

# Catalytic Impact of Ecosystem-based Adaptation Projects of the International Climate Initiative

Strategic Impact Evaluation

Executive Summary



[info@arepo-consult.com](mailto:info@arepo-consult.com)  
[www.arepo-consult.com](http://www.arepo-consult.com)

August 31, 2021

## Executive Summary

Since 2008, the International Climate Initiative of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety has been financing climate and biodiversity projects in developing and emerging as well as in transition countries. This strategic evaluation of the catalytic impact of such projects in the area of ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change contributes to the three objectives of the evaluation system of the International Climate Initiative: Learning, accountability and steering. The evaluation analyzes “whether and how International Climate Initiative-funded projects on ecosystem-based adaptation play a catalytic role either at the national level of the partner countries and/or at the international level.” It provides insights into the underlying causal mechanisms, identifies their relative importance, and provides evidence-based lessons learned and recommendations for how the Ministry’s funding practice can be made even more impactful.

This theory-based mixed methods evaluation employs various synthesis techniques, process tracing, portfolio analysis and Qualitative Comparative Analysis for contribution analysis and understanding the strength of evidence. The evidence base consists of project reports from 33 International Climate Initiative ecosystem-based adaptation projects, all of which started between 2008 and 2017. They were complemented by interviews, three country case studies (Vietnam, Peru and Grenada), and an in-depth study of a global platform project.

### Definition of catalytic impact

Catalytic impact, for the purposes of this study is provided through self-sustaining and continuous or increasing activities utilizing ecosystem-based adaptation practices, that take place as a consequence of an intervention but not in its (temporal or geographic) realm. A project typically can provide “catalytic results” which serve as preconditions for replication of ecosystem-based adaptation practices, and this replication produces catalytic impact. Most projects work towards such catalytic results. Typically, the catalytic impact itself will only be observable after the termination of the project.

The evaluation questions focused on how catalytic impact can be evoked. They suggested two potential pathways to catalytic impact: A) The placement of the concept of ecosystem-based adaptation at the negotiation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements could lead to catalytic impact (Negotiation Pathway). B) Catalytic impact could be triggered by national multiplier effects (Multiplier Pathway). The evaluation was able to formulate very specific findings and provide a validated theory of change for both pathways. For this, various methods and specifically the Qualitative Comparative Analysis provided valuable insights.

### Findings regarding the Negotiation Pathway

For the Negotiation Pathway, evidence shows that International Climate Initiative projects were effective at introducing the concept of ecosystem-based adaptation into the negotiation

space. An outstanding contribution was facilitated through the participation of some International Climate Initiative ecosystem-based adaptation projects in the drafting of the Convention on Biological Diversity Voluntary Guidelines. This set of guidelines was the potentially catalytic outcome closest to formal Convention guidance that could be traced back to the International Climate Initiative projects. It did not lead to the inclusion of ecosystem-based adaptation into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans but is expected to do so in the future. In the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, no guidance around ecosystem-based adaptation has been formulated yet.

Yet, the evaluation shows that formal convention guidance was not necessary for the negotiation path to trigger more ecosystem-based adaptation action. International Climate Initiative projects contributed to discussions on ecosystem-based adaptation in working groups and Subsidiary Bodies in both Conventions, including the Nairobi Work Programme or United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice. Thus, the negotiation meetings served as useful platforms to inform decision makers about benefits and technical aspects of the ecosystem-based adaptation approaches which triggered some replication.

Ecosystem-based adaptation features comparatively often in National Adaptation Plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. The analysis shows that promoting the concept at the international level and linking this to national governments and negotiators have contributed to the fact that the ecosystem-based adaptation concept remains on the national and international political agenda and is perceived as a meaningful option for action.

Bringing the practical implementation experience “from the ground” to the international negotiations was instrumental for that. National implementation experiences were a necessary ingredient for catalytic impact via the Negotiation Pathway.

### **Findings regarding the Multiplier Pathway**

All projects were working on awareness raising, capacity building and policy advice at various intensities, trying to exploit the Multiplier Pathway and lead to local replication without further project support. Especially sensitization of and awareness raising among stakeholders that play a role in the implementation of the ecosystem-based adaptation concept on the ground were important success factors.

Several projects were able to trigger local replication, through institutionalization or transfer of knowledge to other geographies within the same countries. Of particular significance for promoting and scaling up the ecosystem-based adaptation concept were local champions, with close links to other stakeholders. They were often able to bridge between sectors or governance levels. Many projects demonstrated co-benefits, like higher economic productivity. These co-benefits played a role in raising the interests of local politicians and populations in the concept. However, the Qualitative Comparative Analysis unexpectedly did not demonstrate that co-benefits led to catalytic impact. This implies a necessity to put more

emphasis on identifying and promoting co-benefits of ecosystem-based adaptation in future projects, which might lead to even higher uptake.

Some project outcomes like policies or continued funding streams are extremely likely to lead to the continued implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation measures. The analysis in the country case studies highlights that there is significant potential for leveraging such financial and other support for ecosystem-based adaptation by governments, but also national and international private sector stakeholders. Several projects had such outcomes. In addition, a few projects have tried to mainstream ecosystem-based adaptation into other government sectors like agriculture. Where they did this, it was often shown to be a catalytic strategy.

### **Recommendations on the Negotiation Pathway**

- The Negotiation Pathway should be recalibrated with respect to the relevance of the actual negotiation of legal text versus the utilization of the international gatherings as platforms for information exchange. The latter has been the more important avenue towards catalytic impact so far.
- To maximize the impact of the Negotiation Pathway, International Climate Initiative projects should keep providing technical inputs to the Conventions – in particular to the Subsidiary Bodies and their working groups.
- Projects should put less focus on National Communications and more focus on implementing ecosystem-based adaptation approaches that are already embedded in Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.
- All nine United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change groups of constituencies should be systematically addressed.
- Beyond the negotiations, new tools can be used, for example webinars on accessing climate finance, systematic support to Operational Focal Points for the development of country allocation plans for Global Environment Facility and Adaptation Fund or technical aspects of the various approaches, to sustain the discussion between the Convention meetings.

### **Recommendations – leverage the Multiplier Pathway in a programmatic way**

For the Multiplier Pathway, funders should acknowledge that it takes considerable time to implement an approach like ecosystem-based adaptation across a country. The following recommendations support this thought:

- Fund programmes of different projects in one country over a long period of time (e.g., a decade) that build on each other systematically and sequentially.

- These programmes should apply a multi-level and multi-pronged approach on the national, subnational, and local level in parallel, combining various strategies, such as policy advice, capacity building and financing.
- To reduce risk to impact and continuity, projects or programs (i.e., implementing organizations) should identify and work with different ecosystems in the country, for which ecosystem-based adaptation might be relevant, and a range of different ecosystem-based adaptation opportunities/measures.
- Projects should integrate ecosystem-based adaptation approaches systematically into different sectors, including agricultural, natural resource management, infrastructure, economic cooperation to mainstream the approach into productive and commercial sectors.
- Projects and funders should keep in mind the link from the local implementation to the global platform projects and South-South exchanges.

### Recommendations for Implementing Organizations

The evaluation shows that combining practical implementation and international information exchange supports catalytic impact. Based on these results, future projects should continue to support and provide platforms for cross-project learning activities, and to support broad awareness raising activities. Furthermore, future projects should focus more on developing long-term funding mechanisms of ecosystem-based adaptation measures.

Projects should systematically integrate successful micro-strategies into new programming, for example:

- institutionalization (e.g., through regional and/or transnational institutions),
- support of proposal development and access to funding (e.g., Green Climate Fund project), and
- consideration of building up a supply chain for sustainable products from ecosystem-based adaptation projects (a case study example: shrimp fisheries in Vietnam).

A highly successful micro-strategy was the transfer to other sectors. This should be integrated systematically in most future projects.

### Recommendations for future funding – overall

While project design is highly context specific, it is possible to derive recommendations for project design that maximizes the likelihood for catalytic impact – these can be considered as requirements during project approval:

- Important **design details** for project success include: identify the relevant (local) languages for the communication of ecosystem-based adaptation content; connect to the global communities of practice; analyze what might counteract the wider adoption

of ecosystem-based adaptation with a classical barrier analysis. In the stakeholder analysis, national as well as subnational decision makers need to be identified. A focus on institutions rather than individuals helps mitigate political changes.

- **Include the private sector**, for example food producers and farmers, commercial and Impact Investors, and other financiers, with corresponding offerings.
- **Expand the community of implementers** – a broader base of implementing organizations, including large multilateral organizations, is likely to reach a broader audience and broader adoption.
- Projects should be able to **react quickly to current issues** that can catch the attention of relevant audiences and place ecosystem-based adaptation as a possible solution.
- **It is recommended to start large projects that address specific sectors, like farmers, fishers, etc. in the current modality of the thematic call**, potentially including corresponding international organizations, like the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations or the World Health Organization.