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# **Mid-term Evaluation of IKI project “Scaling-up Ecosystem based Adaptation (EbA) Measures in Rural Latin America”**

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Evaluation Report – Executive Summary

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## Executive summary

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### Introduction

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The project Scaling-up Ecosystem based Adaptation Measures in rural Latin America (EbA LAC) is among the first joint projects of the International Climate Initiative (IKI), that was approved and was therefore also among the first projects, to reach the stage for a Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) which Arepo conducted between July and November 2023.

The project consortium is led by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) are the two implementation partners. The project has three country components – Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Guatemala – and a knowledge exchange component with Argentina, Colombia, and El Salvador.

At the time of project planning, all three consortium partners already had experience in the implementation of IKI-EbA projects in Latin America and the project countries.

The three political partner institutions are the *Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía* (MINAE) with the *Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación* (SINAC) in Costa Rica, the *Ministerio de Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica* (MAATE) in Ecuador and the *Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (MARN) in Guatemala. The project has a duration of five years, from 11/2020 until 12/2025, with a budget of EUR 19,444,300. It is financed by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). The IKI Office at Zukunft-Umwelt-Gesellschaft (ZUG) gGmbH supports the BMUV in implementing this project.

The project targets the local, national, and regional levels. The aim is to strengthen the vulnerable rural population in the intervention regions. Their ecosystems are to become more resilient to the adverse effects of climate change in cooperation with actors from the public, private and civil sectors. They should benefit from the project economically, socially and ecologically through project measures in the so-called up-scaling and consolidation areas within the intervention areas identified in each country.

The project should contribute to an increased climate resilience of national priority ecosystems, with different focus being laid in the project proposal on dry and humid forests and agroforestry systems in Ecuador, highlands (*Altiplano*), as well as the dry corridor (*Corredor Seco*) in Guatemala and biological corridors (*Corredores Biológicos*) in Costa Rica.

### Evaluation objectives and methodology

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IKI MTEs aim to facilitate learning, increase accountability, and contribute to better decision-making by all stakeholders involved. To achieve these goals, EbA LAC is analysed through an MTE focusing on the IKI standard criteria, additional criteria, and project specific as well as additional learning questions.

The main objective of this MTE, with its mixed method approach, is to provide all relevant stakeholders with management-relevant information on the status of implementation, the achievement of objectives and the challenges for the remaining project term around halfway through the project term.

The results of MTEs provide BMUV and ZUG with a comprehensive assessment of the success of the project to date and thus contribute to the steering capability at the project and programme level as well as to the accountability of the IKI.

## Main findings

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Regarding the evaluation criterion on the **Relevance** of the project, it can be summarised that the project is in line with global policies on adaptation to climate change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, other agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project works at national and subnational levels closely together with the three political partner organisations in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Ecuador (MINAE, MAATE, MARN), all divisions of environmental ministries.

In any of the three countries, EbA is seen as one of several methodological approaches in the field of adaptation that can increase the resilience of the three countries' vulnerable populations and ecosystems. In this respect, EbA LAC has the task of filling in the void towards integrating EbA into the national framework.

In Ecuador and Guatemala, the sub-national levels are the main drivers for the political anchoring of objectives and EbA activities; in Costa Rica, it is SINAC with its national and regional offices.

Concerning **Project Planning**, it can be said that the planning is principally suitable to achieve the project aim of upscaling successful EbA approaches on the landscape level, although the project has a very complex management and steering structure that is very difficult to understand from the outside. The project management is structured in such a way that intensive cooperation between the consortium partners is required. Each output is subdivided into individual work packages, in which up to two consortium partners usually work together in one output, even all three.

It took the consortium about two years to consolidate itself, and even at the time of the evaluation, interviewees across all institutions and sectors thought that the division of the components and related work packages among the individual implementing institutions in all three countries was still not working well and makes implementation difficult.

The complex management and steering structures lead to a deficit in decision-making. Important decisions are not made quickly and/or consistently enough due to the many people involved in the internal consultation processes.

According to the IKI, a project is gender-responsive if it recognises unequal gender roles, relations and norms and attempts to combat them actively. In Costa Rica, a gender strategy with a gender plan exists. In Ecuador and Guatemala, a gender strategy and a roadmap are in progress, but there is no explicit, monitorable strategy with indicators yet. Therefore, an assessment of the overall gender-responsiveness of the project cannot be made.

The weak spot of the project is the **Effectiveness** of implementation. At the time of the evaluation, out of the 105 activities, 30 activities were completed, 52 were delayed between 3 months to 2 years and 21 were scheduled for the future.

The following bottlenecks were identified during implementation:

- Outcome and output indicators show only little progress.

- The 10 EbA-measures are not yet specified for the landscapes the project promotes: the dry and humid forests and agroforestry systems in Ecuador, highlands (*Altiplano*), as well as the dry corridor (*Corredor Seco*) in Guatemala and biological corridors (*Corredores Biológicos*) in Costa Rica.
- Particularly in Costa Rica, the interviewees across all institutions largely agree that the project has so far been too scientific. Studies often lack concreteness, e.g., a capacity strengthening plan does not include corresponding budgets.
- There is no clear and understandable articulation and promotion of the project about what EbA is and which measures it comprises.
- The methodology and evidence for reporting the area implemented with EbA measures in hectare (ha) has severe deficiencies. Amongst others, in the annual report of the year 2022, the outcome indicator I.O.1 comprised a value of 208 ha under EbA measures in total over all countries, which was detected in November 2023, corrected and downsized to a total of 29 ha.
- Two out of three consortium partners have difficulties in keeping their outflow of funds (% of total funds available) to the level spent: GIZ has so far utilised 29% of the total funds, CATIE 19%, and IUCN only 8%, even though IUCN is responsible for the core piece of the project, component II. IUCN has undercut their planned cash outflow levels. Overall, consortia partners have only spent 19% of the total budget. There is great insecurity from subcontracts and stakeholders in Costa Rica whether concrete activities that have been promoted as “no-regret measures” will be carried out under the “main 10 EbA measures”, as concrete measures have yet to be promoted, although existing in Guatemala and Ecuador.
- So far, there is no clear implementation and concrete strategy for the EbA measures visible that can immediately be put in place when the cost-benefit analyses of the measures are completed. The cost-benefit analysis has conceptual weaknesses as important environmental co-benefits and ecosystemic services are not monetarised, and measures that have been promoted in Ecuador and Guatemala, such as horticulture, were found to have a negative cost-benefit ratio.

With regard to **Transformational Impact & Sustainability**, it can be said that the landscape-based project approach integrates various adapted forms of land use, considering the natural environment and the human systems that depend on it. Although the project offer says, "implementing EbA measures at landscape level means a paradigm shift from small-scale piloting and implementing of EbA practices towards demonstrating how sustainable land management can be implemented on a larger landscape scale", at present, only individual preparatorily piloted projects are recognisable, where individual partner organisations are supported in the area of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Since some measures have only just begun, the main EbA measures are still to be implemented, and sustainability depends to a high degree on governance aspects and the approach towards governance varies from country to country, as well as their acceptance from the stakeholders, it is impossible to assess in this context which individual development the project will take in each country and what its impact will be on the country as well as on regional level. It is currently not possible to estimate the extent to which the desired effects of transformational impact and sustainability can be achieved.

Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, no other particular external situations can be identified that could hinder the impact of the project, nor were adverse effects on the target groups and the consortium partners identified.

A concrete extent of co-benefits cannot yet be identified, but it can be assumed that the orientation of the project will contribute to the low-carbon development of all three countries through reforestation, support for urban cultivation projects, the propagation of adapted agroforestry systems and other so-called "*buenas practicas productivas*" in agriculture and forestry, among other things. It is also assumed that the resilience of the rural population against climate change will be enhanced, as well as living conditions and community well-being improved.

The **Safeguard Measures** mentioned in the country documents are still formulated in a very general way. Due to the delays in project implementation, it is impossible to assess whether the safeguarding measures will achieve their intended results. There are several gaps in the safeguard documentations. Deviations from the project offer are often not adequately explained. The classifications are not homogeneous across all countries and, in some cases, do not match each other or the explanation in the annual reports regarding the content or the assignment of risk categories. A uniform revision of all safeguard documentation is necessary to guarantee consistency.

In terms of the **Standard Indicators**, the difference between the planned values for the individual standard indicators on ecosystems and intended beneficiaries (especially indirect beneficiaries) and the already achieved is so high that it is questionable whether the planned values can be achieved. Therefore, reviewing the planning for the remaining project time and adjusting to the existing conditions is unavoidable.

## **Conclusions and resulting recommendations**

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The three implementing organisations, GIZ, IUCN, and CATIE, are all organisations with experience in EbA projects and compete against each other in tenders. In this respect, the project management of the lead organisation in this joint project has the additional task of "clarifying the roles and budgets" of the individual consortium partners and their positioning in the individual project Outputs and work packages. The complexity of this "role clarification", the complex and lengthy decision-making processes and coordination structures and the time it takes for all consortium partners to "find their role" was underestimated in this project and is reflected in the fact that there was a discussion phase of 1.5 years before the vulnerability studies were finally finalised. Added to this is a scientific and not very practice-orientated approach integrating studies and consultancy services into the implementing practice. There are still no clear statements made public as to which specific measures fall under the 10 EbA measure categories. This is due to the fact that attempts are being made to define a "watertight" research approach for the implementation of specific EbA measures in the consolidation and scaling-up areas on the basis of the risk categories and to define them in terms of natural space.

External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the change of personnel among political partners and in the consortium have led to considerable delays in the implementation of activities. This, as well as a lack of clear implementation roadmaps for the EbA measures, leads to an "implementation backlog", even though almost 50 studies and advisory services had been carried out by the date of the evaluation.

Therefore, the number of measures from which the beneficiaries, the vulnerable rural population, have so far benefitted concretely within the framework of so-called no-regret measures is still relatively small and varies greatly from country to country. In Ecuador, there is already a higher level of acceptance, but not yet in Costa Rica. Guatemala is somewhere in between.

There is also a lack of concrete concepts as to how the delays can be absorbed by the end of the project term and which focussing, and discontinuation of activities are necessary in order to achieve the outputs.

Staffing levels are tight. In Ecuador and Guatemala, in particular, the teams are very small and have many tasks to fulfil. On the other hand, there is a large number of external consultants who are contracted for the individual fields of work. This constellation makes it difficult to transfer knowledge to the team and to follow up on the content of the studies. Consideration should be given to hiring more permanent employees in order to bundle more specialist expertise in the team.

Overall, the project has an implementation problem, which is also reflected in the fact that consortium partners are underspending their outflow of funds. The evaluators, as well as some interviewees, assume that the project will not be able to achieve the planned indicators by the end of the project.

The next steps recommended are:

1. Specify the EbA measures in all countries with more emphasis on the landscape focus and put them into practice as soon as possible without waiting for the results of the cost-benefit analyses.
2. Communicate clearly and understandably to all stakeholders and outsiders what EbA and EbA measures are.
3. Assure the implementation partners that the no-regret measures that were started will continue to be supported.
4. Give direct technical and coupled financial support with incentives for the vulnerable population so that implementation partners and beneficiaries, especially in Costa Rica, have the motivation to carry on with EbA LAC.
5. Review which indicators can be achieved in the remaining two project years and make adaptations.
6. Review the scale of the intervention areas; for example, the areas in Guatemala are very extensive.

The following facts should thereby be considered:

- To turn the scientific approach from "head to toe" as EbA LAC needs practice orientation and faster decision-making
- To think from the perspective of the vulnerable rural population because the overarching aim of the project is to increase their resilience.