



**Mid-term Evaluation of IKI project Promoting
Nature-based Solutions for resilient, low carbon and
biodiverse territorial development (SolNatura)**

22_II_179_COL_G_Promoting Nature-based Solutions

Summary

info@arepo-consult.com
www.arepo-consult.com

17 February 2026



Arepo GmbH

Albrechtstraße 22

10117 Berlin

Tel.: +49 30 220 124 48

E-Mail: info@arepo-consult.com

AREPO GmbH | Registered Office: Berlin

Managing Directors: Dr. Christine Wörten

Registered at: Amtsgericht Charlottenburg, Berlin | Registration No.: HRB 219 349 B

VAT.-ID: DE 332 314 373

Summary

Arepo GmbH was commissioned by Zukunft – Umwelt – Gesellschaft gGmbH (ZUG) to carry out the mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the International Climate Initiative (IKI) project “Promoting Nature-based Solutions for resilient, low carbon and biodiverse territorial development” (SolNatura). The project is implemented by a consortium led by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), partnering with Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez (Fondo Acción) and The Nature Conservancy Colombia (TNC). The MTE was conducted between February 2025 and February 2026 and aims to assess the project against a set of evaluation criteria in a formative way. These criteria are: relevance; effectiveness; planning, steering, and coherence; transformational impact and sustainability; as well as social and environmental Safeguards and IKI standard indicators. This summary distills the evaluation's key findings, methodologies, and strategic recommendations, offering a concise overview to stakeholders involved in project implementation and oversight.

SolNatura is a six-year project (2022–2028) operating in Colombia. It responds to a number of linked challenges: high climate risks, degraded ecosystems, biodiversity loss, and limited funding and capacity to implement Colombia’s climate and biodiversity goals at the departmental level. Colombia is highly exposed to hazards such as floods and droughts. These risks are intensified by unsustainable land use, including pressure from extractive activities, expanding agriculture and livestock production, and urban growth. In many rural areas, these trends weaken livelihoods, reduce resilience to climate shocks, and can undermine peacebuilding efforts.

Colombia has strong national policies for climate action and biodiversity protection, including its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), that is, the country’s official climate targets, and departmental climate plans. However, implementation of these policies often lags behind policy ambitions. The SolNatura project addresses two key barriers: weak implementation of climate and biodiversity policies due to limited technical capacity and weak coordination across actors (i.e., national, regional, and local policy levels, as well civil society and the private sector), and a persistent gap in biodiversity and climate finance. Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are actions that protect, restore, or sustainably manage ecosystems. NbS are considered a practical response to these barriers, as they can translate national targets into suitable local measures. They can also create clearer ‘investment-ready’ projects that can attract longer-term public and private funding for climate and biodiversity protection.

SolNatura tackles these implementation and finance gaps through coordinated work at both national and local levels. It focuses on the departments of Córdoba, Huila, and Santander, selected for their high climate risk and their strategic ecosystems such as wetlands, mangroves, and dry forests. The project has four outputs. First, it supports the design of locally appropriate NbS through multi-stakeholder innovation and research clusters that jointly develop departmental NbS portfolios aligned with territorial development priorities and existing climate and biodiversity plans. Second, it strengthens financing by setting up a financing facility and developing financial and economic instruments that contribute to mobilizing an additional USD 5 million in public and private capital. Third, it supports the implementation of 24 NbS projects on the ground, especially in agriculture and agroforestry, paired with capacity building for local implementers and guidance to monitor and verify results. Fourth, it improves the enabling conditions for NbS by strengthening governance and coordination mechanisms, integrating evidence from NbS into national monitoring systems, and

documenting lessons to inform policy and international reporting, including future NDC updates. Jointly, these four outputs contribute to a joint project outcome, formulated as: “National, sub-national and local actors successfully implement Nature-based Solutions (NbS) that transform territories towards being more resilient, biodiverse and low-carbon, and support the implementation of the NDCs.”

The project consortium is led by GIZ, with Fondo Acción managing the financing facility and funding allocation to local implementers, and TNC providing scientific and technical support, innovation cluster facilitation, and guidance on monitoring. Colombia’s Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MinAmbiente) is the political partner and provides political leadership through a political committee as well as operational support through a steering committee. Long-term sustainability has been sought through the project’s intervention for NbS inclusion and embedding in environmental guidelines, in cooperation with MinAmbiente and DNP. Additionally, it has also been pursued by strengthening local capacity and departmental governance for NbS, embedding NbS portfolios in territorial planning, and establishing financing mechanisms that can continue to mobilize investment beyond the project period. The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN) and managed by the Zukunft – Umwelt – Gesellschaft (ZUG) gGmbH.

IKI MTEs are formative evaluations that aim to facilitate learning, increase accountability, and contribute to better decision-making by all stakeholders involved. It aims to give all key stakeholders clear, management-relevant information on the state of achievement of the SolNatura project, roughly halfway through its implementation. It looks at what has been achieved so far, what is working well, and which challenges still need to be addressed for the remaining project period. The evaluation is meant to support the implementing organizations (GIZ, TNC and Fondo Acción) in reflecting on their approach, the cooperation between institutions, and the usefulness of outputs, so they can adjust activities where needed. It also provides MinAmbiente, BMUKN and ZUG with a structured assessment of progress to date, supporting project steering and strengthening accountability. The evaluation follows the IKI MTE framework and uses a set of standard evaluation criteria and questions. Moreover, stakeholders defined Learning Questions, which are answered qualitatively.

The evaluation applies a theory-based, mixed-methods approach grounded in SolNatura’s Theory of Change (ToC) (reconstructed and refined in a joint ToC workshop with consortium participation during the evaluation inception phase) and combines different sources to triangulate findings. The evaluation team analyzed project documents and, during an on-site mission to Colombia, conducted semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and systematically documented in an evaluation matrix. A core methodological constraint at mid-term is evaluability: while data availability was good for outputs I and IV, as implementation has already progressed, the financial support for NbS implementation (part of output II) and the NbS projects (output III) are being implemented largely in line with the project’s logic and timeline and are thus not yet fully operational, which affects the extent to which effects and safeguards performance can be examined at this stage. Thus, at mid-term, implementation and effects of NbS remain largely prospective because the 24 NbS projects are still transitioning toward full implementation, and the financing facility ‘SolNatura+’ is still moving from planning to operationalization, which constrains outcome-level verification.

As for Relevance, SolNatura is considered highly relevant and timely in the Colombian context, given increased political attention to climate and biodiversity and the project’s strong fit to policy and

territorial development strategies. The project supports government initiatives on NbS, and its four-pronged design is well-positioned to address major barriers to NbS uptake and help move from planning to financing and territorial action. Project design as well as achievements at mid-term show strong alignment with local needs and global frameworks (SDGs, Paris Agreement, Global Biodiversity Framework), but information gaps between technical and financial actors and clearer communication on gender and social and environmental Safeguards still need attention to ensure equitable access.

Planning is assessed as high quality: the project proposal is technically detailed, includes a coherent ToC linking outputs, and uses robust methodologies for NbS formulation, M&E system development, knowledge management, and capacity building. Steering is rated very good due to clear multi-level governance, strong internal consortium cooperation, adaptive management, and a functioning monitoring system. Remaining gaps relate to the simplification of NbS-related language and conceptual agreement among diverse stakeholders, baseline availability for some indicators (given that the eventual NbS projects are yet to be selected), and limited effectiveness of workshops. Gender is integrated in planning and selection criteria. The project's level of gender consideration exceeds IKI requirements at the time of project design. At the same time, stronger attention for gender in output/outcome indicators would enhance the potential to monitor intended gender-related achievements and identify needs for adaptive management.

Effectiveness is progressing as expected for a mid-term point in a project where territorial implementation is scheduled for the second half of the project. Most outcome indicators remain at baseline, but enabling results are substantial across Outputs I, II and IV, and the implementation pipeline for Output III is operational. Delays (staff recruitment, institutional constraints, COP16 scheduling pressures) affected early milestones but were managed through revised timelines and adaptive implementation. Key strengths include: (i) functioning Research & Innovation clusters and completed departmental NbS portfolios; (ii) credible progress on the financial track (formalization steps, capacity building with EAFIT, advancing economic instruments with CVS and CAM plus municipalities); and (iii) strengthened enabling conditions including advances on national M&E and MRV integration for NbS.

On Transformational Impact and Sustainability, most climate and biodiversity effects remain prospective because the implementation of the financial mechanism and the 24 technical projects as well as the projects of the Research & Innovation clusters are only starting. The support of local NbS projects through the project finance facility SolNatura+ is projected for a period of time where SolNatura+ is fully operational and installed. Achievement of environmental and socio-economic co-benefits is theoretically plausible, however, depending on the timely implementation of the NbS measures. The project already contributes to transformational change by building enabling conditions for NbS to be implemented and financed at scale, whilst influencing and assessing political partners to include NbS in national planning documents, plausibly leading to NbS implementation. This includes building the capacity of local organizations, with early signs of organizational change (e.g., application of new knowledge to design finance products). Risks to sustained effects include challenges in indigenous and Afro-colombian engagement, as well as uneven local appropriation of gender strategies.

SolNatura has established a robust Safeguards system integrating environmental, social, gender, and conflict-sensitive measures. Social and environmental Safeguards are embedded in NbS project selection, monitoring, and financial mechanisms. The project's safeguard rating B is overall plausible and suitable, with adaptive adjustments made to performance standards through participatory

workshops. No negative effects have been reported so far. Future risks include security threats and tensions between biodiversity protection and poverty reduction in rural areas. Full assessment of Safeguards in implementation is limited because projects are still in early stages.

On IKI standard indicators, the project design concentrates effect measurement for mitigation and ecosystems toward the end of the project (July 2028), because most indicators depend on implementing and documenting the NbS measures. At mid-term, reported results are plausible given the project phase. Reporting is currently strongest for capacity-related indicators SI 3 and SI 4, while SI 1, SI 2 and SI 5 remain at or near zero because implementation and baselines are still pending.

All in all, at mid-term, SolNatura is a high-potential project with strong strategic fit and governance capacity, has adequately achieved expected mid-term results, and it is on a plausible path to deliver its endline target outputs and outcomes. Notwithstanding, the evaluation yields several recommendations for improved project management, stronger mainstreaming of diversity and inclusion perspectives and effective application of Safeguards, and future NbS project rollout. These recommendations target GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción, i.e., the SolNatura consortium.

1. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should support conceptual alignment and unambiguous communication among cluster members by simplifying NbS-related communication. It is important to ensure there is shared understanding and communication across all stakeholders by **simplifying NbS language**, as the current NbS-related language is too technical. Core concepts should be clearly communicated in plain language that is easy for territorial actors to comprehend and use, to ensure consistent interpretation across the NbS community.
2. GIZ and Fondo Acción should reduce information gaps between financial stakeholders and territorial NbS implementers. Information about the SolNatura+ fund has not always reached local implementers, while micro-finance institutions (MFIs) often lack visibility on the technical measures being implemented. The project should **set up regular communication between the ‘finance track’ and the ‘technical track’**, for example through quarterly cross-component updates and routine territory briefings for MFIs on what is happening where.
3. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should strengthen social inclusion in NbS governance and implementation. This includes **addressing gaps in knowledge and understanding regarding core gender and diversity concepts among project stakeholders** in the different regions, to enable a more effective operationalization of the ongoing gender consultancy. This should happen across territorial project activities and M&E. A related recommendation relates to **increasing efforts towards meaningful participation of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian stakeholders**. Participation barriers should be reduced, for example by occasionally holding cluster meetings outside departmental capitals and leveraging the project cooperation network, particularly in the public sector, to reach rural and urban indigenous, Afro-Colombian and/or peasant stakeholders within the project capacities.
4. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should develop strategies to actively mitigate the risk of stakeholder fatigue and coordination overload. Given high coordination and participation burden for some persons who participate in multiple roundtables, the project should **emphasize maintaining key stakeholders’ motivation and commitment**, to avoid declining engagement over time.
5. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should **ensure impact measurement starts well before project closure**. If Outputs II and III mature late, there may be too little time to measure IKI SIs before July 2028. The project should set an early ‘impact data readiness’ milestone linked to NbS project

implementation timelines, for example by January 2028, to enable learning and corrective action while the project is still ongoing.

6. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should continue to monitor Safeguards closely. The rollout of territorial projects by other implementing partners may require additional efforts of coordination among consortium members, as well as capacity building for implementing partners, in order to **ensure consistent application of Safeguards protocols** across the territories and NbS projects.
7. GIZ, TNC, and Fondo Acción should closely monitor security issues in conflict-affected areas. There is no doubt that all consortium members are well aware of the risks associated with project implementation in security-sensitive areas. This said, the **security situation should be diligently monitored especially during the implementation of NbS projects**, and should be regularly brought to the attention of ZUG and BMUKN through reporting, as a deteriorating security situation might affect project implementation in the future.
8. GIZ and Fondo Acción should more slowly sequence the roll-out of financial instruments with MFIs. Some MFIs feel the process is moving too fast, creating uncertainty about staffing and delivery requirements. GIZ and Fondo Acción should **facilitate a jointly agreed roadmap** with clear milestones, roles, and resource implications **to avoid overwhelming MFIs during scale-up**.
9. ZUG should place emphasis on the funding mechanism SolNatura+ in any future terminal evaluation of SolNatura (should one be commissioned). Since this financing mechanism is highly critical to achieving the intended project outcomes, but could not be fully addressed in the MTE, a potential **terminal evaluation** should examine **the rollout and effect of SolNatura+ against expectations**.