and assess the project's Grievance Mechanism. The evaluator should analyze and assess whether project stakeholders were aware of the grievance mechanism and whether the mechanism was effective in addressing grievances.
In projects that include local communities and/or indigenous people as beneficiaries or key stakeholders, the evaluator should review and assess if established channels and procedures, were accessible and responded to their specific context and needs.
Other Safeguard Plans: The evaluator should also review and assess any other safeguard plans that were triggered.
Overall, the evaluator should identify key lessons learned in the implementation of the ESMF (ESS, gender, stakeholder engagement and grievance mechanism), including what worked well and what needs to be improved. The evaluator should also provide recommendations to guide upcoming project implementation.

J. **Other Assessments**

The Mid-Term Review should assess the following topics, for which ratings are not required:

1. 2. 3. *Need for follow-up:* Where applicable, the evaluators will indicate if there is any need to follow up on the evaluation findings, e.g. instances financial mismanagement, unintended negative impacts or risks, etc.
Knowledge Management: the evaluators should provide an assessment of whether the Knowledge Management Plan as included in the Project Document was implemented. If possible, the evaluators should also include the list of knowledge products developed throughout project implementation, including internet references if available.
Materialization of co-financing: the evaluators will provide information on the extent to which expected co-financing materialized, whether co-financing is cash or in-kind, whether it is in form of grant or loan or equity, whether co-financing was administered by the project management or by some other organization, how shortfall in co-financing or materialization of greater than expected co-financing affected project results, etc.

Sources of Co-financing

Name of Co-financier	**Type of Co-financing**	**Investment Mobilized/Recurrent Expenditures**	**Amount($) at CEO**	**Actual($) at MTR**
Government/CSO/Donor/Agency/etc..	**AAA Grant/In-Kind/Equity…**	**IM/RE**	**XXX**	**XXX**

K. **Lessons and Recommendations**

Evaluators should provide a few well-formulated lessons that are based on the project experience and applicable to the type of project at hand, to the GEF's overall portfolio, and/or to GEF systems and processes. Each lesson/recommendation should be categorized according to the following:
1. Project Design, Appraisal and Planning
2. Project Management, including financial and human resources issues
3. Integrated Approaches
4. Nature-based Solutions

5. Co-financing
6. Non-Grant Instruments/Innovative Financial Mechanisms
7. Stakeholder Engagement (can be categorized as (i) General, (ii) Indigenous People Engagement, (iii) Local Community Participation, or (iv) Private Sector Engagement)
8. Gender Equality
9. Knowledge, Collaboration, and Learning
10. Communications and Outreach
11. Sustainability
12. Innovation/Science/Research and Development (R&D)
13. Demonstration
14. Scaleup
15. Local Context/Project Site Challenges
16. Political/Insitutional Challenges
17. Risk Management
18. Monitoring and Evaluation
19. Results/Global Environmental Benefits/Cobenefits

Wherever possible, Mid-Term Review reports should include examples of good practices in project design and implementation that have led to effective stakeholder engagement, successful broader adoption of GEF initiatives by stakeholders, and large-scale environmental impacts. The evaluators should describe aspects of the project performance that worked well along with reasons for it. They should discuss where these good practices may or may not be replicated. Recommendations should be well formulated and targeted. The recommendations should discuss the need for action, the recommended action along with its likely consequences vis-à-vis status quo and other courses of action, the specific actor/actors that need to take the action, and time frame for it.

Annex 2: Evaluation Team

Our team has extensive experience in environmental management, gender inclusion, and stakeholder engagement, which aligns with GEF priorities. We are familiar with the GEF Evaluation Policy, co-financing frameworks, and safeguards, which ensure full compliance. EarthEmpower will strictly adhere to the GEF Evaluation Office Ethical Guidelines and guarantee impartiality and rigor. The team roles and responsibilities are summarized in the Table below.

Project Roles		
Name	Role	Responsibilities
Rachael Cox	Project Technical Leader	Framework and methodology design, field research, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, results synthesis, and report writing. Conduct remote interviews. Field research in Tanzania.
Daniela Olvera	Project Manager	Ensure weekly communication with the CI/IUCN team and internal communication for on-time delivery. Qualitative research lead and data analysis. Gender specialist. Field research in Chile.
Magda Reynoso	Senior Evaluation Consultant	Methodology design, field research, and results synthesis. Conduct remote interviews. Field research in Tanzania.
Marllury de la Cruz	Junior Evaluation Consultant	Development of digital tools for evaluation research. Field research (if Latin American countries selected). Quantitative data analysis. Field research in Chile.
Yarelmis Perez	Accounting	Financial Management - Invoices, Payments, and Travel finances

Rachael Cox, Project Leader

Rachael Ann Cox, will be the overall evaluation leader for this consultancy. She will lead the development of the evaluation framework and research methodologies. Additionally, she will support the team in data analysis and lead the results synthesis. Rachael will be the lead writer for the evaluation report. She has expertise in project design, monitoring,

and evaluating environmental conservation projects. Rachael has extensive experience in Latin America, with over 12 years working in soil and water conservation in Mexico and Guatemala, with significant parts of that time designing and leading monitoring and evaluation for numerous projects. She designed and led the MEAL strategy for the USAID-funded project Buena Milpa in the Western Highlands of Guatemala and led the implementation of the MEAL strategy for USAID-funded Sweet Potato for Nutrition and Income in Rwanda, designing and implementing household and shareholder surveys for qualitative and quantitative impact evaluation. Rachael led our team to complete the mid-term and final assessment for the IKI Smart Coasts Project with WWF Mesoamerica. She led our team to design and conduct social and environmental risk research in Belize for a WWF GEF project.

Rachael has an M.S. in Natural Resources Conservation and Management and completed a graduate certificate at Tufts University in International Nutrition Delivery Science, which involved extensive study of Evaluation Theory, Design, and Implementation. Rachael is bilingual and based in Mexico City. She will be the leader in designing the evaluation methodology, ensuring compliance with GEF policies, and organizing the team for field research.

Daniela Olvera, Consultant, Researcher, and Project Manager

Our support team will be based in México with Daniela Olvera, who holds a Master's in International Cooperation and Gender Studies. Daniela is the project manager for this consultancy, ensuring internal and external coordination, ensuring on-time delivery of products, and regularly updating the ICI GEF evaluation team about the progress of the evaluation and communicating about questions or issues. Additionally, Daniela will lead the qualitative data analysis and conduct remote interviews. She has experience conducting monitoring and evaluation through qualitative methods. She has a diploma in public policy with a gender perspective. She is trained in project initiation and planning, business writing, advocacy and leadership, Human Rights with a gender perspective, and gender equity in families and masculinities. Daniela will guide the methodological design to ensure gender sensitivity and lead the qualitative data analysis for the evaluation.

Magda Reynoso, Senior Consultant

Magdalena Reynoso guides the methodological design based on her extensive field research experience. She is a highly skilled professional with vast experience in environmental and social project evaluations and safeguards development. In 2024, she contributed to the research and writing of safeguards for WWF’s “Strengthening Ecological Resilience and Livelihoods in the Southern Belize Reef Complex” BAF-funded and “Bold and Resilient Belize” GEF-funded projects. She has led diversity and inclusion workshops in the geospatial field for the NASA Global SERVIR program, demonstrating her ability to facilitate engaging and participatory methodologies. With a solid background

in conducting field research, she has undertaken group interviews and collected data across Central America, including Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, and Honduras. Her expertise includes field research and workshop facilitation in the mid-term and the final evaluation of WWF Mesoamerica's Smart Coasts in 2022 and 2023, which spanned Germany and Central America. Based in Querétaro, Mexico, she consulted for UNICEF, UNDP, and IDB, further strengthening her environmental and social management credentials.

Marllury de la Cruz, Consultant, Data Specialist

Marllury de la Cruz is the project's lead quantitative data analyst. Marllury will design and program the Kobo survey and oversee the results and analysis. She will also conduct field research in Peru, implementing in-person interviews and field observations. She is based in Guatemala and is a highly skilled professional specializing in data collection, processing, analysis, and statistical methods. She has extensive experience designing and executing surveys, training teams in data collection techniques, and applying data analysis to monitor and evaluate project effectiveness. Her expertise spans agricultural, gender, and climate change projects, where she has applied data-driven solutions to diverse social and farming challenges. Additionally, she excels in developing technical documentation, such as SOPs and protocols, to optimize processes and ensure project efficiency.

Annex 3: Key Evaluation Questions

Topics	Evaluation Questions
1. Project Design and Theory of Change	Is the project design and theory of change coherent and realistic? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Are the assumptions documented valid or should they be adjusted? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Does the project design need to be updated or adjusted? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Has the project design allowed for the effective integration of indigenous IPLC in the project? (for overall project and subprojects)
2. Project Communications	How effective and efficient have project communication strategies been? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Are stakeholders satisfied with the project communication efforts? (for overall project and subprojects)
	What opportunities for improvement are there in the project communications? (for overall project and subprojects)
	What have been the primary challenges in disseminating essential project information? (for overall project and subprojects)
3. Project Results	To what extent have project outputs been achieved at the overall results framework of the project level? (same question for subproject)
	What factors influenced the achievement (or lack thereof) of the outputs?
	To what extent have project outcomes been achieved?
	Relevance: Were the project outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, country priorities, and mandates of the Agencies? Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?
	Effectiveness: Were the project's actual outcomes commensurate with the expected outcomes?
	Efficiency: Was the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compared to that of similar projects?
	Sustainability: Are the project outcomes likely to be sustained after the project end? (Further questions about sustainability can be found in section 5).
	What factors influenced the achievement (or lack thereof) of the outcomes?

Topics	Evaluation Questions
	Have any unexpected positive or negative impacts been identified on IPLC communities?
4. Progress to Impact	Is there evidence of long-term impacts?
	Have project activities contributed to systematic changes (i.e. behaviors, policies, governance, etc.)?
	Are there any unintended consequences of the project?
	What barriers have hindered the scalability of the project's impacts?
5. Project Key Risks and Overall Project Sustainability (GEF Risk Appetite)	Is the project taking action to ensure the impacts of the project continue after GEF funding?
	What gaps or risks may threaten the project's sustainability?
	Are there mechanisms in place to ensure sustainability?
	Are the risks initially identified still relevant? (If no, what needs to be updated)
	Have any risks become a reality, and if so, how has that impacted the project?
	Have risks been effectively mitigated?
	What are the ongoing risks to the project (GEF Risk Appetite)
	Have there been negative impacts on IPLC communities due to unanticipated risks?
6. GEB Benefits	Has the project resulted in measurable environmental benefits?
7. Monitoring and Evaluation	Was the M&E plan designed well? (for overall project and subprojects) -Was the M&E plan at the point of CEO Endorsement practical and sufficient? -Did it include baseline data? -Did it: specify clear targets and appropriate (SMART) indicators to track -Environmental, gender, and socio-economic results -A proper methodological approach -Practical organization and logistics -Schedule for data collection -Budget for M&E activities
	Is the M&E system implemented and according to the plan?
	Where necessary, whether the M&E plan was revised in a timely manner?
	Was information on specified indicators and relevant GEF focal area tracking tools gathered in a systematic manner?
	Whether appropriate methodological approaches have been used to analyze data?

Topics	Evaluation Questions
	How was the information from the M&E system used during the project implementation?
	Is the M&E system effectively tracking indicators and project progress? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Are the selected indicators effectively measuring project progress? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Does the project has sufficient FTEs, skills and experience for the work? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Are the roles and responsibilities with regards to reporting are well defined and adequately shared? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Hasr each project has secured MEL capacity as initially defined? (for overall project and subprojects)
	Doesthe project have sufficient resources M&E and reporting, taking into account specificities of working with local communities and indigenous leaders (translation, communication channels, etc.)?
8. Project Governance and Management	Are project governance mechanisms effective for decision making and project management? (for overall project and subprojects)
	How have institutional and human resources challenges been managed? (for overall project and subprojects)
9. Implementation and Execution	Has the implementation thus far been of high quality? (global / IUCN & CI)
	Have any areas been identified where implementation has been more effective than others? Why?
	Has the execution of component 1 thus far been of high quality? (subprojects)
	Has the execution of components 2-4 thus far been of high quality? (global / IUCN & CI)
	What have been the biggest challenges in executing the project in terms of logistics, human resources, and financing?
10. Environmental and Social Safeguards	Has the project successfully implemented the ESS plan?
	Does the project have a grievance mechanism that is known, understood, and accessible for all the participants?
11. Stakeholder Engagement	Were IPs and LCs meaningfully engaged throughout planning and execution?
	Has the private sector been effectively engaged in the project?
	Have governments been effectively engaged in the project?
	Are stakeholders satisfied with the level and mechanisms of engagement used by the project?

Topics	Evaluation Questions
12. Gender	Did the project face any challenges to implementing the GMP as initially proposed? How were the challenges overcome?
	Were there any key lessons learned and/or good practices identified in the project's efforts to implement gender sensitive measures?
	To what extent did the project enhance women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes?
	To what extent did the project facilitate and enhance the capacity of women and men to change negative gender norms, that could potentially prevent women from fully benefiting from the project's Outputs and Outcomes?
	Are there any indications of the project influencing or enabling women's agency, access and control over assets, access to new economic opportunities or productive or conservation activities?
	Were there any unintended outcomes (positive or negative) related to gender equality at the community level?
13. Financial management and Co-financing	Is the project on track for financial execution?
	Have financial resources been used effectively and responsibly?
	Has the planned co-financing been mobilized?
	Does the project have the necessary capacity for financial management? (project and subproject)
14. Knowledge Management, Collaboration and Learning	Does the project have processes in place for data and knowledge management?
	Are there processes to promote learning?
	How has the project promoted and encouraged collaboration?
15. Follow-up	What follow-up actions are required to ensure the project's success and enhance outcome and impact?
16. Lessons Learned	What lessons have been learned through project design?
	What lessons have been learned through project implementation?
	What other lessons have been learned?

Annex 4. Rating System

The main dimensions of project performance on which ratings are first provided in MTR are: outcomes, sustainability, quality of monitoring and evaluation, quality of implementation, and quality of execution. The CI-GEF Agency also includes ratings for environmental and social safeguards.

Outcome Ratings:
The overall ratings on the outcomes of the project will be based on performance on the Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability.
In terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of an outcome , project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

• Highly satisfactory (HS): Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no short comings.
• Satisfactory (S): Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor short comings.
• Moderately Satisfactory (MS): Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate short comings.
• Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings.
• Unsatisfactory (U): Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major short comings.
• Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe short comings.
• Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.

Outcome Sustainability:
In terms of sustainability of an outcome , project outcomes are rated based on risks related to financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and environmental sustainability. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a four- point scale.

• Likely (L): There is little or no risk to sustainability.
• Moderately Likely (ML): There are moderate risks to sustainability.
• Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks to sustainability.
• Unlikely (U): There are severe risks to sustainability.
• Unable to Assess (UA): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of

risks to sustainability.

In terms of an outcome's final and overall project outcomes rating, the calculation will consider all the four criteria, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. The rating on relevance will determine whether the overall outcome rating will be in the unsatisfactory range (MU to HU = unsatisfactory range). If the relevance rating is in the unsatisfactory range, then the overall outcome will be in the unsatisfactory range as well. However, where the relevance rating is in the satisfactory range (HS to MS), the overall outcome rating could, depending on its effectiveness and efficiency, and where applicable – sustainability rating, be either in the satisfactory range or in the unsatisfactory range.

The second constraint applied is that the overall outcome achievement rating may not be higher than the effectiveness rating. During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes has been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is considered and despite achievement of results as per the revised results framework, where appropriate, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given.

The ratings can be summarized as follows:

OUTCOME	Relevance	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Sustainability	Outcome Final Rating	Comment
Outcome 1.1						
Outcome 1.2						
...						
Outcome x.x						
OVERALL RATING						

Project Sustainability and Key Risks Rating

Summarize risks that might affect the achievement of desired outcomes and the mitigation measures which are planned (at the CEO Endorsement or Approval stage) or already undertaken to address these. The risk rating should reflect the residual risk to achieving outcomes after considering the implementation of mitigation measures. The rating scale is: High, Substantial, Moderate, Low. See the GEF Risk Appetite document (GEF/C.66/13) for more information and its Annex B for a description of each risk category. Note that the rating for the "Environment and Social" category should be based on the Environment and Social Safeguards section.

RISK CATEGORIES	RATINGS	ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION MEASURES
CONTEXT		
Climate	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Environment and Social	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Political and Governance	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
INNOVATION		
Institutional and Policy	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Technological	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Financial and Business Model	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
EXECUTION		
Capacity for Implementation	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Fiduciary	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Stakeholder	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Other	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Overall Risk Rating	< Select rating >	< Insert text >

The overall project sustainability will be assessed on a six-point scale:
• Highly Likely (HL): There is no risk to sustainability
• Likely (L): There is little or no risk to sustainability.
• Moderately Likely (ML): There are moderate risks to sustainability.
• Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks to sustainability.
• Unlikely (U): There are severe risks to sustainability.
• Highly Unlikely (HU): The project will not be sustained.
• Unable to Assess (UA): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.

Project M&E Ratings:
Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of:
• Design
• Implementation
Quality of M&E on these two dimensions will be assessed on a six-point scale:
• Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation exceeded expectations.
• Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation meets expectations.
• Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of

M&E design/implementation more or less meets expectations.
• Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.
• Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation substantially lower than expected.
• Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in M&E design/ implementation.
• Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design/implementation.

Implementation and Execution Rating:
Quality of implementation and of execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF Agencies that have direct access to GEF resources. Quality of Execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF Agencies and executed the funded activities on ground. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale.
• Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation exceeded expectations.
• Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/execution met expectations.
• Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation more or less met expectations.
• Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation somewhat lower than expected.
• Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation substantially lower than expected.
• Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation
• Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of environmental and social safeguard plans design/implementation

Environmental and Social Safeguards Rating:
The approved environmental and social safeguard plans will be rated according to the following scale.
• Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of implementation / execution exceeded expectations.
• Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of implementation / execution meets expectations.

• Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of implementation / execution more or less meets expectations.
• Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation / execution somewhat lower than expected.
• Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of implementation / execution substantially lower than expected.
• Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in quality of implementation / execution.
• Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation / execution

Annex 5. Systematic Document Review Tool

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
Project Design and Theory of Change	Is the project design and theory of change coherent and realistic?	Is the project design logical and understandable?			
		Let's take a look at the theory of change. -Are you familiar with the TOC? -Does it reflect what is actually happening in the project? -Are there any adjustments that should be made?			
	Does the project design need to be updated or adjusted?	Has anything changed since the project was designed that could affect its success?			
		Do you think anything should be modified to make the project work better?			
	Has the project design allowed for the effective integration of IPLC in the project?	What changes or improvements could be made to strengthen the participation of IPLC in the project?			
Project Communications	How effective and efficient have project communication strategies been?	Have you received information or updates on the project's progress? ➞ Through which channels have you received information about the project? ➞ How often do you receive updates or information about the project? ➞ Has the information provided by the project been clear and easy to understand? ➞ What would you improve in the way the project communicates its progress and results?			
	Are stakeholders satisfied with the project communication efforts?	Do you feel that the channels used to share project progress and information are suiTable and accesible for all the people involved?			
	What opportunities for improvement are there in the project communications?	In what ways do you think ICI publications, reports, communication materials or tools advance the global field of knowledge regarding IPLC-led conservation?			
Project Results	To what extent have project outputs been achieved?	Have the project objectives been met within the planned timeframe?			
		Have there been any delays or difficulties in delivering the project's products? If yes, what were they?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
		Do you feel that land tenure security in your community has improved due to the project's activities? (Yes/No)			
		What factors have contributed most to enhancing tenure security? (Open-ended)			
		What is considered an improved management practice and how is it measured?			
		Can you provide examples of sustainable practices being implemented? (Open-ended)			
	What factors influenced the achievement (or lack thereof) of the outputs?	Were there external factors (climate, economy, regulations, etc.) that facilitated or hindered the achievement of the products delivered so far?			
		How did the participation of the involved stakeholders (government, communities, organizations) affect the delivery of the products so far?			
	To what extent have project outcomes been achieved?	What has influenced if the outcomes of the project have been achieved or not?			
	Relevance: Were the project outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, country priorities, and mandates of the Agencies? Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?	Are the project results aligned with the GEF's focal areas and operational programs?			
		Do the project results address the country's national priorities?			
	Effectiveness: Were the project's actual outcomes commensurate with the expected outcomes?	Have gaps been identified between the results obtained and the initially stated objectives?			
		From your perspective, are the project results as expected?			
	Efficiency: Was the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?	Have the project resources been used efficiently in relation to the results obtained?			
		Is the project execution time adequate to achieve the proposed objectives?			
		Were there any unforeseen issues with the project budget or schedule? If yes, what were the causes?			
	What factors influenced the achievement (or lack thereof) of the outcomes?	Were there external conditions (economic, political, climatic, social) that affected the achievement of the results?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
		Was the availability and management of financial and human resources sufficient to achieve the objectives, and will they continue to be?			
		Has investment in livelihoods contributed to overcoming market barriers? (Yes/No)			
Progress to Impact	Is there evidence of long-term impacts?	Are there indicators or data that demonstrate the sustainability of the results achieved?			
	Have project activities contributed to systematic changes (i.e. behaviors, policies, governance, etc.)?	Have policies at the local, regional, or national level been developed or modified as a result of the project?			
		Has there been a change in behaviors as a result of project activities?			
		Have the project activities led to changes in governance ?			
		Do you believe your organization has the capacity to absorb and effectively use new resources and knowledge? (Yes/No) -What challenges, if any, exist in absorbing these resources? (Open-ended)			
		Have new opportunities been created for IPLC members to participate in decision-making processes? (Yes/No)			
		-What outcomes or impacts resulted from High-level events?			
	Are there any unintended consequences of the project?	Have there been any unintended positive impacts of the project?			
		Have there been any unintended negative impacts of the project?			
GEBs	Has the project resulted in measurable environmental benefits?	How effectively did the project incorporate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to address environmental challenges?			
Project Sustainability	Is the project taking action to ensure the impacts of the project continue after GEF funding?	What is the project doing to ensure impacts are sustained beyond the project end?			
		Are there alternative funding sources to sustain the project's actions in the long term?			
		Has the project been integrated into public policies or national programs to ensure its continuity?			
		What gaps or risks threaten the projects sustainability			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
	What gaps or risks may threaten the project's sustainability?	Are there political risks or changes in government policies that could compromise the project's sustainability?			
	Are there mechanisms in place to ensure sustainability?	Have clear strategies been developed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project?			
		Have agreements or partnerships been established with governments, NGOs, or the private sector to support the project's sustainability?			
		What mechanisms have been established to ensure financial sustainability beyond the project's duration?			
Project Risks and Risk Management	Are the risks initially identified still relevant? (If no, what needs to be updated)	Are the risks identified at the beginning of the project still the same today? yes no Do the risks need to be adjusted or redefined? If yes Which ones?			
	Have any risks become a reality, and if so, how has that impacted the project?	Have there been any specific risks that have affected or hindered the implementation of the project?			
	Have risks been effectively mitigated?	Do you think that the actions taken to minimize the effects of the risks encountered were effective?			
	What are the ongoing risks to the project (GEF Risk Appetite)	Are the project risks, which are still ongoing, financial, environmental, social, political or institutional, and how do you plan to address them?			
	Have there been negative impacts on IPLC communities due to unanticipated risks?	Have there been any negative effects on IPLC communities due to unforeseen risks?			
Monitoring and Evaluation	Was the M&E plan designed well?	Were appropriate indicators defined to measure the project's progress and results?			
		Were sufficient resources (financial, technical, and human) allocated for the implementation of the M&E plan?			
	a. Was the M&E plan at the point of CEO Endorsement practical and sufficient?	Was the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan well-structured and easy to apply in practice?			
		What improvements could have been made to the M&E plan to make it more practical and sufficient?			
	b. Did it include baseline data?	Did the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan include a baseline with reference data?			
		Was the reference data sufficient to effectively measure the project's progress?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
	c. Did it: specify clear targets and appropriate (SMART) indicators to track	Did the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan define clear and well-structured objectives?			
		Were the indicators established in the plan SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)?			
		Were appropriate indicators included to assess the project's environmental, gender, and socio-economic outcomes?			
	Is the M&E system implemented according to the plan?	Were the monitoring activities carried out within the timeframes established in the M&E plan?			
		Were there any modifications to the M&E system during the project's execution? If so, why were they necessary?			
	Was information on specified indicators and relevant GEF focal area tracking tools gathered in a systematic manner?	Was a regular and structured process followed to collect data for the GEF focal area specific indicators? If yes Was the information collected documented and analyzed in a way that allowed for effective assessment of project progress?			
	Whether appropriate methodological approaches have been used to analyze data?	Were the methodologies used for data analysis appropriate for the project objectives?			
	Is the M&E system effectively tracking indicators and project progress?	Were M&E results shared with key stakeholders to improve implementation?			
		Are the indicators selected in the M&E plan accurate in the expected changes and outcomes of the project?			
		Are the selected indicators effectively measuring project progress?			
		Does the project have adequate M&E capacity			
	Whether the project has sufficient FTEs, skills and experience for the work?	Do you feel that the M&E team has the necessary skills and experience to meet the established objectives?			
	Whether the roles and responsibilities with regards to reporting are well defined and adequately shared?	Do you feel that reporting responsibilities have been distributed equitably and efficiently among the M&E team members?			
	Whether each project has secured MEL capacity as initially defined?	Does the project or subproject have the necessary resources and staff to carry out the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activities as planned?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
	Whether the project has sufficient resources M&E and reporting, taking into account specificities of working with local communities and indigenous leaders (translation, communication channels, etc.)?	Have sufficient resources been allocated for project monitoring, evaluation and reporting, ensuring translation and the use of communication channels appropriate to the needs of IPCLs?			
Project Governance and Management	Are project governance mechanisms effective for decision making and project management?	Have the guidelines of the ICI GSC's Rules of Procedure been complied with?			
		Are the roles and responsibilities within the project team and among key stakeholders well defined?			
		Is the coordination and decision-making process inclusive and does it facilitate the participation of all relevant stakeholders?			
		What improvements could be implemented to strengthen the effectiveness of the project's management and leadership processes?			
Implementation and Execution	Have any areas been identified where implementation has been more effective than others? Why?	Have any areas been identified where implementation has been more effective than others? Why?			
	What have been the biggest challenges in executing the project in terms of logistics, human resources, and financing?	Have there been problems with access to the intervention areas or with the availability of equipment and supplies?			
		Have the allocated funds been sufficient and received on time to ensure efficient project implementation?			
		Have there been any administrative or regulatory delays that have affected the flow of financial or human resources?			
Environmental and Social Safeguards	Has the project successfully implemented the ESS plan?	Has the project implemented the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) plan? If yes Have the safeguards implemented been effective in preventing negative impacts on IPLC communities?			
		Have specific trainings on ESS been conducted for the IPLC communities involved?			
	Does the project has a grievance mechanism that is known, understood, and accesible for all the participants?	Are all those involved in the project aware of the grievance mechanism and do they know the procedure for filing a grievance?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
Stakeholer Engagement	Were IPs and LCs meaningfully engaged throughout planning and execution?	Have the PI and LC communities played a key role in the implementation of project activities?			
		Were PIs and LCs included in the definition of project objectives, strategies and activities?			
		How effectively did the project assess local needs and prevent adverse impacts on vulnerable communities?			
	Has the private sector been effectively engaged in the project?	What organizations or private sector entities have been involved in the project?			
	Have governments been effectively engaged in the project?	Are there government commitments to sustain project activities after GEF funding ends?			
	Are stakeholders satisfied with the level and mechanisms of engagement used by the project?	To what extent were youth involved in the design phase of each ICI subproject?			
		What mechanisms were used to ensure meaningful participation of both male and female youth in project design?			
Gender	Did the project face any challenges to implementing the GMP as initially proposed? How were the challenges overcome?	Do you think that the project has succeeded in involving women and men in an equitable manner?			
		What has been your organization's relationship with the indigenous women's organizations allied to comply with your GMP? -Are these women's organizations part of the decision-making processes?			
		Were adjustments made to the project to enhance women's participation? Yes/No. What changes were implemented to reach the gender-sensitive goals and what were the reasons for modifying the gender focus of the project?			
	Were there any key lessons learned and/or good practices identified in the project's efforts to implement gender sensitive measures?	What key lessons were learned from the project's efforts to implement gender-sensitive measures?			
		What good practices were identified in promoting gender equality throughout the project?			
	To what extent did the project enhanced women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes?	How do women participants perceive their influence in decision-making processes compared to before the project?			
Financial management and Co-financing	Is the project on track for financial execution?	How much of the total allocated budget has been spent to date and what percentage does it represent of the planned total?			

Evaluation Topics	Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions	Answer to sub-question	Documents Reviewed	Notes from documents
	Have financial resources been used effectively and responsibly?	What have been the main challenges in the financial implementation of the project?			
	Has the planned co-finanzing been mobilized?	Has the committed co-financing been mobilized? If not, what factors have influenced it?			
Knowledge Management, Collaboration and Learning	Does the project have processes in place for data and knowledge management?	Is the data and knowledge generated by the project available to key stakeholders?			
		Are there platforms or tools for the dissemination of knowledge generated in the project?			
	Are there processes to promote learning?	Do IPLC communities have access to project information in their languages and in accessible formats?			
		How has the traditional knowledge of IPLC communities been integrated into project decision-making?			
	How has the project promoted and encouraged collaboration?	Has the project been successful at promoting new collaborations?			
Lessons Learned	What other lessons have been learned?	Has your organization established new multiregional partnerships as a result of participating in the ICI initiative? -What has been the focus of these partnerships?			
		Since participating in the ICI Community of Practice, do you feel your organization has experienced greater collaboration with other IPLC organizations? -If yes, in what areas has collaboration increased?			

Annex 6: Field Observations Guide

This field observation guide is part of the MTR for the ICI project. The MTR aims to promote accountability, assess progress, identify design issues, and gather lessons and recommendations to enhance the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. It will also provide feedback to the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) to identify recurring issues across the GEF portfolio and support data aggregation and analysis following the GEF M&E Policy.
This particular tool is a field observation that EarthEmpower will hold within the territories of Tanzania with the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) and Peru with Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD). We will also collect what people tell us, and as an intuitive tool, we will adapt to get as much information as possible. The guide covers a wide range of aspects, including:

- Examining the coherence, realism, and validity of the project's design and Theory of Change.
- Assessing the achievement of outputs and outcomes, challenges faced, factors influencing success, and any unintended consequences in the implementation.
- Evaluating the project's efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- Identifying, mitigating risks, and evaluating the project's sustainability and potential threats.
- Assessing the implementation of the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) plan and grievance mechanisms.
- Evaluating the involvement of the private sector, government, and other stakeholders, and addressing their feedback.
- Reviewing the integration of gender considerations, challenges faced, and lessons learned.
- Examining processes for data dissemination, knowledge sharing, and lessons learned.

The objective of the field observation is to get a general view of what has been done in the areas that we will be visiting. We could briefly tour the areas and places where activities are being held. Those questions can be answered during the visit to the areas when we introduce ourselves to the leaders of the communities or the technicians in the territories. We will adapt to the circumstances.

The questions to answer during the field trip are the following:

Community Needs and Participation

- Does the project design meet the needs of the community? Was it relevant to their needs?

- What changes or improvements could strengthen the participation of IPLC in the project?
- Do IPLC communities feel that their views have been considered in project implementation?
- How effectively did the project assess local needs and prevent adverse impacts on vulnerable communities?

Challenges and Barriers

- What challenges and barriers did you all (IPLC) face when integrating into the project, and how was the design process?
- What challenges have been faced in the process of creating these protected areas?
- What have been the main challenges in the restoration process?
- What challenges remain in strengthening the organizational capacity of the IPLC?
- Were there external conditions (economic, political, climatic, social) that affected the achievement of the results?

Governance and Land Tenure

- How is the governance of the land in your country and community?
- Do you feel that land tenure security in your community has improved due to the project's activities?
- What factors have contributed most to enhancing tenure security?
- Have the project activities led to changes in governance, leadership, and participation in national or local government decisions?

Sustainable Practices and Environmental Impact

- Can you provide examples of sustainable practices being implemented?
- What is considered an improved management practice, and how is it measured?
- What impacts have been observed on productivity, biodiversity, and local communities due to sustainable management?
- How effectively did the project incorporate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to address environmental challenges?
- Do environmental or climatic conditions threaten the achievements of the project?

Project Results and Long-term Impact

- From your perspective, are the project results as expected? Do you think the community agrees?
- What are the main benefits generated by the project that, from your perspective, should be maintained in the long term?
- What could threaten the continuity of these benefits after the project's completion?

- Have lasting changes been observed in communities or ecosystems due to the project?
- Has there been a change in behaviors as a result of project activities?
- Has any positive or negative impact on IPLC communities that was not initially expected?

Financial and Institutional Support

- Have the allocated funds been sufficient and received on time to ensure efficient project implementation? (Question to be asked to leaders or someone in technician areas)
- What role will local institutions and communities play in managing the project's benefits once completed?
- Has investment in livelihoods contributed to overcoming market barriers?
- What types of support have been most helpful in accessing markets?

Gender and Inclusion

- Do you see gender equality and women’s empowerment as an integral part of inclusive conservation? (Question: observe where women are in the community and what activities are being done by groups and gender: children, youth, adults, elders)
- Were there any unexpected results related to gender equity?

Risks and Sustainability

- Are there political risks or changes in government policies that could compromise the project's sustainability.

Annex 7: Summary of Visits

Tanzania				Chile			
Date	**Activity**	**Location**	**Geographic coordinates**	**Date**	**Activity**	**Location**	**Geographic coordinates**
April 14	UCRT intro and team interviews	Arusha	3.3554 S, 36.6079 E	May 5	FVTA MAWIZA intro and team interviews	Villarrica, Playa Pucará	39.28448° S, 72.22224° O
April 15	Formal presentation to district leaders and brief interview with district land and livestock officials	Longido District Office	2.7476° S, 36.7041° E	May 6	Formal presentation to subproject implementers, individual and group interviews	Curarrehue	39.35880°S, 71.58646° O
	Visit to rangeland and fattening group, group interview	Gelai Lumbwa	2.56616°S, 36.21508°E		Field visit to "Humedal Urbano Kolo-Kolo"	Curarrehue	39.36185° S, 71.58183° O
April 16	Visit to rangeland and fattening group, WRLF interview and mixed group interview	Loondolwo	2.76600°S, 36.02463°E		Field visit to "Parque Nacional Villarrica, Sector Puesto"	Curarrehue - Puesco	39.55200° S, 71.56400° O
April 17	Visit to District Sub-office for formal presentation	Mererani	3.5496°S, 36.9977°E	May 7	Formal presentation to subproject implementer, individual and group interviews	Panguipulli	39.641° S, 72.332° O

	Mixed group interview, separate interviews with men and women's groups	Lengasiti	3.5798°S, 37.1537°E
April 18	Group interview with government officials	Korongo	
	Mixed group interview	Lemkuna	3.8806 °S, 37.0266°E

Field visit to "Red de viveros de FVTA MAWIZA"	Coihueco, Panguipulli	39.656° S, 72.204° O

Annex 8: Subproject Implementation Status[18]

Tanzania Subproject: Scaling Community Natural Resource Management for Improved Livelihoods in Northern Tanzania

[18] High level of progress: Objectives were exceeded, with visible and sustainable results.
Significant progress: Most planned goals were achieved with strong implementation.
Intermediate stage of implementation: The component is at a mid-stage; progress has been made, but further consolidation is needed.
Moderate progress: Implementation has begun with some initial achievements, but results are still emerging.
Partial progress: Limited progress; few activities have started and no clear results are evident.
Behind schedule: The component is delayed; key activities have not been initiated.

Component 1: Legally securing communal village lands in the three key biodiverse landscapes. This component shows a ***high level of progress.*** The project successfully secured all 12 Communal Land Certificates (CVLs) across the three target landscapes, resolving boundary disputes and validating processes through community assemblies. The Project Steering Committee was also established, held its first meeting, set up the grievance mechanism, and agreed on a schedule of biannual meetings. The main goals of this component were achieved.

Component 2: **Sustainably managing communal village lands and natural resources in three key biodiverse landscapes**. This component demonstrates ***significant progress***, even surpassing some established targets. Eight villages received training in holistic rangeland management, and the project implemented 81 grazing blocks covering a total of 360,857 hectares—exceeding the target of 270,000 hectares. These actions aim to restore the ecosystem through regenerative practices and rotational grazing. However, challenges remain in reviving traditional cultural practices that support landscape health.

Component 3: Sustainably generating resource-based benefits for Indigenous communities from their communal village lands, thus supporting long-term conservation outcomes. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***, with several activities underway. The development of the General Management Plan (GMP) for Makame WMA has advanced, completing the initial technical phases. The project also formed five community groups for livestock fattening, providing seed capital and technical training. Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs) received additional support, but the expected economic benefits still require further consolidation.

Thailand Subproject: Enhancement of Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Practices on Sustainable Natural Resources Use and Biodiversity Management (EIPRP-SNRBM)

Component 1: Recovering and strengthening Indigenous knowledge, traditional livelihood practices, and institutions on land use to promote sustainable natural resource and biodiversity management of Indigenous communities. This component is ***behind schedule*** in its implementation. Although much of the traditional knowledge from 11 sub-watersheds has been collected and workshops have been held with communities and women, the publication of the documentation remains incomplete, and several key activities are still pending. Educational initiatives with schools, youth cultural camps, ceremonies, and teaching materials are mostly in preparation or rescheduled for the first quarter of 2025. Adverse weather conditions and delays in data systematization have affected overall progress.

Component 2: Advocate for the recognition of Indigenous people's ecological knowledge and customary land rights. This component shows ***partial progress***, with uneven implementation among partners. The Indigenous Geospatial Information Center was successfully established and training sessions were delivered. However, some community maps have not yet been verified, and other communities delayed their engagement. The Special Cultural Zones have not been officially declared, and the drafting of local regulations has yet to begin. Audiovisual materials were produced and disseminated, but several key actions have been postponed to the next quarter.

Component 3: Strengthen collaboration among involved stakeholders including studying and applying indigenous knowledge/scientific knowledge for the mitigation and adaption to climate change. This component shows ***moderate progress***. Some vulnerability assessments and adaptation plans were completed in selected communities, but several partner organizations have not yet started their activities. Progress was made in wildfire prevention (firebreaks in 58 communities), construction of 51

retention dikes, and reforestation efforts covering 32 hectares. However, many community plans, training sessions, and coordination with local governments are still pending. A surge in activity is expected during the first quarter of 2025.

Perú Subproject: Consolidation of Territories of Life and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Madre de Dios River Basin (Amazon, Peru)

Component 1: VII FENAMAD Indigenous Women's Meeting, held on September 9-10, 2024, with the main objective of validating the Indigenous Women's Agenda for the next three years (2025-2027). This component shows ***moderate progress***. The team made headway in planning the Coordination Committee and preparing key documentation. The communications area was strengthened through the production of an annual video and regular publications. Significant gender-related activities were carried out, including the dissemination of the Indigenous Women's Agenda in six communities. However, several activities—such as the committee meeting and internal training sessions—are scheduled for the next quarter, preventing the component from reaching a more consolidated stage.

Component 2: Incorporation and induction of Indigenous facilitators from the Ese Eja and Yine Nations to promote the process of building these Nations' Life Plans. This component shows ***significant progress***. Participatory processes were conducted to develop Life Plans with the Ese Eja and Yine nations, along with their annual assemblies. The team advanced in participatory mapping of territories, knowledge exchanges with Indigenous networks, and the strengthening of cultural identity through document archives, seasonal calendars, and youth leadership events. The team also engaged in international conservation forums, strengthening connections with networks such as TICCA and IUCN.

Component 3: Follow-up on PIACI emergency cases reported during the quarter, especially in the Piedras River basin and, additionally, in the Alto Madre de Dios/Manu River basin. This component shows ***partial progress***. The team responded to PIACI emergencies through advocacy and communication efforts and expanded the team by hiring a specialist. However, strategic activities—such as strengthening the community monitoring system and creating multi-community watchdog groups—were not implemented and were postponed, limiting the overall progress of the component.

Component 4: Working meetings with Eca Amarakaeri and AFIMAD to develop terms of reference for the FENAMAD ICI project subproject consultancies to strengthen the technical support of both institutions. This component shows ***significant progress***. The Indigenous Monitors Training Program on mercury contamination was successfully implemented, including training sessions, environmental monitoring, and women-focused workshops. The team also made progress in the restoration of degraded areas, and activities were well integrated with other project components. Although the update of the Climate Action Strategy remains pending, the actions carried out during the quarter reflect solid and consistent implementation.

Nepal Subproject: SAINO - Revitalizing Nature-Culture Relationship and Recollection of Indigenous Peoples in the Annapurna Area of Nepal

Component 1: Awareness raising and capacity building on rights-based advocacy. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team completed eight training workshops before the reporting period, exceeding the initial target, with participation from 391 people (58% women). They also successfully registered the project, hired the core team, secured agreements with community radios, and signed the

contract with the auditor. Communication and awareness-raising activities are underway, with both the technical and logistical teams fully established.

Component 2: Promotion of sustainable and inclusive natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. This component shows ***partial progress***. The team completed CBMIS inventories in four communities and exceeded participation targets in advocacy events. However, core activities such as the distribution of improved stoves and the workshops to share inventory results were postponed to 2025.

Component 3: Indigenous knowledge-based income-generating initiatives to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' lifeways and economic sustainability and to reduce pressure on nature. This component is ***behind schedule*.** The team was unable to make progress on key planned activities, including the mapping of productive opportunities and vocational training. Support was provided to only one individual beneficiary, while all other actions were rescheduled for the following year.

Component 4: Documentation and dissemination of knowledge and practices of IPs related to Indigenous culture-nature linkages. This component shows ***moderate progress***. The team aired six additional radio episodes and completed the filming of a documentary on the Sakela festival, which is currently in the editing phase. However, the planned case study and part of the technical documentation for the CBMIS remain pending.

Kenya Subproject: Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT)

Component 1: Documenting Presence. This component shows ***moderate progress***. While most key activities—such as the validation of biocultural maps and calendars—were completed in previous quarters, this period focused solely on the continued production of the documentary and related materials (photo essay and educational videos), reaching five additional communities. Although the component remains active, efforts centered on a single output, indicating steady but limited progress for the quarter.

Component 2: Declaration and Legal Empowerment. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team carried out multiple preparatory activities for the development of Biocultural Protocols (BCPs), including staff training, data analysis, visualization workshops, and meetings with eight ethnic groups involving over 700 participants. Planning also advanced for land registration; however, no direct implementation took place due to the political sensitivity of territorial boundaries. A solid foundation is being built, but final outputs have not yet been produced.

Component 3: Management Plans. This component is ***behind schedule***. No activities were reported during the quarter. All actions related to the development of community management plans are scheduled for future quarters, so there was no progress during this phase.

Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation. This component is also **behind schedule**. No activities were reported this quarter related to the development of community monitoring systems or the production of community-validated annual reports. Implementation is planned for later stages of the project.

Component 5: Ongoing self-strengthening, communication, and advocacy. This component shows ***partial progress***. While no specific outputs under this component were directly implemented, the team carried out relevant complementary actions such as the annual stakeholder forum (ICI-ASF 2024) and exchange visits with communities that have not yet given consent.

Guatemala - Panamá Subproject: Paq'uch: Gestión Biocultural de Territorios Indígenas Ru K'ux Abya Yala

Component 1: Strengthening Indigenous Governance and Rights. This component shows a ***high level of progress***. The team advanced in training community leaders, delivering workshops on customary law, leadership, and climate change, and constructing infrastructure for Indigenous training centers. Planning meetings with traditional organizations and cultural activities have also strengthened governance structures. Although some activities—such as tourism and agroforestry initiatives—were rescheduled due to budget adjustments, the technical and cultural execution has been strong and widely participatory.

Component 2: Improving the Management of Natural and Cultural Resources. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. Concrete progress includes the reforestation of 22 hectares with native species, distribution of plants and seeds, training events, and a feasibility analysis for a Marine Protected Area in the Guna Yala region. However, key activities such as field visits and assessments of degraded areas were postponed due to logistical and weather-related constraints, limiting the overall scope achieved during this phase.

Component 3: Promote Investments in the Indigenous Green Economy. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team delivered training sessions on business management, crop handling, and tourism, and strengthened the Caribbean Maya tourism network. Conservation actions, such as turtle nurseries, and initiatives for Indigenous women's economic empowerment were also implemented. Despite some delays in administrative and investment processes, the range of completed and ongoing activities reflects advanced implementation in this area.

Democratic Republic of Congo Subproject: Promoting Equity and The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and local Communities in Biodiversity Conservation in The Democratic Republic of The Congo.

Component 1: Identify and document new ICCAs in 3 major bio-cultural landscapes in the DRC. This component shows ***significant progress***, with substantial activities carried out this quarter across five ICCA sites within the three biocultural landscapes. The team validated maps in Mpembe, identified and conducted scoping visits in Kirundu and Lweghe, and advanced mapping efforts in Losomba and Bolonga, though the latter two still require validation. Additionally, women's committees were formed, livelihood needs were identified, and traditional knowledge and governance systems were documented in three sites. Despite logistical challenges such as lack of electricity and difficult access to territories, the component continues to move steadily and strategically toward its goals.

Component 2: Promoting legal recognition of ICCAs in the DRC. This component is ***behind schedule***, as key planned activities—such as forming the technical and legal working group and conducting advocacy meetings with government stakeholders—have not yet begun. Although these actions are included in the project's work plan, no tangible progress was made during the quarter, clearly placing the component behind the established timeline.

Component 3: Strengthening traditional IPLC governance and management systems in ICCAs in the 3 biocultural landscapes. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team

collected information on traditional governance elements and cultural practices in some of the priority sites, laying the groundwork for future activities. However, strategic actions—such as revitalization forums and intergenerational dialogues—have not yet been implemented, indicating that the component remains in a preparatory phase with limited practical progress.

Component 4: Improving the socio-economic livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities in the 3 bio-cultural landscapes. This component shows ***moderate progress***, evidenced by the formation of three women's groups in key sites and the participatory identification of priority economic activities. However, tangible actions—such as grant disbursements and planned training sessions—have not yet been implemented. While progress in community organization and diagnostics is promising, the operational execution of livelihood improvements is still in its early stages.

Fiji and the Cook Islands Subproject: Strengthening traditional governance for effective management of natural resources and increased resilience to climate change in Fiji and Cook Islands

Component 1: Enhanced IPLC governance of natural resources. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team strengthened Indigenous governance structures in Fiji and the Cook Islands through training sessions, formal agreements, and continued development of community Trusts.

Component 2: Increased traditional knowledge and skills for natural resources management. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team made progress in planning and reaching agreements with key stakeholders for educational and citizen science programs, although concrete implementation has not yet begun.

Component 3: Sustainable Livelihoods. This component shows ***moderate progress***. In Fiji, the team conducted surveys that will inform productive activities. In the Cook Islands, the component remains in the diagnostic and initial planning phase.

Component 4: Ocean Protection and Management. This component is ***behind schedule***. No field activities took place during the quarter; the work remains in the discussion and preliminary design phase.

Component 5: Monitoring & Evaluation Systems. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team hired the M&E manager and developed tools and templates to track the project's results framework.

Argentina Subproject: Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory, Argentina

Component 1: Territorial Analysis and Planning to Strengthen the Management and Governance of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team completed biocultural mapping workshops in two of the three zonal councils and made progress in developing maps with a gender and age perspective. However, key maps still need to be finalized and printed, community presentations held, and efforts on signage and dissemination advanced. These pending tasks limit full achievement of the component's objectives.

Component 2: Strengthening Kvme Felen (Well-Being). This component shows ***moderate progress***. Several executive plans are being actively implemented, with progress in productive projects involving women, partial installation of Starlink antennas, and diagnostics on waste management. However, other

goals—such as the construction of docks, development of a tourist guide, handicraft stands, and livestock training—remain delayed or have not yet started.

Component 3: National and International Advocacy for Culturally Appropriate Recognition and Support for the Protection of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team held meetings with government institutions, produced several podcasts and outreach materials, and advanced legislative proposals and agreements with scientific organizations. Additionally, they completed the official document for CONADIBIO, strengthening the initiative's visibility at national and international levels.

Component 4: Recovery and Exchange of Mapuche Knowledge. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team conducted training workshops, hosted a knowledge exchange on lawen (traditional medicine), and held meetings to design the School of Knowledge. However, key activities such as the koneltun (knowledge-sharing event), production of graphic materials, and infrastructure improvements for training centers are delayed or not yet underway.

Component 5: Strengthening Mapuche Traditional Authorities and Territorial Leaders for Improved Governance, Territorial Management, and the Exercise of Rights. This component is also at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team carried out legal workshops, participated in international events, reviewed gender protocols, and convened Gender Council meetings. However, political training workshops, community gender agreements, dissemination of preventive materials, and activation of the emergency fund are still pending.

Chile Subproject: Strengthening the protection and governance of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory

Component 1: Territorial Planning. This component is at an ***intermediate stage of implementation***. The team completed cultural mapping in several lof of Kurarewe and Panguipulli (4 out of 6 in Kurarewe) and began delivering the results to communities. The Futa Mawiza Life Plan is currently under development. A governance regulation was drafted for the Villarrica National Park Council (Puesco sector), while the regulation for Pucura is under review. As planned, the start of the Biocultural Protocol has been postponed to Q3 of Year 2.

Component 2: Strengthening Kume Mongen. This component shows ***moderate progress***. The team completed two pilot projects and launched two new initiatives in Panguipulli focused on gardens and nurseries. In Kurarewe, activities were delayed due to prioritization of governance agreements. These actions are expected to be completed next quarter. The investment fund was previously designed and will be adjusted based on these experiences in Q2FY25.

Component 3: Kimeluwün (School of Knowledge). This component shows ***significant progress***. The team co-designed two educational programs: Guardianes del Itxofil Mogen and Mapuche Mogen. They conducted four pilot workshops (three for Mapuche Mogen and one on traditional food). Educational materials were also developed, and new programs are scheduled to begin next quarter.

Component 4: Policy Advocacy. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team organized the 1st International Congress on Indigenous Conservation Territories, with participation from authorities and allied networks. They prioritized legal frameworks for advocacy and established alliances with networks

such as TICCA and Mujeres por la Defensa del Mar. A territorial governance proposal was developed for Villarrica National Park – Puesco Sector.

Component 5: Communication. This component shows ***significant progress***. The team finalized the communication strategy and visual identity design. They launched social media content, produced audiovisual materials, newsletters, and press coverage for the Congress, and began developing the official website.