



End-Term Evaluation of the Voices for Just Climate Action

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Executive summary

The End-Term Evaluation (ETE) of the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme provides an independent assessment of the programme's implementation and performance across seven target countries between January 2021 and December 2025, examining its results according to the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Evaluation purpose and process

The VCA programme (2021–2025) is a global initiative funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) aimed at positioning civil society as a central actor in climate governance. This end-term evaluation (ETE) provides an independent assessment of the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, outcomes and impact, efficiency, and sustainability across seven target countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Paraguay, Tunisia, and Zambia. Partnerships were also assessed as a core criterion.

The evaluation utilised a participatory, mixed-methods approach combining Contribution Analysis (CA), Realist Evaluation (RE), and AI-assisted Causal Mapping. The assessment focused on 14 in-depth contribution claims to explain how specific mechanisms triggered outcomes in diverse political and ecological contexts. In line with IOB criteria, the evaluation team maintained complete impartiality, having had no prior involvement in programme design or implementation.

Relevance

VCA's design and implementation were highly relevant to the needs of marginalized groups facing climate vulnerability and shrinking civic space. The programme's locally led ethos was operationalized through context-sensitive diagnostic analyses and the deliberate selection of women-led, youth-led, and Indigenous-led partners. VCA was most appropriate where it addressed structural barriers to participation, such as low procedural literacy and limited institutional recognition. While initially less aligned with urgent material needs, the programme successfully adapted by introducing the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) to fund 540 local climate solutions.

Coherence and partnerships

Strategic alignment was a core strength; the programme reinforced existing mandates of Alliance members and local partners regarding land rights, gender justice, and community resilience. However, a coherence tension existed between the programme's local ownership rhetoric and its governance reality. While locally led implementation was strong at the regional level, high-level strategic and financial decision-making remained largely centralized within Northern-based structures. Coordination with Dutch Embassies was uneven and highly capacity-dependent, acting as a contextual enabler rather than a primary driver of effectiveness.

Effectiveness, outcomes and impact

VCA achieved progress across the three strategic pillars of its Theory of Change:

- **Pillar 1 (Capacity & Alliances):** The programme formed 248 partnerships and significantly increased the confidence, procedural literacy, and collective agency of marginalized groups by converting fragmented activism into structured movements. This achievement was most prominent in Indonesia, where the KOPI Youth Alliance consolidated 400 members into a movement recognized in regional planning, and in Brazil, where extractivist youth experienced an identity transformation, moving from psychological shame to securing formal voting seats on

territorial councils. In Tunisia, the formalization of the GDAP women's collective provided the legal identity necessary to access municipal credit and formal policy forums, while in Kenya, the strengthening of Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPCs) moved women from symbolic presence to the active submission of formal memoranda for county planning.

- **Pillar 2 (Amplifying Voices):** VCA empowered communities to move from being 'invisible' to legitimate narrators of their own climate realities through digital inclusion and self-representation in Indigenous languages. The strongest evidence for this exists in Paraguay, where the establishment of Digital Inclusion Centres in 15 Indigenous communities allowed for rapid digital reporting that created reputational risk for state institutions, and in Bolivia, where the Indigenous Journalism School trained 102 communicators who produced hundreds of radio programmes to strengthen territorial defence narratives. While citizen voices were amplified through these multimedia strategies and new alliances with media and academia, evidence that these efforts measurably shifted the broader national public debate remains limited due to monitoring constraints and persistent infrastructure gaps.
- **Pillar 3 (Policy Influence):** The programme successfully influenced 121 instances of law and policy change by pairing technically credible evidence with public-facing pressure. These achievements were most impactful in Bolivia, where women-led advocacy secured Municipal Law No. 252/2023 to protect 881 hectares from mining, and in Zambia, where a 'hybrid' advocacy strategy successfully halted restrictive national seed legislation. In Paraguay, the programme contributed to the Senate's rejection of an amendment that would have allowed hydrocarbon extraction in a National Park, while in Kenya, the Mulika Tracking Tool enabled communities to move from informal questioning to evidence-based scrutiny of KSh 1.4 million in climate adaptation funds. However, influence was substantially stronger in policy development (101 instances) than in securing the budget execution (20 instances) required for full on-the-ground implementation

VCA demonstrated significant value as an Alliance, particularly through joint mechanisms like the NLGF, which mobilized €47.8 million toward locally led solutions.

Efficiency

The programme achieved a moderate efficiency score (17/24) on the co-developed rubric. The NLGF was a game-changing mechanism, successfully bypassing traditional bureaucratic barriers to reach micro-grantees and informal groups. However, administrative fragmentation—characterized by different Alliance members using varying disbursement and reporting systems—created additional transaction costs and delays for some local partners.

Sustainability

VCA successfully shifted focus from programme longevity to the transfer of conditions for long-term action. Institutional sustainability was enhanced through the formalization of community structures (e.g., WCCPCs in Kenya, GDAPs in Tunisia) and the embedding of 'portable' advocacy skills. Despite these gains, financial sustainability remains the most fragile dimension, as alternative funding sources rarely match the flexibility and technical support provided by VCA.

Methodological limitations and biases

In accordance with IOB Criterion 14, the findings should be interpreted in light of specific constraints:

- **Internal validity:** Relying on stakeholder accounts introduced risks of recall error and social desirability bias. The Outcome Harvesting database contains an inherent positive reporting bias.

- **External validity:** Case study selection was subject to selection bias, often favouring 'good story' contexts with high accessibility. Sample size was guided by evaluation resourcing and timeframes, which limited the inclusion of some vulnerable groups, dissenting views and additional external views.
- **Reliability:** Logistical constraints and respondent fatigue during lengthy interviews may have resulted in under-reporting of unintended negative effects or rival explanations.

Key recommendations

Based on the findings and lessons learned, the evaluation proposes the following recommendations to **improve future programming** within the climate adaptation sector.

For VCA Alliance partners

- **Operationalise local ownership at the highest levels of governance:** Establish clear decision-making rights and resourced feedback loops that allow regional and local partners to shape global strategy on equal terms with international partners.
- **Ensure equitable budget distribution** across Alliance members from the inception phase to resource participation in global taskforces and coordination bodies.
- **Maintain the focus on coalition strengthening and movement building:** Invest long-term resources in coalition infrastructure and "bridging" actors who can translate local knowledge into formats that institutions can process.
- **Invest in global coordination:** Properly resource global strategy and coordination (programmes such as the GloPro) to ensure learning from the ground effectively informs international advocacy.
- **Prioritise sustainability mentorship:** Move beyond technical training to long-term institutional accompaniment, focusing on resource mobilization skills so partners can survive the "funding cliff" after the program ends.

For the donor (MoFA)

- **Maintain flexibility:** Continue providing high levels of strategic flexibility and trust-based relationships, which were cited as critical for navigating shrinking civic spaces and climate shocks.
- **Clarify guideline shifts:** Ensure changes in funding priorities (e.g., from service delivery to advocacy) are communicated early and clearly to avoid straining relationships between Alliance members and local partners.

For the climate adaptation sector

- **Shift from technical to relational:** Recognise that climate vulnerability is a combination of socio-economic precarity and political exclusion; focus on addressing the structural drivers of exclusion rather than just technical adaptation fixes.
- **Pursue "demonstration-first" advocacy approaches:** Support proof-of-concept models (like community-led internet in Paraguay) to shift institutional perceptions of what is feasible before pushing for regulatory change.

- **Pursue innovative funding mechanisms**, such as the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) that bypass traditional barriers through simplified applications, flexible reporting, and the use of intermediaries to manage fiduciary risks.
- **Prioritise "insider–outsider" hybrid strategies** that combine public mobilization with technical support to help government agencies implement existing policies.

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Acronyms

ACDD	Association Citoyenneté et Développement Durable
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMwA	Akina Mama wa Afrika
AWLI	African Women's Leadership Institute
CA	Contribution Analysis
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
CM	Causal Mapping
CMO	Context-Mechanism-Outcome
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC criteria)
DCFCDD	Dutch Fund for Climate and Development
DCCC	District Climate Change Committee
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ETE	End Term Evaluation
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
FLLoCA	Financing Locally Led Climate Action
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GESI	Gender Equality and Social inclusion
GloPro	Global Programme
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IP	Indigenous People
IPT	Initial Programme Theories
JPT	Joint Programme Team
KEQ	Key evaluation question
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCs	Local Communities
LLA	Locally Led Adaptation
MADES	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation



MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
MRT	Mid-Range Theories
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLGF	Next Level Grant Facility
NTT	East Nusa Tenggara
OH	Outcome Harvesting
RE	Realist Evaluation
PLAC	Plan Local d'Adaptation au Changement Climatique
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
PWF	Penjaringan Women's Federation
RT(s)	Regional Team(s)
SAMEA	South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association
SCS	Strengthening Civil Society
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
SSN	SouthSouthNorth
TICCA	Territorios Y Áreas Conservadas Por Comunidades Locales Y Pueblos Indígenas
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Train the Teacher
TYI	Tunisia Youth Impact
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
VCA	Voices for Just Climate Action
WCCPC	Ward Climate Change Planning Committees
WFP	World Food Programme
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of the End-term Evaluation (ETE) of the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme, a five-year initiative (January 2021 – December 2025) funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) under the Power of Voices policy framework. VCA was implemented through an innovative global alliance of six organisations including Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), Fundación Avina, Slum Dwellers International (SDI), SouthSouthNorth (SSN), Hivos and WWF-Netherlands. The alliance worked across Africa, Latin America and Asia, and is active in Kenya, Tunisia, Zambia, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Indonesia.

The VCA programme aimed to amplify voices from the Global South in shaping climate governance agendas, strengthening civil society organisations, and supporting transformative, locally driven climate adaptation action. It operated in contexts characterised by climate vulnerability, shrinking civic space, unequal access to climate finance, and structural inequalities affecting women, youth, Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), and other vulnerable and marginalised constituencies. Through coalition and movement-building, amplifying voices, advocacy, capacity strengthening and the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) as the programme's primary grant-making mechanism, alongside a deliberate allocation of approximately 50% of the programme budget to local partners, the programme sought to shift power within climate governance systems and enhance the agency of historically excluded actors.

This evaluation provides an independent assessment of the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness and outcomes, efficiency, partnerships, and sustainability. It also examines the plausibility of VCA's contribution to strengthening locally led climate action across national, regional and global levels.

The report begins with a background to the programme, which outlines the programme context, rationale, Theory of Change (ToC), and Results Framework. This is followed by the evaluation objectives, scope and methodology. The core of the report presents the evaluation findings, which are organised according to the selected Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria, as outlined above. It concludes with a synthesis of key lessons learned and a set of forward-looking recommendations to inform future programming and partnership design.

2 Background to the VCA programme

This section provides a brief overview of the global context in which the VCA programme operates. While country-level differences exist, the rationale for the VCA programme is cross-cutting and draws from general trends in climate justice and broader climate action landscape globally, rather than being limited to the climate adaptation sector.

2.1 Programme context and rationale

As articulated in the programme's Theory of Change, the climate crisis, ecosystem degradation and social inequality are deeply interconnected (VCA, Theory of Change - Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action). These dynamics reflect the core elements of a climate justice approach, which underpins the VCA programme's rationale.

Current climate governance models remain dominated by narrow power structures and do not adequately support inclusive and integrated planning. Civic space is shrinking globally and nationally,

limiting the influence of civil society in climate action. Women, youth, IPs & LCs and other vulnerable and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected by climate change yet are underrepresented in climate decision-making processes. Moreover, only a limited share of committed climate finance reaches the local level, where climate impacts are most strongly felt. Recent estimates suggest that less than half a percent (0.17%) of total reported climate finance can be considered locally led, and at most only 10–17% of adaptation finance reaches local communities, highlighting a significant gap between global climate finance commitments and resources reaching those most affected (Treichel, 2025).

VCA programme documents (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2022) outlined how polarisation, shrinking civic space and limited financial access constrain civil society engagement in climate governance. Subsequent Annual Progress Reports (2023; 2024) confirmed that these challenges persist, coupled with increasing restrictions on civic freedoms and escalating barriers to multilateral climate finance for local actors. In addition, the growing influence of fossil fuel interests within global climate negotiations is highlighted. Across VCA countries of implementation, these constraints manifest differently depending on national political and governance contexts. For example, in Tunisia, programme reporting highlights civil society engagement in municipal-level climate planning processes, including advocacy leading to the adoption of local climate adaptation plans (PLAC), indicating opportunities for subnational policy influence within a structured governance environment (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023). In Indonesia, programme activities emphasise strengthening civil society participation in national and subnational climate processes, including support to digital activism and coalition-building, reflecting the need to navigate complex governance structures and varying levels of openness for advocacy (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023). In contrast, in countries such as Kenya and Zambia, reporting points to relatively stronger engagement of civil society actors in national climate dialogues and decentralised structures, while still highlighting constraints related to access to finance and sustained influence over decision-making processes (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023).

These examples illustrate how political, social and civic space conditions, including levels of freedom of expression and the enabling environment for advocacy, shape the extent to which civil society actors can engage in advocacy, participate in decision-making and influence climate governance processes across contexts.

Since programme inception, the external context has evolved significantly, from the programme's early implementation under COVID-19 restrictions. Beyond the pandemic context, the broader climate landscape has continued to shift. The last three years have been the hottest on record globally, with 2023 confirmed as the hottest year, accompanied by severe droughts and floods that disproportionately affected vulnerable and marginalised populations in Africa and Latin America, including VCA programme countries (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2024). These developments have heightened urgency for locally led adaptation and climate justice responses. At the same time, global climate policy has evolved. The endorsement of the Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) principles by over 80 institutions, including governments and multilateral organisations, signalled the growing potential of community-driven approaches. New commitments such as the Bridgetown Initiative and reforms within the Green Climate Fund have created potential openings for more equitable climate finance flows. While these are positive developments, persistent structural barriers continue to limit access to climate finance, particularly for grassroots movements and community-based organisations. Simultaneously, the global political landscape has shifted. Programme reports (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2025) highlighted shifting political dynamics, including the rise of right-

wing and populist ideologies in various contexts, shrinking civic space and increased constraints on civil society in multiple regions. Civic freedoms of association and assembly have come under threat, and climate negotiations have faced criticism regarding

These contextual dynamics, escalating climate impacts, shrinking civic space, geopolitical shifts, and structural barriers in global climate finance, represent critical external factors influencing the programme's results chain. They may enable or constrain outcomes at different levels and therefore form an essential part of the evaluation's analysis.

2.2 Description of the intervention

Against the backdrop above, VCA positions grassroots and local civil society as key actors and advocates of just climate transitions. The programme's overarching ambition is to contribute to peaceful, just and climate-resilient societies where inclusive sustainable development can be achieved and marginalised groups have equal access to rights, services and opportunities. The programme's strategic objective is that, by 2025, civil society groups have claimed a central role as empowered innovators, facilitators and advocates of climate solutions.

This section presents the evaluation team's reconstructed understanding of the VCA ToC, drawing on the official theory and the refinements articulated in the evaluation inception report¹. It clarifies the programme's intervention logic and makes explicit the causal pathway linking inputs and activities to outputs, intermediate outcomes and long-term impact.

- **Overall logic of the programme ToC:** The VCA programme is based on the premise that structural inequalities in climate governance can be addressed by strengthening local civil society leadership, amplifying marginalised voices and influencing policy and financial systems. At impact level, the programme aims to contribute to peaceful, just and climate-resilient societies in which inclusive sustainable development is achieved. Within the programme timeframe, the intended long-term outcome is that local civil society groups claim a central role as empowered innovators, facilitators and advocates of climate solutions.
- **Inputs and activities:** To realise this ambition, the programme mobilises alliance partner expertise and networks, financial resources (including devolved finance mechanisms), gender and inclusion competencies, and access to national and global arenas (inputs). These inputs are operationalised through three strategic intervention areas and activities:
 - Mutual capacity strengthening for co-creating locally-shaped climate solutions. Activities included in this package include facilitation, gender and inclusion mainstreaming, relationship brokering, capacity strengthening, technical input, training and mentorship towards generation of citizen-generated data, and seeding innovations through mechanisms such as the NLGF.
 - Agenda-setting and movement building through communications work and training, including storytelling, facilitation of peer learning networks and events, training and mentorship in digital activism and facilitation of multi-stakeholder inclusive dialogues that elevate locally-shaped climate solutions in national and global debates.

¹ During the inception phase, the ToC was further operationalised to clarify incremental pathways and improve evaluability (see Inception Report Addendum, [Appendix 10](#)).

- Joint lobbying and advocacy to influence climate policy frameworks and financial flows, including direct advocacy, and policy influencing, facilitation of local communities' participation in relevant national, regional and global convenings, dialogue with Dutch Embassies and multilateral climate finance institutions, and efforts to influence climate finance criteria.
- **Outputs:** These activities generate tangible outputs, including capacity-strengthening workshops, mentorship and technical support to CSOs; development of gender and inclusion tools and citizen-generated data methodologies; disbursement of funds through mechanisms such as the NLGF; production of communication materials, storytelling products and knowledge outputs; convening of peer learning networks and multi-stakeholder dialogues; facilitation of civil society participation in national and global policy spaces; movement building; and development and submission of policy briefs, position papers and advocacy inputs to climate governance and finance processes.
- **Intermediate outcomes:** At the intermediate level, a number of behavioural and relational changes are envisaged. These include increased collaboration and coordination amongst diverse civil society actors, the development of shared and actionable climate agendas; enhanced digital engagement; and increased use of evidence by civil society actors. In addition, there is enhanced visibility and legitimacy of locally-shaped climate solutions; improved engagement between civil society and decision-makers; and expanded pathways for accessing climate finance mechanisms.
- **Main outcomes:** Through the above mechanisms, the programme aims to achieve three mutually reinforcing outcomes:
 - Diverse civil society actors collaborate on shared agendas and co-create scaled, locally shaped climate solutions.
 - Amplified citizen voices shape public debate on just transitions to low-carbon and climate-resilient futures.
 - Civil society contributions are reflected in climate policy, practice and budget allocations.

Together, these outcomes represent the programme's core contribution to shifting power dynamics within climate governance systems.

- **Long-term outcome and impact:** If sustained, these outcomes are expected to position local civil society as a recognised and central actor in climate governance processes (long-term outcome), contributing to more inclusive and responsive decision-making. Ultimately, this contributes to peaceful, just and climate-resilient societies characterised by inclusive sustainable development (impact).
- **Assumptions:** The VCA ToC articulates eleven explicit assumptions linking activities and outputs to intermediate outcomes, main outcomes and impact. These are outlined in the figure below.

Assumptions underpinning the effectiveness of interventions	Assumptions driving expected intermediate outcomes within the sphere of influence	Assumptions driving main outcomes and impact
• 1. Our principles are effective supports to local civil society collaboration under women's leadership. • 2. Local knowledge is valid and valuable in shaping and deciding climate action at all levels. • 3. Locally-shaped climate solution demonstrations will influence criteria in financial programmes.	• 4. Civil society can engage effectively with marginalised citizens. • 5. Civic space is not further obstructed. • 6. Working in a limited number of countries will ensure concrete outcomes. • 7. Gender and inclusion protocols will reduce risks of Alliance partners becoming counterproductive power structures. • 8. Enhanced collaboration and coordination among civil society will increase capacity and credibility to defend and enjoy rights.	• 9. A recognition of shared interests and rights will create solidarity across societies and national boundaries. • 10. Local civil society will be valued by governments, the private sector and others because it facilitates evidence-based and inclusive climate solutions. • 11. A more pluralistic and democratic society produces better decisions on climate action.

The programme's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system was designed to test and adapt these assumptions over time. In 2024, selected targets were refined in response to contextual shifts, including intensified climate impacts and increased emphasis on climate finance reform (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2025). For the programme's ToC diagram, please see [Appendix 2](#).

3 Evaluation objectives and scope

The purpose of the ETE was to assess how effectively the programme's activities contributed to intended outcomes and longer-term impacts, identify which strategies were most effective, and generate actionable recommendations to inform future programming and advance locally led climate action. The ETE was guided by the following two key objectives:

- **Knowledge objective:** The evaluation sought to assess how VCA's strategic pathways shaped programme outcomes. It aimed to identify lessons from both areas of progress and implementation challenges, including intended and unintended effects.
- **Action objective:** The evaluation aimed to provide practical insights to VCA stakeholders, including Alliance members and partners, donors and governments to guide future programme design, partnership collaboration and funding approaches.

In terms of **evaluation scope**, the ETE assessed the VCA programme as implemented across all seven countries over the period January 2021 to December 2025. It is important to note that the VCA programme closed in Tunisia in 2024, with only WWF Tunisia continuing into 2025 for activities related to the NLGF. As a result, the Tunisia assessment for this evaluation was conducted approximately one year after programme closure. This timing affects the availability of evidence and should be considered when interpreting findings related to Tunisia, particularly with regard to the sustainability of outcomes and the extent to which programme contributions can be assessed in that context.

The budget for this evaluation is a component of the programme budget, specifically, EUR 269,693 out of a total of EUR 54,997,000,

4 Evaluation design and methodology

This section presents the evaluation design and methodological approach. It explains how the evaluation combined theory-based and mixed-methods approaches to assess programme performance, examine causal pathways, and generate robust and triangulated findings across countries and at programme level.

4.1 Evaluation design and approach

The evaluation approach was designed based on our understanding of the ETE's aims and objectives, the IOB evaluation guidelines, and insights gained during discussions and key informant interviews with Alliance partners conducted during the inception phase.

The ETE adopted a **participatory, utilisation-focused, mixed methods approach**, guided by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR). The assessment of reported progress utilised indicators² and country-level case study data to formulate a judgement of achievements. These were collated and presented at programme level. In addition, enablers and barriers of progress were identified through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with VCA Alliance structures and country-level programme partners and rightsholders. Primary data collection was combined with a comprehensive desk review of programme documents. A survey was also conducted with in-country programme partners, with an emphasis on assessing the capacity strengthening component of VCA.

The evaluation combined **Contribution Analysis (CA), and Causal Mapping (CM) with a Realist Evaluation (RE) lens** to guide the assessment of selected outcomes, causality and programme contributions. Stakeholders considered external to the programme (validators³) were included in primary data collection to confirm the achievement of the selected key outcomes at country level as well as the programme's contribution to these changes (external validity). Country case studies were then produced for all seven programme countries to explain *what worked, for whom, where and under which conditions*, to illustrate the achievement of a selected set of outcomes and what causal factors (combination of VCA strategies, enablers and barriers,) led to those outcomes. The combination of these methodologies facilitates evidence triangulation and is appropriate for ToC validation and substantiation of causal claims in complex contexts and in compliance with MoFA Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) guidelines for evaluations. However, the evaluation emphasises that this methodology mix has **certain limitations** in terms of the extent to which **case study findings can be generalised across programme contexts** and what they can indicate **in terms of overall programme effectiveness and impact**. Instead, their strength and value lies in offering robust, in-depth and relevant insights into programme effectiveness and impacts that can be applied to future programming in the sector.

² MFA Basket indicators were used in the analysis of effectiveness; the VCA programme did not operationalise monitoring indicators against the ToC and therefore indicator data was not available to the evaluation.

³ Validators are individuals who can provide contextual insights, identify other contributors to the observed changes, and validate outcomes. In the context of the VCA, these could be representatives from relevant sector organisations and sector experts.

The evaluation matrix, found in [Appendix 1](#), captures the final evaluation questions. Further details regarding CA, RE and CM are provided below.



The evaluation combined **CA and RE, theory-based approaches** suited for assessing advocacy interventions such as the VCA programme. This combination enabled validation of the ToC, assessment of underlying programme assumptions, and an exploration of the context in which the programme operated – and its impact on outcomes. In addition, CA allowed the evaluation team to explore causal relationships where direct attribution is difficult, while RE assisted with the identification of mechanisms of change underpinning these causal relationships in specific contexts. This allowed the evaluation team to develop a greater understanding of *what worked, for whom, and in which contexts*. **Alternative explanations** for observed changes were also considered. In CA, the team examined what other factors and/or actors may have contributed to observed changes, while in RE, Initial Programme Theories (IPTs) were developed and applied in field to cross-check change pathways. Mid-range theories (MRTs) were also incorporated as part of RE to provide a conceptual lens for exploring the mechanisms driving VCA's successes and challenges in advancing rights, shifting norms, and influencing policies. The MRT's were used to help interpret the findings and the causal relationships in the country reports.

CM was used as an analytical and visualisation tool to synthesise large volumes of qualitative data, including over 939 outcome stories generated through Outcome Harvesting (OH). Working with the Causal Map team, the evaluation visualised implicit causal relationships and identified recurring pathways and reinforcing dynamics across programme countries. This provided a higher-level overview of observed change patterns, which was one of the sources used to assess the ToC and selected assumptions.



The evaluation adopted a **utilisation-focused approach**, based on the principle that evaluations should be useful for and actively utilised by their intended users. The ETE was designed and conducted to foster continuous engagement with programme stakeholders and to support the integration of findings into decision-making processes. A **participatory approach** was central to this process, with relevant stakeholders involved in planning the evaluation, reviewing the evaluation framework and data collection instruments, and contributing to the interpretation of findings for the final report.



A **mixed-methods approach** was employed to strengthen the validity of the CA, enable triangulation, and support the formulation of evaluation findings and conclusions. Qualitative and quantitative primary data collection was conducted, coupled with the review and analysis of secondary data sources; mainly programme documents and monitoring data. This included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Netherlands' (MoFA) basket indicators tracked by the VCA PMEL Taskforce, specifically indicators SCS01, SCS02 and SCS06.

Gender equality and youth participation were treated as **cross-cutting themes** across all evaluation criteria to assess how programme strategies addressed the needs and priorities of women, youth and marginalised groups.

Lastly, the [Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action](#) have been used as a **supplementary lens** to frame the extent to which VCA programme has enabled adaptation processes that are increasingly owned by local partners. These principles were developed by the Global Commission on Adaptation and have been endorsed by multiple international organisations (including Hivos and WWF).

The combination of methods above was deemed beneficial to answer the evaluation questions for several reasons, namely:

1. CA and RE offer specific lessons about how a programme works, why it works (enabling factors and barriers) and under which circumstances, which is in line with a context-sensitive programme such as VCA. In addition, they are IOB approved methodologies, because of their systematic exploration of context and alternative factors.
2. CM is an AI-assisted analysis methodology that works well with theory-based approaches such as CA and RE to assess large volumes of data against a well-defined framework. This methodology was particularly selected to be able to make use of VCA's large OH database as a source of triangulation in line with IOB requirements.
3. In line with [Michael Quinn Patton's Utilisation-focused evaluation](#), participatory evaluation methods were selected because, in our experience, it leads to a better understanding, and higher ownership of evaluation findings by intended users. This, in turn, supports the use of evaluation findings to inform future programming decisions.
4. Mixed methods were selected to support triangulation across data methods and sources, and to increase the internal and external validity of findings.

5 Evaluation process and methods

The evaluation was conducted in four phases: (i) inception; (ii) data collection; (iii) data analysis; and (iv) report writing and validation / feedback.

5.1 Phase 1: Inception

The inception phase established the analytical and methodological foundation for the evaluation. This phase included:

- A kick-off meeting and half-day inception workshop with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG);
- A preliminary document review;
- Country and programme-level ToC review workshops;
- The development and refinement of data collection instruments; and
- The preparation and submission of the inception report.

The inception phase clarified evaluation questions, refined the methodological combination of CA, RE and CM, and confirmed case study selection criteria, which are listed in the section below. An addendum to the draft inception report was also submitted in response to feedback from the MoFA and in line with IOB evaluation guidelines.

5.2 Phase 2: Data collection

Data was gathered from secondary and primary sources, to support triangulation and contribute to robust evaluation findings.

Secondary data collection

Document review: An initial document review focused on programme design and architecture, including the ToC, the programme proposal submitted to the MoFA, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) report, and annual programme reports. A more in-depth document review was conducted prior to primary data collection to examine implementation dynamics and emerging outcomes. This phase of the review drew on available monitoring data, the OH database, externally commissioned studies (including the Gender Audit, the NLGF analysis, and the Southern Leadership report), and country annual reports.

Indicator performance data: MoFA indicators reported by VCA were included in the effectiveness analysis, with particular attention to MoFA Basket Indicators (SCS01, SCS02 and SCS06). Programme level monitoring data was also reviewed.

OH database: The OH database was analysed to identify trends and map outcomes against the ToC. This provided a descriptive overview of outcome distribution across countries and ToC pillars, identification of concentration areas and gaps, and cross-country comparison. This analysis was used at the ToC workshops conducted with Alliance governance representatives and each of the seven regional teams and helped trigger discussion around observed patterns, gaps, most salient cases as well as unintended outcomes achieved.

The evaluation has, however, used the OH data with caution, understanding that OH introduces a 'positive bias' and that most of the VCA outcome database has not been externally substantiated. The evaluation does note that 66% of the 939 outcomes provide links to publicly available evidence (e.g., links to media products, policy statements, partnerships agreements, etc.) therefore, augmenting the credibility of the data. Since only a small selection of cases has been externally substantiated during the MTR and now at ETE stage, the evaluation has used the OH analysis and data as an additional source for triangulation instead of drawing any conclusive findings on programme outcomes and contribution from the database.

Primary data collection - quantitative

An **online semi-structured survey** was administered to all past and current VCA programme partners. The survey was distributed to the entire population of VCA partners (198 organisations) across all seven programme-targeted countries. Ninety (90) responses were received (45.45%⁴ response rate). The survey was made available in five languages; namely, Bahasa - Indonesia, French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. It focused on programme and partner supported capacity strengthening but also explored the following issues:

- Partnership dynamics
- Perceived value and added benefits of participation in the programme

⁴ While a 100% response is the theoretical goal of a census/total population survey, a 45% response rate in a global, multi-stakeholder context is significantly above the industry benchmark for partner-led surveys, which typically range between 15% and 30%. IN our experience, given the semi-structured nature of the instrument—requiring qualitative, in-depth input—this rate indicates a high level of engagement and 'buy-in' from the partner network

The survey did not use control variables therefore it can be categorised as a Level 1 of the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS)⁵. For this reason, survey findings were analysed according to the evaluation criteria and were used to triangulate qualitative data analysis at programme level, specifically, to explore intended and unintended changes against Pillar 1 of the ToC. Survey findings were not used to infer causality.

Indicator performance data: MoFA Basket Indicators included in the evaluation are:

- SCS01 – Implementation of laws and policies: “# of laws and policies for sustainable and inclusive development that are better implemented as a result of CSO engagement.”
- SCS02 – Policy changes: “# of laws, policies blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development as a result of CSO engagement.”
- SCS06 – Inclusion of CSOs: “# of CSOs included in SPs programmes”

Additional indicators reported on include the following from the VCA results framework and targets:

- # CSO’s within VCA that participate in new and/or expand their collaborations with existing and emerging gender-responsive climate justice movements.
- # of cases where the VCA network initiates new collaboration with targeted movements from new advocacy campaigns, knowledge sharing, hosting spaces, evidence production, submission, etc.

Note: Data for these two last indicators was compiled by the programme only from 2024, when the indicators were first defined - a monitoring enhancement triggered by the MTR process (VCA management response to the 2023 Mid Term Review). Data availability for these indicators is therefore limited and mostly reflect a positive adaptive management practice by the programme than a reliable source of data for the evaluation.

Primary data collection - qualitative

Programme level: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with internal VCA stakeholders selected via a purposive sampling approach. This allowed for respondent selection based on their knowledge, roles and positioning within the VCA architecture. The interviews examined programme design, relevance, governance structures, partnership dynamics, Southern leadership, effectiveness, and lessons learned. Additional interviews were conducted with sector experts and strategic programme partners to assess relevance and coherence.

Case study level: Data collection at case study / country level began with the selection of contribution claims. The selection process commenced with a comprehensive analysis of the programme’s OH database to shortlist potential outcomes for further examination. This shortlist was discussed with VCA Regional Teams to assess feasibility of primary data collection and evidence availability, after which the evaluators independently selected the final contribution claims for in-depth testing.

The shortlisting process and final selection were guided by a set of clear criteria formulated by the evaluation team (and assessed for feasibility by the PMEL Taskforce and Regional Teams) during the

⁵ The [Maryland Scientific Methods Scale \(SMS\)](#) is a five-point scale ranging from 1, for evaluations based on simple cross sectional correlations, to 5 for randomised control trials, an acceptable method under IOB criteria.

inception phase. This process aimed to balance rigour and feasibility given the evaluation timeframe. Based on the final set of selection criteria, two contribution claims, often comprising several inter-related outcomes, were identified in each programme-targeted country for in-depth data collection. Although the agreed criteria guided the process, the independent evaluation team retained responsibility for the final selection of case studies.

The **selection criteria** for the **contribution claims**, included:

- **Variation across thematic areas**, including locally led solutions, movement building, financial leverage, policy change, gender equality and inclusion, and youth outcomes. The relative importance of themes was considered in light of country-specific priorities.
- Explicit inclusion of **gender and youth dimensions**, with each featuring as a central component in at least two contribution stories.
- Representation across levels of change (**local, national, and global**).
- Coverage of the **three ToC pillars**: capacity strengthening, digital advocacy and storytelling, and advocacy.
- Inclusion of **joint or collaborative outcomes** where possible.
- **Alignment with MoFA interests**, particularly outcomes demonstrating scale (e.g., number of people or area reached), contributions to water and food security, and policy influence.
- **Evidence of sustainability**, including indications that results enabled partners to continue efforts beyond the programme period.
- Potential to shed light on selected VCA assumptions (**notably assumptions 1, 4, 7, and 8**).

Additional criteria to be applied in consultation with VCA country team:

- **Practicality/ accessibility** of the partners and actors involved in the outcome at the time of data collection
- **Information availability** on the specific outcome

CA, combined with a RE lens, was then applied to the contribution claims to assess how and why outcomes occurred, under what conditions, the extent of VCA's contribution, and possible influences by alternative factors and actors. The integrated CA-RE process followed six steps as explained in the table below.

Table 1 Description of integrated CA-RE methodology

Process for assessing plausibility of causal claim (according to IOB criteria)	Process followed by the evaluation combining the CA-RE methodologies, describing any relevant adaptations
1. Formulate the cause-effect contribution question	These two steps were combined in time. They were preceded by an in-depth review of programme documentation on the selected outcomes (including annual reports, country reports as well as additional evidence shared by regional teams during ToC workshops e.g., media clips). Individual contribution story narratives were then developed for each of the selected cases (14), following a set template to ensure consistent application in the approach. Each story narrative included a
2. (Re)construct an intervention theory, including the assumptions	

Process for assessing plausibility of causal claim (according to IOB criteria)	Process followed by the evaluation combining the CA-RE methodologies, describing any relevant adaptations
	contribution claim description, the link to intended outcome(s) in the ToC, and an ITP following the ‘<i>if-then-because</i>’ formulation. All contribution claims were then reviewed by the team’s CA-RE expert and revised based on feedback to further sharpen intervention theories, including embedded assumptions. This revision included a suggested sample for in-field verification, as well as probing questions to 1) test the IPT and 2) explore rival explanations for change processes.
3. Formulate alternative explanations for the observed changes	Alternative explanations were intentionally probed for in field (during data collection) and guided by selected mid-range theories (MRTs). At this point, the evaluation identified six MRTs fitting with the initial context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) configurations and used them to inform interview and FGD protocols and test causal explanations during analysis. Examples of questions included in country level qualitative instruments to assess alternative explanations included the following: Which other factors (contextual) or actors may have contributed to the emergence of these outcomes? Are there any results that would have happened even without the programme? Which ones? Alternative explanations for the contribution claims were gathered during fieldwork to ensure that causal inferences were grounded in context-specific, actor-centred evidence, rather than relying on programme documentation. While the desk review enabled the formulation of initial contribution claims, it was recognised that programme reports tend to reflect internally aligned narratives and did not sufficiently capture competing drivers of change. Fieldwork therefore provided a critical opportunity to engage directly with rightsholders, partners, and external stakeholders, for systematic exploration of what other factors may have influenced observed outcomes. Following data collection, alternative theories were assessed through triangulation across data methods and sources (stakeholder groups), and evaluated based on the consistency of available evidence, which consisted primarily of inputs obtained from programme stakeholders as well as validators. This iterative process enabled alternative explanations to be refined, where necessary, and allowed the evaluation to outline VCA’s contribution relative to other influencing factors and actors. This approach strengthened the robustness of the analysis by reducing confirmation bias, enabling triangulation across perspectives, and

Process for assessing plausibility of causal claim (according to IOB criteria)	Process followed by the evaluation combining the CA-RE methodologies, describing any relevant adaptations
	ensuring that alternative explanations, based in local realities, were adequately considered.
4. Collect data along results areas in the intervention theory	Each of the national consultants was trained in the contribution claim narratives and instruments to be able to effectively conduct data collection, including the use of probing / follow up questions and gathering of data on alternative explanations. For each contribution claim, local partners, rightsholders, and external validators were interviewed or invited to participate in focus group discussions to verify and/ or refine contribution claims.
5. Verify in a step-by-step manner the causal chains of the intervention theory for the full range of possible outcomes, and alternative explanations	Once data was collected and cleaned, it was analysed thematically and coded using a set coding framework covering the evaluation criteria, the evaluation questions, as well as specific CA-RE nodes, including context/mechanism/outcome. Evaluators used the coding of primary and secondary data (programme data) to verify the causal chains, and revise the intervention theories based on the following considerations (detailed in each country report): • New evidence of causal links and CMO configurations • Emerging alternative explanations • An assessment of strength of the evidence, and • The selection of mid-range theories offering additional clarity to explain intervention theories. Part of the verification process included another round of review and QA by the team's CA-RE expert to ensure integrity and consistency in the methodologies.

Further detail on sampling and data collection is provided below.

Sampling approach

In line with the qualitative nature of the evaluation and the specific requirements of the selected evaluation methodologies, the evaluation applied a mixed sampling strategy combining purposive, random, snowball and convenience approaches. Informants were identified in collaboration with VCA Alliance members and country Regional Teams (to check for feasibility), as well as directly by the evaluation team (specifically in relation to external validators). Interviews were conducted with sampled respondents subject to their availability and willingness to participate within the data collection timeframes.

- **VCA Alliance team, governance structures, and Regional Teams:** Purposive sampling was used to select stakeholders central to programme design, governance and implementation, including the Regional Teams, the Joint Programme Team (JPT), Taskforces and the Steering Committee. This sampling strategy was used to ensure that respondents' knowledge and roles within the VCA architecture allowed them direct insight into programme relevance, partnership dynamics and Southern leadership. The selection process prioritised diversity of roles (e.g., secretariat, finance, communications) and geographic coverage across all seven implementing countries and the global programme level. Sample sizes were guided by representation and cost-effectiveness:

sufficient engagements (either at individual or group level) were conducted to ensure the participation of all VCA governance structures and regional teams at least once to ensure the efficient use of evaluation resources.

- **Representatives of local partners and rightsholders:** Purposive sampling targeted programme partners linked to each of the selected contribution claims (three CSOs per contribution claim) to explore implementation processes and outcomes. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that local partners were knowledgeable about the specific claims being tested.

Rightsholders participated in focus group discussions (two per contribution claim). In 50% of cases, FGD participants were randomly selected from partner-provided lists to reduce selection bias. These lists were stratified by demographic characteristics (e.g., women, youth, IPs & LCs) to ensure inclusion of marginalised voices. In the other 50%, where the timeframe of data collection in the life of the programme (see section on limitations for further detail) did not allow for participant lists to be made available to the evaluation team, convenience sampling was used. This means the field team engaged participants that were known to the local partners to be conveniently available to participate in the evaluation.

This sampling may have introduced bias which is further discussed below. The sampling approach sought to achieve at least 75% participation by women and/or youth, where feasible, achieving a final of 60% respondents who were women and/or youth (56.5% women; 9.6% youth). Age/youth status was not disclosed by 20.0% of respondents (n=52), meaning these individuals are uncategorised for youth status.

Sample sizes were guided by representation and cost-effectiveness; that is, sufficient engagements (either at individual or group level) were conducted to ensure the participation of a variety of actors relevant to each claim (local partners, right holders and validators), within the scope of available evaluation resources.

- **Validators / external experts:** Programme partners assisted the evaluation team with the compilation of a list of possible validators linked to each selected contribution claim. Interviewees were selected using a combination of random, purposive and convenience sampling. This approach was used to balance different requirements, namely, that 1) validators were knowledgeable about the contribution claims to be tested but independent of programme implementation (“external”); 2) that interviews could be conducted within the timeframe; and 3) that respondents were independently selected by evaluators.

To find validators with sufficient context, relevant experience and knowledge of the particular contribution claims, a list of eight to 10 validators per claim was developed with local partners (80% of validators). In addition, local consultants in the evaluation team identified additional external validators relevant to the claims (20% of validators). In instances where several validators were of the same ‘calibre’, evaluators chose who to interview by selecting from the prepared lists.

The final choice of respondents was also determined by validator availability. The field team made every effort (including making telephonic contact and offering in-person and/or virtual engagements at a convenient time) to conduct the interviews within the allocated timeframes for data collection. In a few instances snowball sampling was utilised to identify suitable validators; that is, validators that agreed to participate in the evaluation were asked to identify other, appropriate external parties for outcome and contribution claim validation. This approach may have introduced a level of bias that is further explained in the relevant section of this report.

Additionally, for the programme level component, four validators were selected by the evaluation team for an interview from a list of possible candidates co-developed with VCA alliance members. As a result, the evaluation drew from external validator perspectives to answer evaluation questions under all criteria. The respondents in this category included local government representatives, non-VCA NGOs and sector experts with knowledge of climate adaptation. All were confirmed as external to the programme and independent of VCA funding. Sample sizes were guided by representation and cost-effectiveness; that is, sufficient engagements (either at individual or group level) were conducted to ensure the external validation of claims, exploration of alternative hypothesis and minimising bias, while staying within the scope of available evaluation resources.

The evaluation achieved 76% of the target number of engagements, with the highest rate of achievement being focus group discussions with rightsholders (at 85%) and the lowest rate of achievement with validators at 67%. Explanations for lower sample sizes are provided in the section on limitations below.

Survey: A total population sampling (census) approach was used, wherein all eligible participants (current and former VCA local partners) were invited to complete the survey. Overall, the sampling approach ensured diversity across levels of engagement, roles in decision-making, and proximity to programme implementation.

Sample achieved

The evaluation applied a structured and multi-layered sampling approach across programme and country levels, combining purposive, random, and convenience sampling to ensure both depth and triangulation of evidence. **At programme level**, 28 qualitative engagements were conducted with internal stakeholders and external validators, alongside a census survey of local partners (with a 45% response rate), achieving 72% of the targeted sample. **At country level**, the evaluation exceeded its target for engagements with local partners and Alliance members (105%), reflecting strong coverage of contribution claims across all seven countries. Engagement with external validators reached 79% of the target, providing an adequate but somewhat uneven basis for independent verification.

All planned engagements with rightsholders were completed (100%), ensuring robust inclusion of community-level perspectives, including women, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP&LCs), and youth in several contexts. Specifically, women represented approximately 55–60% of participants, while youth accounted for an estimated 15–20%, though youth participation remained uneven across countries and stakeholder groups.

Overall, the evaluation achieved 87% of its total targeted sample, indicating a high level of implementation fidelity despite some shortfalls, particularly in validator coverage. The sample provides a sufficiently diverse and credible evidence base aligned with IOB requirements for triangulation, inclusiveness, and contribution analysis, while acknowledging minor gaps in representativeness across certain stakeholder groups.

Table 7 in Appendix 3 details the final evaluation sample and its composition across internal and external stakeholders, disaggregated by country, type of stakeholder, gender, and youth.

5.3 Phase 3: Data analysis

This section describes the processes followed to analyse the gathered primary and secondary data.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise key survey findings, with aggregated data highlighting trends. Cross-tabulations were performed to compare responses across countries and leadership group, and qualitative responses to open-ended questions were coded according to the evaluation criteria using a combination of Excel and NVIVO12 software. Survey data was triangulated⁶ with qualitative data collected at programme and country level.

Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using two complementary methods: namely, thematic analysis and Causal Mapping.

Thematic analysis, using NVIVO 12, was used to code and organise qualitative data from key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions against a coding framework, thus following an inductive methodology and to ensure integrity and consistency in the process.

The coding framework was categorised according to the evaluation questions included for each evaluation criterion, namely, relevance, coherence, effectiveness / impact, efficiency, and sustainability. In addition, Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) relationships were categorised and analysed according to the principles of RE⁷. Following thematic coding, the data was triangulated across data sources (e.g. quantitative data from the survey, qualitative data from interviews and FGDs, secondary data from VCA reports and secondary data from external publications) to ensure validity and credibility. Validation and sense-making workshops were conducted with stakeholders from each of the countries and programme level governance structures to present and validate the initial findings, and identify any information gaps. The evaluation plan in [Appendix 1](#) provides a detailed overview regarding which methods and data sources were used to answer which evaluation questions.

CM uses OpenAI's GPT-4.0 as a key analytical method to synthesise findings, identify patterns in outcomes, and explore both expected and unexpected causal pathways and relationships within the secondary data. The Causal Mapping team worked both inductively and deductively; that is, the AI reviewed documents to identify changes reported by the programme, and causal influences

How was conflicting information reconciled?

Our thematic analysis of and triangulation of data did not exclude outliers – instead, we included all perspectives even if they were not dominant. A common critique of triangulation is that it is underpinned by the assumption that there is a single 'truth' that multiple methods will converge upon.

This can contradict constructivist and interpretivist perspectives that see multiple realities as equally valid.

Over-relying on triangulation may also reinforce dominant power dynamics if some data sources are privileged over others. Therefore, the evaluation team used triangulation reflexively, acknowledging and capturing contradictions. Where applicable, these multiple perspectives are noted in the presentation of evaluation findings.

⁶ For an overview of the evaluation's triangulation strategy, please refer to Appendix 6.

⁷ This evaluation used a definition of 'mechanism' that classifies it into a combination of *resources* and *reasoning*: "intervention *resources* are introduced in a context, in a way that enhances a change in *reasoning*. This alters the behaviour of participants, which leads to outcomes". Dalkin, S.M., Greenhalgh, J, Jones, D. et al in "What's in a mechanism? Development of a key concept in realist evaluation, 2015.

mentioned in the documents, as well as the source of evidence (inductive); similarly, the AI was asked to seek specific evidence that supports or contradicts pre-determined categories or labels extracted for the ToC (deductive). The findings were organised in causal maps, which allowed the evaluation team to understand and visualize interrelationships between multiple outcomes. This is especially beneficial when there are hundreds of outcomes, as it the case for the VCA programme (935). The causal maps for presentation of an overall synthesis picture of the outcomes reported – and what contributed to them⁸

How to read a causal map

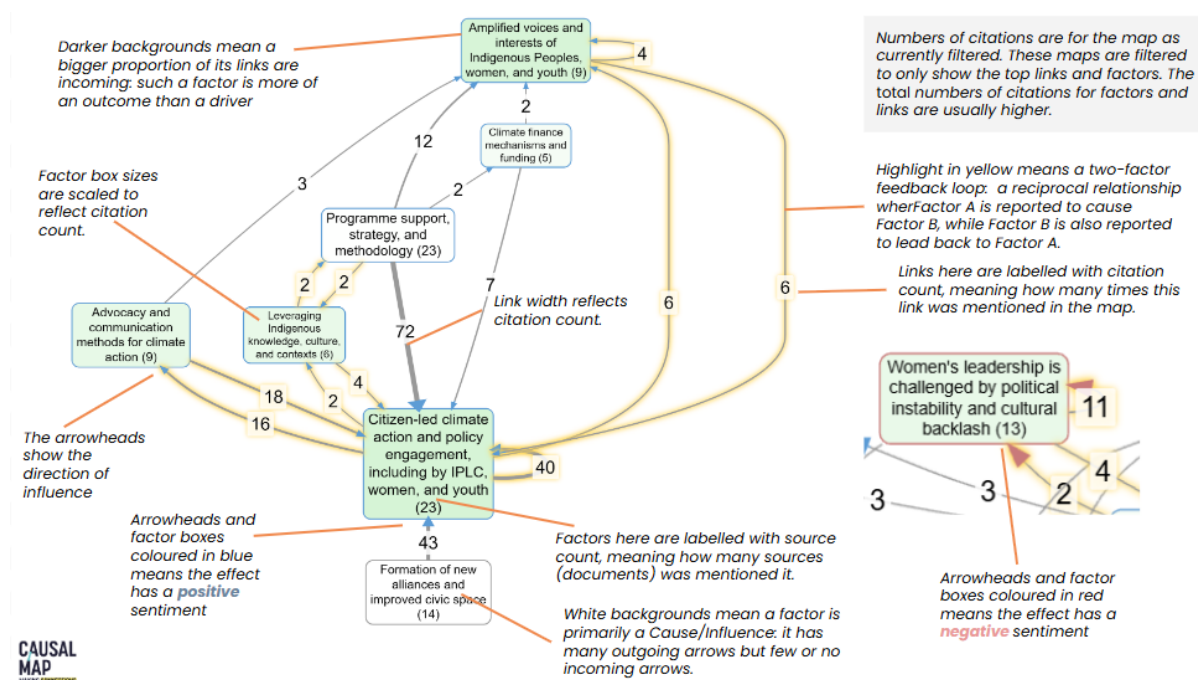


Figure 1 How to read a Causal Map

* Arrowheads and factor boxes coloured in red means the effect has a negative sentiment (this only appears in the women's and the overall programme level maps)

Causal maps have played a central role in the CA, providing a structured visual representation of causal relationships. Individual causal maps have been generated for each country to uncover differences in causal pathways at country level. These differences will be analysed in conjunction with qualitative interview data to understand the contextual and methodological factors contributing to them. Country-specific causal maps will also enable cross-country comparisons to uncover 1) common causal pathways leading to success, 2) context-specific factors driving variations and; 3) external influences, such as climate initiatives or local adaptations.

Figure 2 below illustrates the process of data analysis used for this evaluation.

⁸ For more detailed information on how Causal Mapping works, see <https://www.causalmap.app/>

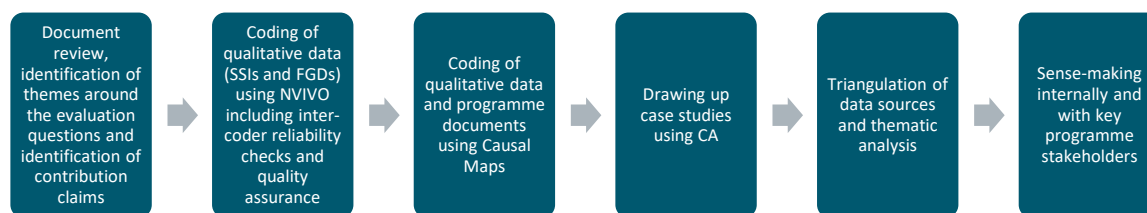


Figure 2 Data analysis process

5.4 Phase 4: Report writing and validation / feedback

A draft evaluation report was submitted on 20 February 2026 for review and comment by the client. This was followed by a series of feedback and validation workshops at country and programme level. Following these workshops, the evaluation team incorporated feedback on the draft findings report and country case studies, received from VCA as well as the MoFA. This submission includes the full set of second drafts of evaluation deliverables.

5.5 Evaluation challenges

The section below provides an overview of the key challenges affecting the evaluation process, as well as mitigation strategies.

The main challenge experienced was a **delayed entry into field**. The review and finalisation of the evaluation inception report, as well as receipt of donor permission to enter field, was delayed as a result of an external review process, per MoFA requirements. A series of revisions to the inception report were requested following completion of the review. Addressing these caused a delay in the evaluation process with primary data collection rescheduled for the final months of 2025. This period coincided with VCA programme closure and completion of year end tasks. A number of VCA programme team members and partners were transitioning to new projects or finalising outstanding tasks prior to cessation of their programme contracts. This impacted on the availability and capacity of country alliance members and programme partners to participate in and support the evaluation process. The shift in data collection timeframes also meant that data collection overlapped with the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30), which was held in Belém, Brazil, from 10 to 21 November 2025. This too impacted on the availability and capacity of country alliance members and programme partners to assist with evaluation tasks and participate in evaluation activities, particularly in that country.

Several strategies were adopted to mitigate these challenges. The VCA PMEL Taskforce met regularly with the evaluation team to identify bottlenecks and addressed these directly with the relevant Regional Team members. Regular communication and proactive strategising by the PMEL Taskforce, Regional Teams and the evaluation team helped to ensure that sampling frameworks were compiled as quickly as possible and fieldwork scheduling could commence. Where necessary, the evaluation team was linked directly to programme partners on the ground who could assist with the formulation of sample lists and field logistics. National consultants also played a key role, assisting with field arrangements and country-level consultations to support with - and expedite - data collection preparations.

In addition, the **evaluation scope and sample were revised and expanded** following the external review. This required the evaluation team to source, select, train and prepare national consultants

for fieldwork in four additional countries. Follow up training on the expanded scope and sample also had to be conducted with the original team members. While the evaluation team was able to draw on Southern Hemisphere's extensive network of well-experienced consultants to add capacity to national team members, this process caused delays with entry into field and hence with the completion of planned primary data collection. However, it was deemed necessary to undergo a thorough preparation process of all national consultants to ensure that evaluation quality standards could be maintained. Mitigation strategies adopted to address this challenge included the sourcing of additional, internal capacity for the evaluation team to ensure that the selection, contracting and preparation of new team members could be finalised as quickly as possible.

It was noted that a number of the sampled evaluation respondents as well as Regional Team members appeared **overburdened by repeated requests for support** and/or evaluation participation. As noted above, availability and capacity was also hindered by the shift in data collection timeframes with some respondents preparing for their annual leave or programme exit. As a result of these challenges, the **scheduling of interviews and focus group discussions took a longer period of time than anticipated**. Selected respondents were also, at times, slow to respond to requests for interviews, requiring follow-up emails and calls by the evaluation coordination team.

The evaluation team addressed this via escalation to the PMEL Taskforce for their support and guidance. To reduce the burden on Regional Team members, the evaluation team made direct contact with partner organisations to request their support with the preparation of sample lists. National consultants were also allocated additional budget to support with fieldwork scheduling and planning processes, which included a number of follow up calls with local partners to assist with any questions regarding sampling and to check country / contextual requirements for respondent introductions and initial engagement.

Where **selected respondents could not be reached**, the evaluation team used the prepared sample lists to select alternative interviewees and focus group participants. The same process of randomised selection was adopted as far as possible. In addition, extensive efforts were made by the evaluation team and national consultants to accommodate requests for the rescheduling of interviews and to ensure that the availability of sampled evaluation respondents was prioritised. This required flexibility on the part of the evaluation team and national consultants who conducted a number of engagements after working hours and over weekends.

Physical distances between the data collection sites of the finalised sample also impacted fieldwork timeframes. For example, in some cases the areas where interviews were to be conducted were spread far apart, which was not initially factored into the planning conducted by the evaluation coordination team. A key assumption was that data collection for each contribution claim would be fairly contained within a particular location or radius. However, in some instances, this was not the case. Mitigation strategies included the expansion of national teams to ensure that there was additional capacity for concurrent data collection and to address travel time requirements. This measure was successfully applied in Zambia and Kenya.

Lastly, as a result of the extensive number of evaluation questions, **interview and focus group schedules were lengthy**. This resulted in a number of interviews and focus group discussions running over the scheduled time. In such cases, some of the respondents had to end the engagement as a result of fatigue or conflict with other appointments. To address this, national consultants prioritised the questions related to the contribution claim to ensure that the required data standards could be met for this vital component of the evaluation. This measure did mean, however, that other themes / areas of questioning such as unintended outcomes could not be covered in-depth.

5.6 Biases and limitations

In line with IOB criterion 14, this section discusses the main evaluation limitations identified, relating to reliability (consistency/replicability of findings), internal validity (confidence that observed changes are plausibly linked to programme contributions rather than other factors), and external validity (the extent to which findings can be generalised beyond the cases and respondents engaged).

Reliability: While the evaluation deployed standardised protocols across countries, conditions for data collection were not uniform. Fieldwork across multiple geographies encountered uneven access and logistical constraints, reducing the extent to which the same methods could be applied in identical ways across contexts, hence **limiting data consistency across sites**. In addition, the abovementioned length of interview and focus group schedules created a risk of respondent fatigue and incomplete coverage of all topics in some sessions, which **reduces comparability across respondent groups and countries**. It also increases the risk that negative effects, implementation harms, or counteracting dynamics were under-reported and that rival explanations were **not fully surfaced in every engagement**.

In at least one setting (Paraguay), interpretation was supported by community members to accommodate multiple language requirements in some engagements (which was not previously communicated to the organisers to ensure adequate preparation). This may have introduced **variability in how questions and responses were translated and recorded**. These limitations mean that patterns identified across countries should be read as convergent qualitative evidence rather than fully standardised measurements. The evaluation team sought to mitigate reliability risks through the use of shared instruments, national team training, systematic data analysis processes and triangulation, including attention to consistency in qualitative coding and interpretation as anticipated in the inception report addendum (dated September 2025).

Internal validity: The evaluation's ability to make strong causal claims is constrained by the nature of the evidence base and by data collection constraints. Much of the primary evidence is derived from stakeholder accounts and programme documentation, which carries **risks of recall error and social desirability bias**, particularly where respondents are closely connected to implementation structures. In some countries (e.g. Tunisia) respondents were reflecting on activities that were no longer actively underway, increasing the distance from lived experience and potentially weakening the specificity of causal accounts and mechanism explanations. For secondary evidence, the evaluation explicitly treated **OH outputs** cautiously due to **potential positive reporting bias and limited independent substantiation**, and did not rely on this dataset alone to substantiate causal claims. Survey findings were also interpreted carefully - the **survey was treated as descriptive and did not use control variables**, limiting the extent to which observed associations could be interpreted as causal effects.

To **mitigate internal validity risks**, the evaluation applied theory testing through CA and realist logic, used explicit assessments of evidence strength, and sought external validation through validators where feasible.

The evaluation recognises that the **purposive sampling strategy** used to select the VCA programme implementation team and local partner representatives may also have **introduced a degree of bias**. The risk is that the evaluation findings may disproportionately reflect the experiences and perceptions of those closely tied to the programme, potentially leading to an over-representation of positive views on programme success or effectiveness, and a lack of critique or recognition of

challenges and shortcomings. Mitigation strategies introduced by the evaluation team include the following: 1) all interview schedules included probes for challenges and barriers of project implementation. These inputs were captured and have been documented in the programme / integrated report as well as each of the country reports; 2) external validators were interviewed at both programme and country level to explore alternative narratives as well as effectiveness, outcomes and impact. The extent to which comprehensive answers to these questions could be provided varied.

In addition, **sample sizes** for the evaluation were guided by representation, available timeframes for data collection, and cost-effectiveness. The qualitative nature of the evaluation methodology also meant that sample sizes were not informed by statistical calculations. A significant amount of data relied on **self-selected participants**, particularly in the survey responses and KIIs and workshops with VCA governance structures and Taskforces. This approach **may not fully capture the diversity of views** across the programme target population, and **carries a risk of under-representation or over-representation of specific groups and perspectives**.

The use of **purposive, convenience and snowball sampling (to a lesser extent) for rightsholders and validators**, especially when partner-provided lists or pre-determined sample frames were unavailable or time constraints affected sampling, may also have led to the **over-representation of more engaged stakeholders with favourable views** on the programme or those within stronger networks. For example, Bolivia, Brazil and Indonesia all encountered situations where participant lists were either incomplete or not stratified by demographic characteristics. In Tunisia, the respondents selected for the GDAP contribution claim were selected via convenience sampling. The evaluation team have been explicit about sample sizes, and levels of representation or under-representation, in all country level reports as well as this integrated report, to ensure that findings are presented and reviewed with this lens.

External validity: A key consideration is the use of CA coupled with a RE lens as the evaluation's methodology. This methodological mix means that the evaluation's findings **are not statistically generalisable across all VCA contexts and partners**, and transferability depends on the similarity of conditions between the evaluated cases and other settings. In addition, **certain groups, particularly marginalised communities** such as youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), were often **under-represented in final country samples**. This was acknowledged as a significant limitation in countries such as Paraguay and Kenya, where IP & LC groups, despite efforts to stratify by demographics, were not fully captured in the sample. The Zambia and Tunisia reports highlight how women and/or women-led organisations were well-represented in some contribution claim samples, but youth and other marginalised groups remained less represented. This could skew the analysis, particularly when assessing VCA's impact on these groups, and therefore poses risks to the **generalisability of the findings across all rightsholders, constraining external validity**.

Another key limitation is the risk of selection bias inherent in case study designs at scale: the inception addendum explicitly anticipated that **case selection could be shaped by accessibility and "good story" effects**, which would skew the evidence base.

The evaluation achieved 87% of planned engagements overall, with lower completion for validator interviews (79%), reducing the breadth of independent external validation and limiting the degree to which findings can be confidently extended beyond the cases studied. While the partner survey achieved a 45% response rate, which is strong for online surveys and exceeds published averages, the evaluation cannot rule out **non-response bias**. Responding partners may differ from non-respondents in engagement, capacity, performance, or relationship with the programme, which may

limit the external validity of survey findings. The response rate was therefore treated as an indicator of coverage rather than representativeness, and survey results were interpreted descriptively and triangulated with qualitative and documentary evidence.

Two factors strengthen the validity of the evaluation process.

Independence of the evaluators: The evaluation team had no prior involvement in the design or implementation of the VCA programme or with MoFA, and maintained complete impartiality throughout. Independent selection of contribution claims, and validators further protected the independence of findings.

Evaluation responsiveness to the IOB reviewer suggestions: The evaluation incorporated the feedback received from reviewers (e.g., methodology, scope and transparency among others) which contributed to extended scope and strengthened the design of a case study-appropriate methodology.

Evaluation Reference Group: An independent ERG was established to oversee the evaluation. The group comprised an independent thematic and evaluation expert, MoFA representatives, two representatives from local partner organisations, one JPT representative, two PMEL Taskforce members, and the commissioner of the evaluation (VCA Director). The ERG reviewed and approved the ToR, the inception report, and the draft and final end-of-term evaluation reports.

Overall, the above overview indicates that the evaluation provides credible, evidence-informed explanations of how change plausibly occurred within the selected and investigated cases, but not a **single, statistically generalisable estimate of programme-wide impact**.

Transferability of findings to other contexts depends on whether the relevant contextual conditions and actor configurations are comparable. In line with IOB criterion 14, the evaluation therefore treats conclusions as strongest where evidence converges across multiple respondent groups and sources, and more tentative where independent corroboration was limited or where sampling relied on convenience/snowball approaches.

In addition: It should also be noted that the evaluation followed a *Made in Africa evaluation approach*, which emphasises inclusivity, cultural relevance and community involvement. The biases identified, such as selection bias, social desirability bias, and positivity bias, are inherent in the evaluation of marginalised communities and cannot be eliminated. These biases stem from purposive, snowball and convenience sampling, which were used to ensure the inclusion of those most affected by the programme, who could provide in-depth and well-contextualised insights rather than aiming for statistical representativeness. While these biases may limit the generalisability of findings, they provide valuable, context-specific insights into the programme's implementation and results. Mitigation strategies, such as triangulation and reflexivity, were employed to manage these biases and ensure a nuanced, balanced interpretation of the findings.

[Appendix 3](#) provides further detail about how IOB criteria were addressed by the evaluation.

6 Findings

This section presents the findings of the evaluation against the following evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness and outcomes, efficiency, sustainability and partnerships.

6.1 Relevance

This section examines the extent to which the VCA programme addressed the specific needs and priorities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), and other marginalised groups across country contexts. It is structured in three parts: (i) how needs were identified and incorporated into programme design; (ii) the nature of needs identified; and (iii) the extent to which VCA's approach was appropriate in responding to those needs.

Data sources for relevance:

Secondary data sources: Programme and country reports (2021–2025), VCA Theory of Change, programme proposal, Mid-Term Review (MTR), annual reporting templates, and country evaluation reports.

Primary data sources: Semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with programme partners and implementers; key informant interviews (KIIs) with VCA governance structures and alliance members; focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders, including women, youth, and IPs & LCs; and selected external stakeholder interviews (validators).

Evidence assessment for relevance:

The evidence for the relevance section draws on a combination of primary and secondary data sources, including programme documentation, interviews, and focus group discussions, allowing for triangulation across programme design, implementation, and stakeholder perspectives. Programme reports were used to assess how needs were identified and incorporated into design, while primary data provided insight into the nature of needs and the perceived appropriateness of VCA's response. However, much of the evidence is self-reported and derived from programme participants, with sampling approaches partly purposive and convenience-based, which introduces risks of positive reporting and representation bias. In addition, triangulation across these sources does not fully mitigate bias, as many data sources are not independent and may reinforce dominant programme narratives. Evidence is relatively stronger for findings related to needs identification processes, while conclusions on the extent to which VCA addressed the needs of marginalised groups and the value added by adaptive management are more perception-based and should be interpreted with caution. Overall, the evidence is sufficient to support moderate-confidence conclusions on relevance, particularly at the level of programme processes and perceived responsiveness, though gaps remain in assessing depth of inclusion and coverage across all groups.

The table below provides an overview of the key evaluation questions and related findings for *Relevance*. Evidence to support each finding is presented in the narrative sections that follow.

Key evaluation questions and findings:⁹

How were needs identified and incorporated into programme design?

Finding 1: VCA used context-sensitive and iterative processes to identify and respond to needs across countries. At country and local level, this drew on diagnostic and situational analyses, ongoing engagement with communities and local organisations, and partner profiling. At higher levels of programme governance, relevance was shaped more through contextual analysis, organisational capacity assessments, reporting, partner selection, and reflection processes. Relevance was therefore intentionally built into programme design and reassessed during implementation, rather than assumed at inception.

What were the key needs of women, youth, IPs & LCs and marginalised groups? To what extent was VCA's approach appropriate in responding to these needs?

Finding 2: Across contexts, the main needs were meaningful participation, recognition, collective voice, and access to climate governance, alongside livelihood and resource pressures. These needs differed across groups: women needed more meaningful participation and recognition, youth needed legitimacy and visibility, and IPs & LCs needed territorial protection and recognition of collective rights. Evidence on Persons with Disabilities was limited.

Finding 3: VCA's approach was broadly appropriate, especially where it addressed weak representation, fragmented voice, limited recognition, and low institutional responsiveness. Its main strength lay in amplifying voice, movement-building, policy engagement, and access to governance spaces. It was less directly aligned to urgent material needs, though mechanisms such as the NLGF helped complement advocacy with more tangible support for local action.

To what extent and how has an adaptive approach been used in VCA and added value to programme implementation?

Finding 4: Adaptive management was used to a considerable extent across VCA. It was applied through contextual analysis, learning and reflection processes, and adjustments to strategies, partnerships, and implementation modalities in response to changing political, civic, and climate conditions.

Finding 5: Adaptive practices added value by helping VCA remain relevant and workable in dynamic contexts. They helped sustain momentum during disruption, reduce barriers to participation, and support timelier and context-specific responses to emerging risks and opportunities.

6.1.1 How needs were identified and incorporated into VCA programme design and implementation

Analysis of evaluation data across all programme countries suggests that the VCA programme has generally prioritised **participatory and context-sensitive approaches** to identifying needs and shaping interventions.

"Once you understand the local political and social context, you can tailor your engagement to support and amplify the voices that are least heard and most affected." - VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

Across the seven countries, needs identification appears to have been shaped through different processes at different levels of the programme. At country and local implementation level, it was grounded in **initial diagnostic and situational analyses**, as well as **ongoing engagement** with communities and local organisations. At higher levels of programme governance, however, needs identification was shaped less through direct participatory engagement with rightsholder groups and

⁹ The question of what VCA's achievements reveal about the validity of its Theory of Change and underlying assumptions is addressed in Sections 6.3.9 and 6.3.10, where ToC testing is presented alongside the Causal Map analysis and the effectiveness findings that inform it.

more through **contextual analysis, organisational capacity assessments, reporting, partner selection, and programme reflection processes**. Secondary documentation indicates that countries were selected based on strong Alliance presence and informed by political, economic, and social situational analyses to identify marginalised groups and barriers to participation. These analyses were reportedly revisited through reporting and reflection processes and informed priority setting, suggesting an effort to **embed context analysis into programme planning**, even where direct rightsholder engagement was less evident at higher governance levels.

“That context-setting work didn’t stop after the proposal phase either. It’s been a core feature of our annual reporting. We have kept track of things like whether it’s an election year, shifts in the civic space and any emerging barriers to implementation.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

In addition, evidence indicates that the **programme deliberately worked through women-led, youth-led, Indigenous-led, and grassroots organisations**, rather than treating these constituencies as peripheral beneficiaries. According to VCA records, among local partners that reported leadership type, 20% (78 of 248) were women-led, 28% (69 organisations) were IPs & LCs-led, and 27% (66 organisations) were youth-led¹⁰. Although these categories may overlap, the overall pattern is important. It indicates that VCA’s relevance was pursued not only through contextual analysis, but also through a deliberate effort to anchor implementation in organisations with direct knowledge of the exclusion, vulnerabilities, and priorities facing marginalised groups.

“Local partners were deliberately recruited to represent vulnerable and marginalised groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women and youth-led organisations, enabling them to speak directly to the needs of their constituents.”- VCA PMEL Taskforce (FGD)

Alongside this programme-wide approach, country-level data shows multiple participatory mechanisms used to identify needs, and these vary in consistency and structure.

In **Zambia**, respondents emphasised that needs identification was not standardised across the programme and varied by partner practice, ranging from **community-led profiling** to structured partner assessment forms and cross-partner synthesis discussions.

“The process of identifying needs was not uniform across the programme. Each local partner applied its own method.”- VCA Regional Team, Zambia (SSI)

In **Kenya**, respondents described a more structured approach to needs identification and partner selection, including **community profiling** and **risk and vulnerability assessments** in informal settlements, complemented by **profiling of partner organisations** representing women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Importantly, this process appears to have considered not only the relevance of these organisations to the target constituencies, but also their institutional capacity to engage in and sustain programme processes. This suggests a deliberate effort to assess both community needs and the organisational ecosystem required to advance inclusion, participation, and voice.

¹⁰ Categories are not mutually exclusive and include, IPs & LC and Women led, IPs & LC led, youth and LGBTIQIP-led, Youth and women and IPs & LC-led, among other permutations.

In **Tunisia**, evidence indicates that needs were identified through **fieldwork and participatory processes** that specifically included women, youth, and pastoralist groups. Respondents described a diagnostic phase informed by direct engagement, with inputs incorporated into PLAC-related priorities and interventions. Importantly, Regional Team respondents also emphasised that many needs only became fully visible through implementation, as partners and alliance members observed barriers to participation, emerging risks, and shifts in community priorities.

“Some partners, interestingly, identified different needs as their work progressed over the course of the project. Some did not start out working with youth, for example, but towards the end of the programme, found that there was an important need for this type of targeting.” - VCA Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)

In **Indonesia**, needs identification is described through a **rights-based, community consent-oriented approach** aligned with principles of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), with communities reviewing options and selecting what fits their priorities:

“We identify the needs of women, youth, and other marginalised groups through a process like Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). We determine the community's needs and then offer potential solutions, discussing them with the community.” - VCA Regional Team, Indonesia (SSI)

In **Paraguay**, needs were identified through long-standing, **participatory engagement** with women, youth and indigenous communities, rather than through a standalone assessment. Partner organisations worked with constituencies they had supported over many years, drawing on accumulated field experience and ongoing dialogue to surface priorities and constraints. Needs were refined during implementation through direct community engagement, using culturally legitimate entry points such as support for women artisans, vegetable gardens and small-scale poultry production. This approach enabled trust-building and allowed more sensitive issues related to rights and empowerment to be incorporated gradually, while remaining responsive to the social and political constraints of the context.

“We identified needs through direct engagement with communities, recognising that the Paraguayan context required a cautious and adapted approach. Rather than imposing external frameworks, we worked through culturally accepted activities, and these served as entry points for us to gradually incorporate discussions on sensitive topics and build trust.” - VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

In **Brazil**, evidence suggests needs identification was supported through stakeholder mapping across Amazon states, with organisations reporting that social, gender, and racial inequality represent key challenges. This mapping approach is also linked to an intentional focus on strengthening the participation and leadership of women and marginalised groups within coalitions.

In conclusion, evidence indicates that VCA intentionally built the programme to be relevant and responsive to the needs on the ground.

6.1.2 Nature of needs identified among women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), and persons with disabilities

This analysis draws on primary data generated through the evaluation process, programme documentation, and VCA ETE country reports. Across these sources, the evaluation found that the

needs of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), and other marginalised groups were **complex, overlapping, and context-specific**. While some needs were shared across stakeholder groups, others were more differentiated and reflected distinct forms of exclusion, vulnerability, and marginalisation.

Overall, primary and secondary data suggests that the most significant **needs identified were political, relational, and structural**, rather than only technical or material. Across countries, marginalised groups were not only disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation, but also **systematically excluded from the spaces in which climate priorities, plans, and resources were negotiated**. Evaluation findings show that participation mechanisms often existed formally, yet meaningful inclusion was constrained by inaccessible policy language, low levels of procedural literacy, weak accountability channels, and limited recognition of marginalised actors as legitimate contributors to climate governance. At the same time, these structural barriers intersected with material pressures, including food insecurity, water stress, livelihood disruption, and threats to land and territory. Climate vulnerability was therefore experienced not as a single issue, but as a combination of socio-economic precarity and political exclusion.

The analysis below disaggregates these needs by stakeholder group. It first highlights the main barriers shared across groups and then considers the more specific needs that emerged for women, youth, IPs & LCs, and Persons with Disabilities.

Shared needs across stakeholder groups

Across the seven countries, women, youth, and IPs & LCs consistently faced **exclusion from climate governance and public decision-making**. These groups were widely described as among those most affected by climate and environmental change, yet they remained underrepresented in planning, policy, and implementation spaces. Even where formal participation structures existed, meaningful engagement was often limited by technical language, inaccessible information, weak feedback mechanisms, and social norms that devalued the contributions of marginalised constituencies.

A second common need was for **accessible, usable, and simplified information**. Across contexts, technical policy, climate, and budget language functioned as a barrier to participation, particularly where communities were expected to engage in planning or accountability processes without the information or procedural understanding required to do so effectively. This was not simply a communication issue. It shaped whether people could recognise their rights, understand decision-making processes, and participate on informed terms.

A third common need related to the climate-induced strain on livelihoods and daily survival. In contexts such as the Brazilian Amazon, the Tunisian islands, and parts of Zambia and Kenya, climate change was described as undermining traditional livelihood systems and deepening insecurity among already marginalised populations. In these settings, needs related to food security, water access, mobility, and sustainable livelihoods were closely intertwined with broader questions of representation, voice, and access to public resources.

Women's needs

Across several countries, women's needs were closely linked to **exclusion from decision-making, weak recognition as legitimate actors, and limited influence** over climate-related decisions that affected their lives and livelihoods. The evidence suggests that women did not only face material vulnerabilities associated with climate change, but also structural barriers that constrained their ability to participate meaningfully in public processes, access resources, and shape local responses.

These barriers were often reinforced by gender norms, literacy and information gaps, institutional practices, and unequal access to land, finance, and governance spaces.

In **Kenya**, women's needs were strongly tied to **structural exclusion from public participation and local planning processes**. Evidence from Siaya County suggests that many women were either unaware of county planning processes or uncertain about how to engage with them (VCA Kenya, ETE Country Report). Even where they attended public participation meetings, their involvement was often limited to passive or symbolic presence rather than active contribution. This points to a need not only for inclusion in formal terms, but for meaningful participation supported by accessible information, confidence, and practical understanding of how to engage.

"We were not being recognised before our engagement with SIMUN/VCA programme. We were ignored when we used public forums to raise awareness of climate change. People could not listen to us. We were not respected." -Rightsholders, Kenya (FGD Report)

In other Kenyan contexts, including arid and semi-arid counties such as Marsabit, Kajiado, and Samburu, as well as parts of Kisumu and Nakuru, climate shocks further deepened **women's vulnerability through food insecurity, livelihood losses, and resource-related pressures**, while gender inequality continued to limit their access to land, finance, and decision-making spaces (VCA Kenya, ETE Country Report).

In **Tunisia**, women's needs were articulated somewhat differently but reflected similarly structural forms of exclusion. Among women fishers and farmers in Kerkennah, the primary needs related to **economic visibility, access to resources, and bargaining power**. These needs were rooted in gender norms, institutional exclusion, and informality, and were compounded by the effects of climate change on livelihood activities. A particularly important dimension was the **exclusion of unregistered women's groups from formal support and resource channels**, pointing to the significance of legal and administrative recognition as part of women's broader struggle for inclusion.

Taken together, these cases suggest that women's needs extended beyond material support alone. They included recognition as legitimate actors, meaningful rather than symbolic participation, improved access to intelligible processes and information, and stronger positioning within the institutional and economic systems that shape climate adaptation and livelihood security.

Youth needs

Evaluation findings show that youth needs centred more explicitly on **legitimacy, visibility, and recognition as political actors** within climate governance processes. Across countries, young people were often positioned as affected by climate change but not taken seriously as contributors to climate decision-making. Their exclusion was reinforced by age-based discrimination, limited access to resources, and a lack of credible entry points into policy processes. In some contexts, youth also faced social stigma linked to their territorial, livelihood, or community identities or backgrounds.

The evidence further suggests that youth did not only require technical knowledge or climate awareness. They also needed public recognition, confidence, collective identity, and meaningful opportunities to participate in governance spaces on legitimate terms. In this sense, youth exclusion was not only institutional. It was also social and symbolic, affecting whether young people saw themselves, and were seen by others, as entitled to shape climate responses.

In **Brazil**, for example, youth from extractivist communities were described as **facing identity and economic pressures that undermined their participation in climate action and local governance**. The dominant public narrative associated success with agribusiness, while traditional extractivist livelihoods were devalued. This created a sense of shame that weakened young people's connection to their own identities and reduced their confidence to engage as environmental actors.

"We didn't even understand ourselves as young extractivists; we didn't even see ourselves, actually. And today, today the reality is different." -Rightsholders, Brazil (SSI)

This points to a need not only for inclusion in formal spaces, but for identity affirmation, political visibility, and recognition of youth as legitimate actors within territorial and environmental governance processes.

In **Indonesia**, youth needs were articulated somewhat differently, but **reflected a similar legitimacy gap**. In the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), youth were described as largely invisible in regional planning processes, suggesting a need for more structured forms of representation within climate governance. Digital connectivity also emerged as a group-specific need, as youth viewed social media and digital storytelling as important tools for mobilisation, visibility, and agency. This indicates that for youth, access to governance was closely tied not only to formal participation mechanisms, but also to the communication channels through which they could make themselves visible and heard.

The above examples suggest that youth needs were closely connected to political visibility, legitimacy, identity, and entry into governance spaces, rather than only to technical participation in climate-related activities. Across contexts, the issue was not simply whether youth were present, but whether they were recognised and able to participate as credible actors in shaping climate responses.

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities' needs

For Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), the evaluation found that needs were closely tied to **territorial rights, resource governance, recognition, and political agency**. In contrast to some of the other stakeholder groups, the needs of IPs & LCs were particularly bound up with struggles over land, consultation, extraction, and the defence of collective ways of life. These were not simply needs for participation in generic governance spaces, but for protection of territory, enforcement of rights, and recognition of indigenous knowledge, authority, and presence.

Across the evidence reviewed, climate vulnerability for IPs & LCs was inseparable from broader struggles over land, territory, rights, and survival. In several contexts, **recurring climate shocks intensified food insecurity, livelihood losses, and resource-related tensions**. This was evident, for example, in arid and semi-arid areas such as Marsabit, Kajiado, and Samburu in **Kenya**, as well as parts of Kisumu and Nakuru, where drought and other climate pressures deepened insecurity among pastoralist and local communities (VCA Kenya, ETE Country Report). Similar dynamics were also reported in **Zambia**, where flooding and drought intensified food insecurity and livelihood stress (VCA Kenya, ETE Country Report). These examples suggest that for many IPs & LCs, environmental exposure was accompanied by limited access to protection, resources, and responsive governance systems.

A central need identified across several contexts **was territorial defence and legal recognition of ancestral lands**. In **Paraguay and Bolivia**, this included the need for stronger technical and legal evidence to substantiate land and water claims in the face of extractive pressures. In these settings,

the issue was not only exclusion from decision-making, but the broader insecurity of holding and defending collective rights within political and legal systems that often privileged external commercial interests over Indigenous and community claims.

In Bolivia, rightsholders described serious concerns regarding flawed consultation processes linked to hydrocarbon exploration, in which communities were exposed to manipulation rather than meaningful consent.

“The main risk was the government through hydrocarbon exploration, which would enter communities with deception using this false consultation (which should be free, prior, and informed). They would have them sign blank lists, so when they realised it, they had already given authorisation.”-Rightsholders, Bolivia (FGD)

“The greatest risk was losing their natural environment, their water springs. But the greatest threat was the government.”-Rightsholders, Bolivia (FGD)

This points to a need not only for formal consultation, but for genuine enforcement of free, prior, and informed consent, and for stronger protection against dispossession through extractive and state-led processes.

In **Paraguay**, indigenous communities were similarly described as **facing land disputes, lack of legal recognition, and forms of political and epistemic invisibility** linked to remoteness and exclusion from state systems. Here, needs related not only to the defence of land and natural resources, but also to being recognised by public institutions as legitimate rights-holders whose knowledge, claims, and presence could not be ignored.

“One challenge was being able to travel to Asunción more frequently... WWF facilitated the community's capacity for political advocacy. They paid for fuel and travel expenses so that the committee could go to Asunción every week.”-Rightsholders, Paraguay (FGD)

The evidence also points to more specific group-based needs linked to sovereignty over productive resources and adaptation systems. In **Zambia**, for example, smallholder farmers identified a need for seed sovereignty, particularly in relation to protecting their ability to save, exchange, and re-use traditional seeds. This reflected a concern not only with agricultural livelihoods, but with control over local knowledge systems and community resilience in the face of regulatory and commercial pressures.

In some contexts, **linguistic and cultural adaptation** also emerged as a significant need. In **Brazil**, Indigenous producers were reported to face state bureaucratic requirements that were poorly aligned with communal production systems. Government procurement and administrative systems designed around individual producers did not fit Indigenous collective models of production and organisation. This suggests that recognition within governance systems was not only a matter of legal status, but also of whether state procedures could accommodate different cultural, economic, and organisational realities.

The evidence across contexts suggests that for IPs & LCs, needs were rooted not only in environmental exposure, but in dispossession, exclusion from consultation, weak protection of collective rights, limited recognition within governance systems, and inadequate adaptation of public systems to Indigenous and community realities.

Persons with disabilities

The evaluation found much more **limited evidence in relation to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)**. Although some country cases, particularly Kenya and Zambia, referenced PWDs among vulnerable or excluded groups, the data does not provide sufficient detail to assess their needs in a differentiated or systematic way across the programme portfolio. There is some indication that PWDs were recognised as facing barriers related to accessibility, participation, and inclusion in public processes. However, across most country cases, the available evidence is insufficiently specific to determine how these needs manifested across contexts or how consistently they were incorporated into programme analysis.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the needs of women, youth, IPs & LCs, and other marginalised groups share important common features, particularly regarding exclusion from decision-making, limited access to usable information, and the governance dimensions of climate vulnerability. However, these commonalities should not obscure important differences between groups. Women's needs were shaped strongly by gendered exclusion and lack of institutional recognition. Youth often needed legitimacy, public recognition, and credible entry points into governance processes. IPs & LCs faced more explicitly territorial and rights-based struggles linked to land, consultation, and collective survival. By contrast, the evidence on PWDs was too limited to support robust conclusions on differentiated needs across contexts.

6.1.3 Extent to which VCA's approach was appropriate

This section assesses the extent to which VCA's approach was appropriate in responding to the differentiated needs identified across the seven country programmes. Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA's approach was broadly appropriate, particularly where it responded to women's needs for meaningful participation and recognition, youth needs for legitimacy and visibility, and IPs' and LCs' needs for territorial rights, consultation, and collective voice. Across contexts, the programme was strongest where it helped marginalised groups overcome the institutional, procedural, and political barriers that had previously limited their influence in climate-related decision-making.

This is important because many of the needs identified in Section 6.1.2, including food insecurity, water access, livelihood pressures, weak recognition, and exclusion from decision-making, were shaped not only by climate impacts themselves, but also by deeper structural conditions. These included weak representation, inaccessible systems, and unequal power relations that determined who could participate in governance, whose knowledge counted, and whose priorities informed public action. In this context, VCA's emphasis on advocacy, movement-building, and capacity strengthening was a relevant response to the underlying drivers of exclusion, rather than a substitute for direct service delivery.

Furthermore, VCA was particularly well suited to contexts where the main barriers were weak representation, fragmented voice, limited recognition, and low institutional responsiveness. Working under MoFA's Power of Voices framework, the programme was inherently designed as an advocacy-oriented civil society programme. As such, its response to material needs was largely indirect, focusing on strengthening voice and influence, supporting advocacy for systems-level change, and enabling locally led solutions rather than providing direct service delivery. This approach was broadly appropriate to the programme's mandate and to many of the governance-related needs identified across countries. At the same time, some stakeholders felt that the programme was less directly aligned to urgent material needs, particularly where communities faced immediate livelihood pressures. As one stakeholder in Tunisia reflected:

“The advocacy focus was good, but we need to concretise, we needed to have concrete solutions... there are other urgent issues in Tunisia.”-VCA Alliance Partner, Tunisia (KII)

The later introduction of the NLGF helped respond to this gap. Through the NLGF, **VCA supported 540 initiatives focused on local climate solutions**, reflecting an adaptive response to country-level priorities and to the need to complement advocacy with more tangible support for local action. More details on this in **Section 6.4.1**.

Overall, however, the evidence suggests that VCA did not treat material needs and governance issues as separate. Rather, it worked on the understanding that more inclusive, accountable, and locally responsive systems are necessary to address climate injustice in more durable ways.

Differentiated response approaches by stakeholder group

Although VCA’s response approaches often worked across stakeholder groups, they were applied in different ways depending on the barriers being addressed. **For women**, VCA was most appropriate where it moved beyond inviting participation and instead **strengthened women’s ability to engage effectively and on more equal terms**. This included support for procedural literacy, collective preparation before formal engagement, and, in some contexts, legal formalisation to overcome institutional barriers to recognition and access.

“SIMUN has coordinated us as women. We are now a movement capable of collectively advocating for issues. Our voices are now heard.”-Rightsholders, Kenya (FGD)

For youth, VCA was most appropriate where it addressed political invisibility, weak legitimacy, and fragmented organisation. In several contexts, this involved supporting collective identity, visibility, and more structured forms of representation, including through youth-led alliances and digital storytelling. Across these cases, the programme was strongest where it **helped youth become more visible and credible as climate actors** rather than treating them only as beneficiaries of climate action.

For IPs and LCs, VCA was most appropriate where it **supported territorial defence, recognition of customary rights, and the translation of community claims into forms that state systems could recognise**. This included support for participatory mapping, long-term land-related advocacy, and practical assistance to navigate legal and administrative systems that were often poorly aligned with communal realities. Across these cases, the programme’s response was strongest where it recognised that climate vulnerability was closely tied to land, rights, visibility, and institutional recognition.

The evaluation found much more limited evidence in relation to Persons with Disabilities. While PWDs were identified in some contexts, particularly in Kenya and Zambia, as among those facing barriers to participation and access, clearly differentiated programme responses for this group were not consistently documented across the seven country reports. This should therefore be recognised as an evidence limitation in the relevance analysis.

Cross-cutting response mechanisms

Across stakeholder groups, several cross-cutting response mechanisms were important. One was **movement-building and strategic convening**. A central reason why VCA’s approach was appropriate is that it helped turn fragmented or weakly recognised constituencies into more visible and organised collective actors. For women, this helped shift participation from symbolic presence to

stronger collective voice. For youth, it supported legitimacy, visibility, and shared identity. For IPs and LCs, it enabled more coordinated articulation of territorial and rights-based claims.

“Before, we were not involved in issues of climate change at district level. Decisions were made and we would just hear about them. But through the District Climate Change Committee, we are now part of the discussions, and we can raise issues affecting our communities.” -Rightsholders, Zambia (FGD)

A second important mechanism was **capacity strengthening** including **the translation and brokering of evidence**. This was especially relevant where exclusion operated through technical language, legal complexity, and bureaucratic procedure. In these contexts, VCA’s support helped make planning, budgeting, legal, and policy processes more accessible and usable to marginalised groups.

“Through capacity building, we learnt how to engage our county and national government on climate change issues. We now understand how to go about the protocols.” -Rightsholders, Kenya (FGD)

The evaluation also finds that VCA’s approach was appropriate because it recognised that participation is not only political, but also practical. In several countries, sustained engagement depended on **transport, administrative support, legal recognition, digital access**, and other enabling conditions. In contexts of poverty, remoteness, and institutional exclusion, these forms of support were often necessary for meaningful participation.

Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA’s approach was broadly appropriate in responding to the identified needs of women, youth, IPs and LCs, and other marginalised groups. Its main strength lay in addressing the structural conditions that limited participation, voice, recognition, and access to climate governance. The evidence also suggests that these responses were not uniform, but were adapted to the different forms of exclusion faced by different groups. For women, this often meant strengthening procedural agency and institutional recognition. For youth, it meant building legitimacy, visibility, and collective identity. For IPs and LCs, it meant supporting territorial claims, legal recognition, and the translation of community realities into forms that governance systems could recognise.

However, it is important to note that this does not mean that all needs were fully met, nor that advocacy alone could resolve the material vulnerabilities communities faced. However, the evidence suggests that VCA’s focus on advocacy, movement-building, and locally led influence was not a mismatch with the needs identified. Rather, it was a strategic response to the structural drivers of exclusion that underpinned those needs. Therefore, VCA’s approach was well aligned to its climate justice mandate and to the realities faced by the constituencies it sought to support.

6.1.4 To what extent and how has an adaptive approach been used in VCA and added value to programme implementation?

The evaluation finds that **adaptive management was a central feature** of VCA’s implementation and an important contributor to programme relevance. Given the dynamic contexts in which VCA operated, including political volatility, shrinking civic space, climate shocks, and changing local priorities, the programme needed to remain flexible in order to sustain momentum and remain responsive. Across the country cases, adaptive management went beyond routine project adjustment. It functioned as a more reflexive approach to implementation, allowing VCA to respond

to emerging risks, opportunities, and constraints while maintaining its focus on climate justice and inclusion.

Strategic adaptation to changing political contexts

One important dimension of adaptation was VCA's ability to shift strategy in response to political change. Across several countries, the programme adjusted its engagement approach when formal entry points closed, new opportunities emerged, or political conditions changed significantly.

In **Brazil**, for example, VCA adapted its strategy following the transition from the Bolsonaro administration to the Lula administration in 2023 (VCA Brazil ETE Country Report). During the earlier period, the programme focused more strongly on community autonomy and on working around a hostile state environment. With the political shift, the programme was able to engage more directly with government ministries and align more strategically with a more favourable climate agenda. As one respondent noted:

"After the change in administration, we were able to shift from avoiding government to actively seeking collaboration, which has significantly enhanced our impact."-VCA Regional Team, Brazil (FGD)

A similar pattern was evident in **Tunisia**. Following the dissolution of municipal councils in 2023, VCA shifted from engaging elected representatives to working more closely with permanent municipal staff in order to maintain momentum around Local Climate Action Plans.

"When municipal councils were dissolved, we adapted by focusing on engaging permanent municipal staff, ensuring that our advocacy work continued."-VCA Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)

In **Bolivia**, adaptation also involved shifting scale. Where national-level openings narrowed, the programme refocused attention on local-level advocacy, where there was still space to advance climate and rights-based work. Across these cases, adaptation added value by helping the programme sustain relevance and continue working toward its objectives despite political disruption.

Responsiveness to climate and economic shocks

A second important dimension of adaptation was VCA's **responsiveness to climate and economic shocks**. In several countries, the programme adjusted activities, timing, and emphasis in response to sudden environmental or socio-economic pressures, while also using these moments to strengthen the policy relevance of its work.

In **Kenya** and **Zambia**, for example, El Niño-related floods and droughts in 2024 were used to reinforce advocacy around devolved climate finance and seed sovereignty for smallholder farmers.

"The floods in Kenya and Zambia were used as evidence to demand more devolved climate finance for communities facing the worst impacts."-VCA Regional Team, Kenya (FGD)

In **Tunisia**, adaptation took a more practical form, with workshop schedules adjusted during periods of extreme heat to allow participation to continue.

“During extreme heatwaves, we adjusted the timing of our workshops to ensure continued participation, even under challenging circumstances.”-VCA Partner organisation, Tunisia, (SSI)

In **Paraguay**, activity timelines were extended to allow local partners to deal with misinformation and other barriers arising during territorial conflicts. These examples suggest that adaptive management was not only about reacting to crises, but about protecting implementation quality and maintaining participation under difficult conditions.

Operational flexibility and adaptation of programme systems

The evaluation also finds that **adaptation took place at the operational level**. In several countries, VCA adjusted internal processes, reporting requirements, and support systems in ways that reduced the burden on local partners and made participation more feasible for grassroots actors.

In **Brazil**, for example, the Regional Team simplified reporting tools and administrative processes in order to reduce workload pressures on smaller and less-resourced partners.

“Simplifying our reporting and administrative processes made it easier for grassroots actors to stay engaged and continue their work.”-VCA Regional Team, Brazil (FGD)

In **Indonesia and Brazil**, digital security plans and safety protocols were also integrated into coalition operations in response to shrinking civic space and cyber risks. In Zambia, a fraud case in 2023 prompted the suspension of activities and the strengthening of due diligence and integrity measures. These examples show that adaptive management was also used to protect programme integrity, reduce operational barriers, and respond to risks facing both partners and the alliance itself.

Value added by the adaptive approach

Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA’s adaptive approach added value in several important ways. First, it helped sustain programme momentum in contexts where political instability, climate shocks, or institutional disruption could otherwise have stalled implementation. Second, it increased the programme’s ability to remain responsive to local realities rather than follow a rigid preset plan. Third, it strengthened local ownership by allowing countries and partners to innovate and adjust in ways that reflected their own contexts and priorities.

The evidence also suggests that adaptation contributed to longer-term institutional readiness. In Brazil, for example, the hostile political context under Bolsonaro appears to have served as a period for strengthening civil society, which later positioned actors to engage more effectively when the political environment became more favourable. In Kenya, adaptive learning processes contributed to more institutionalised tools and approaches, such as the Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPC) Facilitators Guide, which helped support more sustained citizen-led climate action. The Next Level Grant Facility also appears to have added value by providing flexible support that allowed grassroots groups to respond to emerging climate-related needs in ways that reinforced local credibility and ownership.

In conclusion, adaptive management in VCA functioned as a mechanism that preserved relevance. Rather than operating as a separate layer of implementation, adaptability allowed the programme to respond to shocks, accommodate evolving needs, and sustain engagement with marginalised actors under changing conditions.

Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA demonstrated a strong commitment to relevance through deliberate needs identification processes, ongoing contextual analysis, and adaptive implementation practices across countries. Across contexts, VCA was largely successful in aligning its support with expressed priorities, particularly in relation to strengthening voice, movement-building, policy engagement, flexible funding and protection in shrinking civic space. Adaptive management further reinforced relevance by enabling timely responses to climate shocks, political shifts and emerging protection risks.

The question of what VCA's achievements reveal about the validity of its Theory of Change and underlying assumptions is addressed in **6.3.10 ToC validity and testing of assumptions**, where ToC testing is presented alongside the effectiveness findings that inform it.

6.2 Coherence

Coherence is assessed here as the degree to which the VCA programme's strategies, objectives, and operations aligned with the goals, methods, and policy environments of Alliance members, local partners, governments, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) as strategic partner. The analysis also considers how far VCA applied local ownership in engagement with local partner organisations, in a manner consistent with VCA's own programme language on Southern leadership, local partners, and locally shaped solutions.

To avoid conceptual confusion, three related but non-identical terms are distinguished in the analysis that follows. *Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) Principles* are used only as an external normative framework on how adaptation decision-making, accountability, and climate finance should be structured. *Local ownership* is used in the sense developed by VCA itself, namely stronger control, responsibility, and more equal relationships for Southern and local actors within programme implementation and resourcing. *Locally led implementation* is used here as an evaluative term to describe operational features of VCA's delivery model, such as flexible funding, consultative planning, partner-led agenda-setting, and later mechanisms such as the NLGF, which enable local actors to implement the work. This distinction is necessary because the *Voices for Just Climate Action Mid Term Review Final Report* found that even the meanings of Southern Leadership and Local Ownership had already caused "great confusion" within the programme (VCA Mid-Term Review, 2023, p. 46).

Data sources for coherence:

Secondary data sources: Programme and Country Reports (2021-2025), VCA ToC, VCA programme proposal, MTR report, and Southern Leadership report.

Primary data sources: key informant interviews (KIIs), workshops and focus group discussions with VCA governance structures and taskforce members; semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with country programme partners / programme implementers, and external stakeholders (validators) including government officials and subject matter experts; and focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders, including marginalised groups (e.g., women, youth, Indigenous peoples).

Evidence assessment for coherence:

The evidence for the coherence section is drawn from a combination of primary and secondary data sources, providing a comprehensive overview of how VCA's interventions aligned with both the programme's Theory of Change and the local needs of partners. Programme reports were used to assess the alignment of VCA's activities with its strategic goals and to examine the coherence between the programme's intentions and its actual outcomes. The triangulation of these sources with interviews and focus group discussions allowed for a deeper understanding of how VCA's interventions were perceived at the local level and whether they met the intended objectives. However, while the evidence is strong in

terms of programme alignment, there are some limitations in fully understanding the nuances of coherence, particularly given the challenges of sampling (e.g., convenience sampling) and recall bias in participant responses. Despite this, the evidence is sufficient to conclude that VCA's interventions were largely coherent with its objectives, though further exploration of unintended consequences or alternative alignments would strengthen this assessment.

The table below provides an overview of the key evaluation questions and related findings for *Coherence*. Evidence to support each finding is presented in the narrative sections that follow.

Key evaluation questions and findings:

To what extent are the VCA programme's approaches aligned with the broader objectives of its partners, including local CSOs, governments, and donors?

Finding 6: Strategic alignment was strong and built into the partnership model. VCA achieved high coherence because it partnered with organisations whose mandates already aligned with its climate justice framing. Rather than requiring strategic adjustment, the programme reinforced and extended existing work on land rights, gender justice, governance, and community resilience. Alignment was based on shared values and complementary priorities.

To what extent and how have principles of local ownership been applied in engagement with local partners, and did the VCA programme address the most pressing needs of local partners?

Finding 7: VCA incorporated several design and implementation features consistent with local ownership and locally led implementation, and it addressed many of local partner organisations' core advocacy needs. While these features addressed core needs, centralised governance and financial decision-making limited the full extent of local ownership in programme strategy and resource allocation.

6.2.1 To what extent are the VCA programme's approaches aligned with the broader objectives of its partners, including local CSOs, governments, and programme donor (MoFA)?

The evidence indicates a high degree of strategic alignment between the VCA programme and the institutional mandates of its Alliance members and many implementing partners. Across interviews and secondary documentation, VCA is consistently described not as an externally imposed agenda but as a framework that resonated with, extended, or deepened existing organisational priorities.

Alignment with Alliance members and strategic partners

A consistent theme across Joint Programme Team and Steering Committee interviews is that VCA aligned strongly with the core strategic directions of Alliance organisations.

Hivos described VCA as closely aligned with its Climate Justice Strategy, particularly in three domains: facilitating access to climate finance for underserved communities, amplifying marginalised voices (women, youth, Indigenous communities, urban poor), and strengthening community capacity for policy engagement.

"When I look at the VCA programme, I can confidently say it aligns very well with our Climate Justice Strategy. The programme is extremely responsive to our priorities. VCA targets women-led organisations, youth-led groups, indigenous peoples, and local communities". VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

The programme's emphasis on treating women and youth as agents of change rather than beneficiaries was explicitly identified as consistent with Hivos' political framing. In this manner, VCA enhanced the agency of some of the most marginal voices within climate justice advocacy.

AMwA characterised VCA as aligned with its feminist and decolonial agenda, particularly in foregrounding Global South knowledge systems and embedding feminist climate justice into broader environmental movements.

"AMwA applies a decolonial lens to development, we believe that the Global South holds solutions, many of which we've been practicing for generations, often without recognition. These solutions could help address challenges like climate change, but they haven't been brought into the spotlight or taken seriously in global policy and funding spaces. VCA's strategy to elevate these approaches really resonated with our own political agenda." - VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

The programme's intersectional approach to gender — moving beyond inclusion toward interrogation of power and class — was identified as a particularly strong point of coherence. The emphasis on Global South agents as knowledge holders is particularly important. Often within the global economy of climate justice knowledge production, the Global South and indigenous methodologies are seen as fallible in comparison to tried-and-tested Western and Eurocentric methodologies.

SSN described VCA as aligned with its mission of equitable resilience-building and knowledge brokering for the Global South, while also noting that the programme expanded its engagement into civil society and advocacy spaces for the first time.

"So, VCA presented an opportunity to learn how to work more closely with civil society, especially grassroots actors, which we have always recognised as important—even in our more policy-focused work. This programme allowed us to put that recognition into practice." - VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

This indicates that alignment did not always mean replication of existing modalities; in some cases, VCA created strategic extensions of organisational practice. Equally important, through the VCA programme, alliance partners had the opportunity to partner with existing CSOs thereby extending reach and influence into local climate justice and advocacy contexts.

SDI noted that VCA strengthened long-standing settlement upgrading and community organising work by integrating climate risk lenses into existing programmes.

"SDI has made strong contributions primarily at the regional team level. Due to our 30-year history and highly coordinated structure, we understand the VCA programme outcomes well and deliver effectively on reach and scalability. Our extensive access to numerous communities enables regional teams to implement advocacy programmes that reach significant numbers of people." - VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

WWF similarly described VCA as prompting a shift toward co-creation and inclusive conservation approaches, aligning with its broader objectives of empowering local actors to access climate finance independently.

"At WWF, we have over 20 years of engagement in the landscapes where VCA is implemented. VCA challenged us to move beyond a model of simply sharing

implementation of pre-designed programmes, and instead to work through genuine co-creation, positioning partners at the centre.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

Avina was also described as strongly aligned with VCA’s broader strategic direction. Interview evidence suggests that the programme was not only thematically compatible with Avina’s priorities, but also closely matched its institutional approach to working with local actors through collaborative, coalition-based, and sub-granting processes. As one respondent explained,

“VCA is 100% in line with Avina’s working methods (working with local actors, sub-granting, and collaborative processes).”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

Another Steering Committee respondent described the programme as “very aligned” with Avina and “a very important programme institutionally for Avina,” noting that it helped strengthen Avina’s Amazon Biome strategy in Brazil and supported its ambition to expand cooperation across the Global South.

Taken together, this suggests that Avina’s contribution was coherent with both VCA’s justice-oriented partnership model and Avina’s own strategic focus on collaborative, locally grounded climate action.

At the same time, alignment of mandates across Alliance partners did not always translate into frictionless collaboration among Alliance members or their local partners. The mid-term review had identified visible tensions in some contexts, particularly around collaborative versus more confrontational approaches to government engagement and noted that these differences had at times affected local-level collaboration. End-term evidence suggests that these tensions were less visible as a source of implementation incoherence by programme end. In **Kenya**, for example, rightsholders described stronger synergy among partners and less siloed working, noting that “partners support each other with both human and financial resources” and that collaboration had enabled them to “share what we do and complement each other.” Rightsholder, Kenya (FGD). Likewise, cross-country end-term coding including **Tunisia** indicates that while tactics still varied across partners and contexts, they continued to converge toward shared VCA goals and that strong synergies were evident at alliance level. This suggests that earlier tensions were not entirely irrelevant, but that by end-term they had been at least partly absorbed into more pragmatic forms of collaboration.

Alignment was also evident in relation to the programme’s strategic partnership with the **Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)**. From the outset, the proposal positioned VCA as a strategic partnership with MoFA and its embassies, with early embassy conversations intended to identify overlaps in priorities, roles, and next steps across countries. In this sense, coherence with MoFA was built into the programme’s design. In practice, however, coherence was stronger at the level of broad strategic intent than in day-to-day embassy collaboration. On the positive side, one partner reflected that

“our direct relationship with the Dutch Ministry as a donor has been excellent. They are the most flexible and allow for adaptive management of the project, which has been fundamental to being able to work on sensitive issues and respond to changing needs on the ground.”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

There is also evidence of some strengthening over time: 2023 reporting notes that the partnership between VCA, MoFA departments, and embassies had been further strengthened, including support

for participation in the UN Water Conference and useful engagement in Bolivia, Brazil, Kenya, and Indonesia. At the same time, embassy collaboration remained uneven. As one Joint Programme Team respondent noted,

“In theory, this sounded useful. But in practice, we encountered challenges... climate advocacy wasn’t on their radar... their priorities often weren’t aligned, and support was limited.” - VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

Country evidence points in the same direction, suggesting that while some teams secured useful embassy dialogue, visibility, or support, in other contexts interaction remained weak or sporadic. Coherence with MoFA was therefore real and strategically important, but unevenly operationalised across countries.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Alliance members brought distinct strengths, political orientations, and areas of expertise to the programme, and that these informed a design that was broadly aligned with their existing mandates and strategic priorities. Coherence at Alliance level was therefore rooted less in uniformity than in complementarity: organisations entered the Alliance with sufficiently compatible orientations for VCA to function as a shared platform through which those priorities could be advanced collaboratively. At the same time, this coherence should not be overstated as seamless. The evidence indicates that alignment of mandates did not always translate into frictionless collaboration in practice, and that tensions did emerge in some contexts around roles, tactics, and approaches to government engagement. Even so, by end-term these differences appear to have been at least partly managed or absorbed within the broader programme architecture, such that they did not fundamentally undermine Alliance-level coherence. Alignment with local partners

Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA’s approach was largely appropriate and responsive to local partner needs, particularly in enabling advocacy action, coalition-building and adaptive implementation. At the same time, sustainability-related concerns indicate that while the programme strengthened partners’ voice and influence, deeper institutional consolidation remains an ongoing need beyond the programme timeframe.

Across contexts, primary data indicates a high degree of strategic alignment between VCA and local partners. VCA was widely perceived as reinforcing, rather than redirecting, existing organisational mandates and territorial priorities. Importantly, alignment did not result from the programme reshaping partner mandates. Instead, coherence was strongest where local CSOs were already working on issues — such as governance, land rights, gender justice, or community resilience — that naturally intersected with VCA’s climate justice framing. In these instances, the programme provided resources, coalition space, and political legitimacy through which existing struggles could be articulated more explicitly within climate discourse.

From a design coherence perspective, evidence shows that VCA largely worked with local partners whose strategies were already compatible with the programme’s objectives. Alignment was therefore built into the partnership model itself, reducing the risk of strategic divergence. Where tensions emerged, they tended to relate to operational assumptions, capacity constraints, or political context rather than fundamental misalignment of mandates.

ETE findings suggest that while Alliance members broadly shared VCA’s ambitions around climate justice, Southern leadership, and local ownership, coherence at Alliance level was not entirely frictionless in practice. The Mid-Term Review had already noted that collaboration between Alliance

members could be challenging at regional level, with ideological differences over key interventions and tactics, including the extent to which VCA should collaborate with government, surfacing in countries such as Kenya and Tunisia. By end-term, however, these tensions appear less visible as a source of implementation incoherence. In Kenya, rightsholders described stronger collaboration and complementarity among partners, noting that “partners support each other with both human and financial resources” and that the network had enabled them not to work in silos but to “share what we do and complement each other.” Rightsholder, Kenya (FGD). Likewise, ETE findings from the Tunisia, Zambia, Indonesia grouping suggest that while tactics still varied across partners and contexts, they continued to converge toward shared VCA goals, with “strong synergies... evident at the alliance level,” even if some local-level gaps remained. FGD, Tunisia/Zambia/Indonesia. Taken together, this suggests that differences among Alliance members did not disappear entirely, but by programme end they had been at least partly managed or absorbed within a broader collaborative architecture, such that they no longer appeared to fundamentally undermine Alliance-level coherence. The MTR’s own interpretation of **Tunisia** is useful here: it concluded that collaboration and confrontation tactics could co-exist, and that the tensions were “more to do with poor communication” than with members believing different tactics were inherently incompatible.

Others described long-standing work addressing deforestation, mining pollution, and environmental rights violations, including the establishment of observatories and legal advocacy processes. Community-based actors also reported implementing agroforestry systems and mobilising youth in defence of water sources and territorial integrity. For example, in **Bolivia**, VCA clearly entered an ecosystem where climate-related concerns were already embedded in territorial, agricultural, and youth-led initiatives.

While strategic alignment between VCA and local CSOs was strong, some tensions emerged in practice that were raised by partners and documented in coding and reporting. These tensions did not relate to disagreement over objectives, but to the conditions under which aligned work had to be implemented. For example, financial reporting was noted as challenging including early delays in sub-granting processes, and difficulty in reporting, reflecting the complexity of operationalising decentralised funding models across multiple contexts. In response, VCA partners navigated these challenges by providing financial management support and administrative intermediation to enable participation by informal groups:

"We went on taking care of the project and communicating and sending reports to both AMIGA and CNS. It was something we talked about in reports, we continued with this transparency and assumed the project management."-Rightsholder, Brazil (FGD)

Overall, the evidence suggests that VCA did not ignore these tensions. The programme responded through flexible funding, adaptation of design assumptions, coalition facilitation, institutional accompaniment, and logistical support. Nevertheless, structural constraints — including administrative disparities, digital infrastructure gaps, and the long-time horizons required for systemic change — indicate areas where future programming could further strengthen differentiated compliance mechanisms and longer-term sustainability planning.

Alignment with government agendas

Across contexts, alignment with government agendas was shaped primarily by two factors: governance level, especially the distinction between subnational and national arenas, and the degree of political openness, institutional continuity, and civic space available for rights-based

advocacy. The evidence suggests that VCA demonstrated its strongest and most consistent coherence at local and subnational levels of government, where it could intersect with existing planning frameworks, climate finance mechanisms, and service delivery systems. This was visible, for example, in **Kenya**, where engagement with county governments supported locally embedded adaptation and climate finance processes, and in **Tunisia**, where partners worked through municipal climate action planning processes (PLACs) to connect local priorities with wider policy commitments. At national level, alignment was more variable and politically contingent, particularly where leadership turnover, shrinking civic space, or hostility toward environmental and rights-based advocacy limited the scope for collaboration.

Rather than being uniform, alignment functioned differently depending on institutional opportunity structures. In some contexts, VCA contributed to collaborative mainstreaming of climate priorities within public systems. In others, coherence required selective engagement or calibrated distance where national agendas diverged from rights-based or climate justice objectives.

Working within existing local governance frameworks

A consistent feature across countries was VCA's decision to work through existing subnational governance mechanisms rather than creating parallel advocacy structures. This design choice was rational based on the programme's purpose of promoting locally-led adaptation; it was also guided by the existing relationships and connections of local partners at the local level.

For example, in **Kenya** alignment was achieved by supporting county governments to respond to national level requirements regarding adaptation and climate finance. Engagement was described by the Regional Team as reciprocal: in some instances, governments approached VCA; in others, VCA proactively built institutional relationships:

Similarly, in **Tunisia**, alignment operated through integration into municipal climate action planning processes (PLACs), linking national commitments (e.g., NDCs) to local implementation instruments, and pursuing win-win strategies, as illustrated in the following quote by the Regional Team:

"ACDD or Tunisia Youth Impact (TYI) is a good example of alignment with local government and needs of the project. They worked with different local government municipalities and with national authorities to have new funding for implementation of their local action plan. 'Win-win' for local partners and for the local and national authorities to mainstream climate and environmental information into government planning. They commissioned research that supported the government to align their policies with low-carbon development".- Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)

In Indonesia, VCA-supported waste governance initiatives aligned with municipal environmental programmes, with government validators confirming complementarity:

"The Mayor has instructed all RT, RW, and Kelurahan in North Jakarta to support all climate-related activities and Waste Bank. I hope that helps and makes it easier for WF friends to interact with local governments regarding climate change activities. There shouldn't be any obstacles. Because what WF is doing is relevant. And the city government supports it. The Mayor even gave instructions about it."- Validator, Indonesia (SSI)

These examples illustrate a broader pattern: coherence at local level was achieved through reinforcing institutional processes already in place, contributing technical support, participating in planning spaces, and strengthening representation within existing governance mechanisms.

National-level alignment as politically contingent

At national level, alignment was more uneven and closely tied to political conditions, including the openness of state actors to rights-based advocacy, leadership turnover within ministries, the strength or contraction of civic space, and the extent to which climate and environmental priorities overlapped with VCA's justice-oriented agenda. For example, in **Tunisia**, alignment with national climate commitments was described as strong during parts of the programme period, particularly through WWF's long-standing government relationships and VCA's ability to connect local priorities to national and international climate processes. As one Joint Programme Team respondent explained,

"In countries like Tunisia, WWF has always worked closely at the government level. I think that is one of the highest-value aspects, although it hasn't always been easy. Even when advocacy agendas were difficult, we still worked closely with the ministries."-VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

However, in countries like **Paraguay**, alignment with certain state institutions (e.g., land management bodies) occurred around specific policy areas, while tensions emerged in relation to anti-NGO legislation and rights-based advocacy.

Given the complexity of programme and government alignment and shrinking civic space within the Paraguay context, engagement was described as selective and strategic rather than uniformly collaborative:

"The VCA programme approaches aligned with some government agendas, but in a selective and strategic manner. However, it must be recognised that this alignment depends very much on who is in charge at the time. If the minister or official changes, we often have to start from scratch with the new person."- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

Similarly, in countries like **Bolivia** and **Brazil**, alignment with federal government actors was shaped by political leadership and periods of hostility toward environmental advocacy. In such contexts, engagement shifted toward subnational institutions and selective allies:

"In Bolivia the government is not able or willing to collaborate. In these cases, the programme sometimes went against government positions, particularly on land and displacement issues. In Brazil, during the Bolsonaro period, much of the VCA advocacy was about positioning critical issues in opposition to government policies. The degree of alignment depends on who is in power."- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

These examples underscore an essential point: coherence between a programme like VCA and that of national governments are contingent on political willingness, especially at national level where states set their own national agendas in accordance with their political ideations and realities. These examples also indicate that what appeared as non-alignment was, in some contexts, intentional and strategically grounded.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that VCA achieved strong coherence with government agendas at local and subnational levels by embedding activities within existing governance frameworks and planning systems. At national level, alignment was conditional and strategically pursued. Alignment was strongest where institutional priorities overlapped and civic space was open. Where divergence existed, coherence required strategic navigation and pathways into civil society.

6.2.2 To what extent and how have principles of local ownership been applied in engagement with local partners, and did the VCA programme address the most pressing needs of the local partners?

VCA explicitly positioned Southern leadership and local ownership as foundational design principles. In this subsection, local ownership refers primarily to engagement with local partner organisations, rather than implying direct community control in all cases. Coherence in this context refers to the degree to which VCA's design, implementation practices, and governance arrangements were consistent with those local ownership ambitions, while recognising that this is not identical to full alignment with the formal LLA Principles.

The evidence suggests that VCA incorporated several features consistent with locally led implementation at design and delivery levels, but that coherence became more uneven when assessed against Alliance-wide governance arrangements and the fuller power-shifting implications of the LLA Principles. The evidence suggests that coherence between principle and practice was strong at design and implementation levels, but more uneven at Alliance-wide governance level.

Coherence between programme design, local ownership, and locally led implementation. An important design feature supporting coherence was the intentionally open-ended call for proposals. Rather than prescribing themes or activities, the call created space for locally defined priorities to shape proposals from the outset. In **Paraguay**, proposals were described as formed “in a bottom-up way” without a predetermined agenda

“The proposals were formed in a bottom-up way, we did not work with a predetermined agenda. The process of forming proposals with local organisations was respectful, trusting in their trajectory and knowledge. VAC tried to support and strengthen its processes and its proposals.”- VCA Regional Team, Paraguay (FGD)

This indicates meaningful coherence between the programme's rhetoric of local leadership and its entry mechanisms. Agenda-setting was not externally imposed but emerged through partner-led articulation. At the same time, an open call for proposals is better understood as evidence of alignment with some dimensions of locally led implementation, particularly space for local priority-setting, than as proof of full alignment with the entire LLA framework. Internal VCA financial processes further reinforced this alignment; for example, approximately 50% of the programme budget was allocated directly to local partners:

“This is the whole mandate of the programme and that is why half of the budget was allocated at the local level. The results are not reported by us; they are reported by the local partners. That was the main narrative and intention behind the programme. It was the call of the Alliance.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

Partners contrasted VCA's funding modalities with more rigid donor arrangements that limited responsiveness and strategic planning. For example, partners from **Kenya** and **Zambia**, noted that short funding cycles under other programmes constrained their ability to retain staff and respond to policy opportunities. In contrast, VCA's flexible funding enabled organisations to adjust priorities in response to evolving contexts.

"The flexibility allowed us to respond to what was happening on the ground, not just what was in the proposal."- VCA Partner organisation, Kenya (SSI)

This suggests a meaningful attempt to shift agenda-setting space and a share of resources closer to local partners. However, an open-ended call for proposals and decentralised budget allocation are better understood as evidence of some dimensions of locally led implementation than as proof of full alignment with the formal Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) Principles, which also concern how authority, accountability, risk, and climate finance are structured. ETE findings show that these more participatory design features coexisted with significant administrative and access constraints, particularly for smaller and less-resourced organisations. As one regional team respondent noted,

"Local ownership is quite a complex term and there are many angles to it. For me, it often speaks to power dynamics that exist and the agency that local organisations have. Often that requires that the burdens on them are not too heavy – that there is a balance of power – but it is very challenging for organisations to implement all of the bureaucratic demands!"- VCA Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)

Similarly, one partner explained that

"There were significant barriers to participation for smaller and less-resourced partners. The main one was the formal capacity to receive funding: the lack of legal status (personería jurídica) or a bank account prevented WWF from granting them funds directly, forcing us to use intermediaries."- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

These reflections point to an important coherence tension: VCA incorporated features consistent with local ownership and locally led implementation, but the practical conditions required to operationalise these remained uneven. In this sense, VCA created greater space for local ownership and locally led implementation where organisations had sufficient administrative infrastructure to absorb compliance demands, while smaller, informal, or less-resourced actors continued to face barriers to direct access and decision-making. A more explicit mechanism through which VCA sought to address this structural barrier was the NLGF. Unlike the core partnership model, which still largely worked through established organisations, the NLGF was specifically designed to expand access to climate finance for small informal organisations, youths, activists, environmental defenders, and other actors usually excluded from conventional funding because of bureaucratic requirements, lack of legal registration, security risks, or limited financial track record. The NLGF guidance explicitly frames the facility as a means of fostering a bottom-up approach to decision-making, where communities and local allies play a key role in identifying priorities and defining solutions, while the learning report shows that simplified applications, flexible reporting, decentralised fund management, and participatory decision-making improved accessibility and alignment with grassroots priorities to actors, who would traditionally not have had access to funding. In coherence terms, this matters because it shows that VCA did not only advocate for more localised climate finance externally, but also attempted to build a concrete internal mechanism to move resources

closer to actors on the frontlines of climate change. At the same time, the NLGF documents also show that this shift remained partial: Alliance partners still served as contracting conduits, governance and review roles remained partly centralised, and sustainability, MEL, legal constraints, and accountability tensions were still unresolved. The NLGF therefore strengthens the argument that VCA made an important practical move toward more accessible and locally responsive climate finance, without fully resolving the broader contradiction between locally led ambitions and centralised alliance governance.

VCA's mutual capacity strengthening approach emerges as a critical strategy to bridge the gap. Survey findings indicate that capacity strengthening was largely consultative and perceived as relevant as discussed in Section 6.3. ETE findings also suggest that some implementation processes were designed in a more participatory way, with respondents noting that M&E tools were co-created and that timelines were approved jointly. This is better understood as evidence of locally led implementation and consultative programme management than as proof of full alignment with the formal LLA Principles, since broader authority over governance, finance, and accountability remained more centralised. These findings suggest that, in most contexts, capacity strengthening and related implementation processes reinforced alignment with partner strategies and supported locally led implementation. However, they are stronger evidence of responsiveness and consultative programme management than of full power transfer, and should therefore not be treated as proof of full alignment with the LLA Principles or that broader governance relations had been transformed.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that coherence between VCA's local ownership discourse and implementation realities was conditional rather than automatic. Local ownership functioned most effectively where partner organisations had sufficient infrastructure to absorb administrative demands, engage strategically, and exercise discretion over implementation. Where such capacities were constrained, the programmes locally led ambitions could be diluted by the very bureaucratic and compliance requirements that structured access to resources. This is why it is more accurate to describe VCA as having enabled meaningful locally led implementation in many settings, rather than to suggest that power was uniformly redistributed across all levels of the programme. The NLGF is important here because it shows a more deliberate effort to respond to this contradiction by creating more accessible funding pathways for excluded actors, even if the broader Alliance structure remained only partly transformed.

Governance-level coherence tensions

While VCA was comparatively strong at design and implementation levels, the evidence suggests a more uneven pattern at Alliance governance level. This is also where the distinction between local ownership in implementation and fuller alignment with the LLA Principles becomes most important. Decision-making authority regarding strategic direction, financial oversight, and key reporting functions remained concentrated within the Joint Programme Team (JPT), Steering Committee (SC), and related Alliance structures. Although consensus-based processes were described, evidence from the MTR, coding, and the NLGF guidance suggests that role ambiguity, upward reporting demands, weak feedback loops, and burdens placed on regional focal points limited the extent to which local and regional actors could shape Alliance-wide priorities on equal terms. In this sense, VCA's strongest expression of local ownership lay in local implementation and agenda-setting, rather than in fully devolved programme governance. As noted above, there is broad agreement that VCA operationalised local ownership relatively strongly in programme delivery, in the sense that local partner organisations had meaningful space to shape priorities, adapt activities, and lead implementation in context. This should not, however, be read as a direct claim about the ownership

of local communities themselves, particularly in contexts where local partners were not grassroots organisations. Rather, the evidence points more clearly to ownership at the level of partner-led implementation than to community control or downward accountability across all cases. This distinction is important in light of the analysis above: VCA incorporated several features consistent with local ownership and locally led implementation, but this did not mean that authority was equally devolved across all levels of the programme. Ownership was therefore experienced most clearly in implementation practice, while strategic influence over programme direction, structures, and resources remained more concentrated at the top. Viewed this way, the central coherence question is not simply whether VCA enabled locally led action at implementation level, because the evidence suggests that in many contexts it did. The sharper analytical question is whether the programme's own governance architecture applied the same principles upward. On this point, the evidence is more mixed. VCA appears to have been built around a real commitment to Southern leadership and local ownership, and later developed mechanisms such as the NLGF to improve access to locally responsive climate finance, but that commitment was only partially realised in Alliance-wide governance, where strategic authority, compliance obligations, and administrative control remained more centralised than the programmes locally led rhetoric implied. Overall, the evidence indicates that VCA demonstrated strong strategic coherence across multiple levels of partnership, rooted in an intentionally constructed alliance of organisations with compatible political orientations, justice commitments, and institutional mandates aligned to its climate justice framing. That coherence was strongest where the programme reinforced existing partner agendas, worked through subnational governance structures, and enabled local partner organisations to shape implementation in context-responsive ways. It was also strengthened by later efforts, such as the NLGF, to create more accessible and locally responsive climate finance pathways for actors who would otherwise be excluded. However, coherence was weaker where the programme's own governance arrangements reproduced more centralised forms of authority, indicating that VCA was more fully locally led in implementation than in Alliance-wide governance.

When using the lens of the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action (LLA), VCA demonstrates good alignment with several key principles, specifically:

- Principle #2. Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, disabled, displaced, Indigenous Peoples and marginalised ethnic groups, by centring women-, youth- and Indigenous-led organisations;
- Principle #3. Providing patient and predictable funding that can be accessed more easily through the NLGF as an adaptive financing and rapid response mechanism;
- Principle #4. Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy, by focusing on mutual capacity strengthening in advocacy, governance engagement and coalition-building; and
- Principle #6. Flexible programming and learning, by facilitating structured reflection and adaptive management systems.
- Principle #8. Collaborative action and investment, particularly through VCA's work around multi-stakeholder platforms and coalition approaches.

Overall, this evaluation found the VCA programme reflects good alignment with five of the eight Locally Led Adaptation Action principles.

6.3 Effectiveness, outcomes and impact

Data sources for effectiveness, outcomes and impact:

Secondary data sources for this report section include Programme and Country Reports (2021-2025), VCA Results Framework monitoring data; MoFA basket indicator reporting, and OH data (with the latter treated with caution as there has been limited external verification of the outcomes captured in the OH database).

Primary data sources include key informant interviews (KIIs), workshops and focus group discussions, with VCA governance structures and taskforce members; semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with country programme partners / programme implementers, and external stakeholders (validators) including government officials, community and religious leaders, external consultants and experts; focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders, including marginalised groups (e.g., women, youth, Indigenous peoples); and a self-administered, online survey (n=90) that collected data from programme partners across all seven implementation countries.

In addition, causal maps were used to assess pathways of change. These maps were compiled using both primary and secondary data sources (programme and country annual reports) to support the evaluation of programme-related results chains (i.e. to determine which activities and outputs contributed to which outcomes) in the absence of monitoring data.

Evidence assessment for effectiveness, outcomes and impact:

The findings on effectiveness are supported by a broad range of data sources, including programme reports; monitoring data; causal maps; primary data from KIIs, SSIs, and focus groups; and a quantitative survey. However, a key secondary data gap resulted from the *lack of a clear set of indicators for programme monitoring and reporting on activities, outputs and outcomes*. As a result, no monitoring data was available on programme activities and outputs, while outcome level data, captured in the OH database, was unverified. This means that the achievement of outcomes was assessed via primary, qualitative data collection, *within the parameters of the selected contribution claims*, coupled with a review of programme secondary data sources (reports). As noted above in the section on biases and limitations, the use of CA coupled with a RE lens means that the evaluation's findings *are not statistically generalisable across all VCA contexts and partners*. This should be considered in relation to the evaluation findings on effectiveness and the assessment of the validity of the programme's ToC.

Primary data collected through KIIs, SSIs, workshops and focus groups provided qualitative insights into VCA's interventions and results achieved. However, the KIIs and SSIs were primarily based on purposive sampling, which focused on stakeholders with significant knowledge or involvement in the programme. While this ensured the inclusion of knowledgeable informants, it may have result in overrepresentation of positive perspectives. Similarly, those focus groups that used convenience sampling may have included more engaged and accessible participants, potentially limiting the diversity of views captured, especially from those who were less involved or had negative experiences with the programme.

The quantitative survey, with 90 respondents, also added valuable data, though its sample size limits the breadth of representation, particularly in countries with varying levels of engagement. Additionally, self-reported data may reflect an element of social desirability bias, where participants may highlight positive outcomes.

Overall, the evidence is reasonably robust and supports the conclusion that VCA was effective in achieving its objectives. The abovementioned limitations in sampling and self-reporting do, however, suggest that findings should be interpreted with some caution.

The programme level evaluation effectiveness findings draw strongly from country level case studies. This section begins with a summary of the case study scope, rationale and methodology.

6.3.1 Case study scope, rationale and methodology: a summary overview

The VCA end-term evaluation utilised a combination of Contribution Analysis (CA) and Realist Evaluation (RE) to provide a robust assessment of the programme's effectiveness across diverse political and ecological landscapes.

- **Rationale for CA and RE:** CA was chosen to explore causal relationships where direct attribution is difficult, particularly in advocacy contexts, by building a plausible narrative of how VCA contributed to observed outcomes while considering alternative explanations. RE complemented this by identifying the specific mechanisms (M) that triggered change within particular contexts (C) to produce certain outcomes (O). This dual approach allowed the evaluation to explain not just if change happened, but how, for whom, and under what conditions.
- **Selection of the 14 claims:** The 14 contribution claims (two per country) were selected through a rigorous process starting with a review of the programme's Outcome Harvesting (OH) database. They were chosen based on thematic variation (e.g., local solutions, gender, policy change), representation across ToC pillars, and their potential to test core programme assumptions (notably 1, 4, 7, and 8).

Summary of case study claims

Country	Title	Contribution Claim Description	Plausibility rating
Bolivia	Escazú Agreement	VCA contributed to strengthening the implementation of the Escazú Agreement in Bolivia by supporting civil society's capacity (AIBAE alliance) to engage in environmental governance and policy influence.	Plausible (context-dependent)
Bolivia	Motacusito Land Rights	VCA played a key role in supporting women-led advocacy and technical monitoring to secure formal municipal protected area status	Plausible (contextually bounded)
Paraguay	Marina Cué Land Rights	VCA assisted in the long-standing land rights struggle of Marina Cué, contributing to the recognition of land rights through national policy reforms.	Plausible
Paraguay	Digital Inclusion Centres	VCA supported the establishment of Digital Inclusion Centres, Community networks drove national regulatory recognition (SARC) of local internet provision, as a tool for climate advocacy and policy participation.	Highly plausible
Tunisia	GDAP, Kerkennah Islands	VCA helped establish the GDAP in the Kerkennah Islands, which enhanced climate adaptation efforts and fostered greater participation of women in decision-making processes.	Plausible
Tunisia	Beni Khedache Local Action Plan (PLAC)	VCA supported the creation of a Local Action Plan (PLAC) in Beni Khedache, ensuring local communities influenced municipal climate plans	Plausible and valid
Kenya	Mulika Tracking Tool	VCA contributed to shifting citizen engagement from speculation to evidence-based scrutiny of funds through the use of digitised budget data.	Plausible
Kenya	Siaya Gender Governance	VCA supported women moving from symbolic presence to active integration in county planning through sustained education moved	Plausible
Zambia	District Climate Change Committee (DCCC)	VCA facilitated the establishment of the DCCC in Chikankata, improving coordination among local actors for climate governance and advancing the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices.	Plausible

Country	Title	Contribution Claim Description	Plausibility rating
Zambia	Seed Bills Advocacy	VCA facilitated the halting of restrictive seed legislation through hybrid advocacy and pairing grassroots pressure with technical reviews	Plausible (Contributory)
Indonesia	KOPI Youth Alliance	VCA supported the formation of the KOPI Youth Alliance, from fragmented youth consolidated into a structured 400-member coalition gaining regional planning seats.	Plausible
Indonesia	Women's Federation (PWF)	VCA strengthened women's collectives which achieved city-level waste management recognition and leadership.	Plausible and valid
Brazil	Capacity for Influence	VCA's identity-based training for youth and Indigenous groups in Brazil empowered extractivist youth to lead policy discussions and shift official views	Highly plausible
Brazil	School Meals	VCA's capacity building efforts helped Indigenous coalitions successfully integrate agroecological products into school meal procurement	Plausible (limited evidence)

Across the 14 cases, a consistent mechanism for success was the "bridge actor" role, where VCA partners paired grassroots mobilization with technical translation, converting lived experience into "policy-ready" formats such as the Mulika tool in Kenya or the PLAC in Tunisia. The contextual pattern shows that change was most likely to reach a "tipping point" during climate-induced crises (droughts in Zambia and Tunisia) or political openings (the 2023 transition in Brazil), where VCA-strengthened actors were already "ready" to seize the window. The dominant outcome type was formal policy adoption and recognition (aligned with SCS02 basket indicator), which validates the programme-level conclusion that VCA is stronger at influencing *plans and laws* than at securing the *budget execution* (aligned with SCS01 basket indicator) needed for full implementation. These cases collectively illustrate the programme theory that strengthened civic agency is a mandatory prerequisite for just climate governance in obstructed spaces.

Additional detail on each of the case study claims can be found in the respective country reports. The rest of the section discusses the findings of the effectiveness analysis drawing from programme level and case study evidence.

Key evaluation questions and findings:

To what extent, how and why has VCA been able to contribute to an expansion/ deepening of civic space (related to climate action), where climate action voices are present and heard or not?

Key finding 8: VCA helped widen and deepen climate-civic space mainly by strengthening coalitions and participation pathways for marginalised groups. Evidence shows capacity strengthening and alliance-building under Pillar 1 supported partners to collaborate on shared agendas and to co-create/scale locally led solutions, including through new or strengthened climate action knowledge partnerships and convened stakeholder spaces.

Key finding 9: VCA amplified citizen voices (especially women, youth and IPs & LCs) through digital inclusion and self-representation, but evidence of wider public-debate change is weaker. The evaluation finds strong contribution to storytelling and multimedia strategies (including Indigenous languages and culturally rooted narratives), alongside new alliances with institutions (media/academia) to disseminate evidence-based narratives; however, it also notes limited evidence on whether these efforts measurably shifted broader public debate, partly due to monitoring constraints and persistent infrastructure gaps.

To what extent and how did VCA contribute to a diverse civil society that is collaborating on a shared agenda and co-creating scalable, locally shaped solutions that benefit people and nature? What factors contributed to successful strategies (context, enablers and barriers)? (Pillar 1)

Finding 10: VCA's capacity strengthening efforts have strengthened programme partners' knowledge, skills and abilities in multiple thematic areas, but particularly in the ability to identify and strengthen locally-shaped climate solutions, and to create new (or strengthening of existing) climate action knowledge partnerships.

Finding 11: The evaluation found evidence that these capacities and alliances are supporting collaboration amongst a range of groups and structures on advocacy initiatives related to climate finance, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The capacities and partnerships are also supporting the implementation and scaling of locally led climate solutions.

Finding 12: Key strengths of VCA's capacity strengthening approach include its consultative and responsive design, its practical orientation, and the use of cost-effective and scalable delivery models (such as train-the-trainer approaches and ongoing mentoring support). These features have supported not only skills development, but also increased confidence, ownership, and the ability of partners to apply learning in their own contexts.

Finding 13: The VCA alliance members have leveraged their convening power to bring strategically aligned stakeholders into conversations with one another, while also facilitating linkages between actors who may not have previously collaborated. The programme's emphasis on mutual capacity strengthening has also been an effective means of supporting relationship-building.

To what extent and how did the VCA contribute to amplified citizens' voices that shape public debate on the just transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient futures? What factors contributed to successful strategies (context, enablers and barriers)? (Pillar 2)

Finding 14: VCA contributed to amplifying citizens' voices through its work under Pillar 2; that is, by addressing digital exclusion and enabling local story-telling, by supporting the design and implementation of multi-media strategies, and facilitating self-representation – particularly amongst women, youth and IPs & LCs – including the use of Indigenous languages and culturally-rooted narratives.

Finding 15: VCA supported alliance building between community members, civil society organisations and institutions (including the media and academia), to support the design and dissemination of evidence-based, creative knowledge products aimed at shifting public thinking and narratives about climate change contributors, impacts and mitigation measures. These partnerships strengthened the reach, credibility, and diversity of climate narratives.

Finding 16: While there is strong evidence that VCA amplified citizens' voices and increased the visibility of marginalised perspectives, there is more limited evidence of corresponding shifts in broader public debate or dominant narratives. This reflects both the indirect and longer-term nature of narrative change, as well as limitations in monitoring systems to capture changes in discourse and influence.

Finding 17: Successful strategies under Pillar 2 included the combination of capacity strengthening with digital inclusion, as well as the facilitation of linkages and strategic partnerships. These approaches contributed to media and communication skills, expanded visibility and reach through both social and traditional media, and strengthened confidence, solidarity, and collective identity amongst programme participants.

Finding 18: Key constraints include persistent digital and infrastructure gaps, particularly in remote or marginalised areas, which limit the reach of digital storytelling efforts. Safeguarding is also an important programme consideration where visibility is being increased.

To what extent and how did VCA enable civil society contributions to climate solutions being taken into account in policy, practice and budget allocations in our countries? What were factors contributing to successful strategies? (Pillar 3)

Finding 19: VCA contributed substantially to policy influence across countries, with more limited evidence of changes in implementation and budgets. VCA documented 121 instances of laws and policies changing due to CSO engagement, mostly in policy development processes (101 under SCS02) rather than improved

implementation (20 under SCS01), which typically requires longer timeframes and is more vulnerable to contextual barriers.

Finding 20: VCA enabled uptake of civil society contributions through a consistent package of support that combined organisation, evidence, and influence tactics. Across cases, civil society contributions were taken up where VCA helped build organised constituencies and coalitions, strengthened rightsholder capacity to participate in formal planning and budgeting cycles, and supported “hybrid” influencing strategies that paired insider engagement (technical inputs, lobbying, collaborative governance) with outsider pressure (mobilisation, media, petitions).

Finding 21: Success was strongest where strategies aligned with political opportunity and government priorities, creating “win-win” pathways.

Finding 22: Successful strategies were supported by supporting capabilities for participation and engagement (e.g., budget literacy, written submissions, structured follow-up), credible evidence generation, and resourcing the “last mile” (transport, convening, drafting, documentation) so communities could engage consistently.

Finding 23: VCA’s implementation strength lay in locally rooted delivery and adaptive partnership models that increased relevance and influence.

Finding 24: The programme experienced several programmatic barriers, including limited inception time and uneven resourcing for coordination and joint work—especially at global level—reduced shared understanding, constrained collaboration, and created gaps in how well strategies could be implemented across the Alliance; this was compounded by post-approval shifts in MoFA funding guidance that disrupted planning and strained relationships with some local partners.

Finding 25: Contextual barriers felt by the programme include work in remote and diverse settings introduced practical barriers (connectivity, distance, language, climate shocks) that limited sustained engagement, while deeper contextual forces—youth livelihood pressures, misalignment between locally led practices and government approaches, corporate influence, and patriarchal norms—constrained civic space and slowed progress for marginalised groups.

What early signs of positive change (policy shifts, increased agency, visibility, access to rights) has the program contributed to for women, men, girls, and boys, particularly marginalised youth groups?

Finding 26: Reported changes include women and youth participating more actively and being heard in climate spaces, strengthened leadership and influencing skills (including digital communications), and examples of women’s collective empowerment and increased visibility in community decision-making.

What strategies have been applied by VCA to shift power relations in favour of women and young people and how effective were these strategies?

Finding 27: VCA operationalised GESI through a practical package—targeted partnerships, capacity strengthening, leadership development, and network support—that contributed to early gains in agency and visibility.

Finding 28: Effectiveness was uneven because conceptual and operational coherence on GESI varied across the Alliance and contexts.

This section assesses VCA’s effectiveness, outcomes and (where evidence allows) emerging impact, focusing on the programme’s sphere of influence as set out in the Theory of Change. It examines not only what changed, but how and why change occurred across diverse contexts—paying particular attention to the strategies, partnerships and forms of collaboration that enabled civic actors to engage decision-makers, shape climate-related agendas, and pursue more just and locally led climate action. The analysis also considers whether the Alliance generated collective value beyond what individual organisations could reasonably achieve alone, including through shared positioning, complementary expertise, joint advocacy and strengthened networks.

In line with the evaluation plan ([Appendix 1](#)), impact is considered alongside effectiveness and outcomes. However, the evaluation team notes two important constraints on the strength of impact

claims. First, VCA is a five-year programme oriented toward systemic change in climate governance, such as shifts in power relations, policy influence, and the civic agency of marginalised groups, which typically unfold over longer time horizons than the programme period. As such, this end-of-term evaluation is better positioned to assess the plausibility of VCA's contribution to early and intermediate outcomes than to confirm long-term societal impacts. Where broader transformative signals are observed (for example, formalised community structures, institutionalised local climate governance, or shifts in duty-bearer perceptions of rightsholders), these are treated as indicative of impact pathways rather than verified impact. Second, assessment of unintended effects, required under the IOB framing when applying an impact lens, was constrained by the length of data collection instruments, meaning some interviews and FGDs could not explore unintended outcomes in depth. Unintended effects are therefore documented where they emerged spontaneously or through secondary analysis (including instances of cultural backlash and risks of coalition structures reproducing internal hierarchies), but the evaluation does not claim comprehensive coverage.

Given these limitations, wider effects on non-target populations and broader societal outcomes are discussed only where sufficient evidence exists. The report highlights a small number of illustrative cases, such as VCA-supported contributions linked to North Jakarta receiving the national Adipura environmental award (Indonesia), indigenous territorial recognition (TICCA) being reflected as an unintended outcome in Paraguay's 2025 MADES Strategic Plan, and interest from non-programme communities in replicating VCA-supported digital advocacy models (Paraguay). Overall, the impact dimension of this section therefore focuses on: (i) testing selected Theory of Change assumptions as proxies for impact plausibility; (ii) documenting early signals of systemic change emerging from contribution analysis; and (iii) identifying unintended effects, positive and negative, where the evidence base supports this. Stronger claims about longer-term impact would require a follow-on assessment after a sufficient post-programme interval.

6.3.2 VCA ToC Pillar 1

Pillar 1 of the VCA programme ToC focuses on mutual capacity strengthening, the formulation of fundable proposals, and the formation of new alliances so that a diverse civil society can collaborate on shared agendas and co-create locally-shaped solutions that benefit people and nature (VCA, Theory of Change - Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action). Four intermediate outcomes were envisaged under this pillar, namely:

- Shared and actionable local climate agendas of civil society influence policies sub-nationally and nationally, and give rise to compelling citizen-led climate actions;
- New rural-urban and intergenerational alliances between civil society groups form around shared and actionable local climate agendas;
- Local capabilities are strengthened for scalable citizen-led initiatives that can inspire public debate, policy and practice; and
- Fundable proposals for scalable, climate solutions that benefit both people and nature are developed for external funding sources (VCA, Theory of Change - Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action).

An analysis of the programme monitoring data, specifically, the OH database, shows that 238 (25,3%) of the 939 outcomes harvested were categorised under Pillar 1. While this is the lowest number of outcomes harvested across the three pillars of the programme ToC, this could be linked to the foundational character of the outcomes planned in this pathway; that is, strengthening capacity, building alliances and supporting resource mobilisation are key steps on the path to

amplifying citizen's voices through alternative storytelling and digital activism, and the formulation and implementation of effective advocacy strategies for policy influence.

The **basket indicator SCS06** provides a quantitative account of the programme's reach in terms of partnerships, as well as the programme's commitment to work with women and youth.

- **SCS06 – Number of CSOs included in SPs programmes**

Table 3 below provides detail on the number and type of CSOs participating in VCA. Over the course of programme implementation, 248 programme partnerships were forged, of which 104 were with women- and/or youth-led organisations (42%).

Table 2 Number of CSOs included in the VCA programme, including those that are women- and youth-led

Indicator	Sub-indicators	Bolivia	Brazil	Indonesia	Kenya	Paraguay	Tunisia	Zambia	Total
SCS06 #of CSOs included in SPs programmes	SCS061 # of women led CSOs	2	16	4	1	6		9	38
	SCS062 # of youth led CSOs	1	6	4	2	3	8	2	26
	SCS063 # of CSOs not youth or women led	14	52	28	23	15	7	5	144
	SCS064 # of CSOs which are both women and youth led		18		6		11	5	40
Total SCS06		17	92	36	32	24	26	21	248

Strengthening of local capabilities

The evaluation found that VCA has achieved a high degree of success in relation to the strengthening of local capabilities. All survey respondents (n=90) reported **newly acquired or strengthened knowledge, skills and abilities** as a result of programme support. Similar inputs were obtained during qualitative primary data collection where strengthened capacity as a result of programme participation was noted by the overwhelming majority of evaluation respondents across all seven countries, including rightsholders, VCA partners, validators and VCA alliance members.

Capacity strengthening themes reported during qualitative data collection were varied, including communication methods, public speaking and storytelling skills, use of social media and video production, theatre and music shows for advocacy, dialogue and facilitation skills – including those that are culturally appropriate, advocacy skills, network building, programme and ToC design, gender and intersectional analysis – and how to integrate this into programme planning, policy

engagement / establishing relationships with government actors, grant writing and resource mobilisation, financing mechanisms and financial management. Amongst survey respondents (n=90) the most frequently reported areas of strengthened capacity are (i) the ability to identify and strengthen locally-shaped climate solutions (82%), and (ii) the ability to create new (or strengthening of existing) climate action knowledge partnerships (70%). Less commonly reported areas include the ability to identify new, relevant funding sources (46%) and to put together fundable proposals for locally-shaped climate solutions (43%). The ability to design and implement online and offline media strategies for digital activism was also less frequently reported (43%).

Survey respondents (n=90) reported **applying their acquired knowledge, skills and abilities** in diverse ways including:

- The inclusion of marginalised groups (women, youth and Indigenous populations), and/or their perspectives and voices, into programming (70%)
- The formation of new (or strengthening of existing) alliances for partnerships (69%)
- Strengthened relationships with local, national and/or regional decision-makers (69%)
- Convening or co-convening of joint forums for knowledge and learning exchange with other VCA partner organisations (64%)
- Preparation and submission of proposals for climate solution interventions (56%)
- The co-creation of local climate agendas (53%)
- The design and implementation of advocacy initiatives based on local climate agendas (53%)
- The formulation of evidence-based, locally-shaped climate solutions for sharing with sub-national and national actors (44%)
- Implementation of online and offline media strategies to inform public debate (41%)
- The design and implementation of monitoring, evaluation and learning systems related to climate action initiatives (40%)

Indicator reporting extracted from the VCA Results Framework supports the survey results regarding **partner inclusion of marginalised groups** (women, youth and Indigenous populations), and/or their perspectives and voices, into programming. As indicated in the table below, 439 CSOs affiliated to VCA reported an increased inclusion of women, youth, gender-expansive persons, Indigenous people, and other marginalised people in their climate interventions, exceeding the target of 406 CSOs. The recorded number of CSOs (409) reporting capacity to adopt and apply an **intersectional, diverse and feminist frame of analysis in climate justice interventions** also indicates a sound level of progress in relation to inclusion of marginalised groups in climate justice interventions.

Table 3 VCA Results Framework reporting on CSO capacity and level of inclusion of marginalised groups

VCA target	Indicator	Total by end of 2024	Target 2025
By 2025, 200 CSOs and networks are equipped and supported to adopt and apply an intersectional, diverse, gender and feminist frame of analysis and have enhanced the engagement/ representation of women, youth, gender-expansive persons, Indigenous people, and other marginalised people in their climate justice interventions.	# CSOs that report an increased inclusion of women, youth, gender-expansive persons, Indigenous people, and other marginalised people in their climate intervention	439	406
	# CSO's reporting capacity to adopt and apply an intersectional, diverse, and feminist frame of analysis in its climate justice interventions	409	287

Case study findings regarding the **impact of VCA capacity strengthening efforts** are equally positive. Various forms of capacity strengthening were noted in all 14 contribution claims, with immediate or short term outcomes falling into one of the following thematic areas:

- **Increased confidence and self-belief**

The most frequently reported result of VCA supported capacity strengthening was a transformation in how individuals perceived their own agency and value. In **Indonesia**, women in the Penjarangan Women's Federation reported that - after public speaking training - they were more confident to speak in public spaces and to serve in community leadership positions. Similarly, the women leaders in Motacusito, **Bolivia**, reported shifts in confidence stating they *"began to believe we could speak, and that others would listen."* - *Rightsholder, Brazil (FGD)*. In **Tunisia**, capacity building workshops conducted by the VCA partner organisation, Association de la Continuité des Générations (ACG), led to changes in self-perception amongst women of the Groupement de Développement Agricole et de la Pêche (GDAP) who began to see themselves less as subjects of external forces to recognising themselves as legitimate knowledge holders and actors.

- **Willingness to engage authorities**

VCA's training in communication and advocacy tools, and equipping local actors with technical knowledge, has contributed to an increase in confidence and willingness to engage with authorities and/or in public forums. Examples include the youth of the KOPI Alliance in **Indonesia** who reported an increased confidence and willingness to speak publicly about climate justice issues and engage government actors following their participation in workshops coordinated by VCA partner, SPEAK. In Siaya, **Kenya**, women are reportedly more willing to speak in formal meetings; while in **Zambia**, the case study indicates that access to understandable policy information on the Seed Bills enabled a willingness to participate in collective petitioning. In **Bolivia**, training for water monitors provided this group with practical insights and technical credibility, boosting their confidence to gather and share data in support of municipal decision-making regarding water governance.

- **Identity and narrative transformation**

The country case studies also indicate that VCA capacity strengthening has enabled a shift in identity amongst those participating in programme activities. This was particularly evident amongst women and youth rightsholders. For example, in **Brazil**, youth who previously perceived their traditional livelihood of rubber tapping as a sign of poverty are now reported to be celebrating their identity and creating social media content for tourism. In **Indonesia**, the members of the youth-led KOPI Alliance reported a sense of belonging, solidarity, collective identity and purpose after meeting peers from other regencies during VCA supported activities. Similar outcomes were reported by the women of the abovementioned GDAP in **Tunisia**, and members of the Penjarangan Women's Federation in Jakarta, **Indonesia**.

VCA alliance members and country-level partner organisations provided an **extensive range of capacity strengthening interventions**. These strategies spanned both institutional strengthening, including financial management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and thematic knowledge building in areas like climate justice and nature-based solutions (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2025). **Successful strategies** include the use of practical skills development, long-term mentoring,

and the adoption of the mutual capacity strengthening - and a consultative and responsive - approach. These are outlined in more detail below.

- VCA **embedded learning processes in real-world situations and tasks**, with participants expected to leave with concrete outputs and next steps. For example, in **Indonesia**, capacity building was linked to practical action, such as training members of the Penjaringan Women's Federation in urban profiling and data collection to support their advocacy regarding sanitation and waste management. In **Zambia**, practical, livelihoods-relevant training in climate-smart agriculture and water management supported the implementation of practical adaptation strategies amongst smallholder farmers. In **Tunisia**, capacity strengthening models in Beni Khedache built awareness of climate change and nature-based solutions to facilitate the integration of local knowledge and scientific data into local action plans on climate change.
- Programme partners and rightsholders in **Brazil, Kenya and Indonesia** reported that capacity strengthening either took place over longer-term cycles or was supported by **accompaniment or mentoring**. For example, in **Indonesia**, members of the KOPI Alliance were linked with experienced community activists to learn more about their climate action work and to access ongoing guidance and support. In the **Brazilian** Mídia NINJA coalition, the larger organisation (Mídia NINJA) played a mentorship role with smaller organisations (CNS and AMIGA), particularly in relation to strengthening their communications capacity.
- Survey and primary data indicate that VCA adopted a **consultative and responsive approach** to capacity strengthening. Most survey respondents (n=90) (72%) indicated that they or their organisation were consulted regarding the types of support or capacity strengthening to be provided by the programme. When asked to indicate the extent to which the capacity strengthening or support addressed partner organisation needs, respondents showed high levels of agreements with an average rating of 5,47 out of 7. Country level agreement did not differ greatly from the average with Paraguay reporting the highest level of agreement (6,14).

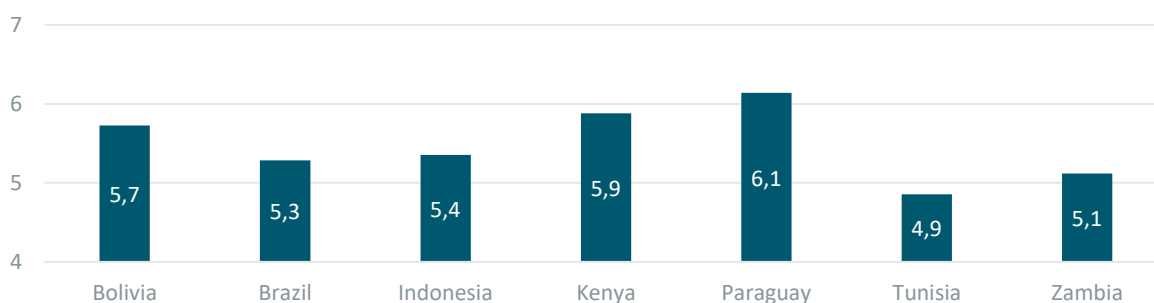


Figure 3 Average agreement on the alignment between VCA capacity support and needs (1 – 7)

- VCA's **mutual capacity strengthening approach** was perceived as offering an alternative to conventional, top-down capacity building. This approach acknowledges that there are multiple forms of knowledge and expertise and that knowledge can flow in multiple directions (e.g. between alliance members, partners and rightsholders), with no static or fixed way of knowing – rather capacity strengthening should be adapted for context, as opposed to being delivered as a fixed package. In this framing, capacity strengthening is also viewed as collective rather than focused on strengthening individual organisations in isolation, and integrates cultural/identity-based methods alongside technical skills. The adoption of this approach was reflected in evaluation respondent descriptions of



collaborative learning spaces and peer support, as well as the often “transformative” shifts in thinking and awareness that these immersive sessions contributed towards. The quote below provides additional insights.

“It was a watershed moment and also the issue of opening the mind, you know. We had no idea how important the trainings were. I always say that taking part in VCA training was a transformation in my life, a transformation of thoughts. Sometimes we think transformations are only about income and that income will improve our life, but thought transformation is also very important.” - Rightsholder, Brazil (FGD)

Lastly, a **good practice for capacity strengthening** reported during qualitative data collection included the use of train the trainer (ToT) or similar models to cascade capacities beyond those identified for capacity strengthening initiatives. In **Brazil**, representatives from the youth collective, Coletivo Varadouro, reported replicating workshops in communities to share skills with their peers, “Comitê trained us, we’re taking this training forward. A seed that Comitê created together with VCA that is bearing fruit.” The workshops attended by the Varadouro youth covered topics such as public speaking and community mobilisation; communication training, including video production and narrative construction; project design, including Theory of Change, and proposal writing. Similar

VCA Kenya, with support from a local partner, Muungano Wa Wanviji, and SDIK, put out a call for applications for innovative urban climate solutions in informal settlements in Nairobi, Nakuru, and Kisumu counties. Following an assessment of the applications, a total of 107 groups from these counties received financial support ranging from Kshs 50,000 to 100,000 (347- 695 EUR). The support facilitated implementation of the proposed solutions. It also contributed to strengthening the institutional capacity and visibility of the informal groups. For example, one of the supported groups, the ‘United Waste Management Youth initiative in Kisumu, secured extra funding from the County Government to scale up their initiatives further. Annual Progress Report 2022 (April 2023; p4)

peer to peer or ToT approaches were reported in **Kenya, Indonesia and Zambia**.

Development of fundable proposals

Evaluation findings indicate that there has been a good level of progress towards the intermediate outcome *Development of fundable proposals for scalable, climate solutions that benefit both people and nature*.

Monitoring databases indicate that an additional EUR 13,671,821.93 was successfully leveraged over the course of programme implementation to support programme-aligned initiatives (VCA, Leveraged Finance Database, Updated 2025). VCA alignment of partner proposal development with other finance mechanisms at both national and international level was a key contributing factor. For example, VCA’s training of 22 CSOs in **Zambia** to help community groups develop gender-responsive proposals facilitated access to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). In **Indonesia**, partners aligned community proposals with village funds and provincial budgets to leverage over IDR 2.3 billion for nature-based solutions. Further examples include VCA partner alignment with the Podáali Fund for Indigenous movements in the **Brazilian Amazon**.

Other programme strategies to support proposal development for scalable climate solutions include **capacity strengthening** on topics such as fundraising, proposal writing and the formulation of resource mobilisation strategies. VCA also supported partners with the development of research skills, and monitoring and data collection initiatives, to support their formulation of **evidence-based funding proposals**, thus enhancing the credibility and potential of these submissions.

However, the extent to which the gains achieved to date will be sustained is unclear. Only 41% of survey respondents (n=90) reported participating in capacity strengthening under the **resource mobilisation** thematic area, and just over half (56%) reported applying the skills acquired via the programme to prepare and submit proposals for climate solution interventions. This indicates survey respondent perceptions that resource mobilisation capacities are less well-developed. Qualitative data aligns with this - a key concern reported by interviewees and FGD participants across all seven countries is the shrinking financial landscape and risk of funding constraints following VCA programme cessation. This is further discussed in section 6.6 (Sustainability) of this report.

Alliance building

The formation of new, unusual and intergenerational alliances has been another success of the VCA programme. Primary and secondary data sources provide a number of examples. For example:

- In **Tunisia**, VCA partnered with the Heinrich Boell Foundation, the Social and Economic Rights Forum, Tunisia Verte Network, Stop Pollution, and other organisations to spread climate justice principles. Also, a youth movement in Tunisia collaborated with VCA partner Cinema Pour Tous and six media channels for joint advocacy (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023). Programme support for the development of the Beni Khedache Local Action Plan (PLAC) brought together a range of stakeholder groups including shepherds, unemployed youth, women and municipal officials. Results of this collaboration included the linking of traditional local knowledge and technical scientific data, which provided the Beni Khedache municipality with a coherent framework for climate adaptation and mitigation for the first time.
- In **Indonesia**, women's federations in Yogyakarta and Jakarta have entered into collaborations with universities, media organisations and local government agencies to address waste management issues. The youth-led KOPI Alliance was linked with experienced climate activists to facilitate access to mentoring and ongoing support for young people following their participation in programme-led capacity strengthening interventions.
- Evaluation respondents in **Bolivia and Paraguay** reported alliances with allies linked to the Catholic Church, while the MTR also cites the **Paraguayan #LosMédanosNoSeTocan** campaign coalition, which grew to over 70 CSOs and included private sector actors. In **Bolivia**, the Intergenerational Alliance for the Escazú Agreement (AIBAE) unified youth networks, Indigenous organisations, and feminist movements.
- In **Zambia**, VCA support for the establishment of District Climate Change Committees (DCCCs) contributed towards predictable coordination, collaboration and improved information flows between district officials and community leaders.
- In **Brazil**, the Mesa Permanente de Diálogo Catrapovos functioned as an unusual alliance between Indigenous associations and the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF). The result of this cooperation was institutional backing that lent the Apinajé people the legitimacy needed to overcome initial resistance from state education officials regarding food procurement.
- In **Kenya**, the Siaya Muungano Network, along with other partners in the Siaya County Climate Change Civil Society Organisation (CSO) working group and Action Aid Kenya, joined forces to advocate for more effective climate change governance and the development of the County Climate Change Fund Regulations.

VCA's **strategy for alliance building** was multifaceted, and extended beyond convening and the facilitation of linkages. Capacity strengthening and mentoring were highlighted by evaluation respondents for the case study in **Brazil** as an effective means of bringing individuals and organisations together to facilitate learning exchanges and alliance 'activation'. Alliance members also leveraged their networks and reputation to convene a broad spectrum of actors operating in the climate space, and to facilitate partner and rightsholder access to national and regional decision- and policymakers as well as international platforms and events. Other successful strategies include the following:

- VCA provided **resources** to facilitate engagement and network building. For example, in **Brazil**, flexible funding was provided for transportation and stipends to youth from isolated regions to enable their participation in collective coordination meetings. Small, flexible grants were also provided (via the NLGF) to allow alliances to implement projects together, which reinforced their internal bonds through shared success. In **Indonesia**, KOPI Alliance members were allocated small grants to plan and implement local projects. This generated collective interest and strengthened the alliance's cohesion.
- VCA also supported informal networks to **register as legal entities**. A highly strategic approach, this facilitated new alliances' access to resources for sustainability as well as decision-makers and decision-making spaces. For example, in **Tunisia**, programme partners provided administrative and financial support for the informal Kerkennah Climate Justice Network to register as the GDAP. This legal status allowed them to apply for funding independently and to engage with local authorities. In **Brazil**, the Varadouro Collective was also supported to obtain its own business registration (CNPJ), enabling this group to access grants directly rather than depending on larger intermediary NGOs.
- The programme also put mechanisms in place to **manage power asymmetries** and facilitate inclusive governance. For example, the **Brazilian** case study outlines how VCA facilitated the creation and strengthening of 15 coalitions representing diverse constituencies across all states of the Legal Amazon. Here the programme provided governance support and multi-stakeholder shared management, which enabled inclusive participation whilst managing power asymmetries between established NGOs and grassroots movements. In **Indonesia**, the programme connected youth in the KOPI Alliance with senior activists for mentorship while ensuring the youth-led structure remained autonomous.

Other **good practices** related to alliance building included VCA's support of internal alignment processes so that alliances could 'speak with one voice' in public and policy spaces. In **Kenya**, SIMUN organised preparatory spaces for women in Siaya County to collectively review draft agendas and planning documents before attending public county meetings. This allowed them to align their priorities and enter negotiations with a unified position. Working through trusted local partners that could leverage their community reputation and longstanding relationships to support multistakeholder convening and engagement was a good practice noted in **Tunisia** and **Indonesia**. In addition, integrating economic support and IGA models into alliances helps to sustain participation and motivation amongst members. This emerged as a finding from the Tunisia GDAP case study.

Challenges impacting Pillar 1 success in relation to alliance building include varying levels of **organisational capacity and maturity**. This was noted as slowing down alignment and increasing the management burden of the often complex alliance structures. **Shifts in alliance membership** and changes of organisation representatives participating in these structures also poses a risk to organisational memory and the institutional knowledge required to sustain complex coalition functions beyond VCA's support. These challenges were highlighted in the Brazil context specifically;

while in across all seven countries, respondents raised the concern regarding the **sustainability of alliances** without VCA's flexible funding.

In summary, Pillar 1 of the VCA programme has significantly contributed to building local capacities, fostering new alliances, and supporting preparation of fundable climate proposals. The programme's focus on practical skills, mentoring, and long-term support has enabled participants to confidently engage with decision-makers and advocate for climate justice. VCA has also facilitated the formation of new, intergenerational, and cross-sector alliances that brought together civil society organisations, local government actors, media, academia, women and youth-led groups, and Indigenous communities. While progress was made in preparing fundable proposals for scalable climate solutions, there is room for further development in resource mobilisation. However, the programme's efforts to link local solutions with broader funding mechanisms have emerged as a good practice.

6.3.3 VCA ToC Pillar 2

Pillar 2 of the VCA programme ToC focuses on amplifying alternative storytelling to support agenda setting and movement on climate action. The main envisaged outcome of this pillar is to shape public debate on climate resilient futures. A review of the programme TOC indicates that Pillar 2 interacts with Pillars 1 and 3 as a mutually reinforcing mechanism; that is, the intermediate and main outcomes outlined for each pillar are seen as supporting and catalysing the achievement of outcomes within the other pillars of the ToC (VCA, Theory of Change - Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action).

Five intermediate outcomes were envisaged under Pillar 2, namely:

- The use of online and offline multimedia strategies, often as part of joint lobbying and advocacy strategies, to inform public debate;
- The facilitation of access to data technology and analytics for local civil society partners to support new digital activism;
- The formation of new and unusual alliances on alternative transition pathways;
- The stirring of public debate by strong, new narratives about locally-shaped climate solutions; and
- The formation of new climate action knowledge partnerships and networks (VCA, Theory of Change - Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action).

An analysis of the programme's OH database, shows that 325 of results documented through this monitoring tool (of a total 939 outcomes) fall under Pillar 2 (35%). The following two indicators in the VCA Results Framework provide a quantitative account of the programme's achievements in this area.

- # CSO's within VCA that participate in new and/or expand their collaborations with existing and emerging gender-responsive climate justice movements
- # of cases where the VCA network initiates new collaboration with targeted movements from new advocacy campaigns, knowledge sharing, hosting spaces, evidence production, submission, etc.

By the end of 2024, 277 of the programme's partners were reported as participating in new and/or expanded collaborations with gender-responsive climate justice movements, exceeding the target set for the end of 2025 by 13. In addition, 240 cases of the VCA networks' initiation of new

collaborations were recorded by the end of 2024 (the target set for end 2025 is 250). This indicates that the programme has achieved sound progress towards its targets related to the formation of new and unusual alliances on alternative transition pathways and new climate action knowledge partnerships and networks¹¹.

Key achievements under Pillar 2 include **the production of community-led, local or grassroots narratives**. This was noted particularly in **Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay**. For example, **Bolivia** established the Indigenous Journalism School (EPI), which trained 102 Guaraní and Chiquitano communicators who produced 216 radio programmes and 506 articles to strengthen "territorial defence narratives". In the same country, collaboration with a feminist digital media initiative (Muy Waso) led to the production and broadcast of 42 pieces of journalistic content highlighting the perspectives of Chaco women in local and national media. In **Brazil**, the programme-supported Rádio Banzeiros broadcast Amazonian narratives to challenge colonial discourses. In **Paraguay**, the Network of Creators of Digital Content supported the production of videos by Indigenous youth. Members of Indigenous communities were also trained to use social media platforms to create content in their native languages (such as Guaraní).

In addition, VCA's support has helped to **expand the reach of the narratives and advocacy strategies** of IPs & LCs, women, and youth climate activists, raising their **profile and visibility**. Evaluation respondents, including programme partners, validators and rightsholders, reported that strengthened capacity and access to digital tools has contributed to these groups being seen, heard, recognised, and empowered to lead in social, economic and political spheres. The quotes below outline how capacity strengthening and digital inclusion have also supported access to funding and the introduction of additional income streams, and challenged gender stereotypes in **Paraguay**.

"We created a digital marketplace for selling crafts. This includes taking photographs of the products, pricing them and sharing them on the network. This resulted in many sales, which changed the previous situation where there were no sales due to the high transport and food costs associated with in-person sales."- Rightsholder, Paraguay (FGD)

"Through the programme, a training module on how to apply for online funding for micro-projects was implemented. This resulted in the youth network being awarded its own funding from Cultural Survival to finance its meetings for two years."- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

"The digital solution centres for the territory are managed by women. This has led to a cultural change, where technology is perceived as "women's work" in these communities, reversing the traditional stereotype."- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

In some cases, online and offline advocacy campaigns have triggered **additional coverage by traditional media outlets**, who may not have covered such issues before. This unanticipated

¹¹ Reporting against these indicators also applies to Pillar 1.

outcome is supporting programme partner and rightsholder **partnership- and network-building**, while building the **confidence and self-belief** of the content creators. The quote below elaborates.

“The simple fact of being part of the network means that I no longer feel alone. It helped us to be more confident, to encourage us to become leaders. The success and visibility of the network has sparked interest from people in other communities who want to be part of it or who want to establish their own internet points.”- Rightsholder, Paraguay (FGD)

The strategic use of digital platforms has strengthened advocacy by **shifting power dynamics between communities and public institutions**. Enhanced online visibility has enabled rightsholders to exert greater pressure on authorities, increasing responsiveness and accountability. As a result, digital communication has become an important tool for amplifying community demands and influencing institutional behaviour. This was noted in the Paraguay case study report specifically.

Despite these gains, barriers were noted in relation to Pillar 2 objectives. In **Paraguay and Kenya**, concerns were raised that the increased reliance on digital tools risks excluding those with low digital literacy or those living in areas with high connectivity costs. There were also warnings that communities may not be able to afford internet services or sustain digital infrastructure once programme support comes to an end. In addition, amplifying local voices increases visibility but also raises the risk of harassment and violence. Safety concerns were highlighted during primary data collection in **Bolivia, Indonesia and Kenya**. However, the receipt of safeguarding capacity strengthening or support by the programme was reported by only 24% of survey respondents (n=90).

Lastly, while the evaluation points to the amplification of voices, particularly those of marginalised groups, it is unclear to what extent the programme has stirred or shifted public debates on climate resilient futures (VCA Theory of Change). However, it is acknowledged that the monitoring of such outcomes would require a substantial amount of time and resources, and that effecting such change requires sustained efforts over a long period of time.

Successful strategies for storytelling and digital activism

Qualitative primary data indicates that VCA’s strategies under Pillar 2 can be clustered into three mutually reinforcing approaches. These are discussed in the sections that follow.

- **Capacity strengthening**

Primary and secondary data indicates that VCA has **strengthened the capacity of marginalised communities**, including women, youth and IPs & LCs, to produce and circulate content regarding their key climate change and/or environmental exploitation and degradation concerns. Training provided includes the use of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), video production, infographics, and the production of radio shows. This has allowed rightsholders to shape and frame narratives and advocacy agendas in their own formats and according to their own perspectives; that is, to self-represent rather than being spoken for.

- **Digital inclusion**

In **Paraguay**, VCA established Digital Inclusion Centres (telecentres) in 15 Indigenous communities, providing the physical infrastructure (antennas and computers) necessary for remote communities to gather and share information. This has supported community mobilisation and strengthened the

efficiency and effectiveness of community-led lobbying and advocacy strategies, shifting communities from slow, risky, offline tactics, such as road blockades and protests. The quote below from case study focus group discussions with rightsholders in Paraguay provides additional insights.

“Previously when seeking to resolve urgent problems, such as lack of medical care or obtaining social housing, the strategy involved physical mobilisation. For example, to demand houses, we hired a bus full of women and men to go to the ministries to make constant petitions. To convene meetings or assemblies, we had to notify everyone by going from house to house. Or we used an iron object to make noise, similar to a bell, and everyone knew they had to come. Communication has become much faster than before. Now, messages about meetings and other matters are communicated by phone or WhatsApp.”

- **Alternative forms of storytelling**

The programme has encouraged alternative forms of storytelling, supporting empowered communities to share their personal experiences and local climate solutions, and humanising the climate change narrative. A review of secondary data sources indicates that a range of formats have been utilised across the seven programme countries. For example, the use of activism was reported across Brazil, Kenya, Tunisia, Indonesia and Paraguay, while theatre and performative storytelling were highlighted in Zambia and Kenya. Podcasting and audio storytelling were reported for Zambia, Indonesia and Tunisia, with radio and community broadcasting noted for Brazil, Kenya, Zambia and Paraguay. Documentaries and long-form storytelling were a preferred format in Tunisia, and citizen journalism and community-led reporting were reported in Indonesia, Zambia and Bolivia. Across countries, these storytelling formats are rarely used in isolation. Instead, VCA partners combine them into hybrid storytelling ecosystems (e.g. combining theatre, radio and digital media).

In conclusion, Pillar 2 of the VCA programme has succeeded in amplifying marginalised voices and through digital inclusion, capacity strengthening and alternative forms of storytelling. It is, however, unclear to what extent these efforts have impacted on broader conversations around climate justice. Also, addressing challenges such as safeguarding and digital infrastructure sustainability should be factored into future initiatives.

6.3.4 VCA ToC Pillar 3

Pillar 3 of the VCA programme ToC posited that civil society would influence climate policies, norms, laws and practices, support public debate, and change policy, finance, practice, data and criteria in climate adaptation (VCA ToC doc). Envisaged intermediate outcomes include:

- Identify promising locally-led community funds to scale-up, with peer-to-peer learning.
- Joint campaigning, including Dutch embassies, for adoption of locally-shaped climate solutions in NDC revisions (2023) and other relevant opportunities.
- Work with Dutch Government, other donor agencies and investors (DFCD, GCF, IFI, GCA) to make their processes coherent with locally-shaped climate solutions (VCA ToC doc).

An analysis of the programme monitoring data, specifically, the OH database shows that most results captured by the programme were achieved within this pillar, specifically, 39% (366) of all results documented (939 outcomes) were categorised as pillar 3 results.

Basket indicators SCS01 and SCS02 provide a quantitative account of the programme’s reach in this area, specifically:

- SCS01 – Implementation of laws and policies: “# of laws and policies for sustainable and inclusive development that are better implemented as a result of CSO engagement.”
- SCS02 – Policy changes: “# of laws, policies blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development as a result of CSO engagement.”

Over the programme implementation period, the VCA recorded 121 policies and laws changing as a result of civil society engagement. Most of the changes were recorded under indicator SCS02, which refers to the policy development processes (101 out of 121 policies and/or laws we influenced i.e., blocked, adopted, or improved). A minority of policy and law changes were recorded under indicator SCS01 (20 out of 121), which captures *changes in the quality of policy implementation*; arguably, such changes require longer periods of time to materialise and are also subject to a myriad of contextual barriers (e.g., budget cuts, leadership shifts, etc.). Table 5 below provides detail on the types of policies impacted in each of the programme countries.

Table 4 VCA's progress against relevant indicators

SCS01 # of laws and policies for sustainable and inclusive development that are better implemented as a result of CSO engagement								
	Bolivia	Brazil	Indonesia	Kenya	Paraguay	Tunisia	Zambia	Total
SCS011 # laws	3	4	1		3			13
SCS012 # governmental policies			1		2		2	5
SCS013 # private sector company policies								0
CS014 # by-laws		2						2
SCS015 # international agreements								0
SCS02 # of laws, policies blocked, adopted, improved for sustainable and inclusive development as a result of CSO engagement								
SCS021 # laws	9	3		2	4	1		19
SCS022 # governmental policies	7	5	25	21	5	3	18	84
SCS023 # private sector company policies								0
SCS024 # by-laws	1	2		1	1			5
SCS025 # international agreements								0
Total SCS01 and SCS02	20	14	26	24	13	4	20	121

Most of VCA's programme influence addressed governmental policies, followed by laws, and this is the case across all countries. No changes to international agreements or private sector company policies were recorded. It is understood that the programme did not prioritise work with private companies and therefore this result is unsurprising. It is noteworthy that the programme did not record any changes to international agreements as a result of VCA CSO engagement. While there is evidence of VCA's engagement at this level (e.g., participation at UNFCCC / COP Processes (COP26, COP27, COP28, COP29) submissions to the "Baku to Belém" Roadmap (COP29-COP30) among others), this type of impact in the international arena requires time and consistent input to materialise which may have fallen short, given the constraints of the VCA GloPro previously discussed.

Successful strategies for policy influencing

An analysis of case study data in project countries sheds some light as to how the programme enabled civil society contributions to be taken up by practice and budget allocations in target countries. VCA's results under Pillar 3 were driven by a fairly consistent *package* of interventions, namely: building organised constituencies and coalitions, generating and packaging credible evidence on locally-led solutions, and combining "insider" engagement (technical inputs, lobbying, collaborative governance engagements) with "outsider" pressure (public mobilisation, media, petitions) to shift decisions on policy, practice and budgets. It is important to note that Pillar 3 outcomes are not standalone, but they're in fact the culmination of work done under pillar 1 (mutual capacity strengthening) and pillar 2 (amplifying voices).

Supporting governments to fulfil their national and/or international mandates

In **Bolivia** (Escazú Agreement), **Tunisia** (PLAC case study), and **Paraguay** (Marina Cué land titling) the VCA regional programme positioned itself as an instrument or vehicle for governments to close implementation gaps. In these cases, VCA local partners pursued inclusive locally led adaption actions that clearly aligned with governments' agenda and priorities and could easily be supported. The case of Marina Cué in Paraguay provides a strong illustration for how this strategy works: VCA helped resolve the Marina Cué land conflict by providing the technical-legal input needed for the government to meet conservation requirements while recognizing communal land rights. The government's will to resolve a historical conflict with national and international reverberation was capitalised on by the Marina Kue community and VCA allies.

VCA work in target countries offered governments strategies and input that unlocked unresolved civic battles or policies never yet implemented by providing technical expertise, evidence and practical advice that resulted in 'win-win' strategies.

Strengthening rightsholder capacity as a precondition for influence especially where it depends on procedural participation (budget literacy, rights awareness, ability to produce written submissions, sustained follow-up).

In **Kenya** and **Tunisia** VCA's support to local partners is described as sustained civic education and *practical accompaniment* to enable women, youth and marginalised groups to participate effectively in county planning/budgeting cycles, e.g., women's forums, pre-budget dialogues, drafting memoranda/petitions, and structured follow-up with officials. This is explicitly linked to integration of community priorities into planning instruments (Climate Action Plan, CIDP, ADP) and to increased confidence to hold government accountable.

(participation) "was zero... SIMUN opened my eyes, 'removed wax from my ears'... we were just 'rubber stamping'. Now that we have a CSOs network we present same issues. We don't fear anymore."- Rightsholders, Kenya (FGD)

A county assembly validator linked this to budget responsiveness: "More women and youth voices are now in budget forums... The allocation of budgets now reflects women priorities," and attributed part of the shift to SIMUN guidance on budgeting and mobilisation to present memoranda.

Brokering local knowledge into decision-making spaces by adding evidence and credibility

Across regions, the MTR concluded that VCA influence tends to work when it targets receptive actors *with evidence-based approaches* and "carefully designed lobbying and advocacy tactics," and that decision-makers respond to credible evidence (including when produced/validated by legitimate

actors such as academics), plus visible public support that creates political incentives.

In **Kenya**, the Mulika Tracking Tool claim in Marsabit County illustrates how VCA was successful in generating evidence generation that shifted engagement from "informal questioning to evidence-based scrutiny". By translating technical budget data into usable formats, Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPCs) moved from speculative claims to informed negotiations; evaluation respondents discussed how community women moved from offering "verbal complaints to structured advocacy" through written tools (charters, memoranda, petitions) and persistent, documented follow-up. This shift was presented as a reason for officials to incorporate priorities into plans and ultimately, enabled officials to track KSh 1.4 million in climate adaptation project funds and.

Coalition-building and hybrid "insider-outsider" tactics (movement-building + access + pressure).

The MTR synthesis highlights that effective coalition work (notably in **Brazil** and **Paraguay**) is associated with strong leadership, agility, inclusiveness, resilience, and "hybrid approaches that combine insider and outsider tactics" alongside sophisticated communications.

A clear illustration comes from **Paraguay's** #PorLosBosques coalition: the campaign combined mass public mobilisation (e.g., "about 8000 signatures," press conference, digital content), insider engagement through committee relationships and technical inputs, and direct testimony by Indigenous leaders in Congress. The MTR linked WWF's parliamentary lobbying to the Senate rejecting an amendment that would have allowed hydrocarbon extraction in Médanos del Chaco National Park.

Zambia's case study on the halting of restrictive seed legislation illustrates how this 'hybrid' advocacy strategy can work: VCA-supported partners successfully halted the PBR and Seeds Bills by combining grassroots mobilization (outsider tactics) with detailed, technically credible clause-by-clause review processes in collaboration with officials (insider tactics). The external validator interviewed described participation in clause-by-clause discussions and provision of "in depth text comments," indicating that pressure was not only public-facing but also translated into policy-relevant drafting inputs. The combination of social legitimacy (grounded in farmer realities) and institutional usability (translated into technical arguments) increased the weight of advocacy within formal processes.

Country-tailored pathways: collaborative governance where feasible; confrontation/campaign where needed.

The MTR already observed that regional teams adapted Pillar 3 pathways to context, e.g., more collective action campaigns in **Brazil**, compared with more collaborative, multi-stakeholder lobbying approaches in **Kenya**, **Zambia** and **Indonesia**, and resourcing the "last mile" of influence (transport, convening, technical drafting, documentation) to enable communities to show up consistently and navigate bureaucracy in **Paraguay** and **Brazil**. This matters for "how" VCA enabled influence: VCA did not apply a single blueprint but supported locally viable strategies.

Case study findings also offer some nuance and/or caution in the interpretation of findings, as explained below:

- **The importance of 'rowing with the tide':** some case studies suggest that VCA's work was most successful when capitalizing on external factors calling for change and contributing to those movements: in **Indonesia**, the Penjaringan Women's Federation's success was partially attributed to pre-existing municipal waste management priorities and national award incentives (Adipura Award) rather than solely VCA mobilization. In **Zambia**, high climate stress

(drought) was cited as the primary reason for increased community demand and government responsiveness, positioning VCA as a "contributor" rather than the "initiator".

- **Policy making vs. implementation gap:** while the programme recorded high policy adoption across all programme countries, a few case studies reflect a major lag in budget allocation and execution. This is the case in **Tunisia**, where the Beni Khedache Local Action Plan (PLAC) has not yet resulted in practical on-the-ground implementation or even a reallocation of municipal budgets. According to primary data "resourcing for PLAC implementation remains limited," which indicates that more work is necessary to reap the benefits of this policy change. In **Zambia**, while district coordination (DCCC) improved, "resource constraints and shifting priorities" remained a barrier to implementing climate activities.

Overall, Pillar 3 was a major area of achievement for VCA, accounting for 39% of documented outcomes by the programme and 121 recorded instances of policy and law influence, largely in policy development rather than implementation. Case evidence suggests results were driven by a consistent package of support, including, building coalitions, producing credible evidence on locally led solutions, and combining insider engagement with public-facing pressure, adapted to what was politically feasible in each context.

6.3.5 What early signs of positive change (policy shifts, increased agency, visibility, access to rights) has the program contributed to for women, men, girls, and boys, particularly marginalised youth groups?

Outcomes for women

The following Causal Map (Figure 3) was created from secondary and primary data at country level (VCA Annual country reports) as well as primary data collected by the evaluation team from local partners, rightsholders, and validators in the seven programme countries. The analysis reveals a clear and recurring narrative about how women's groups are achieving policy influence. It is important to note that this analysis is based on a highly filtered view of the data, focusing only on the most common causal links reported for women.

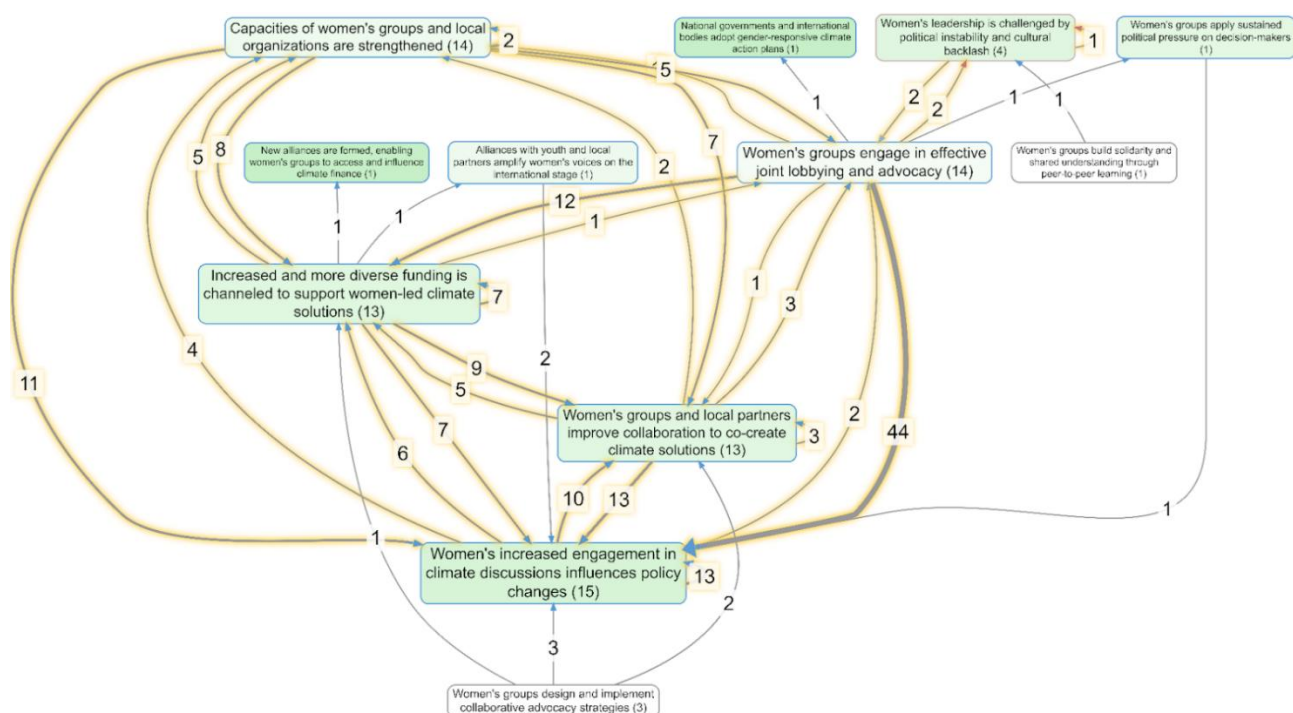


Figure 4 Outcomes for women and causal links

The data points to a central causal pathway where *strengthened organisational capacities* and *improved funding* enable effective advocacy, which in turn leads to greater influence in climate policy discussions.

The most prominent causal chain begins with efforts to strengthen the capacities of women's groups and local organisations. Data sources reported that strengthened capacities of women (47 citations in 14 sources) were a key precursor to *groups engaging in more effective joint lobbying and advocacy* (75 citations in 14 sources).

The most significant connection in the entire dataset, with 44 citations, was the subsequent step: sources link *effective joint lobbying and advocacy* directly to *women's increased engagement in climate discussions influencing policy changes*, showing confidence in the catalysing power of collaboration and strategic advocacy as critical components of success. The data also suggests that when *women's groups and local partners improve collaboration to co-create climate solutions* (58 mentions by 13 sources), this also contributes to *increased engagement and policy influence*, a pathway mentioned 13 times. Collaboration is bolstered by strengthened capacities accord to 7 citations and increased funding (9 citations). Several case studies illustrate this causal link, namely:

- Women from Kerkennah (**Tunisia**) transitioned from informal, invisible labour to forming a legally recognized structure (the GDAP). This conferred legal identity, allowing them to access municipal credit, participate in rainwater harvesting policy briefs, and attend regional trade fairs independently.
- Similarly, the Penjaringan Women's Federation (PWF) in **Indonesia** reoriented their mobilising efforts toward climate action, scaling household waste sorting from 60 to 325 households. Several women were subsequently elected to neighbourhood leadership roles, breaking traditional gender barriers in community governance.
- Lastly, the women-led ecotourism association of Motacusito in **Bolivia** spearheaded the legal defence of their territory, and resulting in a municipal law declaring 881 hectares as a

protected area, effectively blocking mining concessions. This important policy outcome cemented a gender transformative outcome, namely, the transformation in women's roles in the community from "informal stewards" of natural resources to "visible political actors".

Funding also plays an important role as both an enabler and an outcome. Data sources suggest a virtuous cycle where effective advocacy and stronger capacities lead to more diverse funding. The link from effective joint lobbying to *increased and more diverse funding* was one of the strongest in the map, with 12 citations. This funding then reportedly fuels further success by enabling groups to strengthen their capacities (5 citations) and improve collaboration (9 citations).



Figure 5 Feedback loop in achieving outcomes for women

These dynamics create reinforcing feedback loops. For instance, it was observed that as women's engagement in policy discussions increases, it leads to *improved collaboration with local partners* (10 citations), which in turn drives further policy influence.

Data from causal mapping analysis and country case studies has provided strong evidence of VCA's contribution to significant early signs of change for women, specifically around, procedural literacy, collective agency, and institutional visibility of women, through strategic interventions.

Alternative narratives

The path to influence is not without obstacles. The data contains a counter-narrative where the work of women's groups can face resistance (negative links depicted in red). It was reported that effective joint lobbying and advocacy by women's groups could provoke cultural backlash that challenges their leadership (2 citations) as already reported in the MTR:

In Kenya, despite VCA leveraging the two thirds gender rule on women's representation, partners faced backlash from deeply rooted cultural attitudes on women's leadership in the advocacy to ensure women's representation within the WCCPC. (VCA MTR Final Report, 2023)

However, this was not a simple one-way effect; the data also shows that this same backlash was reported to spur further effective joint lobbying and advocacy (2 citations), suggesting a complex cycle of action and reaction.

Outcomes for youth

The following Causal Map (Figure 7) was created from secondary and primary data at country level (VCA Annual country reports as well as primary data collected by the evaluation team from local partners, rightsholders, and validators in the seven programme countries).

The analysis reveals a clear pathway for how youth engagement translates into tangible climate action outcomes. The data suggests that a foundational starting point for this change is strengthening the abilities of young people and their organisations.

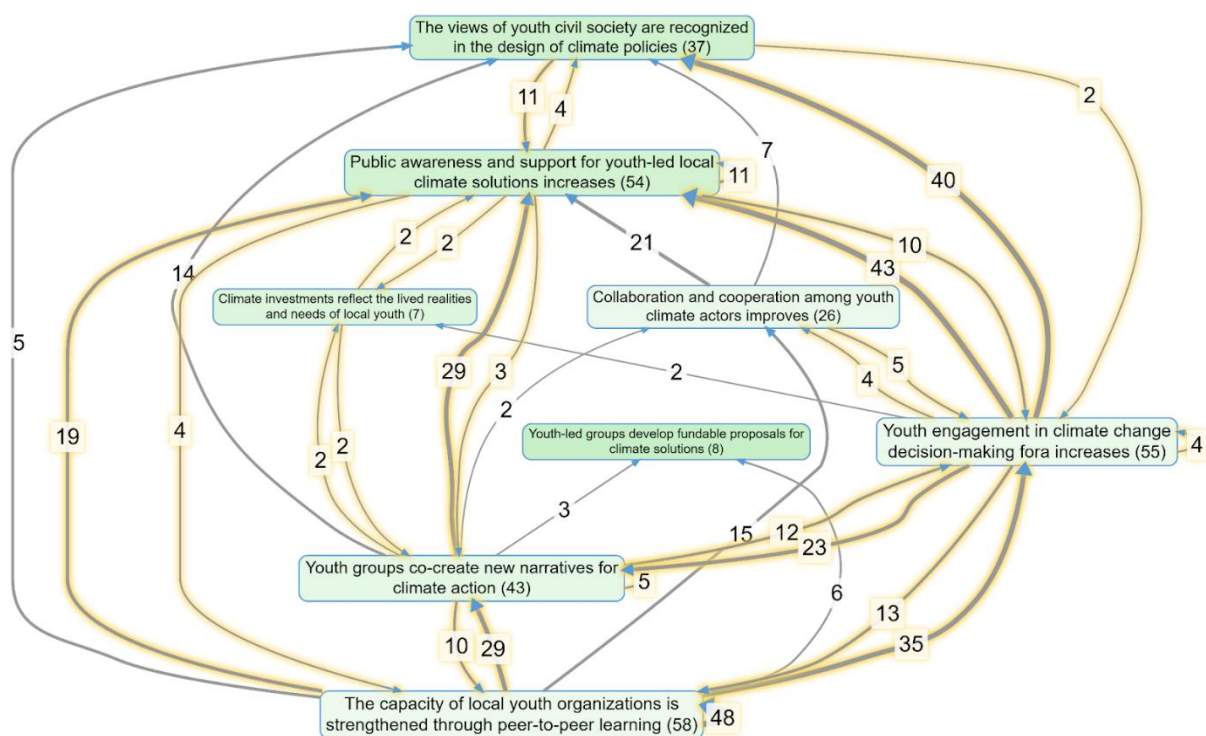


Figure 6 Outcomes for youth and causal links

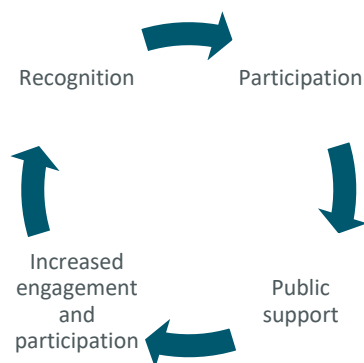
The most central statement in the map, appearing in 242 citations, is that *the capacity of local youth organisations is strengthened through peer-to-peer learning*. This mutual capacity building was frequently described as a critical driver for two interconnected pathways: *influencing policy* and *raising public awareness*.

The first major pathway leads toward policy influence. When youth capacity is strengthened, this leads to an *increase in youth engagement in climate change decision-making fora* (35 citations). This increased engagement was mentioned as a powerful lever for achieving policy-level change. Evidence consulted linked an increase in youth participation in these fora with examples of *recognition of youth-led civil society groups in the design of climate policies* (40 citations). Case study data illustrates that capacity strengthening goes hand-in-hand with movement building and strengthening, for example, the KOPI Youth Alliance in **Indonesia** consolidated scattered groups into a structured movement of 400 members across 12 regions. The groups then transitioned from being

"invisible" in regional planning to participating in the provincial Climate Change Working Group (POKJA API).

A second, parallel pathway focuses on shifting public perception. Capacity strengthening of the youth also led to their *empowerment in co-creating new narratives for climate action* (29 citations). These new, youth-driven narratives were seen as instrumental in increasing public awareness and support for youth-led local climate solutions (29 citations). The outcomes of VCA's work in Acre, **Brazil**, where youth experienced 'an identity transformation' illustrate this trend: VCA invested heavily in strengthening communication capacities including identity workshops addressing the shame young extractivists felt, video production, social media training, and activism (art as activism). These youth have created the Varadouro Collective's and gained formal political representation - a seat on the Extractive Reserve Council with voting rights - and obtaining its own business registration to access grants independently.

The data highlights a powerful reinforcing feedback loop between these outcomes. For instance, while youth engagement in decision-making fora was seen to boost public awareness (a very strong link with 43 citations), a rise in public awareness and support was also reported to encourage further youth engagement in those same fora (10 citations). This creates a virtuous cycle where



participation and public support mutually reinforce one another.

Ultimately, these intermediate outcomes were seen to contribute, in a few cases, to high-level goals such as ensuring that *climate investments reflect the lived realities and needs of local youth and helping Youth-led groups develop fundable proposals for climate solutions*.

Figure 7 Positive feedback loop in achieving outcomes for youth

Taken together, the outputs of the evaluation's thematic analysis and the causal maps reinforce that VCA's most evident and repeatable power-shifting pathway for women and youth runs through capacity strengthening and collaboration that increases participation in decision-making spaces, with feedback loops (funding, collaboration, public support) that can reinforce gains.

6.3.6 What strategies have been applied by VCA to shift power relations in favour of women and young people and how effective were these strategies?

Gender equity and inclusion (GESI) was a critical principle in the VCA programme design to be mainstreamed at various levels, namely:

- **Institutional level:** through intersectionality training and mutual capacity strengthening, led by Alliance partner and gender equality expert, AMWA.
- **Community level:** through intentional targeting of women's and youth organisations as partners and climate action leaders in their contexts;
- **Individual level:** Strengthen feminist and transformational leadership amongst women and youth (civil society) leaders (VCA Full Programme Proposal, 2021, p 46).

The language of ‘feminist principles and gender transformation’ is reflected in the original VCA programme proposal, although its scope is arguably narrower and more strategically focused than the gender equality and inclusion theme in which it was embedded. The shift in priorities and conceptualisation of gender by MoFA as the donor guided by political forces may have influenced the introduction and use of these concepts during the life of the programme: e.g., from a focus on feminist principles at the start of the programme to the current focus on women and youth. Consensus around the application of these concepts is therefore not apparent across Alliance members and partners, and they are at times used interchangeably, signalling vagueness. The discussion in this section therefore refers to VCA’s programme strategies in GESI towards VCA groups of interest, namely, women, youth and IPs & LCs.

During programme implementation, the Alliance operationalised GESI principles through very practical steps.

At the Alliance member and partner level (institutional), members agreed to partner with organisations that represent and work with excluded groups, women, youth, and IPs & LCs. Targeted training was provided for partners to strengthen their understanding and use of gender, feminist and intersectionality concepts and tools. 47% of the VCA partner evaluation survey participants (and 50% of gender audit participants) reported having received capacity strengthening or support in feminist and intersectional thematic (Gender audit report). Specific knowledge productions were also produced in this area, such as the Gender Audit Tool, CDF Guidelines for Locally Led Adaptation and the Intersectional Feminist Guide on Climate Action. From a programme management perspective, and while the programme’s ToC was silent on target groups, the programme collected disaggregated data from the onset and later set gender-specific targets (in 2024) to illustrate GESI integration. At the community and individual levels, the programme clearly prioritised working with women, youth and IPs & LC groups across all regions as previously stated. Targeted training was provided, including leadership training for the youth. Additionally, programme support was intentional in strengthening youth, women and IPs & LC networks through enabling exchange and collaboration towards movement building. Lastly, some examples emerged of community-care approaches in the Latin America region to allow women to delegate caregiving roles within the community, thus allowing them to participate in VCA programme activities.

The integration of a gender equality and social inclusion lens was done flexibly, accommodating differences in contexts and partner capacities in this area. The gender audit report noted that *“from the outset, gender was recognised as a critical component of the Alliance’s ambitions, but the paths taken to put it into practice were varied, shaped by organizational cultures, regional differences, and changing capacities over time”* (Gender audit report). As a result, the integration of gender equality and inclusion is diverse and uneven across countries and partners as previously documented in the gender audit report. Factors affecting the extent of GESI integration include:

- Donor’s priority shifts influencing the programme’s agenda and focus (e.g., gender transformative, feminist principles, intersectionality, women focus);
- Diverse levels of existing capacity and understanding of concepts across the Alliance (cascading down to local partners);
- Concept appropriateness and application varying across contexts;
- Geographical reach of AMwA, the expert alliance partner, limited to African countries: while training was made available online, partners outside of the continent felt they were not receiving the same level of support in this area.

The gender audit report noted the programme missed an opportunity to create space for cross-learning and sharing of good practices in GESI integration emerging from local partners experiences on the ground. According to the gender audit report *“the Alliance lacked mechanisms to surface and scale up this local knowledge”* (Gender audit report).

The evaluation found that VCA’s flexible and context responsive approach produced tangible results for women, youth and IPs & LCs, namely:

- **Increased knowledge and agency around climate change and environmental protection:** Multiple examples of women becoming environmental stewards and role models in their communities.
- **Individual and collective empowerment of women:** In contexts of marginalisation and cultural stereotyping, women gained self-confidence, collective purpose and agency as well as tools and abilities for effective influencing.

“Before, women were not visible in agriculture and fisheries. Today, they participate actively in meetings and collective activities.”- Validator, Tunisia (SSI)

The case of women, in Siaya county, **Kenya**, serves to illustrate the effective elements of VCA’s strategy: they moved from having “symbolic presence” to actively participating in climate planning. VCA’s capacity strengthening approach helped them develop the confidence to submit formal memoranda to county governments, leading to the integration of priorities like clean energy cookstoves into the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). This was achieved by creating ‘safe spaces’ (pre-engagement forums) which enabled women to prepare collectively, align priorities, and enter public forums with shared positions. This increased their willingness to speak and reduced fragmentation in advocacy messages.

- **Increased visibility and opportunities to lead for both women and youth.**

“Before VCA, we were invited to meetings but not heard. Now we don't just participate - we lead the conversation about what climate solutions our communities need.”- Rightsholders, Brazil (SSI)

- **Offering opportunities for innovative and creative communication and advocacy for the youth** to learn communication tools, proposal preparation and influencing strategies in the climate space (Brazil, Bolivia, Indonesia). Particularly effective strategies in working with the youth emerging from the case studies include VCA’s workshops addressing the psychological shame of traditional livelihoods combined with advocacy training in video production, social media use, and activism (art as activism). The case study in **Indonesia** also illustrates youth positive reactions to VCA’s use of creative youth-aligned “camps”, which were described as engaging and aligned with the “spirit of young p. This helped to sustain interest and engagement.
- **Strengthened ability for income generation of women:** Either through income diversification (Tunisia) or consolidation of income streams (Bolivia and Paraguay) women’s economic outlook improved. Specifically, the case study of economic empowerment and income generation activity (IGA) **in Tunisia** offers insight into this strategy: pairing climate justice training with access to resources and additional income streams (e.g., equipment for bread-making or blue crab processing), which motivated their engagement in the programme and provided them with resources to ensure that they could sustain their convening and collaboration.

Overall, VCA applied practical GESI strategies—capacity strengthening, intentional partnership with women’s and youth organisations, and leadership and network support—that contributed to early signs of change in agency and visibility. However, results were uneven across contexts due to shifting priorities and concepts, varied partner capacity, and unequal access to specialised support.

6.3.7 What unintended positive and negative outcomes did the VCA program contribute to, particularly in relation to how these affected marginalised groups? What enabled or challenged the achievement of outcomes?

The evaluation did not manage to explore unintended outcomes in depth as explained in the methodology section of this report. However, a few unintended outcomes were reported by stakeholders interviewed at community level:

- A validator from **Indonesia** reported how North Jakarta received the Adipura Award, a prestigious national award given by the Ministry of Environment to cities that have successfully maintained cleanliness and sound urban management. According to the validator, the PWF played a considerable role towards this achievement, which is hoped will consolidate good environmental management in the city in the future.
- A local partner organisation in **Paraguay** explained how the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADES) included in its 2025 Strategic Plan the recognition of indigenous territories as Territorios Y Áreas Conservadas Por Comunidades Locales Y Pueblos Indígenas (TICCA) or self-managed and protected territories, a victory for IPs & LCs in the country, which was not initially envisaged.
- A validator from **Tunisia** explained how as a result of the VCA programme, local women in Kerkennah had been making joint decisions and working closely with each other beyond the scope of the programme; this involved making decisions over production, attendance at fairs, and “*presenting themselves as a collective rather than individuals*”. An additional ripple effect is the informal role modelling that the women offer younger women in the community.

Implementation strengths

This section shifts from what the programme achieved to *the dynamics of programme implementation that enabled or challenged* the achievement of such results. It synthesises the main strengths that supported implementation and influence across VCA countries, alongside the key challenges and constraints that limited progress or made results uneven.

- **VCA’s local partner network of experienced organisations**, who are connected to the grassroots level, understand the situation on the ground and are trusted by local communities; this network has enhanced the programme’s ability to design and implement initiatives that are relevant and appropriate.

“Because they are always on the ground and their local contact persons have the knowledge and the expertise. They work with the communities on a daily basis, and this knowledge is a big plus. When they talk about the challenges in climate change, they see it in reality.”- Validator, programme level (SSI)

- **Intentional localisation of decision-making power to local partners:** Alliance partners trusted their experienced network of local partners to make decisions about project implementation in their territories.
- **Openness, agility and flexibility to incorporate a diverse range of partners and interests** and to be ready to adapt the programme to meet their needs. Strategic programmatic examples of this include the NLGF, and BASE, among others.
- **A principle-based collaboration approach**, which guided partners towards a common vision while allowing for diversity and difference. The VCA Alliance member organisations were open

to calibrate and adjust pace, systems and processes to working in tandem with other organisations with different internal cultures, approaches and practices.

- **Strategic alignment of project objectives** and the locally-led adaptation agenda **with the needs of decision-makers** (coherence) to arrive at win-win solutions that advance the rights of women, youth and IPs & LCs while advancing political and/or administrative mandates and requirements. This implementation strength was visible in several contribution stories, including the promotion of the PLAC in Tunisia, the resolution of the environmental requirements of land titling in Paraguay and the endorsement of the role of the Ombudsman Office in Bolivia.
- One Alliance partner mentioned that the programme duration of five years facilitated programme outcomes since *“processes of strengthening, training and leadership require time”*. This programmatic strength is worth highlighting as a critical feature, especially in the context of a consortium-led global programme such as VCA.

Contextual enablers

- **Political will where present, provided ‘windows of opportunity’** for VCA actors to advance the rights of marginalised populations and the locally-led adaptation agenda. This enabler was critical for several contribution stories, including Marina Cué in **Paraguay**.

Implementation challenges

Challenges linked with VCA programme governance and implementation

- Limited time for a proper inception phase among partners to align, develop trust and a shared understanding of priorities, language and ways of working in general, and specifically in the climate adaptation space. This challenge reverberated throughout the project in that Alliance partners held divergent perspectives on topics of interest (e.g., feminism, carbon markets, conservation or nature-based solutions), which limited collective buy-in.
- Uneven budgets across partners prevented more joint work, especially, at the global level, to be implemented consistently. Limited collaboration among partners restricted collective impact; more could have been achieved through joint action; however, the global strategy and coordination wasn’t sufficiently strategized or properly resourced.
- Insufficient resources allocated for Alliance coordination and administrative work (e.g., communications, PMEL, overall programme management). Regional Team members recognised that participation in programme governance structures was seen as voluntary; however, it took substantial time and energy, which meant that members were often distracted from their programme implementation duties or tasks may not have received necessary attention.
- Limited collaboration with Dutch embassies in target countries; apart from notable exceptions, as discussed in the section on Partnerships.
- Changes in funding guidelines by MOFA after grant approval created confusion among VCA Alliance members and caused strain in the relationships with some local partners. Funding for service delivery projects or investment in testing locally-led climate solutions was suddenly discouraged, and some partners did not include it in their annual plans; however, this strategy proved challenging for Alliance members and partners who, as found by the MTR, *“... struggled to engage communities in long-term advocacy initiatives without being able to offer some kind of incentives in return”*.

Challenges linked with working in remote and diverse geographies:

- The difficulties of working in remote rural areas: inadequate or insufficient infrastructure (e.g., low internet speed), logistical barriers that limit access (long distances with insufficient or costly transport) have required additional resources or limited the frequency of participation.
- Insufficient budget to cater for existing language diversity in some locations (e.g., rural Paraguay);
- Extreme weather events: local partners in several countries described the impact of severe weather events on environmental resources, infrastructure and people. The worsening climate conditions challenge the gains made by the project (e.g., a damaged antenna leaves a community without connectivity for months).

Challenges linked with local partner programme design and implementation:

- Youth have competing priorities: local partners in **Paraguay** and **Indonesia** discussed how it was difficult to engage young people because they will prioritise income-generating opportunities that are seen to directly improve their livelihoods.
- Misalignments between communities' climate-smart knowledge and governments' mainstream policies and practices: government's support and services to VCA communities do not often follow agro-ecological practices and locally led adaptation principles, which challenges the gains made by the project at the community level.

"Streams are drying up. INFONA brought cloned eucalyptus seedlings. We need native plants for reforestation around streams, as they absorb less water. The problem arises when the community voices are not heard when selecting the trees." - Rightsholders, Paraguay (FGD)

Contextual barriers

- **Policy influencing and rights-based advocacy are complex change processes** that are influenced by many factors and interests: in some countries, advancing and protecting civic and environmental rights has been hampered by corporate interests that yield substantial influence over political powers.
- **Patriarchal social and cultural norms** hold back women and communities from enjoying more opportunities to develop and to contribute to the overall development of their communities.

The rest of the effectiveness, outcomes and impact section discusses findings to the second key evaluation questions namely: ***To what extent and how has the VCA program demonstrated the value of the Alliance being more than the sum of its parts?***

Key questions and findings:

To what extent and how has the VCA programme demonstrated the value of the Alliance being more than the sum of its parts?

To what extent and how were outcomes achieved through joint efforts of multiple Alliance members?

Finding 29: Jointly developed mechanisms strengthened collective impact of the VCA programme. The NLGF emerged as an innovative co-developed delivery mechanism prioritising excluded communities, with end-2024 reporting noting mobilisation of Euro 47.8 million toward the 2025 climate finance target.

To what extent and how did Alliance members improve program implementation through their thematic experience, networks, focus areas or other qualities?

Key finding 30: Complementarity across members improved implementation breadth because members brought distinct, specialised capabilities that filled different parts of the ToC. The evaluation finds that each member brought distinct capabilities that filled different parts of the ToC.

Key finding 31: The alliance created added value through network power and credibility—supporting risk-sharing and stronger negotiating power for grassroots actors. Respondents across countries reported that working collectively generated “collective strength and boldness,” enabled risk-sharing, and increased credibility and negotiating power, particularly for grassroots organisations.

Key finding 32: There are concrete joint outcomes, but the model is largely decentralised and global-level collaboration was constrained by under-resourcing.

How have VCA partners benefitted from VCA's communications training and tools, if at all?

Finding 33: Communications capacity strengthening was widely valued and used, helping partners amplify local messages and align advocacy narratives: 60% of surveyed partners reported benefitting from communications capacity strengthening.

What communication outputs did the program produce and how effective was the program in communicating internally across the alliance and partners?

Finding 34: VCA produced a credible set of communications outputs and platforms, but internal communications coherence and consistency were constrained by governance complexity and limited resourcing.

6.3.8 To what extent and how has the VCA program demonstrated the value of the Alliance being more than the sum of its parts?

Joint outcomes

VCA Alliance partners have reported several outcomes as a result of joint efforts by Alliance members. The following examples illustrate results achieved by Alliance members combining their comparative advantages (e.g., movement-building, communications, urban organising, conservation/NbS, and climate finance expertise) to shift narratives, strengthen coalitions, and influence policy and financing debates beyond the direct control of any single member:

- **Joint public mobilisation in the Netherlands for just climate finance.** In 2021, Hivos and WWF-NL worked together to influence domestic and international climate policy and financing agendas in the Netherlands by gathering wider public support (e.g., the Klimaatwake and broader coalition engagement), contributing to a stronger integration of climate justice and an international perspective in public campaigning.
- **Building on each other's work and expertise to produce evidence-informed advocacy.** In 2021, Hivos commissioned a study on local communities' finance needs that explicitly built on earlier SSN work on local finance approaches; this evidence was then used to inform global conversations (including COP-related panels) about why climate finance often fails to reach communities and how mechanisms should change.
- **Joint development and advancement of devolved climate finance “delivery mechanisms.”** The NLGF and Building Approaches to fund local Solutions with climate Evidence' (BASE) (co-developed by VCA with partners and implemented by Avina), are two examples of climate finance delivery mechanisms prioritising difficult to reach and traditionally excluded local communities, in alignment with Locally Led Adaptation principles. By end-2024 reporting, the Alliance had mobilised **47.8 million** of the USD 100 million / €87.9 million 2025 target of climate finance for scaling locally led solutions.

- By end-2024 reporting, the programme recorded a **combined total of 121 laws/policies “better implemented” or “blocked/adopted/improved”** as a result of local partner engagement across the seven countries—an overall outcome that reflects the effect of Alliance support on coalition building and civil participation.

Despite these notable examples of joint results, the work of the Alliance is better described as a decentralised strategy focused on supporting local partners to address barriers for inclusion and locally led climate adaptation. Additionally, VCA’s Global Programme (GloPro) was the Alliance’s flagship strategy to connect country and regional priorities to global influencing spaces and to translate learning from country programmes into global action. The global component was designed to be coordinated by “a team of global advocacy representatives from each Alliance partner,” with a core task to facilitate cross-country activities so that global work “builds on what is emerging from the Country Programmes.” (VCA programme proposal)

Some of the examples of GloPro work and participation include i.e., COP27 taskforce co-creating strategy, side events and engagement plans; the UN 2023 Water Conference, the Loss and Damage Fund Facility and the Green Climate Fund, where global teams joined forces with local teams to bring VCA programme and messaging to international platforms. A key strength and value add of this programme is the deliberate attempt at providing capacity strengthening, logistics and coordination support to facilitate the participation and visibility for women, youth and Indigenous communities in global spaces.

However, all sources consulted for this evaluation (secondary documents as well as interviews with programme stakeholders) reflect that the GloPro programme experienced crippling challenges, most notably, severe underfunding which left the team unable to consistently support regional teams to identify and pursue global influencing opportunities. GloPro was not allocated a dedicated budget but rather, it relied on the members’ voluntary contributions (in funds, staff and time) to resource the global strategy, although involvement was expected from all members. In practice, three organisations allocated a portion of their budget to the global programme (two of them contributed 85% of the programme budget of EUR3 988 000) while the others contributed in kind, which considering competing needs and priorities at the regional level, placed a limit to what the programme could do. Evaluation respondents echoed challenges already identified during the MTR, namely, that greater thematic focus would have been needed when choosing where to engage globally, and that a few members were sceptical about the impact of global engagement for regional and local teams. The funding imbalance coupled with strategic differences in members’ positioning in global areas made it difficult for a coherent strategy to emerge. As a result, regional teams did not fully understand GloPro’s role and did not feel ownership of the agenda.

Specific contributions of Alliance members

VCA’s Theory of Change assumes that the Alliance’s complementary strengths, namely, rights-based work, international reach, capacity strengthening for lobbying/advocacy, strong gender and inclusion programming, and knowledge brokering, would improve programme implementation. Below is an account of the contributions of Alliance members to the programme with a non-exhaustive list of practical examples.

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA)

AMwA's value-add to implementation was its feminist and intersectional leadership and advocacy expertise, thereby strengthening how partners understood and applied climate justice in practice (especially around women's rights, inclusion, and power). A good example is AMwA's Feminist and Transformational Leadership Training Fellowship (AWLI), which targeted 25 young women from Kenya, Zambia, and Tunisia to build capacity to integrate a feminist approach in climate action. In Kenya, AMwA also supported "consciousness raising" processes that combined gender, civic space, and climate justice agendas to strengthen local actors' ability to participate and organise.

Fundación Avina

Avina's value-add was its regional networks and experience collaborating with social movements in Latin America, supporting "southern leadership and local action" through locally grounded partnerships and platforms. This shows up in the profile of Avina's contracted partners: for example, women-led and youth-led actors such as Mingara (supporting Indigenous communities to engage in local adaptation planning) and El Surtidor (building youth-facing climate narratives through digital media). The MTR also notes an internal enabling effect: Avina's "agile, collaborative but political... stance" helped establish safer spaces within the Alliance for other members to raise concerns—supporting troubleshooting and smoother implementation.

Hivos

Hivos' value-add lay in its approaches to climate justice, civic space and movement-building, especially connecting youth and other constituencies to influencing opportunities and networks. In Kenya, Hivos played a specific brokerage role by linking youth activists to the Swedish Embassy, which led to youth being invited to the Embassy's Stockholm+50 launch event. Hivos (with SDI) also supported implementation of the Local Conference of Youth, including enabling participation of youth from informal settlements, strengthening the programme's practical pathways for youth engagement from local to higher-level spaces.

Slum Dwellers International (SDI)

SDI's value-add to implementation was its organising model with urban poor constituencies (especially women and youth) and its bottom-up approaches (including citizen science), which helped VCA work more credibly in urban and informal-settlement contexts. A concrete example is the climate change festival in Jakarta implemented with SDI's local partner (SPEAK Indonesia), initiated and managed by the community and designed to engage youth and build awareness through local artworks and "local wisdoms." The MTR also describes SDI's connective role across countries: stories from Zambia and Kenya suggest SDI connected youth (including those in local federations and those outside them) to share experience, motivate each other, and build issue-based movements around climate-related concerns like housing and pollution.

SouthSouthNorth (SSN)

SSN's value-add was knowledge, policy and partnership brokering, including relationships with decision-makers, and a major role in convening learning and strengthening MEL coordination at Alliance level. In practical implementation terms, the coding indicates SSN enabled the network to mobilise coherent knowledge and evidence for collective position papers, supporting more aligned advocacy and messaging. The MTR also points to SSN's contribution to methodological learning: SSN supported a systematic approach to analysing the effects of journalist training on media and public discourse in Paraguay, which stood out for testing assumptions about influencing public debate.

WWF-Netherlands (WWF-NL)

WWF-NL's value-add to implementation was its technical depth and global network on integrated climate–nature–development solutions, including shaping how partners operationalised Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and more inclusive conservation approaches. In Kenya, WWF produced climate change videos highlighted during COP and supported post-COP convenings with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to support follow-through and planning towards COP27. WWF also developed and rolled out capacity strengthening tools: for example, a manual on the UNFCCC negotiation process and a COP simulation (training-of-trainers style) to prepare youth/rightsholders for climate governance engagement. In 2024, WWF reported developing and embedding tools such as the Inclusive Conservation Playbook and an “IC Self-Assessment Tool,” and influencing wider guidance on “Inclusive Conservation,” indicating continued effort to improve implementation quality and consistency across country offices.

6.3.9 Benefits of VCA's communications training and tools

This sub-question focuses on two interrelated but distinct themes. On the one hand, it discusses the effectiveness of externally facing communication activities as an important programme function and as a key intervention strategy under pillar 2 (amplifying voices); on the other hand, it discusses internal communication for the purpose of coordination, governance and knowledge sharing.

Effectiveness of internal communication as a coordination and knowledge management function

As part of the VCA programme governance structure, the VCA Communications Taskforce was tasked with leading the communication activities at the programme level and working alongside regional teams to amplify the messaging in their contexts. An important mission of the Taskforce was to filter the messaging from the country contexts to the Alliance and the global level to contribute to shared learning as well as feeding knowledge and experience of locally-based climate adaptation solutions to global actors.

Interviews with local partner representatives indicate that internal communications, were generally fluid and effective in terms of guidelines, requirements and responsiveness to requests for information or clarification. The local partner representatives who spoke to this theme (from **Paraguay, Bolivia, Kenya and Tunisia**) indicated that it generally supported partners work and the coordination among actors. Effective communications extended to local partners in their networks of CBOs and constituents, and some examples were shared about the use of WhatsApp for regular and quick updates and coordination.

A few Alliance partner representatives did share challenges with internal communication, specifically, related to understanding reporting requirements, and the alignment in messaging from the different VCA governance bodies. Concerns raised include lack of clarity of roles and mandates of the different VCA governance structures and uncertainty as to whether information was filtering to the right decision-making bodies. The large size of the VCA Alliance and the layered governance structure used presented challenges for transparency and coordination of information and decision-making as discussed in previous sections of the report.

The positive views of local partner representatives do point to the effective management of information downwards from the designated Alliance partners to their local partners in their regions. The good effective collaboration and co-management of the **Bolivia and Paraguay**

programme by Avina and WWF stands out as a clear example of coordination, clear roles and streamlined communications at the regional level.

Effectiveness of communications activities: training and tools

The VCA's communication portfolio was an important workstream in the mission towards expanding civic space and amplifying the voices of marginalised people on climate action. The Programme used several tools including strategic communications of the programme's work and achievements (through website and social media presence), communications training and support to regional teams and a bi-monthly newsletter to promote cross-project sharing and learning.

Regarding its online presence, the programme redesigned [the website](#) in 2025 to transform it in a repository of knowledge and resources to showcase the programme's work and "to inspire future replication of the programme's successful strategies, lobbying, and advocacy approaches" (written submission, VCA Communications Taskforce). Between January and November 2025, the website gathered 10,285 new users and 10,356 active users. Following the lead of regional partners, the VCA programme communications has penetrated other platforms where it was initially not present, including X, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook. Additionally, since 2023, the VCA Communications Taskforce produced a [bi-monthly newsletter](#) to highlight work done in the programme countries and the global level.

While the evaluation did not conduct an exhaustive analysis of the programme's communication strategy and products, there is some evidence that Alliance and local partners valued the communications platform offered by the programme as illustrated by the following quote:

"The dissemination of information and visual documentation to other regions convinces the audience that we're not working alone. It shows that other organisations in different areas are tackling the same issues, reinforcing the idea that we're part of a larger national movement, not just a small initiative. VCA has successfully built this kind of communication, positioning itself as a big tent where various stakeholders come together." – VCA Regional Team, Indonesia (FGD)

Close collaboration between the Communications Taskforce and the regional teams was necessary to ensure that stories filtered upwards to the rest of the Alliance while amplifying local messages in their context. This collaboration included structured capacity strengthening activities led by the Taskforce with local partners to strengthen communication capability where needed. As discussed above, according to the survey of partners implemented by the evaluation, 60% of respondents (54 out of 90) said they had benefited from capacity strengthening in the area of communications. Examples of communications training highlighted by survey respondents as particularly effective include:

- citizen journalism, community-led reporting, and radio-based climate communication in Zambia;
- ethical and Indigenous journalism, climate storytelling, and communication tools for grassroots organisations and women's collectives in Bolivia; and
- capacity strengthening through 'artivism', storytelling, and media engagement, including work with journalists and creative activists in Kenya.

Specifically, survey respondents from **Bolivia** reported applying their newly acquired communications and advocacy skills to ongoing campaigns, enabling broader dissemination of messages and more effective engagement with national and international actors. Survey feedback

noted that having strategic clarity helped them prioritise advocacy actions and align messaging across partners.

There's also evidence that the VCA Communications' Taskforce approach was aligned with encouraging local ownership by providing general guidelines but without prescribing a specific format, product or frequency of output for the purpose of coherence and unifying messaging. As a result, some regional teams stood out because they prioritised communications as part of their work. The work of local partner Emancipa in **Paraguay** stands out: the organisations was tasked with producing a monthly digital magazine, [Ecos de VAC](#), showcasing work in the region. The VCA Communications Taskforce and one Alliance partner did recognise the challenge of effectively implementing this approach: it is more difficult to receive consistent quality outputs aligned with the programme's vision and regular intervals; instead the team relied on building relationships with key regional team colleagues and some communication champions to feed relevant content upwards to be shared with the broader alliance. Additionally, the programme was deemed under resourced around 1) interpretation and translation services to be able to implement truly inclusive communications and 2) systematically track regional communications outputs across the Alliance.

Overall, the evidence suggests VCA's communications function added value both as an external visibility strategy and as an internal coordination mechanism. Internal communication was generally experienced by local partners as responsive and useful for day-to-day guidance and coordination, with stronger performance where regional co-management arrangements were clear, although some Alliance members noted gaps in role clarity and information flow across layered governance structures. Externally, the programme built a credible platform through its website, expanded social media presence, newsletters, and partner-led products, while communications training was reported to have strengthened partners' ability to shape narratives and engage wider audiences. However, the flexible, non-prescriptive approach also created challenges in ensuring consistent quality and regular outputs across regions.

6.3.10 ToC validity and testing of assumptions – Causal Map analysis

This section synthesizes learnings from the effectiveness analysis to provide a summative assessment of the relevance of the VCA programme ToC; this includes assessing whether selected assumptions hold true and the ToC pathways accurately reflect how change actually happened.

Based on the evaluation scope, design and allocated resources, four of the 11 assumptions identified by the ToC were selected for testing. These are:

- #1: Our principles are effective supports to local civil society collaboration under women's leadership
- #4: Civil society can engage effectively with marginalised citizens.
- #7: Gender and inclusion protocols will reduce risks of Alliance partners becoming counterproductive power structures.
- #8: Enhanced collaboration and coordination among civil society will increase capacity and credibility to defend and enjoy rights.

This section presents a preliminary discussion of results from Causal Mapping analysis.

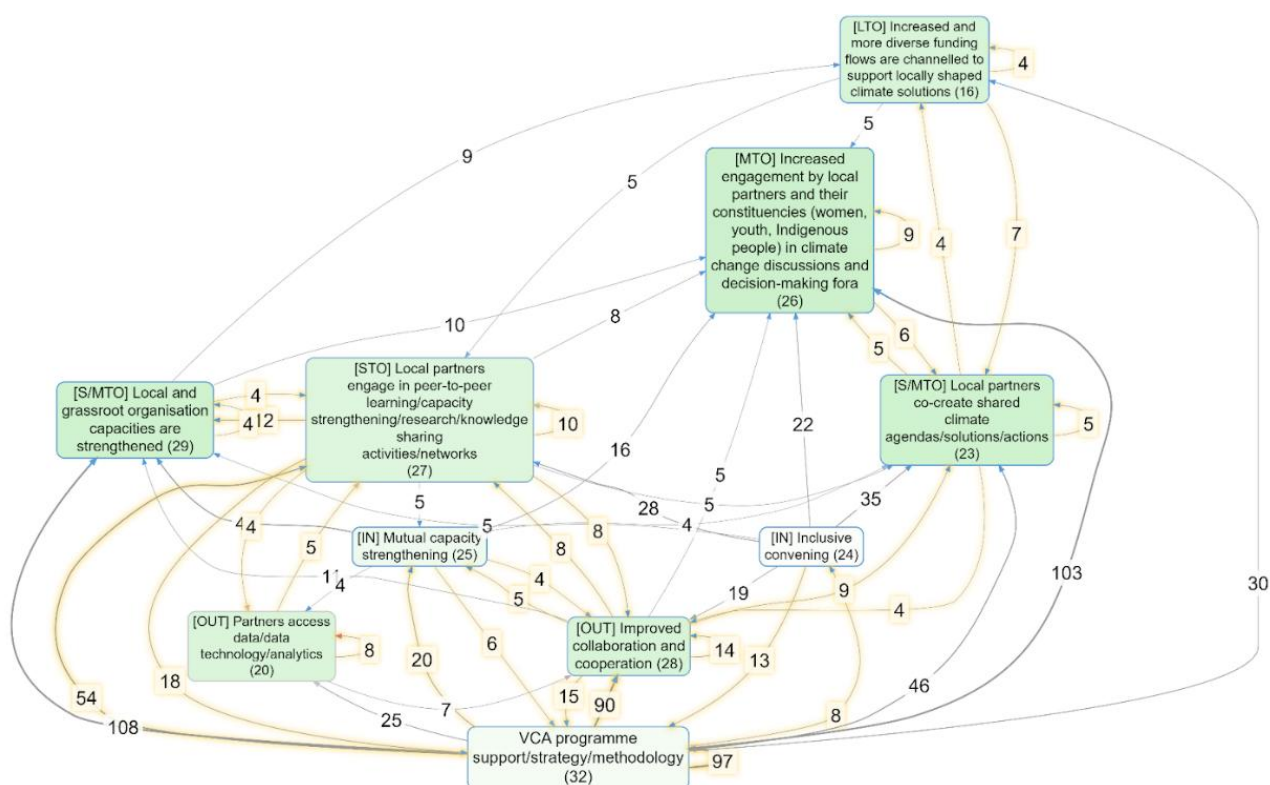


Figure 8 VCA programme level outcomes and linked causal factors

The analysis of relevant secondary and primary data (annual programme reports and all evaluation interviews and FGDs, respectively) reveals key patterns of change reported achieved by the VCA programme. The patterns of change and causal links suggest that the programme's interventions contributed to a virtuous cycle where strengthened local organisations become more influential, leading to tangible policy shifts. The narrative is predominantly positive, with the average sentiment of the causal links being very high.

Common causal pathways to success

Two primary interconnected causal pathways emerge from the data.

- **The most prominent pathway centres on building the capacities and voice of local actors:**

Data sources consistently linked VCA's programme support, strategy and methodology, directly to the strengthening of local and grassroots organisation capacities (108 citations), in line with Pillar 1 of the ToC. VCA's programme support package is also directly linked to partners engaging in peer-to-peer learning and mutual capacity strengthening (54 and 20 citations respectively). There's a positive feedback loop in such activities where capacitation by VCA leads to peer-to-peer capacity building, possibly pointing towards a multiplier effect. Interestingly, evidence sources highlight how partners access data, data technology and analytics as part of VCA's package of support as well as through mutual capacity strengthening.

Once partner capacities were enhanced, local organisations increase their engagement and participation in climate change discussion and decision-making fora (34 citations). Some data sources (9 citations) also link increase capacity to increased access to a more diverse pool of funding to support locally-shaped climate solutions.

- **A second, parallel pathway highlights the role of collaboration:**

The VCA programme's use of inclusive convening was cited a strong mechanism for bringing partners together (22 citations for increased engagement and 35 for co-creating agendas). Inclusive convening is also linked to peer-to-peer learning and capacity strengthening (28 citations) which illustrates the nature of VCA's mutual strengthening approach: action oriented, informal, practical and organic.

- **These co-created agendas, in turn, were linked to an increase in funding flows (4 citations) as a long-term outcome.**

Another important dynamic is the reinforcing feedback loop between these outcomes. For example, sources indicated that as partners co-created agendas, their engagement in decision-making forums increased (5 citations), and conversely, increased engagement provided more opportunities to co-create solutions (6 citations).

Similar results emerged from the analysis of the contribution claims across the seven programme countries; that is, that the programme ToC is valid particularly in relation to Pillars 1 and 3. Further detail is provided below:

- Across the seven countries, a clear pattern emerges: VCA appears most effective when it helps **local civil society and rightsholders convert dispersed groups and informal legitimacy into coordinated, collective agency that is recognised in institutional spaces**. In Bolivia, this is articulated directly as a pathway of “convening, credible evidence, and bridging support” that enables civil society to move from informal structures with limited legitimacy to recognised influence, contingent on political and institutional openness and access / entry points. A similar example emerges in Tunisia, where the programme was most effective when it helped actors translate lived experience and informal collective capacity into formally recognised structures. Again, this is conditional based on climate urgency, political openness, and trusted facilitation. The Brazil country report also identifies coalition infrastructure as a mechanism that reduces isolation, builds collective power, and sustains advocacy. This proved critical to building readiness for political windows.
- A second cross-cutting finding is that **capacity strengthening is most effective when it is relevant, practically usable and connected to action and influence**. This is explicit in Zambia, where practical, livelihood-relevant capacity strengthening is most strongly associated with changes in day-to-day practice, and policy influence strengthens when local actors are not only mobilised but also collectively organised and technically prepared. Similar examples are noted in Indonesia (e.g. the use of youth-friendly convening and capacity strengthening methods to strengthen youth-led advocacy) and Kenya (e.g. where information is translated into accessible formats and embedded in governance processes).
- A third consistent pattern is the importance of “bridging” functions: **combining evidence generation and translation with relationship brokering so that institutions can act**. Bolivia emphasises the use of evidence as leverage and a bridging mechanism to connect civil actors to courts and municipalities, enabling a shift from protest-only approaches to recognised institutional roles. Paraguay expresses the same logic through strategies that convert community claims into institutionally actionable forms, that make solutions legible to risk-averse institutions.

Across cases, “for whom” VCA works most clearly is also consistent: **groups that have been historically excluded from decision-making, such as women, youth, and IPs & LCs**. Benefits for

these groups are most apparent when collective organisation is coupled with practical support that reduces barriers to participation. Brazil explicitly identifies youth and women leaders as programme rightsholders where legitimacy gains and organising/communication capabilities enable representation in formal arenas. Paraguay, Tunisia and Indonesia also note benefits for groups facing participation barriers when skills and platforms enable collective voice.

The cross-country evidence is also clear on “under which conditions” change is most likely. Three conditions recur across contexts. First, VCA outcomes strengthen when there **are institutional entry points and political opportunities** that are not actively closed. Bolivia frames system-level change as requiring openness and accessible decision-making spaces. Kenya’s synthesis makes the same point: progress depends heavily on whether engagement by government is negotiable rather than closed, and whether engagement aligns with accountability mandates or reform incentives. Second, high **climate stress** increases urgency and motivation for collective action and reform salience; this is explicitly noted in Zambia, Tunisia and Indonesia as an enabling condition for both adaptation and advocacy pathways. Third, mechanisms are most likely to function effectively where VCA can **activate pre-existing legitimacy and local organising capacity** rather than attempting to create mobilisation from scratch. This too is noted in the country reports for Bolivia, Indonesia and Tunisia.

Taken together, these patterns strongly **support the validity of VCA’s Theory of Change** at the level of its strategic interventions. The ToC centres on three mutually reinforcing pillars as outlined above. The findings emerging from cross-country analysis **align particularly strongly with Pillars 1 and 3**. Coalition infrastructure, inclusive convening, and flexible support fit with Pillar 1’s emphasis on mutual capacity strengthening, brokering new and unusual alliances, and supporting local solutions / innovations. Meanwhile, the “bridging” pattern, translating lived experience into usable evidence and proposals, combined with relationship brokering, reflects Pillar 3’s intent to shift policies and finance practices to become responsive to locally shaped climate solutions.

The ToC’s Pillar 2 intervention is also supported, albeit more indirectly: Brazil’s emphasis on identity, narrative and communication work, and the ToC’s intermediate steps around storytelling, digital activism, and knowledge networks point to narrative and story-telling as enabling conditions that strengthen the creation of alliances and support advocacy traction rather than as stand-alone drivers of change.

Testing the validity of selected ToC assumptions

1. VCA principals are effective supports to local civil society collaboration under women’s leadership

Data sources reported that VCA programme support/strategy/methodology positively influenced collaboration (90 citations). This central node is a basket category which includes VCA strategy elements such as the promotion of local agendas, a modular approach, the creation of global taskforces, funding, flexibility, legal assistance and support from local partners and through feminist action groups, among others.

As illustrated by the above quote:

“Movement building has also been an important part of VCA. In the beginning, partners were almost forced to work together, but over time it became natural. That kind of collaboration doesn’t just disappear.”- VCA Regional Team, Zambia (FGD)

Additionally, inclusive convening was identified as a distinct driver leading to improved collaboration and cooperation (19 citations). Since 31% of VCA local partners are considered women-led (78 out of 248 partners¹²), this supports the notion that VCA's specific methodologies effectively fostered cooperative environments.

Similar findings emerge from the analysis of the contribution claims. The cross-country synthesis provides strong evidence that VCA support mechanisms (convening, coalition/federation formation, accompaniment, brokering) can strengthen collective agency and collaboration, including among women-led constituencies. For example, Tunisia shows women's collectives benefitting when programme support shifts informal women's networks to formalised, recognised structures. A key component of this is to work via trusted partners, who have a deep knowledge of – and connections with – the community. The contribution claims indicate that where facilitation/brokering is trusted, collaboration and women's collective leadership can be amplified.

4. Civil society can engage effectively with marginalised citizens.

Regarding the assumption that civil society can engage effectively with marginalised citizens, the analysis shows a robust causal pathway. VCA programme support/strategy/methodology was reported to lead directly to intermediate outcome *Increased engagement by local partners and their constituencies (women, youth, Indigenous people) in climate change discussions* (103 citations).

Furthermore, VCA's inclusive convening was explicitly linked to this increased engagement (22 citations), supporting the view that specific inclusion protocols enable effective engagement with marginalised groups.

The cross-country synthesis provides evidence that civil society engagement with marginalised citizens is effective when specific conditions are met, particularly around accessibility, trust, and barrier reduction. Across cases, civil society actors were most effective in engaging marginalised groups where:

- Participation barriers were actively reduced, including practical constraints such as time, distance, administrative burden, and costs (Paraguay).
- Information was translated into socially accessible forms, rather than remaining technical or elite-controlled (Kenya).
- Engagement was sustained and relationship-based, not one-off or extractive (Kenya).
- Collective backing reduced the risks of speaking up, especially for women and community representatives (Kenya).

7. Gender and inclusion protocols will reduce risks of Alliance partners becoming counterproductive power structures.

The assumption that gender and inclusion protocols will reduce risks of Alliance partners becoming counterproductive power structures is supported by the link between VCA's inclusive convening work and positive outcomes reported by the data. Inclusive convening was seen to lead to *improved collaboration and cooperation* (19 sentiments) and *strengthened capacities of local and grassroots organisations* (5 citations).

¹² For 136 organisations the leadership was unknown (55%)

The contribution claim analysis supports the Causal Map findings outlined above; that is, the strongest evidence relates to how VCA's inclusion-oriented practice can reduce internal hierarchy and agenda capture within programme alliances and partnerships, and strengthen grassroots legitimacy and voice. Brazil's synthesis is explicit that outcomes are stronger where inclusive convening and shared management prevent stronger actors from capturing agendas. Tunisia similarly highlights participatory convening and using trusted local intermediaries as brokers, as a means of amplifying grassroots agency rather than reproducing top-down control. Paraguay further reinforces this logic by identifying barrier removal for sustained participation and agency-enabling infrastructure as key conditions for marginalised groups to remain engaged in programme processes, rather than being included only nominally and sporadically.

8. Enhanced collaboration and coordination among civil society will increase capacity and credibility to defend and enjoy rights.

This assumption is the most strongly supported by the cross-country findings. Multiple cases indicate that coalition infrastructure and coordinated engagement reduce isolation and fragmentation, strengthen legitimacy, and improve the credibility and effectiveness of civil society engagement with institutions. **Zambia's** synthesis shows that structured coordination and convening supported shifts from siloed engagement toward more coordinated and credible action, and that advocacy influence strengthened when coalitions combined mobilisation with technically credible engagement in formal policy processes. **Kenya** similarly describes how collective action was leveraged to increase the likelihood of responsiveness from duty bearers.

The overall data analysis validates the assumption that enhanced collaboration and coordination among civil society will increase capacity and credibility to defend and enjoy rights. *Improved collaboration and cooperation* was reported to lead to *Local and grassroots organisation capacities are strengthened* (11 citations). Similarly, the short-term outcome *local partners engage in peer-to-peer learning/capacity strengthening*, a form of collaboration, was linked to *strengthened local capacities* (12 citations). These pathways illustrate a reinforcing loop where collaboration and mutual support directly contribute to the robust capacity of local organisations.

Overall, the causal mapping and CA findings provide support for the relevance of the VCA ToC, with reported change patterns broadly aligning with the programme's intended pathways. Across sources, VCA's support package and inclusive convening are consistently linked to strengthened local capacity and improved collaboration. These dynamics appear to reinforce each other and contribute to increased participation in decision-making spaces, occasional diversification of funding, and ultimately greater influence. Within the limited set of assumptions tested, the evidence largely validates underlying assumptions.

Suggested revisions to the VCA ToC

The evaluation findings, including the causal map analysis and cross-country contribution evidence, indicate that VCA ToC remains fundamentally sound. However, some refinements would help the ToC to better reflect how change has occurred in practice. These refinements are less about altering the core logic and more about strengthening the ToC's alignment with observed programme dynamics.

A central area for revision relates to the ToC's representation of change as a largely linear process. The evidence consistently shows that outcomes emerge through **iterative and reinforcing dynamics**, rather than sequential progression across pillars. Capacity strengthening, collaboration, and influence do not operate as discrete stages, but rather as mutually reinforcing elements within a

broader system. For example, strengthened capacities enable more effective collaboration, while collaboration itself further enhances capacity through peer learning and collective action. Similarly, engagement in advocacy processes can reinforce both legitimacy and organisational strength. The ToC would therefore benefit from being reframed as a more **dynamic system**, incorporating feedback loops that reflect these recursive relationships.

Closely related to this is the need to more clearly articulate the **mechanisms through which change occurs**. While the current ToC identifies key activities and outcomes, it does not sufficiently explain how these translate into behavioural or institutional shifts. The case studies indicate that change is often driven by less tangible but critical factors such as increased confidence, perceived legitimacy, trust between actors, and a strengthened sense of collective identity. Making these mechanisms explicit within the ToC would provide a more robust explanation of how programme interventions lead to outcomes, and would enhance its usefulness as both an analytical, monitoring and learning tool.

The evaluation also suggests a need to reconsider the positioning of **storytelling within the ToC**. While there is strong evidence that storytelling, digital media, and communication strategies have expanded the visibility and voice of marginalised groups, there is less evidence that these efforts have directly translated into broader shifts in public discourse. The causal links between such changes and legal or policy shifts is also unclear. In practice, storytelling appears to function primarily as an **enabling mechanism**, supporting mobilisation, enhancing legitimacy, and strengthening advocacy efforts, rather than as a standalone pathway. The ToC would therefore benefit from reframing this pillar to more clearly distinguish between steps in causal pathway (**voice amplification, narrative visibility, and longer-term discourse change**), and to position storytelling as complementary to, and reinforcing of, advocacy processes.

The evaluation further highlights the importance of **contextual conditions** in shaping programme outcomes. While the ToC implicitly assumes that its pathways are broadly applicable across contexts, the findings demonstrate that success is highly contingent on factors such as political openness, the availability of institutional entry points, levels of climate stress, and the presence of pre-existing local legitimacy and organisational capacity. Incorporating these **enabling and constraining conditions** more explicitly into the ToC would improve its realism and help clarify the circumstances under which different pathways are more or less likely to succeed.

In relation to scaling and sustainability, the ToC currently assumes that locally led solutions will translate into broader impact through increased **access to finance**. However, the evaluation finds that this pathway is more complex and less direct than anticipated. Limited access to funding often constrains the ability of local actors to scale their initiatives. The ToC would therefore benefit from more clearly articulating the intermediate steps required to connect local solutions to financing, including brokerage, translation of local knowledge into fundable proposals, and alignment with existing funding mechanisms.

Similarly, the ToC would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of **policy influence**. Rather than occurring primarily at the national level, case study findings indicate that influence was often observed at sub-national levels and through incremental changes in planning processes, institutional practices, and informal governance arrangements. Clarifying these different forms of influence, distinguishing, for example, between local institutional change, subnational planning influence, and national policy reform, would improve the precision of the ToC and align it more closely with observed outcomes.

The evaluation also points to the need for a stronger and more explicit articulation of **power dynamics and inclusion** within the ToC. While these are recognised as guiding principles, they are not fully integrated into the causal logic. In practice, the extent to which marginalised groups were able to exercise voice and influence depended significantly on how power was mediated within alliances, and on the effectiveness of facilitation and inclusion mechanisms. The ToC would therefore benefit from explicitly modelling **how power shifts occur**, and how gender and inclusion strategies contribute to more equitable forms of collaboration and influence.

A further area requiring attention is **conceptual clarity** within the ToC, particularly in relation to how key constructs and outcomes are defined. The evaluation found that lack of clarity around certain concepts (such as voice and narrative change, influence, and compelling citizen-led climate actions), as well as overlaps between the three pillars and intermediate outcomes (new and unusual alliances, new knowledge partnerships and networks, and new and unusual alliances on alternative transition pathways) created challenges, particularly in how outcomes were reported and aggregated at programme level. The conflation and overlap of outcomes under different pillars also made it difficult to clearly trace causal pathways or to provide an assessment of the achievement of each step in change pathway under the three pillars. Strengthening conceptual clarity by providing more precise definitions and clearer outcome statements, coupled with clearer articulation of steps in the change process, would enhance the internal coherence of the ToC and support more consistent application, monitoring, and learning across contexts.

Finally, the evaluation highlights the importance of refining and qualifying the ToC's underlying assumptions. While many of these assumptions are broadly supported, they are not universally applicable and depend on specific conditions being met. For example, civil society engagement with marginalised groups is effective where barriers to participation are actively addressed and trust is built over time. Similarly, collaboration enhances capacity and credibility, but only where it is inclusive and well-facilitated. Reframing these assumptions as **conditional rather than absolute** would strengthen the analytical rigour of the ToC.

In summary, the VCA Theory of Change does not require fundamental redesign, but rather a set of targeted refinements to better reflect the **non-linear, context-dependent, and mechanism-driven nature of change** observed in the evaluation. By incorporating feedback loops, clarifying causal mechanisms, repositioning storytelling, strengthening the articulation of collaboration and power dynamics, and explicitly recognising contextual conditions, the ToC can be made more realistic and useful for guiding both implementation and learning.

6.4 Efficiency

This section discusses the findings on evaluation question 5, namely VCA's efficiency in distributing funds to local partners and final beneficiaries. This evaluation on efficiency examines the programme's success in distributing funds to local partners. Success, in this case, is understood by two parameters, namely: that a large proportion of grant funding is distributed to local partners (and administrative costs are minimised), and that grant funding reaches traditionally marginalised or hard-to-reach groups. The programme's success depended on developing mechanisms that could provide liquidity and operational freedom to the most marginalised stakeholders in the different contexts they were operating.

In order to capture this, the evaluation utilises a co-developed rubric to assess how the Alliance balanced the compliance standards of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) with the need for agile support in the Global South. The rubric can be found in Appendix 6.

Data sources for coherence:

Secondary data sources: Programme and Country Reports (2021-2025), VCA financial reports and financial monitoring data.

Primary data sources: Key informant interviews (KIIs), workshops and focus group discussions with VCA governance structures and taskforce members; semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with country programme partners / programme implementers, and external stakeholders (validators) including climate action sector organisations; and focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders, including marginalised groups (e.g., women, youth, Indigenous peoples).

Evidence assessment for coherence:

The evidence supporting the efficiency section is based on a range of primary and secondary data sources, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the programme's use of resources and its operational efficiency. Financial data, including leveraged funding, alongside programme reports and monitoring data, offered insights into the cost-effectiveness of the VCA interventions. The use of key informant interviews and focus group discussions allowed the evaluators to gauge local perceptions on the programme's efficiency, including whether interventions were seen as timely and adequately resourced. However, some limitations are noted in the data collection process, particularly around sampling bias and respondent fatigue, which may have affected the depth of feedback received on efficiency. Despite these limitations, the data provides a reasonable understanding of the programme's efficiency. Further verification through additional external data would enhance the robustness of the efficiency assessment.

The table below provides an overview of the key evaluation questions and related findings for *Efficiency*. Evidence to support each finding is presented in the narrative sections that follow.

Key evaluation questions and findings:

How successful was VCA in distributing funds to local partners (and final beneficiaries)? What lessons can be learned?

Finding 35: VCA successfully distributed funds to local partners, with the **Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF)** enabling flexible, rapid disbursements, particularly benefiting marginalised groups like informal organisations.

Finding 36: VCA's efficiency was "moderate" overall: The programme scored 17/24 on the efficiency rubric, reflecting that flexible support to local actors was often achieved, but diverse administrative and disbursement approaches across Alliance members created uneven experiences and reduced efficiency across regions.

To what extent have the programme's financial and operational structures supported the inclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, youth and gender-expansive persons?

Finding 37: Timely disbursements and agile funding mechanisms allowed the programme to respond to emerging needs, such as climate emergencies, benefiting marginalised groups. However, the lack of consistency in the execution of these mechanisms across regions highlighted a need for more standardized and inclusive processes to ensure equitable participation

Within climate justice, resource utilisation and disbursement becomes a strategic pillar rather than an administrative and operational function. For grassroots organisations, financial agility as well as devolved decision-making is key for effective delivery of their work. This enables them to pivot in response to landscape-level changes of different nature, such as climate emergencies or political shifts, aligning with the first of the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation, namely: 1. *Devolving decision making to the lowest appropriate level* (Soanes et al, 2021).

Under the Power of Voices Framework, it was established that Alliance partners would be able to apply their own processes and procedures in order to support efficiency. As explained by the programme's governance team:

"Just to note that each Alliance member had their own methods for grant making. For example, some partners may have received 50% of their funds upfront, others 20% or even 100%. Also, due diligence processes varied slightly per organisation. Alliance members' partners definitely each had their own different processes and also the levels of engagement and management by the various Alliance members would have differed at country level. There was probably a general framework but the way this was operationalised was very much determined by each Alliance member." - VCA Governance Representative (SSI)

"So sometimes you would have 30 different partners in the room and five were funded by SSN, 18 were funded by WWF and five by HIVOS, three by AMwA, etc – and they all came with their diverse experiences. There was no one management authority or way of doing things, so some experienced diverse difficulties just because of the sub-granting process." - VCA Governance Representative (FGD)

Nonetheless, overall grant disbursement **efficiency** seems to have been **ambivalent**. While some respondents acknowledged and appreciated the high strategic flexibility and agility of the programme, bureaucratic and structural delays, and fragmented administrative systems, counterbalanced the programme's efficiency (Regional Team, Kenya (FGD)). Despite the pockets of efficiency observed, it was inconsistent across Alliance partners and regions. Below we discuss in detail the efficiency assessment in line with the Efficiency Rubric.

6.4.1 Efficiency rubric assessment

Following the efficiency rubric, the evaluation found that the VCA programme showed a moderate level of efficiency, with a score of 17 (out of a maximum of 24). This indicates that the programme meets necessary efficiency expectations, but there is room for improvement across all criteria.

Table 5 Efficiency rubric Assessment

Criteria	Evaluation	Score (1- 4)
Funding flows to local partners (Main grant)	Meets expectations	3
Funding flows to local partners (NLGF)	Meets expectations	3
Timeliness of fund disbursement	Meets expectations	3
Inclusiveness of fund allocation process	Needs improvement	2
Adaptability to changing needs	Meets Expectations	3
Coordination between Alliance members and partner organisations	Meets Expectations	3
Total score		17

The scores for each dimension as well as the underpinning evidence are discussed in the section below.

Funding flows to local partners

The first criteria, *funding flows to local partners*, is based on the understanding that disbursing a large proportion of grant funding to local partners and containing administrative costs reflect programme efficiency. This criterion is applied to the two funding mechanisms of the VCA programme, namely the main grant and the Next Level Grant Facility.

The programme has had substantial reach through its financing mechanisms, designed to bypass traditional funding barriers, in particular, the Next Level Grant Facility. The programme connected with 248 local partners through Alliance Members and an additional 540 partners via the NLGF, as illustrated in Table 6 below. This criterion assesses the success of the VCA programme in moving funds to these local partners and initiatives at the forefront of climate justice.

Table 6 Local partners of VCA's funding mechanisms

Country	Number of local partners receiving funding from the main grant)	Number of initiatives/projects receiving funding from the NLGF
Bolivia	17	37
Brazil	92 (through 13 coalition leads)	63
Indonesia	36	62
Kenya	32	175
Paraguay	24	128
Tunisia	26	18
Zambia	21	57
Total	248	540

These quantitative criteria have been assessed based on data received in December 2025. The data does not include information from the last quarter of 2025, and hence, the assessments of this evaluation may be slightly adjusted. Considering the programme's 5-year duration, it is this evaluation's assessment that working with financial data up to 2025Q3 is sufficient as a proxy.

Main grant

This criterion was assessed against three variables, namely:

- iii) the percentage of total Alliance budget used for sub granting to local partners,
- iii) staff costs against the initial MoFA-approved budget, and
- iii) the percentage of indirect costs against total programme budget.

For the first variable, the **percentage of total Alliance budget used for sub granting to local partners**, the financial statements up until 2025Q3 acknowledge that €25,497,448, i.e. 46.4% of total budget, have been allocated to local partners, less than 49.6% benchmark established. Hence, this variable is evaluated as "needs improvement", yet the evaluation recognises that with 2025Q4 financial reconciliations, it is likely that the benchmark might be reached.

Qualitative data further supports this assessment. The 2022 Financial and technical report recognise that only 80% of the year's budget forecast for sub granting was achieved, one of the reasons being the delay in the operationalisation of the NLGF. It acknowledges that "sub-granting of local partners

(...) needs special attention in 2023" to ensure this component reaches full utilization and impact by programme end. It is also noted that contracting delays within Alliance Members also hindered achieving sub-granting benchmarks, such as in Bolivia and Kenya. Underspending and limited staff capacity has also been raised as reasons for not achieving sub-granting benchmarks at the start of the programme. Despite underspending persisting into 2024, the number of funded projects and activities significantly increased in the final two years of the programme, also thanks to the programme's learnings and the NLGF becoming operational across all countries

For the second variable, **actual staff costs against the initial MoFA-approved budget**, the programme financial statements show actual staff costs between 2021-2024 as EUR 9,859,037, under the approved budget of EUR 10,866,000 for the same time period. This variable can be assessed as "exceeds expectations".

The third variable under this criterion refers to **the percentage of indirect costs against total programme budget**. The financial statements for the 2021-2024 period show indirect costs (these refer to support staff, administrative, and other non-allocable costs) totalling EUR 5,355,524, including sub-granting expenses. This amounts to just 10% of the total grant value, well below the 15% benchmark, justifying a score of "exceeds expectations."

Considering these three variables, it is our understanding that the assessment for the first criterion of *funding flows to local partners* through the main grants is "meets expectations", i.e. 3 points.

Next Level Grant Facility

The NLGF was established in 2023, halfway through the programme. The NLGF can be understood as the most direct support mechanism for marginalised groups, contributing significantly to overall programme efficiency and inclusion. The NLGF has been regarded as an efficient mechanism for delivering funds for both rapid relief of urgent crises and supporting long-term resilience. As noted in the programme report:

"The recipients (of the NLGF) are small informal organisations (...) that represent local rights holders and work on local climate solutions. Moreover, some of them cannot operate openly for security reasons, let alone showing a 'track record'" - VCA Annual Report 2024

This criterion was assessed against three variables, namely:

- iii) the percentage of funds that reach final beneficiaries/grantees,
- iii) the percentage of indirect costs per Alliance member, and
- iii) the percentage of indirect costs for the fund manager.

The first variable, the **percentage of funds that reach final beneficiaries/grantees**, is slightly below the benchmark of 70% for the total NLGF, with 68% of the total funds reaching final grantees. In some countries, this variable is actually above the benchmark, such as Paraguay (79%) and Bolivia (90%), both managed by WWF. It is also important to note that financial reconciliations for 2025Q4 have not been submitted to this evaluation, so it is plausible that the benchmark of 70% will be reached. This, therefore, justifies an assessment of 'meets expectations'.

The benchmark for the second variable under this criterion, **the percentage of indirect costs per Alliance member**, was established at 5%. The financial statements reviewed show that the amount subcontracted to fund managers was equivalent to 95% of the total committed capital to the NLGF,

implying that 5% was dedicated to administrative costs of Alliance members. It is important to note that WWF achieved higher percentages in Tunisia and Paraguay, 4% and 3% respectively.

The last variable under this criterion refers to **the percentage of costs for the fund manager**, with a benchmark of 25% of the total budget for the fund manager. The reviewed financial statements show that 20% of the fund manager's budget was spent with direct and indirect costs, well below the benchmark, justifying a score of "exceeds expectations". This variable has the most diversity across countries, with some countries reaching 4% of fund managers costs (Bolivia), and others up to 25% (Tunisia).

Timeliness of fund disbursement

The second efficiency criteria referred to **timeliness of fund disbursement**, under the understanding that quicker disbursements enable quicker implementation, and therefore more local ownership of results. The different and multiple grant-making systems contributed an overall score of 'meets expectations' because of regional disparities in grant disbursement. Success in timely disbursement was understood as being dependent on monitoring, follow-ups and open communication between partners and Alliance Members, establishing a reinforcing feedback loop between coordination and timeliness. In some countries, the programme demonstrated great efficiency in providing timely funding for emerging needs. For example, in Paraguay, partners received an entire year's budget as a once-off disbursement. This liquidity allowed for fieldwork completion and timely reaction to emerging threats and risks thanks to the freedom of operating without the constraints of periodic disbursements. The disbursement model adopted by SDI also enabled efficiency, using its pre-existing affiliates, bypassing the time-consuming "Calls for Proposals". In Kenya, a partner organisation noted "I never saw any hitch" when referring financial disbursements.

The opposite was observed in Zambia, where grant disbursement adhered to a "70% disbursement rule", where subsequent funds were withheld until 70% of the previous disbursement had been spent and accounted for. This created delays due to back-and-forth reporting clarifications. Similar barriers to overall programme timeliness were noted within SouthSouthNorth, where internal delays affected timeliness of disbursements to small grantees, shortening their implementation windows.

Some internal challenges hindered VCA's timeliness. It was noted that some Alliance members had rigid administrative practices that contradicted the programme's goal of working with grassroots organisations, such as WWF's internal system, described as "ultra-standardized and full of protocol", compared to more flexible partners with a "Latin American DNA" (Local partner representative, Paraguay (SSI)). Additionally, some partners faced additional bureaucratic layers, such as translating budget requests and difficulties into English, which created substantial delays and communication barriers, delaying fund disbursement processes, and reducing funding flow efficiency

"This multi-layered funding architecture involved different alliance partners (WWF, Avina, HIVOS) managing various coalition portfolios. While some partners experienced relatively direct access, others faced additional bureaucratic layers (...) creating substantial delays and communication barriers that reduced process efficiency for organisations with limited English capacity or international funding experience."- VCA Regional Team representative, Brazil (SSI)

Other contextual challenges hindered VCA's timeliness and overall efficiency. For example, in Tunisia, strict financial laws regarding CSOs contradicted the intended flexibility of the NLGF design,

leading to situations where auditors rejected expenditures approved by the Alliance, causing delays (Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)).

While the program demonstrated responsiveness and timely disbursements in certain regions, varying institutional requirements across the broader Alliance led to inconsistencies, highlighting the need for improvement.

Inclusiveness of the fund allocation process

The third efficiency rubric, **inclusiveness of the fund allocation process**, revolves around the involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders in fund disbursement decisions, and hence ensuring traditionally difficult-to-reach groups benefit from the grant funding. Within the VCA programme, fund allocation was determined at two levels. Firstly, at Alliance level, budget allocations were distributed across the programme's seven countries and Alliance members. This distribution determined at programme inception and included in the programme proposed budget, shaped by for example MoFA priority areas and joint decision-making and agreement between Alliance members. Secondly, budget was distributed then at regional level. at the regional level the regional Alliance members then mostly distributed funds amongst their own partners (just a few exceptions where funds were moved to other partners). This means that inclusion in decision-making on budget allocation to individual local partners happened primarily within the work of a single Alliance member in a regional team. Therefore, there was much variation in these processes, each local Alliance member defining their own processes. Lastly, there was also the fund allocation process of the NLGF. The criterion has been evaluated based on the first two processes, and NLGF budget allocation process has not been evaluated.

At the VCA-programme level, budget allocations were largely pre-determined and top-down, which created a significant resource disparity that limited inclusiveness within the partnership itself. There was a marked imbalance in resources, where Northern-based members (Hivos and WWF) received approximately USD 18 million, while Southern-based Alliance members received between USD 4 and 5 million, pointing out to limited input from Southern Alliance members. Despite this budget imbalance, Alliance members were asked to equally participate in task forces, despite insufficient funding for engaging in equal footing ((VCA Governance Representative, SSI).

These structural imbalances in governance, and unequal budget distribution is mentioned by multiple sources (Local Partners, Brazil SSI; Local partners, Paraguay SSI; VCA Governance representative SSI).

"Local members are unaware of the reason for this difference (in fund allocation). Lessons learned suggest budgets should be locally defined with clarity, not just from global structures." - MTR Paraguay

At regional level, the evaluation found some evidence of regional mechanisms to make grant disbursement more inclusive, such as flexibilization of communications channels, documentation and the use of participatory and coalition-based models, such as in Brazil and in Indonesia, but not sufficient evidence of an inclusive budget allocation process per se. As observed by a local partner in Tunisia:

"Limitations included uneven resource distribution and the need for additional advocacy funding." - VCA Partner organisation, Tunisia (SSI)

Local partners often pointed out that the rationale behind budget allocation is not clear, which points towards a process that was not inclusive. While the overall intent of the program was highly

inclusive, the financial and operational structures did not always facilitate equitable representation in fund disbursement decisions, and hence justifies a score of “needs improvement”.

Adaptability to changing needs

The fourth criteria of efficiency, **adaptability to changing needs**, understands that adaptability prevents funds from being allocated to irrelevant or unsuccessful initiatives in a changing context, and thereby increasing the ratio of outputs to inputs.

There is evidence that a significant level of strategic flexibility and donor openness that allowed for adaptability, hence justifying a score of the programme has “meets expectations”. For example, partners in Paraguay highlighted that the program’s “generous budget” and “agility” allowed them to react immediately to unforeseen risks. As noted by a regional team representative, the program allowed partners to quickly shift focus to support emerging advocacy needs:

“The programme was adaptable and agile. The generous budget allowed us to react to opportunities and risks. It was also agile because the entire budget for the year was transferred at the beginning, with the resources on hand to transfer to the local partner if the need arose.”- VCA Regional Team, Paraguay (SSI)

In Brazil, for example, the noted “openness and willingness to adjust the project according to circumstances on the ground” was described as fundamental to responding effectively to what marginalised groups needed at specific moment. Other efforts that showcase adaptability was the implementation of adaptive administrative support, simplified procedures, and contextual flexibility, including organizational strengthening pilots, integrated administrative staff support, This could also be a reflection of the POV framework of allowing Alliance Members to use their own criteria and processes, where organisations that already had mechanisms supportive of adaptability were able to recreate this adaptability within the VCA programme.

“VCA’s financial structure not only provided us with resources, but offered the only route truly available for WWF and our partners to be able to address political, social and human rights work in Paraguay with the necessary flexibility.”- VCA Regional Team, Paraguay (SSI)

The reality is that there are very few donors willing to do this, and those that exist generally do not offer the necessary flexibility to adapt to the realities of the Paraguayan context and respond to changing needs on the ground.” – VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

Additionally, the NLGF's design also enabled flexibility when allocating funds to different climate action needs according to the context. As per the table below, in each country the ratio of funds allocated to emergency response (short term) or resilience building (long term), reflecting regional priorities.

Table 8. NLGF-supported initiatives per climate action type

Indicator	Country	Emergency response	Resilience building
% of projects benefiting according to project type (disaggregated by country)	Bolivia	46%	54%
	Brazil	51%	49%
	Indonesia	10%	90%
	Kenya	4%	96%

Indicator	Country	Emergency response	Resilience building
	Paraguay	52%	48%
	Tunisia	39%	61%
	Zambia	0%	100%
	Global	25%	75%

The NLGF successfully disbursed grants ranging from €671 up to €18,039, a breadth that serves as proof of its flexible design, supporting adaptability to local needs. By avoiding a strict lower limit, the facility is able to adapt to the specific needs of potential grantees, supporting micro-grants for projects that only require a few hundred euros. This strategic flexibility allows the NLGF to be highly responsive to both rapid emergency relief and long-term resilience initiatives, catering to organisations that often lack a formal financial track record and to reach "hard-to-reach" groups and grassroots activists who are frequently excluded from traditional, large-scale climate finance models. As observed by an external stakeholder:

"The fact it (the NLGF) can be responsive to what comes from communities and networks ad hoc and not only having to allocate funds at the beginning of the period or the year) makes it (adaptive)." – Validator (SSI)

The flexibility offered from the start by the funder and the programme's alignment with locally led implementation are the key enablers for the programme's fund allocation adaptability. While the programme was highly adaptable, the main factor hindering a score of 'exceeds expectations' is the limited evidence on proactive monitoring and identification of emerging needs with local partners across all regions.

Coordination between Alliance members and partner organisations

The fourth efficiency criterion, coordination between Alliance members and partner organisations, is considered to "meet expectations." The programme has established regular and clear coordination structures, such as the Joint Program Team, Regional Teams, and various Taskforces, which have fostered significant collaboration. However, administrative fragmentation posed some challenges to seamless coordination.

"The varied processes affected inter-partner collaboration and made it harder to synchronize activities across the alliance. This sometimes hinders the collective impact and timely delivery of results." - VCA Regional Team, Kenya (FGD)

Coordination was also impacted by a trickledown effect from the budget imbalance issue raised earlier. The budget imbalance affected coordination between Alliance Members and local partners, which, in turn, impacted efficiency. Alliance members with smaller budgets were still expected to support overall programme implementation and participation in task forces equally, despite the lack of funds, and hence, had fewer resources to focus on local partner coordination, cascading in limited capacity for such (Local Partner Representative, Tunisia (SSI)), VCA Governance representative, SSI).

The perception of local partners of the programme's coordination is highly dependent on their context, and the systems set up by Alliance Members:

"...Financial? I imagine the operational form, how the procedures were done, the requirements, or what path had to be followed, if there was clarity, for example, what

has to be done, who to contact. That has always been chaotic to this day. There has been no clarity. Communication has never been able to be good. It has improved over the years, but it hasn't been very efficient.”- VCA Partner organisation, Bolivia (SSI)

“Structures were supportive, with transparency and clear allocation of responsibilities ensuring effective programme delivery.”- VCA Partner organisation, Tunisia (SSI)

“The structure was considered "super" and "very, very efficient", much less bureaucratic than other cooperating agencies, and we never had problems with reports or forms.”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

While some regional teams did notice an improvement in coordination efficiency through regular communication channels and informal problem-solving mechanisms, the Alliance's decentralized and fragmented systems prevented the score of 'exceeds expectations' that a proactive, seamless coordination between Alliance Members and local partners for efficient grant disbursement would entail throughout all geographies.

6.4.2 Efficiency findings and limitations

Overall, the evaluation finds that VCA achieved moderate efficiency in distributing funds to local partners and final beneficiaries (17/24), reflecting a generally workable balance between MoFA compliance expectations and the need for agile support in diverse Global South contexts. The programme met expectations on timeliness, adaptability, and coordination, and performed particularly well against funding flows benchmarks, particularly thanks to innovative mechanisms such as coalition-based funding and the NLGF, which enabled micro-grants and prioritised hard-to-reach groups.

This heterogeneity in programme's systems affected the programme's overall efficiency as the local partners had differing experiences in receiving funds. It is understood that organisations with stronger relationships or better administrative capacity experienced more efficient processes than those remaining peripheral to programme networks. Additionally, fragmented grant-making systems and varying administrative practices created delays, additional transaction costs and coordination frictions—effects that were amplified for smaller or organisations with limited exposure to international granting mechanisms. For example, some local partners faced additional transaction costs, such as having to translate documents, or especially a minority of programme partners who received grants from multiple VCA Alliance Members, as they had to navigate different reporting timelines, templates and compliance requirements for the same programme (Regional Team, Kenya (FGD)), impacting overall programme efficiency. The main area requiring improvement was the inclusiveness and transparency of fund allocation processes, where governance and budget imbalances limited equitable representation in funding decisions despite an overall stated commitment to localisation and inclusion.

It is worth noting that the review of efficiency rubric to favour quantitative funding flows and benchmarks instead of a qualitative understanding of the design of financing mechanisms obscured the successes of the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF). While quantitative benchmarks prioritise the volume of capital moved, they potentially shadow the NLGF's role as a "game-changing" mechanism specifically designed to prioritize accessibility, flexibility, and local ownership for "hard-to-reach" groups that traditional financing mechanism ignore. The true value of the NLGF lies in its ability to bypass systemic barriers—such as the requirement for a formal bank account or a financial "track

record" — on top of the amount that has been sub-granted. By putting people at the centre of the strategy, the NLGF has demonstrated that efficient pathways to locally-led climate action often prioritize non-bureaucratic agility over the sheer volume of financial throughput, even if it includes “hand-holding” and higher administrative costs.

6.5 Partnerships

This section examines partnership dynamics across four interrelated domains: (i) Alliance-level governance structures and decision-making processes; (ii) power sharing and local ownership at regional and country levels; (iii) barriers to participation for smaller or less-resourced partners and the programme’s mitigation strategies; and (iv) the enabling role of Dutch MoFA and Embassies in supporting effective and adaptive implementation.

Data sources for partnerships:

Secondary data sources: Programme and country reports (2021–2025), VCA Theory of Change, programme proposal, Mid-Term Review (MTR), annual reporting, and relevant synthesis outputs.

Primary data sources: Key informant interviews (KIIs) with alliance governance structures (JPT, taskforces, regional teams); semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with programme partners and implementers; focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders; and selected interviews with external stakeholders, including MoFA and embassy representatives.

Evidence assessment for partnerships:

The evidence for the partnerships section draws on a combination of programme documentation and stakeholder perspectives across alliance, regional, and country levels, enabling triangulation on governance structures, power sharing, and participation dynamics. Programme reports were used to assess partnership design and intended governance arrangements, while primary data provided insight into how these were experienced in practice. However, much of the evidence is based on self-reported accounts from alliance members and partners, introducing risks of positive reporting and positional bias, particularly in relation to findings on “leading from the South” and partnership effectiveness. In addition, sampling was partly purposive and weighted toward more engaged actors, with more limited representation of less-resourced or marginal partners, which may understate barriers to participation and power asymmetries. While triangulation was applied, many data sources share similar proximity to the programme and may reinforce dominant narratives rather than fully challenge them. Evidence is relatively stronger for findings on formal governance design and regional-level decision-making, but weaker in assessing the depth of power redistribution and equitable influence at alliance level, where conclusions rely more on perception than independently verifiable indicators. Overall, the evidence supports moderate-confidence conclusions, with stronger confidence in process-level findings and more caution required in interpreting claims related to power shifting, equity, and inclusion.

The table below provides an overview of the key evaluation questions and related findings for *Partnerships*. Evidence to support each finding is presented in the narrative sections that follow.

Key evaluation questions and findings:

To what extent and how has the partnership collaboration supported leading from the South?

Finding 38: Partnership collaboration supported “leading from the South” to a moderate extent, most strongly at regional and local levels, where decision-making over priorities and delivery was meaningfully devolved through joint planning processes, coalition governance, and rights-holder-led participation.

How has the alliance ensured inclusivity and equity in decision-making processes across its partnerships?

Finding 39: VCA’s governance architecture was inclusive by design but uneven in practice at Alliance level. Layered decision-making structures (taskforces, JPT, regional teams) created formal representation and consultation mechanisms across Alliance members. However, governance complexity, fiduciary

accountability structures, and uneven participation capacity meant that formal inclusion did not always translate into equitable influence, particularly for smaller or Southern-based partners.

Finding 40: Power sharing was most substantive at regional and country levels, where decision-making authority over delivery and priorities was meaningfully devolved. Joint planning processes, coalition-based governance models, and territorial platforms enabled horizontal agenda-setting and strengthened local ownership.

Are there any barriers to participation for smaller or less-resourced partners?

Finding 41: Participation barriers were real and multi-dimensional, but partially mitigated through adaptive design features. Administrative formalisation requirements, legal constraints, connectivity challenges, and uneven organisational capacity limited participation for smaller actors. Mitigation strategies such as flexible grant modalities (e.g., NLGF), coalition access mechanisms, and contextual adaptations reduced but did not eliminate these barriers.

To what extent the Dutch Ministry support and Embassies enabled effective and efficient implementation?

Finding 42: Dutch MoFA support was a critical enabler of effective and adaptive implementation, providing flexible funding and a trust-based relationship that allowed partners to respond to shifting political and climate contexts. In contrast, Dutch Embassy engagement added contextual value in some countries through legitimacy and convening power, but was uneven, capacity-dependent, and not central to overall programme effectiveness.

6.5.1 Alliance-level decision-making structures and inclusivity

From inception, the VCA programme design positioned partnership collaboration and locally driven decision-making as central to its theory of change. The alliance model was designed to combine global advocacy reach with strong regional and local grounding, enabling Southern actors to shape priorities and implementation pathways. This subsection assesses how this governance architecture functioned in practice, and the extent to which it supported inclusive and equitable decision-making.

Evaluation findings indicate that **decision-making within VCA operated through a layered structure**, with different types of decisions sitting at different levels. For example, taskforces provided thematic and technical inputs, the Joint Programme Team (JPT) held much of the operational and coordination authority, and regional teams exercised significant influence over delivery and contextual adaptation. As one taskforce described:

“Operational decisions made by JPT, delivery decisions made at the regional level... This structure had representation by all alliance members.”- VCA Finance Taskforce (FGD)

This governance architecture has important strengths. The separation between operational oversight (Alliance level) and delivery decisions (regional level) **aligns with the principle of devolving implementation authority to the lowest appropriate level**. In practice, this allowed regional teams to adapt programming to political and climate realities without requiring continuous authorisation from global structures. This can be considered a positive feature of the VCA governance model.

However, evaluation findings also show that the existence of layered structures did not automatically translate into equitable influence across all actors. Stakeholders described several frictions that shaped the experience of inclusivity in practice.

First, **mandate clarity and oversight gaps** were raised. Primary evidence suggests that, while the governance structure was designed to be representative, there were perceived gaps in how

oversight and mandates operated in practice, particularly between the Steering Committee and the JPT. One interview respondent noted that:

“The Steering Committee did not always have sufficient oversight and that the JPT did not always have a strong enough mandate to push decisions. As a result some decisions fell away or their inputs were not necessarily taken onboard.”- VCA Finance Taskforce (FGD)

Second, stakeholders also described a tension between VCA’s strong emphasis on inclusive, democratic decision-making and the practical need to make timely, actionable decisions. While governance structures were designed to promote participation and power-shifting, this sometimes resulted in slowed momentum or unclear accountability when perspectives diverged. In particular, the separation between consultative spaces (such as taskforces) and formal decision-making bodies occasionally limited the ability of technical groups to influence final outcomes. This suggests that participatory intent was embedded in governance design, but clarity around decision rights and responsibility for action was not always equally strong in practice.

“We placed a lot of emphasis... on shifting power and being very democratic, but sometimes decisions get diluted or stagnate and that can dilute responsibility for taking action. Taskforces could identify a way forward but were not necessarily part of the decision-making bodies, so it became quite difficult to really push for a particular decision to be made.”- VCA Finance Taskforce (FGD)

Furthermore, evidence shows that in some cases **inequity was partly structural** as legal accountability to the donor, fiduciary risk management, and administrative compliance obligations rested primarily with larger organisations. As a result, Northern-based alliance members with established systems and donor relationships were often more central in high-level governance processes.

Perceptions of this imbalance surfaced most strongly in one JPT interview and should therefore be treated as emerging rather than definitive.

Lastly, evaluation findings indicate that despite the programme’s empowerment discourse, governance structures did not structurally include implementing organisations in high-level decision-making. Local partners largely remained as “implementers” rather than decision-makers particularly at the global level. This was perceived as a missed opportunity for the programme. One interview respondent argued that,

“We still see them more as subcontractors rather than equal partners. At the local level, it’s different, but globally, I think we missed an opportunity to bring what’s happening on the ground more into the Global Programme Team and Secretariat spaces.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

The above sentiments were partially echoed by a local partner in Bolivia who described decision-making within the VCA as “vertical” and reported that their time was often consumed by providing input that was not always considered.

In summary, Alliance-level governance can be characterised as inclusive by design, with formal representation and multiple consultative structures. However, in practice, equitable influence was moderated by governance complexity, fiduciary constraints, and uneven participation capacity.

These dynamics demonstrate the need for clearer decision rights, stronger feedback loops from country to global levels, and resourcing for participation.

The strongest evidence for “leading from the South” emerges at regional and country levels, where governance arrangements were more directly grounded in territorial realities and partner relationships.

6.5.2 Joint planning and horizontal decision-making

A consistent mechanism across the countries was the annual and multi-year planning process through which regional teams convened local partners to jointly determine priorities, review progress, and adjust plans and budgets. As noted by one respondent:

“Regional Teams invite all local partners into one place to determine priorities for next year. Decisions are made jointly and this is helpful in creating horizontal rather than vertical decision-making.”- VCA PMEL Taskforce (FGD)

This process shifted decision-making away from a purely compliance-based relationship toward collective priority-setting. Regional and local actors were able to shape programme direction based on lived realities, emerging climate risks, and political developments.

6.5.3 Coalition governance and territorial platforms

In Latin America, coalition-based governance structures expanded voice and coordination across territories. For example, primary data shows that in Brazil there were about 14 coalitions (comprising 74 NGOs) and each coalition was coordinated by a lead organisation with local governance mechanisms.

Respondents noted that such large-scale networks did not exist at this scale prior to VCA. These coalitions enabled cross-territorial coordination and collective agenda-setting, supporting Southern leadership in advocacy and policy engagement.

Findings also show that while coalition models can reproduce internal hierarchies (discussed below), they also created structured spaces for joint decision-making that extended beyond bilateral donor-partner relationships.

6.5.4 Rightsholder experience of participation and ownership

Evidence from focus groups held with rightsholders across countries reinforce or validate these power-sharing claims. In Tunisia, FGD participants described participatory decision-making as a core strength:

“Decisions regarding activities, events, and collective initiatives were made jointly, rather than imposed externally. This strengthened ownership and encouraged women to take initiative and leadership roles.”- Rightsholders, Tunisia (FGD)

Similarly, in Kenya, one local partner explained that the VCA partnership enforced local ownership and voice.

“Generally, it was a transparent process; a process that allows you to speak. You feel like you are valued and that you are an equal part of it.”- VCA Partner organisation, Kenya (SSI)

The above findings suggest that, at regional and local levels, partnership collaboration extended beyond consultation toward experienced influence and ownership.

Overall, the evaluation finds that power sharing was most substantive where decision-making was more horizontal and embedded within local coalitions and community structures.

6.5.5 Barriers to participation for smaller or less-resourced partners and mitigation strategies

Despite inclusive intent, the evaluation findings indicate that participation barriers were real and multidimensional. These varied between local partners (often shaped by contextual constraints) and alliance members (more directly linked to governance design and resourcing structures).

Barriers affecting local partners

Across countries, formalisation requirements, legal status, banking systems, and administrative compliance were significant barriers for smaller organisations and informal groups.

“For most of them they didn’t have their governance procedures in place, and that was sort of automatically disqualifying them. We had to give them very small amounts, so that we can monitor them closely and ensure that they are aligned to our reporting procedures.” - VCA Regional Team, Zambia (FGD)

In Tunisia, national legal frameworks constrained flexibility:

“We tried to negotiate but there is always a limit. For example, strict financial laws in Tunisia contradicted some assumptions of the NLGF. A key lesson was that we have to look at the context!” - VCA Regional Team, Tunisia (FGD)

In Brazil and Paraguay, connectivity and infrastructure limitations further constrained participation in remote contexts.

These barriers are partly contextual and not fully within programme control. However, expectations aligned to large INGO systems sometimes contradicted the programme’s equity ambitions.

Similarly, evaluation findings indicate that at Alliance level, “equal seats” did not always translate into equal influence. In practice, participation in global governance spaces was shaped by **unequal organisational bandwidth and resourcing capacity**. Smaller Alliance members, or those without staff dedicated specifically to VCA, faced constraints that limited sustained engagement in Alliance processes. In recognition of this, a decision was taken in 2022 to increase staff budget support for some partners to strengthen their participation at global level. Even so, some respondents noted that staff in certain Alliance organisations continued to work across multiple projects, limiting the depth and consistency of their engagement compared to organisations with dedicated VCA personnel.

These inequities were not described as intentional design features, but rather as structural asymmetries linked to staffing levels, time availability and internal budget allocations. As a result, formal representation did not automatically ensure equitable participation or influence within Alliance-level decision-making.

Mitigation strategies

The programme adopted several mitigation strategies to reduce participation barriers, most notably through the design of the NLGF. For example, in Zambia, smaller organisations were allowed to submit proposals through different channels, including text, video, audio, and WhatsApp, with some materials translated into local languages, such as Nyanja, Bemba, and Tonga.

Small grants, simplified procedures, coalition-based access arrangements, and embedded strengthening support further enabled engagement of actors who would otherwise have been excluded. However, these mitigation efforts had clear ceilings, as legal, fiduciary, and donor compliance requirements constrained operational flexibility.

In **conclusion**, partnership collaboration supported “leading from the South” most convincingly at the regional and country levels. Decision-making authority over delivery and agenda-setting was meaningfully devolved, coalition governance expanded voice, and rights-holders reported experiencing ownership and influence.

At Alliance level, governance was inclusive by design but more constrained in practice. Formal representation did not consistently translate into equitable influence, and structural accountability arrangements, resourcing asymmetries and governance complexity limited the redistribution of power.

6.5.6 To what extent the Dutch Ministry support and Embassies enabled effective and efficient implementation?

This subsection assesses the contribution of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Dutch Embassies to the effective and efficient implementation of VCA, drawing on both primary data and programme documentation.

Across countries, Dutch MoFA support was widely perceived as **enabling and flexible**, particularly at donor and global levels. Respondents consistently highlighted MoFA’s willingness to allow adaptive management, tolerate iteration, and maintain trust-based relationships as critical to working in politically sensitive, climate-affected and civic-space-constrained contexts. This perception was raised by many respondents across Latin America and Africa.

“Our direct relationship with the Dutch Ministry as a donor has been excellent. They are the most flexible and allow for adaptive management of the project, which has been fundamental to being able to work on sensitive issues and respond to changing needs on the ground.”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

While tensions around expectations and adjustments were acknowledged, these were largely framed as a normal feature of donor–implementer relationships rather than as constraints on implementation.

“With the Dutch donor at a global level, it was tense due to adjustments and tensions, but this is perceived as normal, as is also the case with other donors.”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

Programme documentation similarly highlights MoFA’s role in enabling participation of local actors in global policy spaces and allowing flexible use of resources in response to emerging opportunities and risks (VCA Annual Report, 2023).

Furthermore, engagement with Dutch Embassies was perceived as **uneven and highly context-dependent**, shaped by embassy presence, staffing capacity, geographic coverage and diplomatic priorities. This finding was raised by several respondents across countries.

Evaluation findings show that in contexts without a resident Dutch Embassy, such as **Paraguay and Bolivia**, interaction was limited and often mediated through embassies in neighbouring countries, reducing opportunities for sustained engagement.

“The absence of a diplomatic mission in Paraguay meant that interaction was minimal and connection a bit sporadic.”- VCA Partner organisation, Paraguay (SSI)

By contrast, in countries with an active embassy presence, such as **Brazil and Kenya**, engagement was more visible, particularly around information exchange, dialogue and participation in international fora.

“Brazil’s Regional Team maintained dialogue with the Dutch Embassy, sharing progress and exploring opportunities at COP and G20 events.”- VCA Alliance Secretariat (SSI)

However, even in these contexts, embassy engagement was described as person-dependent rather than institutionalised, leading to variability over time.

Moreover, several respondents pointed to **misalignment between embassy priorities**, often oriented towards trade, commerce or geopolitical interests, and VCA’s focus on climate justice, rights and advocacy. This issue was raised across stakeholder groups.

“When we met with the Dutch Embassy in Bolivia, they made it clear that their focus in the region was on trade and commerce. Therefore, climate advocacy wasn’t on their radar.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

MoFA respondents also noted structural constraints affecting embassy engagement, including reduced staffing and the phasing out of some missions.

“I know that there were expectations that this type of collaboration would happen but in practice not sure about embassy capacity, embassies are phasing out, losing a lot of personnel.”- MoFA (SSI)

These factors limited the extent to which embassies could consistently act as strategic partners for advocacy-focused programming.

Overall, evidence indicates that VCA implementation was not dependent on embassy engagement for effectiveness. Where embassies engaged, they added value by providing legitimacy, convening opportunities and access to policy or international spaces. Where engagement was limited, implementation proceeded through alliance governance structures and partner networks.

Programme documentation reflects this mixed picture, noting both productive engagement in some contexts and limited interaction in others (VCA Annual Report, 2023). As such, embassies functioned more as contextual enablers rather than as core drivers of programme effectiveness.

In conclusion, Dutch MoFA support played a **critical enabling role** in effective and efficient implementation, particularly through flexible funding, trust-based relationships and tolerance for adaptive management. Embassy engagement, while valuable in specific country contexts, was **uneven and constrained** by geography, capacity and diplomatic priorities. The gap between initial

expectations of embassy involvement and actual practice reflects broader structural trends in development diplomacy rather than programme-specific shortcomings.

6.6 Sustainability

This report section presents the evaluation findings regarding sustainability. It examines the extent to which VCA partners have increased their **institutional sustainability**, and how this was supported by programme initiatives. For the purposes of the ETE, the following definition of institutional sustainability was adopted:

Institutional sustainability refers to an organisation's ability to maintain and strengthen its capacity to achieve its goals over time, without relying on external support. It involves having the necessary skills, resources, and systems for effective operations, diversified funding, strong relationships with stakeholders, and the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. Ultimately, it ensures the organisation can continue delivering lasting positive impact and remain resilient in the face of challenges.

The analysis draws primarily on qualitative primary data collected during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions at programme and country level. This was triangulated with secondary data extracted from programme documents, including annual progress reports, and survey data on the sustainability of skills, knowledge and abilities. Further detail regarding data sources is provided below, together with an assessment of the evidence gathered in the course of the evaluation.

Data sources for sustainability:

Secondary data sources for this report section include Programme and Country Reports (2021-2025).

Primary data sources include key informant interviews (KIIs), workshops and focus group discussions, with VCA governance structures and taskforce members; semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with country programme partners / programme implementers; focus group discussions (FGDs) with rightsholders, including marginalised groups (e.g., women, youth, Indigenous peoples); and a self-administered, online survey (n=90) that collected data from programme partners across all seven implementation countries.

Evidence assessment for sustainability:

The evidence supporting the sustainability section is based on a combination of primary and secondary data sources, providing a well-rounded perspective on the institutional sustainability of VCA's country partners. Programme reports offered insights into the implementation and effectiveness of VCA's support mechanisms, while survey data and SSIs with programme partners helped assess the likelihood of sustained results and the challenges to long-term sustainability. These primary data sources allowed the evaluators to gather local perspectives on whether the programme's outcomes, such as increased capacity and institutional engagement, were likely to be maintained.

Limitations impacting the evidence presented in this section include the use of purposive and convenience sampling, specifically for the KIIs with VCA programme teams and SSIs with country partners. This may have led to the overrepresentation of stakeholders who had more favourable views of the programme, and social desirability bias. Additionally, financial sustainability was not explored in-depth, and the absence of independent financial data limits the ability to assess the long-term financial viability of VCA's partners.

Despite these limitations, the evidence provides a reasonable understanding of the programme's sustainability. The perspectives gathered from local stakeholders indicate that the outcomes are likely to be sustained in the medium term, but challenges related to resource mobilisation, political continuity, and levels of external support could affect long-term sustainability. Further verification through the gathering and review of financial data for programme partners would enhance the robustness of the sustainability assessment.

The table below provides an overview of the key evaluation questions and related findings for *Sustainability*. Evidence to support each finding is presented in the narrative sections that follow.

Key evaluation questions and findings:

Has the programme implemented any initiatives to support sustained institutional capacity of local CSOs?

Finding 43: VCA prioritised leaving behind the conditions for sustained local action, guided by its Exit and Sustainability Plan as well as a focus on local ownership. This underpinned the programme's approach to capacity strengthening, partnership-building, and coalition / alliance formation and strengthening.

Finding 44: The programme's contribution to sustained institutional capacity includes (i) strengthening of networks and coalitions; (ii) provision of practical capacity strengthening; (iii) the formalisation of community structures and representation in decision-making spaces; (iv) facilitating relationship-building with key decision-makers; and (v) improved documentation practices and use of evidence. These areas are perceived by interviewees and FGD participants as vital to institutional sustainability, and as areas where significant outcomes have been achieved as a result of VCA support.

To what extent and how have VCA partners increased institutional sustainability or achieved other forms of sustainability?

Finding 45: Across the programme-targeted countries, respondents confirmed that they had strengthened their coalitions/networks, that practical "portable" skills had been embedded in their organisations, and that they had improved their access to evidence and established stronger relationships with decision-makers. Case study data indicates the formalisation of community structures, which has supported community actor access to official spaces (e.g., committees, councils, commissions) while conferring increased legitimacy and visibility. These elements have increased the institutional sustainability of VCA's partners.

Finding 46: VCA has supported a number of efforts to improve climate finance access and follow-on funding for partner organisations. However, the majority of evaluation respondents stressed that post-VCA resources are often insufficient or less flexible. This presents a threat to continuity of advocacy, leadership, and long-term legal/policy work.

Finding 47: The above challenges related to sustainability are compounded by political/institutional volatility, limited government responsiveness, structural inequalities (including land/access constraints), and infrastructure gaps coupled with market access limitations for IGAs. These factors undermine sustainability even where local capacity is strong.

Have capacities of local women- and youth-led organisations been strengthened for long-term advocacy and influence?

Finding 48: Survey data indicate that 66% of women-led and 52% of youth-led organisation representatives reported gaining or strengthening skills for advocacy strategy design and implementation through VCA capacity strengthening. This is reflected in increased confidence among women and youth rightsholders to engage decision-makers across levels, underpinned by improved climate knowledge, access to evidence, and strengthened solidarity/support networks.

What evidence is there that the programme's feminist, intersectional principles have been embedded in national and local climate policies or governance structures?

Finding 49: There is insufficient evidence to conclude on the extent to which women- and youth-led advocacy under VCA is leading to the integration of gender transformative, feminist or intersectional principles in national and local climate policies or governance structures.

6.6.1 The VCA programme's approach to sustainability

Across countries and respondent groups, VCA's approach to sustainability is described as **legacy- and localisation-first**; that is, instead of making the programme itself 'last,' it focused on transferring the conditions for long-term action to its partners. This approach was underpinned by extensive engagement with programme partners and a deliberate focus on **local ownership**, with success defined as local-level action that continues and adapts after programme cessation. As noted by a Joint Programme Team respondent:

“The original ethos was about leaving behind a legacy; laying the groundwork for local level action that could thrive beyond our involvement.”- VCA Joint Programme Team (SSI)

VCA also formulated an Exit and Sustainability Plan (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2025) which outlines the key elements required for continuity; namely, maintaining coalitions/movements, continuing capacity building (notably that related to resource mobilisation), and setting up mechanisms to enhance access to funding. Aligned to this, **the programme’s transfer of conditions for institutional sustainability** shows up most clearly in (i) strengthened networks and coalitions; (ii) practical capacity strengthening; (iii) the formalisation of community structures and representation in formal spaces; (iv) relationships with key decision-makers; and (v) improved documentation practices and use of evidence. These areas were also perceived by interviewees and FGD participants as vital to institutional sustainability, and as areas where **significant outcomes have been achieved** as a result of VCA support. Further input on each is provided in the sections that follow.

6.6.2 Institutional sustainability achieved: key pathways and evidence

Sustaining action through coalitions, networks and collective structures

Evaluation respondents, primarily programme partners and rightsholders, **across all seven countries**, confirmed that VCA supported engagement amongst partner organisations. This engagement facilitated the sharing of information and good practices, the identification of common areas of work, and **the building of relationships and networks**. Case study data confirms the latter with VCA support for the formation of coalitions, networks and collective structures outlined across the selected contribution claims, including the Trinational Youth Network and Marina Cué networks in **Paraguay**, the establishment of the youth-led KOPI Alliance in the Province of NTT in **Indonesia**, and the formation and operationalisation of the Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPC) in **Kenya**. The building of networks and collective structures has also contributed towards a sense of solidarity and confidence to act, as outlined in the quote below. All of these elements were seen by respondents as **key enablers of sustained action post the VCA programme**.

“We have become connected with other friends in Indonesia. And within these coalitions, we have learnt and we have become motivated; we are not alone. And, importantly, we can say that we have the power too. That further strengthens my belief that we are doing with KOPI is on the right track. The proof is that now, after the programme is considered complete, the KOPI Alliance will continue this work.”- Rightsholders, Indonesia (FGD)

VCA’s facilitation of relationship and network building extended beyond programme and national boundaries to include VCA partner and rightsholder **collaboration with allied organisations and movements**. For example, in **Zambia**, the Regional Team reported that the Energy Poverty Alliance brought different organisations together to look at energy poverty and to propose solutions. The programme’s facilitation of partner access to other organisations and networks is seen as key in supporting continuous information exchange and learning, as well as access to future collaboration opportunities, national and international fora, and resources; again, **important elements for sustaining advocacy for climate justice**.

Practical capacity strengthening - skills that can be used beyond VCA

Across all countries and respondent categories, including rightsholders, VCA local partners, validators and VCA alliance members, strengthened capacity was repeatedly identified as a key enabler of sustainability. In **Brazil** and **Tunisia**, evaluation respondents highlighted the **practical and applied nature of the capacity strengthening provided via VCA** noting that this supported learning and contributed towards the development of sustainable skills.

“The real strength is the linking of training to “real activities”. This helped to ensure that learning became meaningful because it was immediately applied.”- Rightsholders, Tunisia (FGD)

This matters for institutional sustainability because it implies that **capacities strengthened by VCA are not “project-specific”**. Instead, they are portable, reusable, and can support future advocacy windows, relationships, and fundraising opportunities.

Survey responses also indicate a strong perception of the **sustainability of the skills, knowledge and abilities acquired through VCA support**. Across countries, the majority of respondents (93%) reported that they would continue utilising their strengthened capacities going forward, noting that a number of the skills obtained had already become embedded into their day-to-day ways of working (including planning, leadership, coordination, and internal systems).

Sustainability was repeatedly linked to the continued **relevance of the capacities to organisational mandates**, with several respondents’ noting alignment with strategic plans and intentions to scale or replicate approaches. In addition, survey respondents linked sustainability to the continuing and intensifying impacts of climate change, noting that the knowledge and skills gained through VCA remain directly relevant to community and national climate priorities.

Survey data also indicates that the capacities of women- and youth-led organisations have been strengthened for long-term advocacy and influence: 66% of respondents who noted that they represented a women-led organisation indicated that they had acquired new (or strengthened) skills, knowledge and abilities in the design and implementation of advocacy strategies as a result of capacity strengthening conducted under the VCA banner. Fifty two per cent (52%) of the representatives of youth-led organisations noted the same. This aligns with input obtained during qualitative data collection which indicates that women and youth rightsholders feel more confident to engage with decision-makers and in local, regional and – for some – international platforms to share their perspectives and advocate for effective climate solutions.

As demonstrated in the country case studies; for example, **Tunisia** and **Indonesia**, this increased level of confidence is the result of higher levels of knowledge of climate change challenges (and strategies to address these); their ability to generate and / or access evidence to support their perspectives and contributions to dialogues and discussions, and – importantly – a sense of solidarity and support (this is further discussed in the section below). However, as outlined in the country case studies and in the preceding sections of this report, the impact of women- and youth-led advocacy appears to be limited at this point. Case study findings and a review of the Policy Change Database for VCA indicate that while women and youth have gained access to decision-making spaces and are increasingly being perceived as credible and key stakeholders in climate debates, there is limited evidence to indicate that this is leading to any substantive shifts in national and local climate policies or laws. Similarly, there is limited substantiated evidence regarding the extent to which the VCA

programme's feminist, intersectional principles have been embedded in national and local climate policies or governance structures.

Formalisation of community structures and representation in formal spaces

A third pathway to sustainability was the formalisation of community structures, which refers to the transitioning of informal, organic, or traditional or community groupings into a more formal composition with structured and standardised processes and systems. This transition provides legal recognition and was repeatedly linked by evaluation respondents to **legitimacy, visibility and recognition; access to credit and grants, and also to formal governance structures and decision-making platforms**; all key features of institutional sustainability.

For example, in Marsabit, **Kenya**, rightsholders reported registering the abovementioned WCCPCs as community-based programmes, improving their ability to engage donors independently, and securing physical space within government offices.

"We have managed to register ward climate change committees as community-based programmes, so we are now able to engage donors on our own. The ward climate change committees have also been given offices at the ward administrator's office – this showcases progress towards sustainability." - Rightsholders, Kenya (FGD)

Similarly, in **Brazil**, members of a youth collective reported the following,

"The collective got a seat at the table, right, a seat on the council that deliberates all decisions of the Chico Mendes reserve. The Varadouro Collective is inside, has a vote, has a voice, is always influencing decisions." - Rightsholders, Brazil (FGD)

In Kerkennah, **Tunisia**, the creation of the GDAP marked a turning point for informal women's groups on the island by providing them with a legal identity, enabling interaction with municipal authorities and the Ministry of Tourism. Rightsholders reported that the GDAP *"...facilitated access to fairs, partnerships, and income-generating opportunities, and strengthened our confidence and leadership. It also created a platform for collective learning, decision-making, and mutual support."* These outcomes were confirmed via interviews with two validators as well as civil society partners. In addition, the formation of the GDAP supported the women to establish an office in Sfax, beyond the islands, helping to reduce their geographic isolation while facilitating *"...higher levels of access to partners, markets, and administrative services that are less accessible from the islands."* Rightsholder, Tunisia (FGD)

Paraguay provides an example of sustained influence through ongoing representation in formal commissions with one of VCA's partner organisations reporting *"We are part of the MADES Climate Change Commission and the Desertification and Drought Commission, being the only indigenous organisation in these spaces. This ensures that our proposals continue to have a direct impact on government policies."*

These outcomes are important for institutional sustainability in the sense that they alter who is recognised, who can access resources, and whose inputs shape future decisions, beyond the programme's lifespan.

Relationships with key decision makers

Across **Kenya, Zambia, Tunisia, Indonesia, Brazil and Paraguay**, rightsholders and partner organisation representatives described **improved relationships with key decision makers particularly government at the local level, as a key sustainability condition**. As above, VCA was perceived as playing a role in establishing these relationships by initially acting as an intermediary between community, civil society and grassroots actors, and government as well as other decision-making structures. The sense amongst evaluation participants is that this intermediary role has gradually fallen away to create space for direct engagement, dialogue and relationship building between themselves and key decision makers.

A **Kenya** CSO respondent and a representative of a women's federation in Jakarta's informal settlement of Penjaringan, **Indonesia** described the sustainability value of these relationships:

"The relationship that we have built with some of the county departments, they see us as partners in development, they easily listen to us. We will work together because we share ideas on how to make our county better. We are not enemies, we are friends in development who complement one another – we hold the government accountable."- VCA Partner organisation, Kenya (SSI)

"Currently, when the government holds community events, the women's federation is always invited and asked to participate. Especially if it's related to climate change. They're even asked to facilitate events sometimes. The government feels really helped by our presence. It never used to be like this before. When the government held events, they did it alone without citizen participation."- Rightsholders, Indonesia (FGD)

Evidence, documentation and knowledge systems as sustainability mechanisms

Qualitative data collection with programme partners and rightsholders in **all seven programme countries** also points to **evidence generation, documentation and dissemination as a pathway to sustainable action, as well as VCA's contribution to strengthening organisational practices and systems for such purposes**. For example, in **Kenya**, VCA's support in strengthening local data collection and co-design of climate finance tracking tools, such as Mulika, will be key in sustaining evidence generation and its use in advocacy interventions following programme closure. In **Indonesia**, the Penjaringan Women's Federation was capacitated on the collection of urban profiling data on sanitation to support community advocacy initiatives.

Partners referred to the use of both traditional and non-traditional evidence, including community knowledge and citizen science approaches, as a means of raising awareness regarding their efforts and achievements, while validating particular models or approaches and their effectiveness. This, in turn, supports resource mobilisation and strengthens partner legitimacy and reputation. It also maintains community awareness of – and mobilisation around - priority issues, as well as the need for climate activism and what can be achieved.

VCA's investment in alternative and innovative forms of storytelling, research, communication and dissemination has also played a role in supporting evidence, documentation and knowledge systems

as sustainability mechanisms. Secondary data sources¹³ note socio-ecological assessments and grassroots profiling and mapping in **Kenya** and **Zambia**; **Indonesia** partners' rapid assessment to explore the status and role of women in the management of natural resources and ecosystem services; baseline studies in **Bolivia** and **Paraguay** on Nature-based Solutions, to identify locally-led solutions for scaling; as well as engaging with universities as a knowledge associate to produce new knowledge.

6.6.3 Barriers to sustainability

Financial sustainability emerges as the **most fragile sustainability dimension**, even where institutional sustainability (skills, legitimacy, relationships, structures) is strong. This was noted across all respondent groups and **all seven countries** covered by the VCA programme.

On the **enabling side**, primary and secondary data sources reference VCA's efforts to influence climate finance access by lobbying governments and IFIs to adopt strategies and policies that would increase access to funding by local communities and marginalised groups. For example, the VCA GloPro is reported as *"...spearheading lobby and advocacy at international levels, actively lobbying governments, negotiating blocks such as the Africa Group Negotiators and C77, and international finance institutions, including the World Bank, to adopt strategies and or policies that would increase the accessibility of funds by local communities and marginalised groups."* (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2024) The Annual Progress Report 2022 (April 2023; page 5-6) also notes that *"Two new initiatives were set up by the alliance: the BASE initiative, 'Building Approaches to fund local Solutions with climate Evidence' serves to articulate advocacy messages and to mobilise additional funds for partners on the ground. Secondly, the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF), has been set up to direct funds to the hardest-to-reach groups the VCA Alliance works with."* The NLGF in particular was highlighted during qualitative primary data, allocating a budget of €3.56 million to support more than 500 projects.

Annual Progress Reports capture examples of leveraged or follow-on funding and financing mechanisms, including:

- The allocation of funding support to a total of 107 informal groups from Kisumu, Nairobi, and Nakuru Counties in **Kenya**, ranging from Kshs 50,000 to 100,000 (347- 695 EUR), to support their implementation of innovative urban climate solutions in informal settlements; (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023)
- **Paraguay's** Payment for Environmental Services mechanism linked to certification of forest reserves (112,256 hectares) with Conservation International funding; (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2023)
- VCA **Tunisia** and the women's network in Kerkennah secured GEF Small Grants funding to design and implement locally-led solutions in the region. This funding was used to construct and rehabilitate five Feskias¹⁴ (VCA, Annual Progress Report, April 2024)

¹³ Annual Progress Reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023.

¹⁴ Feskia's are a traditional water storage method used by communities in the Tunisian Kerkennah Islands. These underground water-storage reservoirs are lined with impermeable materials to capture rainwater, serving as reliable water sources for agricultural communities during periods of drought.

However, respondents involved in qualitative data collection stressed that **alternative funding often cannot match the level and flexibility of VCA support**. Resource constraints can also trigger knock-on effects such as loss of technical capacity and leadership skills. As noted by a **Paraguay** alliance member,

“Currently, there is no similar fund or project that can follow up with or work with this large number of local partners. Furthermore, advocacy and legal work, such as land titling and legal cases, are very lengthy processes that require time and constant funding. Five years is very little time for this type of process. The mobility support for leaders and lawyers, which was an extra that VCA was able to cover, will no longer exist, which will make it difficult to continue pending legal cases,” – VCA Alliance Member, Paraguay (SSI)

In addition, qualitative data highlighted **several external barriers to sustainability, which fall beyond the programme’s control**. These include political and institutional volatility, such as legislative changes, shifts in government priorities, and duty bearer transitions, which weaken follow-through on commitments and require ongoing advocacy and accountability. Respondents also noted institutional resistance and limited responsiveness; for example, inadequate county government response to petitions in Kenya, alongside persistent levels of structural exclusion and inequality, including land ownership and access constraints. Where rightsholders have gained access to income generating opportunities, practical constraints, such as fragile or intermittent market opportunities and infrastructure gaps that hinder market access, limit the sustainability of these initiatives.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that **VCA’s support has been instrumental in fostering institutional sustainability among local partners** by strengthening their capacity, networks, and relationships with decision-makers. Through practical capacity strengthening and facilitation of collaboration and networks, local actors have gained the skills and confidence needed to engage effectively in climate governance and advocacy. The formalisation of community structures like WCCPCs in Kenya and GDAP in Tunisia has provided these groups with legal recognition, ensuring ongoing representation in decision-making spaces and access to resources. However, **financial sustainability remains a fragile aspect of institutional sustainability**. Despite efforts by VCA to leverage external funding and mobilise resources, alternative funding mechanisms are perceived as insufficient in maintaining the level of flexibility and technical support that VCA provided.

7 Conclusion

The VCA programme has demonstrated substantial effectiveness in positioning civil society as a central, empowered actor in climate governance, successfully influencing 121 instances of law and policy change and supporting over 160 locally led climate solutions across seven countries. The programme contributed to the expansion and deepening of climate-civic space to a significant extent by strengthening coalition infrastructure and participation pathways for historically marginalised groups. This expansion was achieved through a consistent package of mutual capacity strengthening, digital inclusion, and hybrid advocacy, which moved marginalised voices from symbolic presence to substantive engagement. The coalition model acted as a primary mechanism, reducing individual isolation and building collective negotiating power through safety in numbers, which proved vital in the obstructed civic spaces of regions like Brazil, Indonesia, and Kenya. Furthermore, VCA acted as a

bridge actor, translating local knowledge into technically credible, policy-ready evidence that duty-bearers could not easily dismiss.

Achievements in Southern leadership and local ownership were most visible at the implementation level, supported by a deliberate allocation of approximately 50% of the programme budget to local partners and a legacy-first approach to sustainability. The Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) emerged as a game-changing mechanism that bypassed traditional bureaucratic barriers to reach the most marginalised groups, disbursing over EUR 2.3 million to hard-to-reach activists. However, a structural coherence tension remained: while local ownership was strong in delivery and agenda-setting, high-level strategic and financial decision-making remained largely centralized within Northern-based alliance structures. Southern partners often lacked the budget to resource the heavy administrative time required for programme-wide governance, limiting the full extent of Southern leadership at the global level.

However, the findings of this evaluation are subject to important methodological limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. These limitations primarily relate to sampling, participant availability, and data collection constraints.

The evaluation's sampling methods were influenced by purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling, which, while practical, introduced potential biases. Purposive sampling ensured the selection of knowledgeable and engaged participants, but this may have led to an overrepresentation of more active stakeholders and a selection bias towards those with positive experiences. Similarly, convenience sampling used when participant lists were unavailable likely missed less engaged or more critical voices, which affects the generalizability of the findings.

There were also challenges in participant availability, particularly with stakeholders who were already engaged in multiple roles, leading to respondent fatigue and delays in data collection. The non-response rate and the logistical difficulties in accessing remote regions meant that the final sample was not fully representative of the target population. These challenges were compounded by loss of participants due to timing issues, such as holiday schedules or program exits, and the need to adapt the sample during the fieldwork phase.

Furthermore, self-reporting bias in both interviews and the survey could have inflated positive outcomes, as participants were likely to emphasize successful aspects of the programme. The Outcome Harvesting data was also subject to positive reporting bias and lacked independent verification, limiting confidence in claims of causality.

Despite these limitations, the data provides valuable insights into the programme's impact on local advocacy, governance, and capacity building. However, the findings are not fully generalizable beyond the specific contexts evaluated, and decision-makers should be cautious in applying these results to broader contexts without further validation.

6 Lessons learned

Evaluation question:

What lessons have we learned about promoting equitable partnerships and locally led adaptation principles?

The evaluation of the VCA programme offers critical lessons on implementing locally led adaptation and fostering equitable partnerships. While the program successfully shifted implementation authority to local levels, it faced persistent challenges in devolving global governance and

overcoming structural administrative barriers. The following lessons are meant to strengthen future similar programming.

On governance:

- 1) Linked to findings 40, 41 & 42: meaningful Southern leadership requires moving beyond "locally led implementation" to fully devolved program governance, where local actors have equal influence over strategic resources and program-wide priorities.

On inclusion and equitable partnerships:

- 2) Linked to finding 7: local ownership principles cannot be realized through standard INGO compliance systems; they require purpose-built, flexible financing mechanisms that prioritize "hard-to-reach" groups.
- 3) Linked to findings 38, and 39: Equity in partnership is undermined by financial asymmetry; Southern partners cannot lead effectively if they lack the budget to resource the heavy coordination and administrative time required for program governance.
- 4) Linked to finding 22 and 44: The formalisation of community groups into structured organisations (e.g., GDAP in Tunisia, WCCPCs in Kenya) has been vital for ensuring recognition and access to decision-making spaces. This has provided local partners with institutional legitimacy that enhances their influence and longevity in climate governance.

On effective strategies for advocacy and policy change:

- 5) Linked to findings 21: Policy influence is most likely when locally led solutions are framed as contributions to public mandate, such as helping officials meet national climate targets or resolve land disputes.
- 6) Linked to finding 20 and 22: Effective climate advocacy is not just a technical exercise but a relational and political one; coalitions provide the 'safety in numbers' and shared identity necessary to contest power.

On capacity strengthening and institutional sustainability

- 7) Linked to finding 45: Capacity strengthening is most sustainable when it is practical and applied to real-world tasks, as seen in Tunisia and Brazil. Because these 'portable' skills (such as budget literacy, data collection, and public speaking) are immediately used to address lived realities, they become embedded into day-to-day organisational practices and remain relevant beyond the programme cycle.

8 Recommendations

Based on the findings and lessons learned, the evaluation proposes the following recommendations to **improve future programming** within the climate adaptation sector.

For VCA Alliance partners

- **Operationalise local ownership at the highest levels of governance:** Establish clear decision-making rights and resourced feedback loops that allow regional and local partners to shape global strategy on equal terms with international partners.
- **Ensure equitable budget distribution** across Alliance members from the inception phase to resource participation in global taskforces and coordination bodies.



- **Maintain the focus on coalition strengthening and movement building:** Invest long-term resources in coalition infrastructure and "bridging" actors who can translate local knowledge into formats that institutions can process.
- **Invest in global coordination:** Properly resource global strategy and coordination (programmes such as the GloPro) to ensure learning from the ground effectively informs international advocacy.
- **Prioritize sustainability mentorship:** Move beyond technical training to long-term institutional accompaniment, focusing on resource mobilization skills so partners can survive the "funding cliff" after the program ends.

For the donor (MoFA)

- **Maintain flexibility:** Continue providing high levels of strategic flexibility and trust-based relationships, which were cited as critical for navigating shrinking civic spaces and climate shocks.
- **Clarify guideline shifts:** Ensure changes in funding priorities (e.g., from service delivery to advocacy) are communicated early and clearly to avoid straining relationships between Alliance members and local partners.

For the climate adaptation sector

- **Shift from technical to relational:** Recognize that climate vulnerability is a combination of socio-economic precarity and political exclusion; focus on addressing the structural drivers of exclusion rather than just technical adaptation fixes.
- **Pursue "demonstration-first" advocacy approaches:** Support proof-of-concept models (like community-led internet in Paraguay) to shift institutional perceptions of what is feasible before pushing for regulatory change.
- **Pursue innovative funding mechanisms,** such as the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) that bypass traditional barriers through simplified applications, flexible reporting, and the use of intermediaries to manage fiduciary risks.
- **Prioritize "insider-outsider" hybrid strategies** that combine public mobilization with technical support to help government agencies implement existing policies.

Appendix 1: Evaluation plan

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
Criteria: Effectiveness, outcomes and impact			
1. To what extent, how and why has VCA been able to contribute to an expansion/deepening of civic space (related to climate action), where climate action voices are present and heard or not?	1 a. To what extent and how did VCA contribute to a diverse civil society that is collaborating on a shared agenda and co-creating scalable, locally shaped solutions that benefit people and nature? What factors contributed to successful strategies (context, enablers and barriers)? (Pillar 1) 1 b. To what extent and how did the VCA contribute to amplified citizens' voices that shape public debate on the just transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient futures? What were factors contributing to successful strategies (context, enablers and barriers)? (Pillar 2) 1 c. To what extent and how did VCA enable civil society contributions to climate solutions being taken into account in policy, practice and budget allocations in our countries? What were factors contributing to successful strategies? (Pillar 3) 1d. What early signs of positive change (policy shifts, increased agency, visibility, access to rights) has the program contributed to for	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports, OH database and result databases, baseline studies. Review of MTR Review of existing studies: gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership SSIs with • Alliance-Director Secretariat, • Gender Audit team rep • Local partner representatives • validators FDGs with • Steering Committee, • PMEL Taskforce, • Finance Taskforce, • Communications Taskforce • Regional team representatives, • Global Program team,	Thematic analysis; context analysis; meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership), output analysis of program indicators, frequency analysis of trends and qualitative analysis of themes of OH database, Causal Mapping analysis, including frequency analysis of causal links; Survey: Descriptive frequencies, spider diagrams, cross-tabulation of key variables e.g. region. gender, key population group (if sub-groups of sufficient size).

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
	women, men, girls, and boys, particularly marginalized youth groups? 1.e What strategies have been applied by VCA to shift power relations in favour of women and young people and how effective were these strategies? 1 f. What unintended positive and negative outcomes did the VCA program contribute to, particularly in relation to how these affected marginalized groups? What enabled or challenged the achievement of outcomes?	- Joint Program Team - FGDs with right holders / program participants to test contribution stories. Partner survey	
2. To what extent and how has the VCA program demonstrated the value of the Alliance being more than the sum of its parts?	2 a. To what extent and how were outcomes achieved through joint efforts of multiple Alliance members? (joint outcomes) 2 b. To what extent and how did Alliance members improve program implementation through their thematic experience, networks, focus areas or other qualities? (specific contributions of Alliance members) 2.c. How have VCA partners benefitted from VCA's communications training and tools, if at all? 2.d. What communication outputs did the program produce and how effective was the program in communicating internally across	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports, OH database and result databases, baseline studies. Review of MTR SSIs with - Alliance-Director Secretariat, - Gender Audit team rep - Local partner representatives - validators FGDs with - Steering Committee, - PMEL Taskforce,	Thematic analysis; context analysis; meta-synthesis of existing studies (Southern Leadership). Survey: Descriptive frequencies, spider diagrams, cross-tabulation of key variables e.g. region. gender, key population group (if sub-groups of sufficient size).

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
	the alliance and partners?	• Finance Taskforce, • Communications Taskforce • Regional team representatives, • Global Program team, • Joint Program Team Partner survey	
Criteria: Coherence (external)			
3. To what extent are VCA interventions aligned with strategies of VCA partners, Alliance members, strategic partners and policies?	3 a. To what extent and how have principles of local ownership been applied in engagement with local partners, and did the VCA program address the most pressing needs of the local partners? 3 b. To what extent are the VCA program's approaches aligned with the broader objectives of its partners, including local CSOs, governments, and donors? 3.d. How were these needs identified and incorporated into program design?	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports, baseline studies. Review of MTR Review of existing studies: gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership SSIs with • Gender Audit team rep • Local partner representatives • validators FGDs with • Steering Committee, • PMEL Taskforce, • Finance Taskforce, • Communications Taskforce	Thematic analysis with selective coding. Meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership).

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
		- Regional team representatives, - Global Program team - Joint Program Team	
Criteria: Sustainability			
4. To what extent and how have VCA partners increased institutional sustainability or achieved other forms of sustainability?	4.a Lasting positive effects of VCA program for partners (RE increased advocacy, communication, fundraising, use of feminist and intersectional approaches) 4 b. Has the program implemented any initiatives to support sustained institutional capacity of local CSOs? 4c. What evidence is there that the program's feminist, intersectional principles have been embedded in national and local climate policies or governance structures? 4.d. Have capacities of local women's and youth-led organisations been strengthened for long-term advocacy and influence?	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports. Review of MTR Review of existing studies: gender, Southern Leadership SSIs with - Local partner representatives - validators FGDs with - Regional team representatives Partner survey	Thematic analysis with selective coding. Meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership). Survey: Descriptive frequencies, spider diagrams, cross-tabulation of key variables e.g. region, gender, key population group (if sub-groups of sufficient size).
Criteria: Relevance			

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
5. What do the VCA strategies, achievements and adaptive management teach us about the validity of the VCA Theory of Change and its underlying assumptions?	5 a. To what extent and how has an adaptive approach been used in VCA and added value to program implementation? 5.c To what extent has the programme addressed the specific needs and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys, as well as gender-diverse and marginalized youth?	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports, baseline studies. Review of MTR Review of existing studies: gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership SSIs with • Gender Audit team rep • Local partner representatives • validators FGDs with • Steering Committee, • PMEL Taskforce, • Finance Taskforce, • Communications Taskforce • Regional team representatives, • Global Program team Joint Program Team	Thematic analysis with selective coding. Meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership).
	5.b. Which components of the ToC require revision?	All methods (this is a summative analytical question that will draw on all the data)	Conclusive analysis
Criteria: Efficiency			

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
6. How successful was VCA in distributing funds to local partners (and final beneficiaries)? What lessons can be learned?	6 a. How efficiently has the program utilised resources (time, funding, etc.) to achieve intended objectives? 6 b. To what extent have the program's financial and operational structures supported the inclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, youth and gender-expansive persons?	Review of program documents: annual reports, including financial reports. Review of MTR Review of global program and NLGF disbursement and tracking data against benchmarks Review of NLGF study SSIs with • Alliance-Director Secretariat, • Gender Audit team rep • Donor FGDs with • Steering Committee, • Finance Taskforce, • Regional team representatives, • Global Program team,	Thematic analysis with selective coding. Meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership). Frequency analysis of financial data and efficiency metrics against efficiency rubric.
Criteria: Partnerships			
7. To what extent and how has the partnership collaboration supported leading from the South? To what extent and how did partnerships with the Ministry and Embassies support the VCA	7 a. How has the alliance ensured inclusivity and equity in decision-making processes across its partnerships? 7 b. Are there any barriers to participation for	Review of program documents: annual reports, country reports, OH database and result databases, baseline studies. Review of MTR	Thematic analysis with selective coding. Meta-synthesis of existing studies (gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership). Social Network Analysis through Causal mapping from OH database and documents.

Evaluation Criteria and Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods
program? What lessons and good practices can be documented?	smaller or less-resourced partners? 7 c. To what extent the Dutch Ministry support and Embassies enabled effective and efficient implementation?	Review of existing studies: gender, NLGF, Southern Leadership SSIs with • Alliance-Director Secretariat, • Local partner representatives FDGs with • Steering Committee, • PMEL Taskforce, • Finance Taskforce, • Communications Taskforce • Regional team representatives, • Global Program team, • Joint Program Team	

Appendix 2: VCA programme ToC

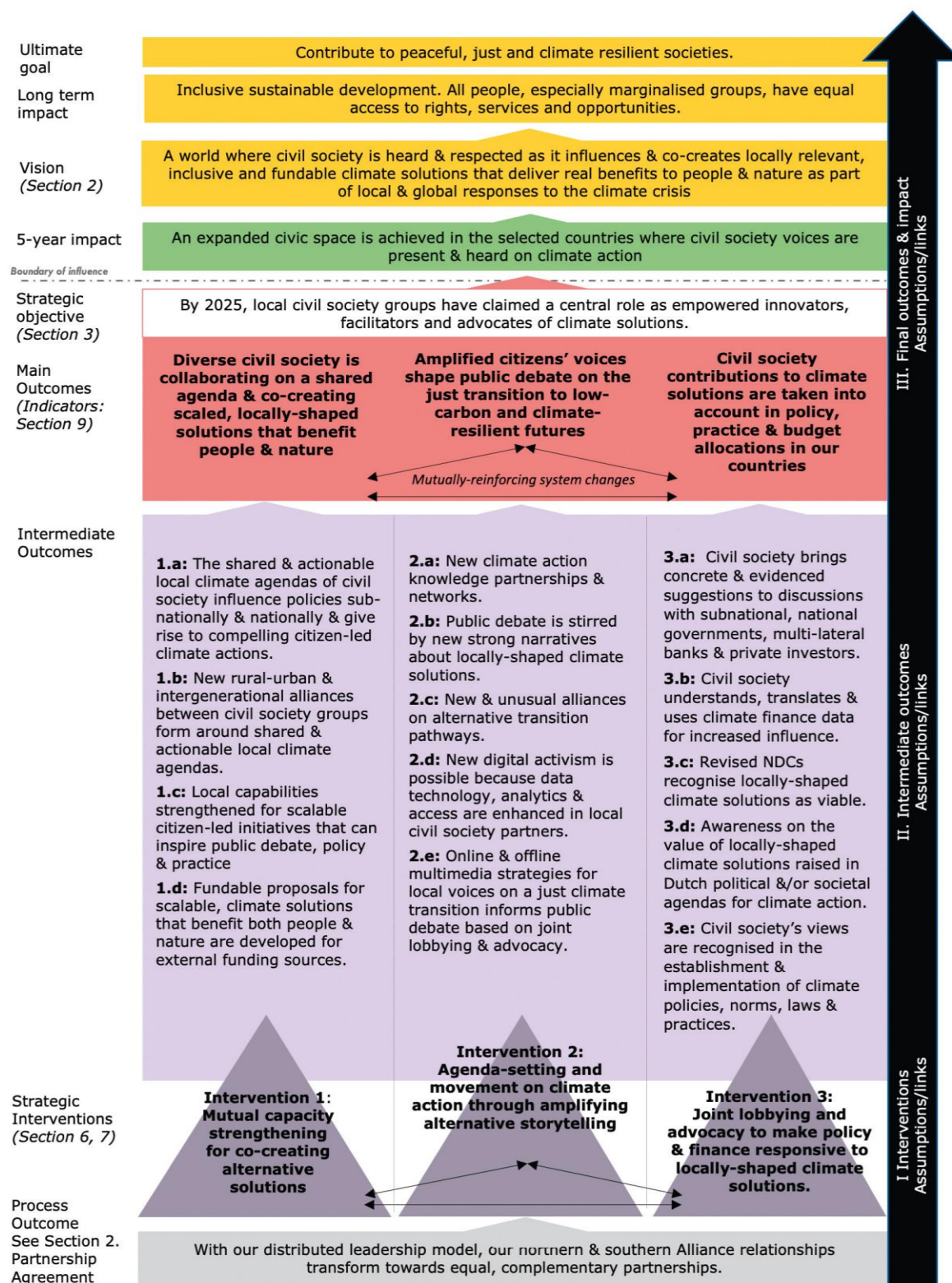


Figure 9 VCA ToC

Appendix 3: Detailed evaluation sample

Table 7 Target and actual sample

	Targeted sample	Actual Sample	Sample Description	Sampling approach	% achieved	
Programme level	39 engagements (SSIs, FGDs, KIIs, and group interviews) of which 10 were external	12	KIIs with internal VCA programme stakeholders	Purposive sampling	72%	
		12	FGDs with internal VCA programme stakeholders			
		4	KIIs with external programme-level validators	Random, purposive and convenience sampling		
	1 survey targeting all local partners (+- 198)			Total population sampling (census)	45% (survey uptake)	
	Targeted sample	Actual Sample		Sample Description	Sampling approach	% achieved
Country level (contribution claim)	42 CSO / local partner representatives (3 per contribution claim)	Bolivia	8	Claim 1: Escazú - 4 SSIs (2 women, 2 men - no youth)	Purposive sampling	133%
				Claim 2: Motacusito - 4 SSIs (2 women, 2 men- no youth)		
		Brazil	6	Claim 1: Capacity Strengthening - 1 SSI (1 woman - no youth)		100%
				Claim 2: School Meals - 1 FGD (3 men, 2 women - no youth) *The FGD with 5 participants has been accounted for as 5 SSIs		
		Indonesia	6	Claim 1: KOPI Alliance - 1 group SSI (3 women, no youth). *Counted as 3 SSIs		100%
				Claim 2: The Penjaringan Women's Federation - 3 SSIs (2 men, 1 woman - no youth)		
		Kenya	7	Claim 1: Mulika Tool - 3 SSIs (3 men -- no youth)		117%
				Claim 2: Institutionalizing gender-responsiveness - 4 SSIs (3 women, 1 man - no youth)		
		Paraguay	7	Claim 1: Marina Cué - 4 SSIs (3 women, 1 man - no youth)		117%
				Claim 2: Digital Inclusion - 3 SSIs (2 women, 1 man - no youth)		

	Targeted sample	Actual Sample		Sample Description	Sampling approach	% achieved
		Tunisia	5	Claim 1: GDAP - 1 SSI (2 women - no youth). *One interview was conducted, but it included two interviewees/representatives from the partner organisation		83%
				CLAIM 2: PLAC - 3 SSIs (2 men, 1 woman - no youth)		
		Zambia	5	Claim 1: DCCC - 3 SSIs, (3 men, no youth)		83%
				Claim 2: Seed Bills - 2 SSIs (1 man, 1 woman - no youth)		
	42		44	Engagements with local partners and Alliance members		105%
	56 Validators (4 per contribution claim)	Bolivia	9	Claim 1: Escazú - 4 SSIs (1 woman, 3 men - no youth), including a municipal official, an elected indigenous community leader and 2 x national government institutions	Combination of random, purposive and convenience sampling	113%
				Claim 2: Motacusito - 5 SSIs (4 women, 1 men - no youth), including an elected indigenous community leader, a municipal official, and 3 x CSO representatives		
		Brazil	5	Claim 1: Capacity Strengthening - 3 SSIs (2 women, 1 woman - no youth), including a regional government institution representative, and a national government institution representative		63%
				Claim 2: School Meals - 2 SSIs (2 men - no youth) including a national government institution representative and 2 x CWO representatives		
		Indonesia	8	Claim 1: KOPI Alliance - 4 SSIs (2 men, 2 women - no youth), including a municipal official, a regional government official, a community leader / volunteer and an educator		100%
				Claim 2: The Penjarangan Women's Federation (PWF) - 4 SSIs (3 men, 1 woman - no youth), including 1 local government official, 2 community leaders, 1 religious leader		
		Kenya	6	Claim 1: Mulika Tool - 3 SSIs (1 woman, 2 men - no youth) including 3 x country government representatives		75%
				Claim 2: Institutionalising gender-responsiveness - 3 SSIs (3 men - no youth) including 3 x country government representatives		

	Targeted sample	Actual Sample		Sample Description	Sampling approach	% achieved		
		Paraguay	7	Claim 1: Marina Cué - 4 SSIs (3 women, 1 man - no youth) including, 2 x national government representatives, a regional government representative and a CSO representative		88%		
				Claim 2: Digital Inclusion - 3 SSIs (2 women, 1 man - no youth) including 2 x CSO representatives and 2 x national government representatives				
		Tunisia	4	Claim 1: GDAP - 2 SSIs (2 men - no youth) including a CBO representative, a representative from an agricultural development group and a community leader		50%		
				Claim 2: PLAC - 2 SSIs (2 men - no youth) including a national government representative, and an independent consultant				
		Zambia	4	Claim 1: DCCC - 2 SSIs (2 men, no youth) including 2 local government representatives		63%		
				Claim 2: Seeds Bill - 2 SSIs (2 men, no youth) including 1 local government representative and 1 civil society organisation				
		56	43			Engagements with validators		79%
		28 FGDs with rightsholders (2 per contribution claim)	Bolivia	4		Claim 1: Escazú - 4 SSIs (1 woman, 3 men - no youth; no IPs & LCs) *counted as 2 FGDs	Random sampling (50%); convenience sampling (50 %)	100%
	Claim 2: Motacusito - 2 FGD (9 women, 2 men - 5 youth; 11 IPs & LCs)							
	Brazil		5	Claim 1: Capacity Strengthening - 4 SSIs (4 women, 2 men - 5 youth; all IP & LCs) *Holding a FGD was not possible, SSIs were conducted instead	125%			
Claim 2: School Meals - 1 SSI (1 man; IP & LC representative) *Holding a FGD was not possible, SSIs were conducted instead								
Indonesia	4		Claim 1: KOPI Alliance - 2 FGD (5 men, 9 women - all youth)	100%				
			Claim 2: The Penjanringan Women's Federation - 2 FGD (28 women - no youth)					
Kenya	4		Claim 1: Mulika Tool - 2 FGDs (14 women, 3 men - 3 youth)	100%				

	Targeted sample	Actual Sample		Sample Description	Sampling approach	% achieved
				Claim 2: Institutionalizing gender-responsiveness - 2 FGDs (12 women, 6 men - 3 youth)		
		Paraguay	4	Claim 1: Marina Cué - 2 FGDs (5 women, 5 men - no youth; 10 IPs & LCs)		100%
				Claim 2: Digital Inclusion - 2 FGDs (8 women, 4 men - 6 youth; all IP& LC)		
		Tunisia	3	Claim 1: GDAP - 1 FGD (1 man, 11 women - no youth; 12 IPs & LCs)		75%
				Claim 2: PLAC - 2 FGDs (5 men, 3 women - no youth)		
		Zambia	4	Claim 1: DCCC - 2 FGDs (7 men, 8 woman - no youth 15 LPs & LCs)		100%
				Claim 2: Seeds Bill - 2 FGDs (6 men, 17 women; 23 IP & LCs)		
	28	28		Engagements with rightsholders		100%
Internal / external split	44 % external engagements		38% external engagements			
Total	165 engagements		144 engagements			87%
	1 survey		1 survey			

Appendix 4: Alignment of the ETE with IOB evaluation quality criteria

This table expands Section 5 on how the evaluation addressed the IOB evaluation quality criteria

Table 8 Alignment of the ETE with IOB evaluation quality criteria (Netherlands MoFA)

IOB Criterion	How addressed in the ETE	Where Evidenced
Relevance	Assessed the extent to which the VCA programme addressed the specific needs and priorities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs), and other marginalised groups across country contexts	Section 6.1
Coherence	Assessed the extent to which the VCA programme's approaches aligned with the broader objectives of its partners, including local CSOs, governments, and donors; and to what extent and how were the principles of local ownership applied in engagement with local partners.	Section 6.2
Effectiveness, outcomes and impact	Examined plausibility of VCA's contribution to observed outcomes using a theory-based approach combining CA and RE. In terms of impact, the evaluation assessed early signals of systemic change and unintended effects as part of the effectiveness and outcomes criterion. Full long-term impact assessment is beyond the scope of an end-of-term evaluation, given that systemic governance change operates on timelines exceeding the programme period. Unintended effects – both positive and negative – are documented where the evidence base supports this, with acknowledged limitations on depth of coverage.	Section 6.3; country case studies
Efficiency	Assessed level of success of VCA's fund distribution to local partners (and final beneficiaries), and extracted lessons learnt.	Section 6.4
Sustainability	Examined the extent to which - and how - VCA partners increased institutional sustainability or achieved other forms of sustainability.	Section 6.6
Validity	Evaluation design, sampling, and tools were tailored to address the evaluation questions and capture outcomes, processes, and contextual influences.	Section 4 (Evaluation design and methodology)

IOB Criterion	How addressed in the ETE	Where Evidenced
Reliability	Standardised tools, protocols, and trained field teams were applied consistently across countries to ensure dependable findings.	Data collection and quality assurance procedures (ETE Fieldwork Report)
Triangulation	Multiple methods and data sources were used to cross-check findings and reduce reliance on any single source.	Embedded throughout the analysis and the report, with findings consistently verified across multiple data sources and data collection methods.
Completeness	Broad coverage across countries and stakeholder groups was ensured, with follow up engagements and validation workshops used to address gaps.	Sampling approach; section 5.2
Transparency	Methodological decisions, assumptions, and limitations were explicitly documented to support transparent interpretation of findings.	Section 4 (Evaluation design and methodology)
Context sensitivity	Methods were adapted to country-specific socio-political, legal, and operational contexts, including considerations for sensitive populations.	Section 4 (Evaluation design and methodology)
Proportionality	Conclusions were aligned with the strength of evidence, with explicit judgements applied and cautious interpretation where data were limited.	Embedded throughout the analysis and the report, ensuring that conclusions and claims are proportionate to the robustness of the underlying evidence.
Responsiveness	Iterative validation through stakeholder debriefs and feedback strengthened accuracy, credibility, and learning.	Debrief workshops, Sense-making workshop, feedback and recommendations workshop

Appendix 5: Methodology for Causal Mapping analysis

Overview

The evaluation uses AI-assisted causal mapping to synthesise qualitative data across the programme. This approach moves beyond simple thematic coding by focusing on the links between factors: identifying what influences what, according to stakeholders.

Data Strategy Amendment: Following internal discussion to prevent the repetition of causal links and outcomes, it was decided that the Outcome Harvesting (OH) database would be analysed separately. A dedicated subsection in the report was created for the OH top-level map, which was then against the overall map that combines primary and secondary data from the country-level. Furthermore, to enrich the country-level maps, the 2022/23/24 country annual reports were incorporated as additional data sources for each country analysis.

AI model used: The methodology uses Gemini 2.5 Pro (Google) to code data. A temperature setting of zero was applied throughout to ensure outputs are as deterministic and reproducible as possible. Temperature controls the randomness of AI responses; at zero, the same input will consistently produce the same output, reducing variability introduced by the model itself.

Coding Approach

The methodology uses a hybrid approach combining two modes of coding:

- **Deductive coding:** Deductive coding applies a predefined codebook based on the VCA Theory of Change (ToC) to test existing assumptions and intended pathways. This codebook was created by the analysis team alongside the Evaluation team by looking at the TOC wording/categories and adapting them to fit better with the causal mapping style of labels as well as some additional contextual factors identified during the testing phase such as VCA programme support/strategy/methodology, Climate change adaptation, COVID 19 etc. These links are therefore 'theory-driven' and designed to test whether the expected causal pathways in the ToC are visible in the data.
- **Inductive coding:** Where a causal claim in the source text did not fit any of the predefined labels, the AI was permitted to generate a new label of its own. These emergent labels allow the analysis to capture outcomes, actors, and contextual factors not anticipated in the original programme design.
- In practice, the vast majority of causal links in the maps were coded using the deductive codebook labels. Inductively generated labels represent a minority of the total and tend to cluster around contextual factors and locally specific outcomes. The Section below specifies, for each map type, whether deductive labels, inductive labels, or both are present.

Prompts used

A structured coding prompt was developed specifically for this analysis and iteratively tested on a sample of sources before being applied to the full dataset. The full prompt is available on request from the analysis team and is documented in the internal analysis files.

In summary, the prompt instructed the AI to:

- Read each source document in full.

- Identify every causal claim present in the text : every instance where the source states that one thing influenced, caused, enabled, or contributed to another.
- Attempt to label each factor (cause or effect) using the predefined codebook (see codebook below). If the factor did not fit an existing label, the AI was permitted to create a new label that best captured the meaning of the original text.
- Record the verbatim quote from the source text that supports each causal claim.
- Assign a sentiment to each effect (positive, neutral, or negative from the perspective of the interviewee or report author).
- Tag each claim as factual-past, factual-present, or hypothetical.
- Extract every causal claim exhaustively, regardless of its apparent relevance to the programme.

Note on prompt stability: Small changes in prompts can produce different results in generative AI. To address this, the same prompt was used consistently across all sources within each map type, and the temperature was fixed at zero.

Overview of maps

The table below provides an overview of each map produced in this analysis, including the data sources used, whether deductive or inductive labels predominate, and the key filters applied during the map-building phase. Filters are applied after AI coding and do not affect the coded data, they determine which subset of the coded links is displayed in a given map.

Table 9 Overview of maps

Map	Data Sources	Coding Type	Key filters applied	Contextual factors included?
Programme-level overall map	Programme-level interview write-ups, annual reports (programme level)	Hybrid (deductive ToC labels + inductive)	ai_type=1 (factual past/present only); soft recode with magnetic codebook (similarity $\geq$ 0.6); exclude: Challenges to VCA project implementation; exclude: Political instability; exclude: Difficult external circumstances; factor freq: top 10 by source count; link freq: min. 4 citations	Excluded from display (present in raw data but filtered out for this map to highlight programme pathways)
Programme-level IP & LCs	Programme level sources (33 total)	Hybrid (deductive + inductive)	ai_type=1; labels containing 'indig' or 'IPLC'; soft recode 8 magnets, similarity $\geq$ 0.6; link freq: min. 2 citations	Excluded from display
Overall combined map (programme + country)	All programme- and country-level sources	Hybrid (deductive + inductive)	ai_type=1; multiple ToC outcome labels excluded to focus on higher-level pathways; soft recode magnets; link freq: min. 4 citations; factor freq: top 10 by source count	Excluded from display

Women's focused map	Country-level sources only	Hybrid — additional inductive magnets for women-specific outcomes	ai_type=1; filtered for country-level sources; magnetic labels for women (see Section 6); focused on labels mentioning 'women', 'woman', 'females', 'ladies'; link freq: min. 2 citations	Included — contextual barriers (e.g. political instability, cultural norms) visible in women's map to show structural constraints
Youth focused map	Country-level sources only	Hybrid — additional inductive magnets for youth-specific outcomes	ai_type=1; filtered for country-level sources; magnetic labels for youth (see Section 6); focused on labels mentioning 'youth', 'young', 'young people'; link freq: min. 2 citations	Included where relevant to youth outcomes
Country-level maps (x7: Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Paraguay, Tunisia, Zambia)	Country reports, country ToCs, case study interview write-ups, contribution claims, annual reports (per country)	Hybrid (deductive ToC labels + inductive)	Per country: ai_type=1; sources filtered to country only; soft recode with magnetic codebook; link freq: min. 2–4 citations depending on country data volume	Included in raw data; selectively displayed depending on country narrative
Outcome Harvesting (OH) top-level map	OH database	Deductive (ToC labels applied to OH outcomes)	OH sources only; ai_type=1; magnetic codebook applied	Included where present in OH data

See a description of the most recurrent filters below.

Full Codebook

The codebook was developed by the Causal Map analysis team in collaboration with the evaluation team. It was constructed by reviewing the VCA Theory of Change wording and translating it into causal mapping labels: shorter, noun-phrase labels that describe a factor that can be a cause or effect in a causal chain. Additional contextual factor labels were added during the prompt-testing phase, based on factors that emerged consistently in the data (e.g., COVID-19, political instability, climate change impacts).

The codebook is structured in levels, reflecting the ToC hierarchy from inputs through to long-term outcomes. The prefixes in brackets indicate the level and type of label:

- [IN] = VCA programme inputs / strategies
- [OUT] = Immediate outputs
- [STO] = Short-term outcomes
- [S/MTO] = Short-to-medium-term outcomes
- [MTO] = Medium-term outcomes
- [LTO] = Long-term outcomes

- No prefix = contextual factors (external, not programme-driven)

Note: Labels without a prefix bracket are contextual factors

(0,)VCA programme support/strategy/methodology

Climate change adaptation

Challenges to VCA project implementation

Challenges to VCA project implementation; programme management

Challenges to VCA project implementation; Resource constraints and administrative processes

Challenges to VCA project implementation; monitoring and evaluation

(0,0)VCA project adaptation

Political instability/challenges/corruption

Government engagement

Government engagement; government support

Government engagement; government awareness

Difficult external circumstances; Poverty

Difficult external circumstances; Unemployment

Difficult external circumstances; Climate change impacts

Difficult external circumstances; COVID-19

Difficult external circumstances; health pandemics

(2,)[IN] Mutual capacity strengthening

(2,)[IN] Mutual capacity strengthening; training and activities

(2,)[IN] Broker new alliances

(2,)[IN] Inclusive convening

(2,)[IN] Storytelling and digital activism

(3,)[IN] Joint lobbying and advocacy

(3,)[STO] Local partners capture and co-create new inclusive narratives and debates on climate action

(3,)[STO] Local partners engage in peer-to-peer learning/capacity strengthening/research/knowledge sharing activities/networks

(3,)[STO] Local partners generate citizen-led data with support from IPLCs; Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

(3,)[S/MTO] Local partners co-create shared climate agendas/solutions/actions

(3,)[S/MTO] Local partners co-create shared climate agendas/solutions/actions; Co-creating Knowledge and Inclusive Climate Agendas

(3,)[S/MTO] Local and grassroots organisation capacities are strengthened

- (3,)[S/MTO] Local and grassroots organisation capacities are strengthened; Strengthening civil society capacity for climate action
- (3,)[S/MTO] Locally led community funds are identified to support climate initiatives
- (3,)[S/MTO] Local partners understand/translate/use climate finance data for increased influence
- (3,)[S/MTO] Communication strategies are created and implemented in offline and online civic spaces
- (3,)[S/MTO] Evidence-based collaborative advocacy strategies based on co-created climate agendas are designed and implemented by local partners
- (3,)[S/MTO] Fundable proposals for scalable climate solutions are developed for external funding sources
- (4,)[MTO] Increased engagement by local partners and their constituencies (women, youth, Indigenous people) in climate change discussions and decision-making fora
- (4,)[MTO] Increased engagement by local partners and their constituencies (women, youth, Indigenous people) in climate change discussions and decision-making fora; Women's social and political participation
- (4,)[MTO] Civil society views are recognised as being key in the design and implementation of climate policies/laws/norms/practices
- (4,)[MTO] Awareness of locally led climate solutions is raised amongst the public and key stakeholders (including decision-makers/donors and the Dutch government)
- (5,)[LTO] Shifts take place in national and subnational policies to enable and support citizen-led climate actions
- (5,)[LTO] Shifts take place in national and subnational policies to enable and support citizen-led climate actions; policy change
- (5,)[LTO] Donor agencies and investors' (and Dutch government) processes are more coherent with locally shaped climate solutions
- (5,)[LTO] Increased and more diverse funding flows are channelled to support locally shaped climate solutions
- (1,)[OUT] Partners access data/data technology/analytics
- (1,)[OUT] Partners access data/data technology/analytics; Accessing Data, Technology, and Alliances for Climate Action
- (1,)[OUT] New unusual and disruptive urban-rural and intergenerational alliances and coalitions are formed
- (1,)[OUT] Improved collaboration and cooperation
- (1,)[OUT] Improved collaboration and cooperation; Building Alliances and Collaborative Advocacy
- (1,)[OUT] Improved collaboration and cooperation; new alliances

Note on inductive labels: In addition to the deductive labels above, the AI generated further labels inductively during the coding phase. These are not listed in the table above because they emerged

from the data and varied across source documents and countries. In the Causal Map software, inductive links can be identified by their labels: any factor label that does not appear in the codebook above was generated inductively by the AI.

- **Map-building process and filters applied**

Map-building is a distinct step that happens after AI coding. The coded data (thousands of individual causal claims extracted from the source texts) is assembled into maps by a human analyst. The analyst applies filters to select which subset of the data is displayed and how to better answer the Evaluation questions. The underlying data is unchanged, but the displayed map shows only the relevant portion.

The following filters were consistently applied across all maps as a baseline:

- **Claim type filter (ai_type=1):** Only causal claims tagged as 'factual-past' or 'factual-present' are shown. Claims tagged as hypothetical (i.e., wishes, plans, or aspirational statements) are excluded. This ensures maps represent what stakeholders report as having actually happened, not what they hope will happen.
- **Soft recode / magnetic labels:** After initial coding, the magnetic codebook above is applied using a semantic similarity threshold of ≥ 0.6 . This groups overlapping or near-synonym labels (e.g., 'Economic factors' and 'Economic issues') into the canonical codebook labels, reducing label fragmentation without losing the granularity of the original coding.
- **Link frequency filters:** Maps typically show only links cited in a minimum number of sources (usually 2–4, depending on the map and data volume). This displays the most robust, cross-source findings and prevents the map from being dominated by one-off mentions or too much detail that impacts readability.
- **Factor frequency filters:** Some maps limit the number of visible factors (e.g., top 10 by source count). This is also a presentational decision to improve readability; it does not affect the underlying analysis.
- **Source filters:** Country-level maps include only sources from the relevant country. Programme-level maps include only programme-level sources.

In addition to these baseline filters, specific maps applied contextual factor exclusions where the analytical purpose was to highlight programme pathways rather than the broader contextual environment. These exclusions are documented in the map overview table above. Contextual factors remain in the underlying dataset and were visible and available in exploratory maps used during the analysis process.

Coding contextual factors

Contextual factors such as political conditions, COVID-19, and climate events were coded and treated as follows:

Coding as standard factor labels (nodes): Contextual factors were not given a separate node type or structural category in the causal maps. They were coded using the same mechanism as programme outcomes: as labelled nodes connected to other nodes by causal links. What distinguishes them is their label: contextual factor labels either carry no prefix bracket (e.g., 'Political instability/challenges/corruption', 'Difficult external circumstances; COVID-19') or are assigned to

the 'Difficult external circumstances' parent category. Programme outcome labels, by contrast, carry the [IN], [OUT], [STO], [MTO], or [LTO] prefix bracket.

This distinction is visible in the maps and in the codebook. Because they share the same node structure, contextual factors participate in the causal network in the same way as programme outcomes: they can be causes, effects, or both. This is intentional as it allows the analysis to trace, for example, how political instability inhibited a programme output, or how COVID-19 disrupted a causal pathway.

Implications for interpreting the causal structure and TOC validity analysis: In the TOC validity analysis (Section 6.3.9), the presence of contextual factors in the maps is relevant because:

- Where a contextual factor appears as a cause of a programme outcome (e.g., 'Political instability leads to reduced civil society engagement'), it shows that the expected ToC pathway was operating in an unstable environment. The ToC assumption that programme activities would lead to that outcome is therefore partially supported but influenced by external factors.
- Where contextual factors are filtered out in the main programme-level maps (as noted in Section 4 and 6), this is an analytical choice to highlight programme-attributed causal pathways. The contextual factor data remains in the underlying dataset and was reviewed by the analysis team when interpreting country-specific findings.

Appendix 6: Fieldwork report



End-term Evaluation of the VCA programme

Fieldwork Report

10 February 2026

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1. Introduction

Southern Hemisphere has been commissioned to conduct the end-term evaluation (ETE) of the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands (MoFA). The ETE's objective is two-fold: to generate knowledge and to trigger action. The knowledge component focuses on understanding how VCA's strategic pathways, mutual capacity strengthening for co-creation of alternative solutions; agenda-setting on climate action through alternative storytelling; and joint lobbying and advocacy, contributed to programme outcomes, providing critical lessons on what worked, what did not work, and why. The action objectives are designed to inform decision-making for VCA stakeholders, including the Alliance partners, donors, national governments, and civil society organisations (CSOs). Thus, the evaluation seeks to assess the effectiveness and impact of the programme and provide insights for learning for future, similar programmes.

This report provides an account of data collection conducted up to 10th January 2026. It describes the activities implemented in preparation for fieldwork, as well as limitations. Lastly, it presents a work plan mapping out the next activities required for the timely completion of the ETE¹.

2. Fieldwork preparation, management and quality assurance

The Southern Hemisphere team is composed of seven (7) members: Elena Mancebo (team lead), Tracey Phillips (project manager), Brilliant Bhebe (coordinator and evaluator), Camilla Buenting (coordinator and evaluator), Lisa Petersen (evaluator), Brindley Fortuin (evaluator), and Claire Julius (evaluator). In addition, seven (7) national consultants were contracted to conduct fieldwork activities in each of the programme-targeted countries; namely Valeria Campos (Bolivia), Verena Dodabella (Brazil), Saleh Abdulah (Indonesia), Mulubi Asiligwa (Kenya), Marisol Zubizarreta (Paraguay), Vision Development (Tunisia), and Mutale Chonta (Zambia).

Fieldwork was conducted at two programmatic levels and across two main phases.

- The first level / phase of primary data collection focused on the VCA programme's overall design, governance, implementation dynamics, and outcomes achieved. Areas of investigation included programmer relevance and coherence, effectiveness, partnerships and sustainability.
- The second level / phase of fieldwork focused on country-level primary data collection. The aim of this phase was to gather data regarding programme implementation and partnership strengths, outcomes achieved, and sustainability of results. In addition, a key focus of this phase was to gather additional data – and verify – two contribution claims per country, in line with the evaluation's use of Contribution Analysis. The fourteen contribution claims were selected by the Southern Hemisphere team following a review of the VCA programme's Outcome Harvesting database and the application of a set of selection criteria², agreed to during the ETE inception phase. Additional data relating to each of the selected contribution claims was gathered during online Theory of Change workshops, which were conducted with representatives of each country Regional Team.

2.1 Fieldwork preparation

2.1.1 Programme level fieldwork

In preparation for programme level fieldwork, a team orientation and training session was conducted on the 21 May 2025. This was attended by the Southern Hemisphere team as well as the national consultants for Brazil, Indonesia and Kenya³. The training covered the following key elements:

- An overview of the VCA programme, including its rationale and objectives
- A review of the objectives and sampling approach of the evaluation
- Key ethical considerations (e.g. anonymity of input, obtaining respondent consent, etc)
- A walk-through of the data collection tools
- An overview of the fieldwork process, including coordination, roles and responsibilities, and timelines

2.1.2 Country level fieldwork

For the second phase of primary data collection (at country level), all seven national consultants were engaged. To prepare these team members, two - two-hour fieldwork training sessions were conducted online. The first session took place on the 10 July 2025, with the national consultants for Brazil, Indonesia and Kenya. The second session took place on the 09 November 2025 with the national consultants for Tunisia, Bolivia and Zambia. In addition, an update session was held with the national consultants for Brazil, Kenya and Indonesia, to update them on the change in ETE scope, methodology and sample. A separate session was held on the 24 October for the national consultant for Paraguay due to conflicting schedules. These sessions covered the following topics:

- An overview of the VCA programme, including its rationale and objectives
- A review of the objectives and sampling approach of the evaluation
- Update on the ETE methodology, namely the use of Contribution Analysis coupled with the integration of a Realist Evaluation lens
- Key ethical considerations (e.g. anonymity of input, obtaining respondent consent, etc.)
- A walk-through of the data collection tools
- An overview of the fieldwork process, including coordination, roles and responsibilities, and timelines
- Data quality assurance mechanisms and processes

In preparation for entry into field, the evaluation team undertook the following activities to support the national consultants, and ensure a well-coordinated fieldwork process, plus the collection and submission of quality data:

- Fieldwork schedules were prepared by the project coordinators, in consultation with the national consultants and key VCA contacts at country level. An online, access-protected collaborative fieldwork schedule was prepared for each round of primary data collection in each country. This was shared with the national consultants and the VCA contacts to allow all team members to track progress with fieldwork arrangements and logistics – and to capture the details of proposed evaluation participants for random sampling by the Southern Hemisphere team.
- The use of online schedules ensured that the Southern Hemisphere coordinators were kept up-to-date on field visits and any necessary challenges or changes to scheduled data collection. This allowed for ongoing collaboration with the national consultants as well as timely troubleshooting where this was required.

- The data collection schedules and guides (for both semi-structured interviews - SSIs and focus group discussions - FGDs) were piloted in the first engagements by the Southern Hemisphere team members and the national consultants. Based on this pilot, the tools were refined and adjusted prior to continuing with the data collection process. This approach helped to ensure that the tools were aligned to the stipulated interview times, and to ensure that the terms and concepts used in the questions were contextually appropriate and non-ambiguous.
- Each consultant was required to submit one complete transcript of an interview and an FGD during the initial stages of fieldwork. This was reviewed by the Southern Hemisphere team lead and/or the project manager, who provided feedback to the national consultants on any data gaps or areas for reframing of questions.
- In addition, anonymised examples of previously prepared transcripts were shared with the national consultants to provide them with examples of appropriate forms of data capture, as well as data quality standards required by Southern Hemisphere.

3. Data collection

The following section of this report outlines the achieved sample for data collection at programme and country level.

3.1.1 Programme level fieldwork

The initial round of programme level data collection took place over the period 10 June 2025 to 10 July 2025. Data collection methods included SSIs with key informants and FGDs. All engagements were conducted virtually.

Additional rounds of data collection took place in August 2025 (gender- and youth-focused FGDs in Nairobi, Kenya) and over the course of November and December 2025 (four validator interviews were conducted).

Key stakeholders identified for this phase were part of i) VCA programme governance structures and funding partner, ii) global programme team members, iii) external consultants, iv) RTs, and v) external stakeholders. The planned evaluation sample included **nineteen (19) key informant interviews** (some of which were group interviews) and **twelve (12) focus group discussions**. A summary of the data collected to date is provided in **Table 1** below.

Table 1 Summary of programme level data collection

Stakeholder	Method	Planned	Actual	Sample criteria and additional notes
Joint Programme Team	KII	6	6	A purposive sampling approach was used to identify respondents for programme level data collection. This approach ensured the inclusion of stakeholders that were knowledgeable about programme design, implementation, and governance (e.g., Regional Teams, Joint Programme Team, Taskforces and Steering Committee).
Alliance Programme Director / Secretariat	KII	1	1	
PMEL Taskforce	FGD	1	1	
Communications Taskforce	FGD	1	1	These key informants were selected based on their unique insights into programme implementation, partnership dynamics, relevance of programme interventions and strategies, and Southern leadership (EQ3, EQ7).
Finance Taskforce	FGD	1	1	
Steering Committee	FGD	1	2 KIIs	

Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative	KII	1	2	Selection criteria prioritised diversity in roles, organisations and structures (e.g., secretariat, finance, communications) and geographic location (for example, sampled respondents were included from all seven programme-targeted countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Tunisia, Zambia, and Paraguay). The regional team members that participated in FGDs included representatives from each of the alliance organisations (AMwA, Fundación Avina, SDI, SSN, Hivos, and WWF).
Global Programme team (representatives of Alliance Members, i.e. Hivos, Avina, SSN, WWF, SDI, AMwA)	FGD	1	1	
Gender audit team (external consultants)	KII	1	1	
Regional Teams (RTs)	FGD	7	7	
VCA programme stakeholders	FGD	1	1	An FGD focussing on programmatic elements related to gender and youth was scheduled during the four-day close out event of the VCA programme, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya.
validators	KII	10	4	These respondents are those considered "external" to the programme; that is, they are knowledgeable about the thematic area or topic under which the selected change stories are classified, but independent of VCA funding and programming.
Total		19 KIIs 13 FGDs	16 KIIs 12 FGDs	

3.1.2 Country-level fieldwork

The selection of respondents for country level data collection was guided by the abovementioned selection of 14 contribution claims for in-depth investigation and validation (two contribution claims per country).

In consultation with key VCA contacts in each country, the Southern Hemisphere coordinators and national consultants identified programme partners for evaluation participation. In addition, sampling lists were compiled of up to 30 rightsholders and eight to 10 validators / validators per contribution claim. The evaluation team drew a random sample from each list in discussion with the relevant national consultant to eliminate - as far as possible - any potential bias (i.e. selection of respondents that were more predisposed towards a positive assessment of the VCA programme). More details on the sample criteria are discussed in the table 2 below.

Country-level data collection took place over the period 01 November 2025 to 06 January 2026. Both virtual and in-person engagements were conducted. A summary of the data collected is provided below.

Table 2 Summary of country level data collection

Stakeholder	Method	Planned	Actual	Sample criteria
CSO representatives	KIIs	42, of which 6 per country - 3 per claim	41, as outlined below:	These respondents were selected from VCA's local partners and/or consortium members.

			Bolivia: 8 Brazil: 6 Indonesia: 6 Kenya: 7 Paraguay: 7 Tunisia: 5 Zambia: 5	A purposive sampling strategy was followed, i.e. respondents must have been involved in programme activities related to the selected contribution claims. They were able to speak to both programme implementation, as well as the outcomes achieved, plus contributing factors and actors (including VCA and external factors and stakeholders). A purposive sampling strategy was used, together with convenience sampling if accessibility was limited (e.g., the organisations were located in remote areas). This approach was justified by possible logistical constraints and the need for timely data collection.
Rightsholders	FGD	28, of which 4 per country - 2 per claim	28, as outlined below: Bolivia: 4 Brazil: 5 Indonesia: 4 Kenya: 4 Paraguay: 4 Tunisia: 3 Zambia: 4	RTs and country partners were requested to provide a list of 30 – 40 rightsholders, (15-20 per change story), i.e. potential FGD participants, from which a random sample of 20 was drawn by the evaluation team (10 per change story). Selection criteria included – where possible – representation by vulnerable groups including women, youth, and indigenous communities, to ensure that marginalised voices are captured.
Validators	SSIs	56: 8 per country - 4 per claim	44, as outlined below: Bolivia: 9 Brazil: 5 Indonesia: 8 Kenya: 6 Paraguay: 7 Tunisia: 4 Zambia: 5	These respondents are considered "external" to the programme but must be knowledgeable about the thematic area under which the selected contribution claims are classified. They are independent of VCA funding and programming. A list of potential respondents was compiled based on input received from VCA RTs and partner organisations (or members of their networks). A list of 10-12 possible respondents was provided as far as possible to the evaluation team, from which four respondents per contribution claim were randomly selected. Where 10-12 possible respondents could not be identified for a particular contribution claim, the evaluation team requested additional names from the rightsholders during their FGDs. Engagements were conducted with those respondents who were available during the fieldwork period, and who agreed to participate in the evaluation.

Total	42 KIIs 98 SSIs 28 FGDs	35 KIIs 85 SSIs 28 FGDs	
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4. Challenges and mitigation

Data collection, which was originally scheduled to conclude in August 2025 (as per the original inception report), was extended to the period November 2025 to January 2026. The following challenges were observed:

- Delays with inception report feedback and finalisation, including donor permission to enter the field:** The review and finalisation of the evaluation inception report, as well as receipt of donor permission to enter field, was delayed as a result of an external review process. Revisions to the inception report were requested, which further delayed the evaluation team's entry into field.
- Delays with country samples and respondent detail:** Following the inception report review, the evaluation scope and sample were revised. This required a review and re-drafting of sample frameworks for country-level data collection. The population of the revised frameworks, including respondent details and guidelines for initiation of contact with sampled respondents, took longer than anticipated. This was particularly the case with identifying and engaging with contribution claim validators and validators.
- Respondent responsiveness and availability:** Scheduling of interviews also took a protracted period of time. Respondents were, at times, slow to respond to requests for interviews, requiring follow-up emails and calls by the evaluation coordination team. The evaluation team addressed this as far as possible via escalation to the RTs and PMEL TF for their support and guidance. The national consultants also supported with the fieldwork scheduling process but struggled to reach participants. This affected sample size. Details of the final sample can be found on Annex I.
- A number of factors contributed to slow levels of responsiveness and availability amongst the identified respondents. These include the shifting of data collection to the end of the calendar year⁴, and the VCA programme's entry into its closing phase. This meant that many programme team members were in the process of transitioning to new projects or finalising outstanding tasks prior to cessation of their programme contracts. Furthermore, a number of proposed evaluation respondents were unavailable as they were attending COP30 in Brazil. As a result of these challenges, some respondents did not respond to requests for evaluation participation despite repeated requests from the evaluation team, or did not arrive for scheduled interviews.
- In countries like Tunisia, the in-country alliance member was not available to assist and support the coordination team and national consultant with the finalisation of the sample, nor with fieldwork scheduling. This created additional work for the partner organisations on the ground, who often had limited capacity to assist with sampling and fieldwork logistics, affecting mostly the sample of rightsholders and validators.
- Stakeholder fatigue and programme discontinuity:** In some regions, for example Brazil, some of the proposed evaluation participants appeared overburdened by repeated requests for interview participation. Furthermore, because several partner organisation projects had been completed, participants in Tunisia, Brazil and Bolivia were asked to reflect on activities no

longer actively underway. This created a sense of distance from their lived experiences. This was particularly the case for local partner organisation representatives.

- **Remoteness of certain case studies and limited connectivity:** The physical distance between sites and poor infrastructure hindered data collection. For instance, in Zambia, areas where interviews were to be conducted were spread far apart, a factor not initially accounted for in the fieldwork schedule nor in the budget. Similarly, in Bolivia, the Motacusito community was considerably isolated from Pantanal and Chaco region, which made follow-up interviews in the case of unforeseen cancellations unfeasible. In other cases, participants were geographically dispersed across different departments/provinces/states and remote rural areas, which eventually made conducting in-person FGDs impractical. In addition, the remoteness of certain areas meant that there was limited internet connectivity for online engagements as an alternative to face-to-face data collection. This challenge affected the rightsholders and validators sample.
- **Random sample feasibility:** There were difficulties in implementing the donor requirement of random sampling of rightsholders and validators. For example, in some cases the affected communities were so small that it was not realistic to apply random sampling, or even to conduct two focus group discussions. In addition, a number of difficulties were noted in identifying sufficient validators from which to draw a sample; many of those who were identified were not available or willing to participate in the evaluation; and those who were, did not always have a great deal of in-depth knowledge of the programme and the outcomes covered by the contribution claim.
- **Language barriers:** A challenge particular to Paraguay was the engagement with multiple indigenous groups, who spoke languages other than Spanish and Guaraní. Other FGD participants volunteered to act as interpreters.
- **Environmental and seasonal factors:** Local conditions and seasonal activities interfered with evaluation participation. In Zambia, fieldwork took place during the agricultural season, making it difficult to get participants to leave their fields for discussions. Additionally, some Zambian FGDs had to be held outdoors, which made it difficult to conduct planned participatory activities effectively. In another instance, weather and poor network connections in Zambia required participants and the national consultant to be highly flexible during data collection processes.

4.1 Mitigation Strategies

The local consultants, in collaboration with the country coordinators from the SH team and the local partners, adjusted fieldwork challenges using the following mitigation strategies:

- **Adapting data collection formats:** When convening respondents for a focus group discussion proved difficult due to geographic location or scheduling conflicts, consultants pivoted to individual interviews. For example, for the Bolivia Escazú contribution claim, the focus group individual, online interviews were conducted to overcome the challenge of participants being spread across seven different departments. Similarly, in Brazil, rightsholders were interviewed individually, instead of the planned focus group discussions, to address limited availability and to avoid overburdening sampled participants with data collection requirements. In instances where turnout was lower than expected, consultants merged focus groups to maintain their participatory and interactive nature. For example, in the Bolivia Motacusito case, the consultant combined the participants into one group.



- **Leveraging partner networks for access:** To support the data collection process and facilitate access to remote communities, consultants relied on alliance members and project partners. For example, in Motacusito, the national consultant was accompanied by a WWF programme coordinator, who provided a connection to the community and "fasten the process of collecting information". In Tunisia, VCA programme partners were instrumental in supporting primary data collection in Sfax, Kerkennah and Beni Khedache. This support was also necessary in Brazil, albeit remotely.
- **Follow-ups and flexibility around scheduling:** Despite a number of respondents being out of office for their end-of-year leave, and project closures, consultants managed to secure interviews through persistent outreach. In Zambia, one programme officer was on leave but managed to participate in the interview, while another whose contract had ended also made the effort to participate. In another instance, a participant in Zambia was lauded for being "flexible to endure a **bad connection due to weather and poor network**" to ensure the interview was completed.
- **Intentional facilitation for inclusivity:** To mitigate gender imbalances in groups, facilitators used targeted engagement techniques. In Kenya (Marsabit), where only three women participated in a focus group discussion compared to thirteen men, the facilitator was intentional in ensuring those women contributed significantly to the debate to ensure that their perspectives were gathered and recorded.
- **Flexibility despite time constraints:** Where sampled respondents had limited time available for evaluation participation, national consultants scheduled follow-up engagements or requested written feedback on key evaluation questions, and even proceeded with data collection in the annual holiday period, such as in Tunisia. Rich conversations led to engagements being continued in a second, follow-up engagements, such as in Paraguay.

5. Next steps

The following table outlines the next steps for the final phase of the evaluation.

Phase	Activity	Date
Primary data collection and analysis	Prepare fieldwork report with VCA for comment	21 January 2026
	Prepare first draft of integrated evaluation report plus country reports	21 January – 13 Feb 2026
	Presentation of topline / preliminary findings	04 February 2026
Submission of draft report and case studies	Draft report submitted for review and comment	14 February 2026
	Review and provision of feedback on draft report and case studies	14 – 27 February 2026
Discussion and review of draft deliverables	Feedback workshop with VCA Reference Group and collaborative formulation of draft set of recommendations	03 March 2026
	Validation and sense-making meetings with Regional Teams	Week of 9 March 2026
	Validation meeting with Alliance members, and review of draft recommendations	Week of 9 March 2026
Finalisation phase		

Finalisation of report and case studies	Comments / feedback integrated into evaluation report and case studies, and final report and case studies submitted to VCA	13 March 2026
Review and approval by VCA Reference Group	Final approval process of all evaluation deliverables	24 - 27 March 2026
Final report submitted to MoFA for review, plus presentation to MoFA	Final report shared with MoFA, plus presentation of key findings and recommendations	Week of 30 March 2026

Appendix 7: Evaluation triangulation strategy

This section clarifies the VCA End-Term Evaluation approach to data triangulation to strengthen the validity and credibility of findings and to explicitly address IOB's concerns about poor triangulation strategy, reliance on internal stakeholders, and insufficient use of external perspectives.

We applied triangulation at three levels, namely:

Methodological triangulation by using a variety of methods, including qualitative and quantitative primary data collection:

- Qualitative: Contribution Analysis, Realist-informed CMO analysis, KIIs with validators, SSIs and FGDs.
- Quantitative: Partner survey, indicator data, outcome harvesting trends, efficiency rubric.
- Secondary data and programme documents: Annual reports, gender audit, Southern leadership review, NLGF analysis, external literature (i.e., specifically on partnerships).
- Analytical tools: NVIVO (qualitative coding), Causal Mapping (outcome and contribution pattern visualisation and Social Network Analysis).

Each evaluation question will be answered with at least two different methodological lenses (e.g., EQ1 effectiveness: CA case study + survey trend + validator validation).

Data source triangulation by using diverse sources, internal and external to the VCA programme:

- Internal stakeholders: VCA governance structures, partners, PMEL taskforce, regional teams.
- External stakeholders (40% of new sample): validators (community leaders, local government officials, NGOs not funded by VCA), MoFA reps, sector experts and representatives from global strategic partners.
- Rights holders: marginalised groups (women, youth, indigenous peoples), to validate lived experiences of outcomes (included above as internal stakeholders).

The final number of validators and external stakeholder interviews is at 38% of total engagements as recommended, ensuring each contribution story and programme-level finding has external validation.

Perspective triangulation by carefully considering various perspectives to provide a robust, rich and useful findings and conclusions:

- Programme perspective: partner capacity, Alliance value-add, Southern leadership, participation in decision-making.
- User/rights holder perspective: inclusion, voice amplification, access to decision-making spaces, appreciation of local knowledge.
- External observer perspective: plausibility of program contribution, and assessment of alternative explanations.

Appendix 8: Use of AI in the evaluation

AI tools, including ChatGPT, Allyze, and Google Notebook, have been integrated into the report-writing and data analysis process. The use of these AI tools has been guided by specific principles that prioritise responsible usage, ensuring that the integrity of the evaluation and the confidentiality of sensitive data are maintained at all stages. A technical guidance document was created, providing clear directions for report writers on how to appropriately use AI tools during the VCA evaluation. This guidance was disseminated during the report-writing briefing session to ensure all evaluators were aligned with the ethical standards and best practices, particularly in line with IOB (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department) guidelines.

Purpose and role of AI in VCA evaluation:

AI tools were employed to assist evaluators with tasks related to language, structure, clarity, and the synthesis of data. AI tools like ChatGPT and Google Notebook were particularly useful for streamlining the report-writing process, while Allyze was leveraged to strengthen the contribution claim narratives by assisting in the analysis of data (together with manual coding using NVIVO 12 software).

ChatGPT and Google Notebook were used to:

- Structure and format report sections.
- Summarise anonymised findings and provide clarity in complex language.
- Enhance grammar, readability, and consistency.
- Check the coherence of causal logic and Theory of Change (ToC) pathways.
- Generate tables, lists, and headings from summarised text.
- Check cross-country report synthesis.

Allyze was used to:

- Strengthen contribution claim narratives by analysing and summarising data from multiple sources.
- Assist in the synthesis of large data sets and the identification of trends that aligned with VCA's goals, ensuring that all contribution claims were backed by solid, verifiable evidence.

Data privacy and confidentiality measures

The following instructions were provided to report writers:

- DO anonymise and replace identifiable data with generic terms (e.g., "Respondent 1", "Community Leader A").
- DO ensure all data used is summarised and anonymised before inputting into AI tools.
- DON'T upload raw data such as interview transcripts, focus group notes, or unpublished reports that contain confidential or sensitive information.
- DON'T use AI tools for analysing confidential information or for processing data that could potentially identify participants.

Allyze and other tools were never used to analyse or store sensitive or confidential information. They were strictly used for the analysis of anonymised, non-confidential data, particularly in relation to synthesising contribution claims that could be cross-verified with programme data.

Quality and ethics

The integration of AI tools into the VCA evaluation was guided by ethical principles and quality standards:

- Cross-checking all AI-generated content for factual accuracy with verified programme data.
- Ensuring neutrality and professional tone in all AI-generated text, aligning with the evaluation's core values of objectivity.
- Distinguishing between AI-generated summaries and human evaluators' own interpretations or evaluative commentary.
- AI was used strictly for writing aid and data synthesis. It was never allowed to generate conclusions or replace human analysis. Evaluators remained fully accountable for the final content, ensuring that all conclusions were evidence-based and supported by programme data.

Appendix 9: Efficiency rubric

Introduction

The focus to the efficiency study is on the extent of program's success in distributing funds to local partners. In this context, the program defined success around two key parameters: 1) a large proportion of grant funding is distributed to local partners (and administrative costs are minimised) and 2) grant funding reaches traditionally marginalised or hard-to-reach groups. In addition, the efficiency criterion as part of the DAC criteria requires an enquiry into the extent to which reasonable resources (time, funding, systems, etc.) were used to achieve intended outputs at the program level (over and above the Next Level Grant Facility as a sub-activity).

This rubric is designed to assess VCA program efficiency in terms of financial, system and time dimensions. It includes both qualitative descriptions and quantitative scoring guidelines.

Quantitative and qualitative information collected during the evaluation will be weighted against the rubric to ensure a robust interpretation of findings against the program's own definition of success.

Proposed scoring system:

- Unsatisfactory = 1 point
- Needs Improvement = 2 points
- Meets Expectations = 3 points
- Exceeds Expectations = 4 points

Total Possible Score: 24 points (6 criteria × 4 points max)

Performance interpretation:

- 18-24 points (High Efficiency): Strong, consistent efficiency across all dimensions.
- 13-17 points (Moderate Efficiency): Meets basic expectations; some improvement needed.
- 8-12 points (Low Efficiency): Inefficient in multiple areas.
- Less than 7 points (Critical Inefficiency): Urgent corrective action needed.

Criteria	Unsatisfactory (1 pt)	Needs Improvement (2 pts)	Meets Expectations (3 pts)	Exceeds Expectations (4 pts)
Funding flows to local partners (Main grant)	Less than 49,6% of the Alliance budget is used for sub-granting of local partners		49,6% of the Alliance budget is used for sub-granting of local partners	More than 49,6% of the Alliance budget is used for sub-granting of local partners
	Staff costs were higher than initial MOFA approved budget		No increase in staff costs compared to initial MOFA approved budget	Staff costs were lower than initial MOFA approved budget
	Indirect costs are higher than 15%		Indirect costs are 15%	Indirect costs are below 15%
Funding flows to local partners (NLGF)	Less than 70% of the funds reach final beneficiaries / grantees		70% of the funds reach final	More than 70% of the funds reach final beneficiaries / grantees



			beneficiaries / grantees	
	More than 5% indirect costs for the Alliance member		5% indirect costs for the Alliance member	Less than 5% indirect costs for the Alliance member
	More than of 10% indirect costs for the fund manager and/or more than 15% of direct costs for the fund manager		A maximum of 10% indirect costs for the fund manager and maximum 15% of direct costs for the fund manager to implement	Less than of 10% indirect costs for the fund manager and/or less than 15% of direct costs for the fund manager
Timeliness of fund disbursement	Frequent delays;	Inconsistent timing;	On-time disbursement.	Timely, strategic disbursement responsive to needs.
Inclusiveness of fund allocation process	Top-down decision making by Alliance partners	Some involvement; some stakeholders not represented	Majority represented	Strong involvement of diverse stakeholders representing different VCA constituencies in fund disbursement decisions
Adaptability to changing needs	Rigid; no adaptation to emerging needs	Some adaptation but slow to respond	Flexible and adaptable timely when emerging needs are put forward by local partners	Proactive monitoring and identification of emerging needs with local partners; flexible and adaptable
Coordination between Alliance members and partner organisations	Minimal or ineffective coordination.	Irregular or unclear coordination.	Regular, clear coordination structures.	Collaborative, proactive coordination and feedback loops.

Appendix 10: Glossary of key terms

Adat: *Adat refers to the customary law of the indigenous peoples of Malaysia and Indonesia. It encompasses the unwritten, traditional code governing all aspects of personal conduct as well as natural resource management. It represents local wisdom that is vital for developing sustainable, community-led climate adaptation and mitigation strategies rooted in local ownership.*

Civic space: A rights-based and capability-based definition of the conditions allowing individuals and groups to exercise basic civil rights without discrimination. It is the fundamental environment required for citizens to organize, protest, and influence political decision-making.

Civic space (Shrinking/obstructed): A condition where power holders utilise legal restrictions and harassment to limit assembly, as defined by CIVICUS monitor criteria. In VCA contexts like Kenya and Brazil, this acts as a primary stressor that threatens the physical integrity of advocates.

Civil society organisation: A non-profit organisation, neither established by a government body nor linked to a government body, either de facto or under its constitutions, which is a legal person under civil law and serves a public interest.

Civil society: A community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity. Under PoV, civil society is understood to mean not only non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also community-based organisations (CBOs), social movements, trade unions, religious organisations, digital activists, citizen journalists, youth organisations, slum dwellers, interest groups, diaspora organisations, cultural organisations and informal networks.

Climate adaptation: A proactive, long-term perspective on devising new practices and infrastructure to reduce vulnerability. Within the VCA framework, it is strictly distinguished from short-term "coping" strategies, serving as a measure of enduring resilience against climate-induced shocks.

Climate induced pressures: Stressors like El Niño, prolonged droughts, and floods. These stressors characterize the operating environment, affecting local livelihoods.

Climate justice: A term used to frame climate change as an ethical, political and development issue, rather than one that is purely environmental or physical in nature. This is done by relating the effects of climate change to concepts of justice, particularly environmental justice and social justice and by examining issues such as equality, human rights, collective rights, and the historical responsibilities for climate change.

Climate mitigation: Human interventions to reduce, prevent, or offset greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These actions form the core of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and represent a strategic effort to eliminate carbon from the atmosphere through the preservation of natural sinks.

Conflict: A serious disagreement or argument, often resulting from conflicting interests and causing physical and/or psychological harm.

Equality: The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities.

Global Programme (GloPro): A team focused on creating international impact by amplifying local Southern voices in global policy arenas

Human rights based approach: A conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind.

Human rights defenders (HRDs) / Environmental defenders: Individuals or groups who actively work to protect and promote Indigenous, tenure, and environmental rights, typically in the context of resisting economic exploitation. These two roles are often intertwined as activists fight for climate justice, which treats the climate crisis as an ethical and political issue involving human and collective rights.

Inclusive conservation: An approach where Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs) are recognized as the primary actors in governing and managing their own lands and resources

Indigenous community territories (TIOC/TCO): Legally recognized communal land rights for indigenous groups in Bolivia and Paraguay. These territories are the primary defence against the encroachment of extractive industries and are central to protecting ancestral biomes.

Intersectionality: An analytical lens used to assess how overlapping identities —such as gender, age, and ethnicity — act as structural drivers of exclusion, exacerbating climate vulnerability and limiting access to decision-making power and spaces.

Joint Programme Team (JPT): An administrative and technical body composed of Alliance partner representatives that provides oversight and makes decisions on programme modalities

Just climate transition: Recognised under the 2015 Paris Agreement, there is no single definition of the term but rather a framework of core principles (ISIS 2020) to help achieve the economic and social changes necessary for sustainable development, while protecting workers and communities and ensuring a more socially-equitable distribution of benefits and risks. In our programme we refer to a Just Climate Transition within the context of a transition to both a low carbon and climate resilient future.

Lobbying and advocacy: Advocacy is a political endeavour by which individuals or groups aim to influence agendas, policies or practices, for a particular cause or goal, within political, economic and social systems. Lobbying is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is used to influence decision-makers.

Local ownership: In-country partners stand up and speak out, feel and be responsible and accountable for the goals and actions they define. Local CSOs and civil society coalitions have more control and a more equal relationship with Alliance partners. This supports increased legitimacy and an independent role in their specific context. This ownership must be guaranteed from the start and made visible in clear decision-making responsibilities on goals, roles, implementation, funding and

distribution of resources. It requires visible and changed power relations and strengthened capacity, as well as recognition by, and a different role for, Dutch organisations and INGOs.

Locally Led Adaptation (LLA): Principles endorsed by 80+ global institutions to shift power to local actors in climate action. The eight principles are:

1. **Devolving decision making to the lowest appropriate level:** Giving local institutions and communities more direct access to finance and decision-making power over how adaptation actions are defined, prioritized, designed, implemented; how progress is monitored and how success is evaluated.
2. **Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, people with disabilities, people who are displaced, Indigenous Peoples and marginalised ethnic groups:** Integrating gender-based, economic and political inequalities that are root causes of vulnerability into the core of adaptation action and encouraging vulnerable and marginalized individuals to meaningfully participate in and lead adaptation decisions.:
3. **Providing patient and predictable funding that can be accessed more easily:** Supporting long-term development of local governance processes, capacity and institutions through simpler access modalities, as well as longer term and more predictable funding horizons to ensure that communities can effectively implement adaptation actions.
4. **Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy:** Improving the capabilities of local institutions to ensure they can understand climate risks and uncertainties, generate solutions and facilitate and manage adaptation initiatives over the long term without being dependent on project-based donor funding.
5. **Building a robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty: Informing adaptation decisions through a combination of local, traditional, Indigenous, generational and scientific knowledge that can enable resilience under a range of future climate scenarios.**
6. **Flexible programming and learning:** Enabling adaptive management to address the inherent uncertainty in adaptation, especially through robust monitoring and learning systems and flexible finance and programming.
7. **Ensuring transparency and accountability:** Making processes of financing, designing and delivering programmes more transparent and accountable downward to local stakeholders.
8. **Collaborative action and investment:** Collaboration across sectors, initiatives and levels to ensure that different initiatives and different sources of funding (humanitarian assistance, development, disaster risk reduction, green recovery funds, etc.) support each other, and their activities avoid duplication to enhance efficiencies and good practice.

Locally shaped solutions: Climate solutions that are locally (co-)developed, influenced or found acceptable by citizens and civil society in a way that effectively and appropriately addresses their daily needs such as water, energy and food. These may be based on their experiences, traditional knowledge, local rights, customs and resources, as well as urban, digital, youth or feminist perspectives. This is an important feature in the context of the Just Climate Action because for these solutions to become replicated and /or scaled, they need broad support and multiple stakeholder buy-in

Mosalaki: A traditional, hereditary leader within the Lio-Ende group in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara Indonesia. They serve as the central authority in customary (adat) governance, acting as custodians of land, culture, and social order issues.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): These refer to climate pledges made by countries under the Paris Agreement/UNFCCC. VCA partners use these as critical advocacy entry points to

hold governments accountable for their international environmental commitments and local implementation quality.

Nature-based solutions: Ecosystem conservation, management and/or restoration interventions intentionally planned to deliver measurable positive climate adaptation and/or mitigation benefits that have human development and biodiversity co-benefits, managing anticipated climate risks to nature that can undermine their long-term effectiveness.

Outcome Harvesting (OH): A qualitative, monitoring methodology that identifies changes in policies, practices, or norms and determines how the programme contributed to them

Power of Voices: Power of Voices is a five-year (2021–2025) policy framework from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed at strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) in low- and lower-middle-income countries. It supports strategic partnerships to foster inclusive, sustainable development, focusing on lobby and advocacy, human rights, climate action, and gender equality.

Quilombolas (Brazil): Afro-Brazilian residents of historical settlements first established by escaped slaves, with IPs & LC status.

Riverines (Brazil): Traditional communities living along riverbanks in the Amazon region, with IPs & LC status.

Southern leadership: The ability of Southern Alliance partners and local partners to create spaces and mechanisms, to build and strengthen capacities to promote effective participation and motivate their constituencies and society to proactively discuss and define their common climate goals and act upon them, leading the way on advocacy.

Steering Committee (SC): A high-level body of Alliance directors responsible for strategic guidance and approving fundamental programme changes

Strengthening civil society (SCS) basket indicators: Standardized metrics used for aggregating qualitative outcomes into a standardized quantitative global framework. They provide a unified reference point for the Mid-Term Review and Final Evaluation to assess results across diverse countries

Structurally excluded groups: Populations historically denied or impeded from decision-making power, specifically women, youth, indigenous peoples, and the urban poor. Their exclusion limits their capacity to respond to climate shocks and stressors despite possessing unique local knowledge and innovative potential.

Theory of Change: a comprehensive, evidence-based methodology that maps out how and why a specific, long-term goal will be achieved through a series of intermediate outcomes and activities. It works backward from a desired impact to identify necessary conditions, mapping the "missing middle" between planned actions and final impact. It is the primary instrument for communicating the project's objectives, outcomes, outputs, activities in order to facilitate adaptive management by mapping complex, multicausal change processes.

Youth: The United Nations defines "youth" for statistical purposes as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. This group represents a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, characterized by specific needs regarding education, employment, and health, and is considered a key demographic for driving innovation and sustainable development. The programme understands 'youth' as 15 - 24 yrs. Youth is legally defined differently across the VCA alliance countries. *Bolivia:* 15-29 y.o. , *Brazil:* 18-29 y.o., *Kenya:* 18-35 y.o., *Indonesia:* 16-30 y.o., *Paraguay:* 15-29 y.o., *Tunisia:* 15-29 y.o., *Zambia:* 15-35 y.o.

Appendix 11: Inception report



End-term Evaluation of the VCA programme

Inception Report

10 February 2026

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Abbreviations

AMwA	Akina Mama wa Afrika
CA	Contribution Analysis
CMO	Context Mechanism Outcome
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC criteria)
ETE	End-of-Term Evaluation
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
GESI	Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IPT	Initial Programme Theory
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
NLGF	Next Level Grant Facility
OH	Outcome Harvesting
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
RT(s)	Regional Team(s)
SAMEA	South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
SSI(s)	Semi-Structured Interview(s)
SSN	SouthSouthNorth
ToC	Theory of Change
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VCA	Voices for Just Climate Action
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (Netherlands)

1. Introduction

This addendum to the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) End-of-Term Evaluation (ETE) builds on the inception and implementation phases of the study by clarifying the evaluation design, methods, and refinements made in response to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) feedback.

It outlines the combined use of Contribution Analysis, Realist Evaluation, and Causal Mapping to assess VCA's Theory of Change, validate assumptions, and capture the programme's contributions across diverse contexts.

The document further details the participatory and utilisation-focused approach, triangulation strategies, and strengthened attention to cross-cutting issues such as gender, youth, and Southern leadership.

By situating the evaluation within the OECD-DAC and IOB criteria, the addendum ensures methodological rigour, stakeholder relevance, and actionable insights to guide future climate justice programming.

2. Study design and approach

1. Evaluation objectives and scope

The purpose of the end-of-term (ETE) evaluation is to assess how effectively the program's activities have resulted in intended outcomes and impacts, and which strategies have been most effective while also offering actionable recommendations and insights to advance locally-led climate solutions. The ETE focuses on two sets of objectives:

Knowledge objectives: To evaluate how VCA's strategic pathways—strengthening locally led solutions, advancing gender-transformative approaches, and amplifying Southern voices—have shaped program outcomes. The goal is to identify lessons from both successes and challenges.

Action objectives: To provide insights to VCA stakeholders, including Alliance partners, donors, governments, and civil society organisations (CSOs) to guide future programming.

Evaluation Scope: The ETE will assess the VCA program, as it has been implemented in all seven countries during the period, January 2021–December 2025.

2. Study design

This End-of-Term (ETE) evaluation will assess the Theory of Change (ToC), validate design assumptions, and analyse effectiveness against the programme's intended outcomes,

available targets and basket indicators. The assessment relies on two design components. On the one hand, an assessment of reported progress against indicators will provide a measure of the extent of achievement at the programme level. Enablers and barriers of progress will be identified through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with VCA Alliance structures, a desk review and a survey with in-country partners, with an emphasis on assessing capacity strengthening. External validation will be achieved through interviews with external Validators¹ who can attest to the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of VCA's programme strategy. On the other hand, case studies in all programme countries will be produced to explain what worked, where and under which conditions, and illustrate the achievement of outcomes and what causal factors (combination of strategies, pathways, enablers and barriers,) will have led to those outcomes.

In response to the feedback received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the evaluation will combine Contribution Analysis, and Causal Mapping with Realist Evaluation to guide the assessment of causality and programme contributions. Mixed methods in data collection and analysis will be applied to a selection of two contribution claims in each program country. The combination of methodologies facilitates evidence triangulation and is appropriate for ToC validation and substantiation of causal claims in complex contexts and compliance with the [IOB guidelines](#) for evaluations.

The evaluation will assess program design, relevance and coherence, implementation dynamics, emerging results, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation of the partnership collaboration explores the strengths and challenges of the consortium or partnership model, with an emphasis on Southern Leadership, and collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (MFA), and how this has contributed to program effectiveness and coherence (both internal and external). Additionally, the evaluation will examine unintended outcomes, the inclusion of and impact on vulnerable populations, and cross-cutting themes like gender and youth.

The evaluation will also highlight lessons and good practices from the VCA Alliance to inform future consortia, improve decision-making, and enhance similar initiatives.

The evaluation matrix, found in Appendix A, captures the final evaluation questions and includes elaboration of which of the different evaluation methods are applied to each evaluation question.

3. Study approach

The overarching evaluation approach for the ETE will be a **participatory, utilisation-focused, mixed methods evaluation based on DAC criteria** (relevance, coherence, effectiveness & impact, efficiency, and sustainability).



Participatory and utilisation-focused approach: We will adopt a **utilisation-focused** approach, based on the principle that evaluations should be useful for (and utilised by) their intended users.ⁱⁱ Therefore, the ETE is designed and carried out to foster continuous engagement with programme stakeholders and to facilitate the integration of findings into decision-making processes. A **participatory approach** is essential to this process, hence, relevant stakeholders will be involved in planning the ETE, reviewing the framework for the assessment, reviewing the data collection instruments, and making sense of the findings for the final report.



Contribution Analysis (CA) and Realist Evaluation– a theory-based approach: We will be using [Contribution Analysis](#)ⁱⁱⁱ for this evaluation in combination with [Realist Evaluation](#). This combination is suitable for evaluating theory-based advocacy

interventions such as the ETE of the VCA programme. It will enable us to validate the ToC, assess the underlying programme assumptions, understand the context in which it operates and assess barriers and enablers of observed outcomes. CA is well suited to evaluate advocacy interventions because it is often difficult to prove the attribution of advocacy initiatives to change. CA and Realist Evaluation will be applied at the level of case studies (see section 3.2.2. for more information). Through CA, we can understand the causal relationship, and using Realist Evaluation will help identify the actual mechanisms of change underlying causal relationships in specific contexts.^{iv}

Casual Mapping is an analysis and visualisation method of qualitative data, which explores causal relationships between multiple different causal factors. Causal mapping is a way of making sense of a large amount of text to answer questions about what people think caused what, by building links between different factors. To get a higher-level overview of the causal relationships at work in the VCA programme and effectively use the large amount of qualitative monitoring data collected by the programme (over 850 outcomes stories), we plan to work with the Causal Mapping team to aid us with data analysis and visualisation.



Mixed methods based on the DAC criteria for greater triangulation of data: The use of mixed methods will allow us, through triangulation, to strengthen the degree of confidence in the CA and Realist Evaluation findings. Mixed methods include using qualitative and quantitative primary data collection, and the review of programme data and relevant literature (e.g., on partnerships). Evaluation questions have been structured against the DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness /impact, efficiency, and sustainability) and they are guiding our inquiry into the program's ToC and underlying assumptions of interest. Methods will include a thorough desk review of program documents, including the research studies commissioned by VCA² and the Outcome Harvesting database, as well as interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders involved in the management, implementation and co-creation of the program. An electronic survey targeting representatives from all partner organisations across the seven countries will explore capacity strengthening efforts and overall value add of the VCA program as perceived by partners. The diversity of methods is part of the evaluation's triangulation strategy to mitigate for possible bias. See section 3.4 for more detail.

Cross-cutting themes | gender and youth: gender and youth participation are important themes for the VCA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and we have therefore, included relevant sub-questions under each of the evaluation criteria. See section 3.7 on how gender and youth will be included.

Therefore, this combined approach will allow for the following:

- Assessing progress against set indicators;
- **Validate (or refute) selected assumptions** in the VCA Theory of Change.
- Understand **what is working**, why it is working, under what conditions it is working, and for whom it is working.
- Generate **new information and insights** from programme stakeholders that may not have emerged through monitoring and progress reports.
- Tell the **programme story** across the full breadth of the initiative.

These approaches will be used in synergy to arrive at a comprehensive and robust assessment of the program. How these principles are operationalised is explained in section 3 below.

The table in Appendix B shows how the three key evaluation approaches (contribution analysis, realist evaluation and Causal Mapping) and various methods will be used in the evaluation to respond to specific evaluation questions. The data from SSIs, FGDs, and document reviews will also be analysed thematically to respond to all the evaluation questions.

3. Evaluation methods and process

The evaluation is being conducted in four phases, namely, inception, evaluation, analysis and review, and finalisation. Detail for each phase is provided below.

1. Phase 1: Inception³

- Kick-off meeting and half-day inception workshop with the Reference group
- Preliminary document review
- VCA programme-level ToC review workshop
- Development of data collection instruments and guiding document (See Appendix J for a list of tools and attached file for actual tools).
- Inception report development and submission.

2. Phase 2: Data collection

Both primary and secondary data will be collected for the evaluation. Further details are provided below.

1. Secondary data collection

Document review: A preliminary review of key documents was conducted. This initial review focused on program design, including Theory of Change (ToC) documents, the full program proposal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Mid-Term Review (MTR) report, annual program reports, the program's learning framework, and learning reports.

A more in-depth analysis of the VCA program's overall design and implementation dynamics as well as the emerging outcomes achieved by Alliance partners is being conducted. This will involve a comprehensive desk review of relevant documents, including baseline and monitoring data, Outcome Harvesting database, externally commissioned research studies such as the Gender, Equity, and Social Inclusion (GESI) study, the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) analysis, the Southern Leadership report as well as country-level documentation from case study countries.

Outcome harvesting database: the OH database will allow for a quantitative trend analysis of outcomes to map outcomes against the ToC to visualise, where outcomes have been achieved, where gaps exist, outcome number per country, per ToC pillar, among others. Quantitative trends will be triangulated with qualitative findings (e.g., interviews, FGDs) to assess consistency, and any conflicting results will be reconciled by prioritizing external Validators perspectives and secondary data to mitigate internal bias, while noting outliers to reflect multiple realities.

2. Primary data collection

Quantitative data collection

Partner Survey: A semi-structured online survey has been conducted targeting both past and current VCA partners (census approach to all and past VCA local partners – survey successfully delivered to a total of 198 local partners). The survey focused on the effectiveness of the mutual capacity strengthening approach, as well as the partnership model, and the perceived value or

benefits of participation. The survey was available in Bahasa Indonesia, French, English, Portuguese and Spanish and collected 90 responses from all seven program countries (45.45% uptake). Findings will be triangulated with qualitative data (e.g., KIIs/FGDs) by cross-referencing trends (e.g., capacity perceptions) against case study narratives.

Indicator performance data: All the MoFA indicators that VCA has been reporting on will be included in the effectiveness analysis and MoFA Basket Indicators will be a key focus. Evaluators have already started extracting monitoring data from VCA annual reports and this information will be analysed as part of the effectiveness analysis.

Qualitative Data Collection

Programme level: A selection of interviews has already been conducted with internal VCA program-level stakeholders following a purposive sampling approach. These interviews were guided by guidelines designed against the DAC criteria and were primarily aimed at understanding program design, relevance and coherence with partners' needs, program governance and partnership dynamics in line with local adaptation and Southern leadership principles, as well as effectiveness of program strategies and lesson learned. To further strengthen the external validation in the evaluation, we propose to add 10 interviews with sector experts and/or VCA strategic partners at global level, who can attest to the relevance and coherence of the program's strategy and speak to relevant achievements, where possible.

Case study level: an overview of the qualitative data collection process, integrating CA and a realist lens, at case study level is provided below.

Contribution Analysis will help evaluators understand how and why observed outcomes occurred, enablers and barriers to observed outcomes, and whether the VCA program contributed to these changes. CA tests a theory of change against evidence, acknowledging external factors, alternative explanations, and assumptions. It involves developing a plausible narrative linking program activities to outcomes while considering other influencing factors. Through CA we will gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms of change, and how the different partners have contributed towards the achievement of key results/changes in a given context. CA works confirmatory, aiming to reduce uncertainty about an intervention's role without claiming sole causation.

The Contribution Analysis combined with Realist Evaluation process will broadly follow the following steps:

Step 1: Set out the question(s) to be addressed

Step 2: Develop a theory of change and formulate mid-range theories through Realist Evaluation

Step 3: Gather existing evidence (following both CA and Realist Evaluation methods)

Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution narrative and explore alternative theories

Step 5: Seek out additional evidence

Step 6: Revise and strengthen the contribution narrative⁴.

These steps closely match with the five steps of qualitative substantiation methods for effectiveness as described by the IOB criteria.⁵

The process will start with the selection of contribution claims, which will follow several steps, starting with the co-development of selection criteria, agreed with the VCA team. Two contribution

stories (likely including several inter-related outcomes) will be identified in each VCA implementing country and explored in detail. While the selection will be guided by the below described selection criteria, the final choice of case study selection lies with the external evaluators. These selected contribution stories will be referred to as **case studies**.

The **selection criteria** to be used to select the **contribution stories**, include:

- **variety across thematic areas** (local solutions, movement building, financial leverage, policy change, gender and inclusion, youth outcomes). Selection of specific themes should follow their relative importance/ priority of specific country.
- **Gender and youth** should each be a key component of at least 2 contribution stories
- **variety across level of impact** local, national, global
- **variety across the 3 TOC pillars** (capacity strengthening, storytelling and advocacy)
- **joint outcomes** would be a plus
- **outcomes that speak to MFA interests** would be a plus (in particular those would be impactful results in terms of numbers of people and amount of area benefitting; results that contribute to water and food security; and policy change)
- **outcomes that demonstrate sustainability of VCA efforts** are a plus, e.g. if results allow partners to continue their work beyond the end of the programme
- **VCA assumptions** - if the outcome can provide anecdotal evidence on assumptions #1, #4, #7, #8⁶.

Additional criteria to be applied in consultation with VCA country team:

- **practicality/ accessibility** of the partners and actors involved in the outcome at the time of data collection
- **information availability** on the specific outcome

To guide the selection process, evaluators will 1) analyse the program's Outcome Harvesting database⁷ to identify a shortlist of stories; 2) build a contribution database incorporating elements of CA design, realist evaluation, as well as link them to VCA indicators, and the stakeholder group for whom the outcome is relevant; 3) present the shortlist to VCA country teams at in-person or virtual workshops to advise on practicality and information accessibility; and 3) decide on final claims to be tested through primary data collection.

Alternative theories in CA: In both CA and Realist Evaluation, the evaluators explore possible alternative explanations for the changes that have taken place. In CA we ask: *who else contributed to this change and how much?* and we see if there is another plausible reason for this change. In Realist Evaluation, we identify how outcomes (O) are generated by mechanisms (M) in particular contexts (C)⁸ and then use that to define alternative Initial Programme Theories (IPT)⁹ to double check the pathways on the ToC.

Once contribution claims have been selected, we will conduct a desk review of relevant program documents to refine contribution claims, identify underlying theories of change and IPT hypothesis following a realist evaluation lens, as well as identify alternative explanations about why change may have happened.

Mid-range theories as part of Realist Evaluation: The realist approach requires mid-range theories to provide conceptual lenses to explore the mechanisms driving VCA's successes and challenges in advancing collaboration, amplifying citizen's voices, and influencing local climate adaptation policies and practices. Since Realist Evaluation is a new addition to the evaluation's design and methods, this lens will be applied in the next evaluation activities, including:

- Selection of relevant mid-range theories aligned with VCA's programme model and strategy to be identified through a literature review;
- Selected mid-range theories will be used as support to the CA process by 1) initially, identifying context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) factors and developing IPT hypotheses for each of the selected contribution stories; 2) guiding the data collection process by helping to identify key mechanisms and contexts. The IPT and mid-range theory linked to a particular contribution claim will be inserted into the interview protocols and tested with respondents during the interview process; and 3) during data analysis, these theories will be tested, refined, or replaced based on the evidence.
- Mid-range theories will only be applied at the level of the case studies. They will therefore *not* be applied to the design and analysis of survey data or the program-level KIIs and FGDs already conducted.

We will then develop a list of stakeholders of interest (internal and external) who can verify or refute or refine the claims in each country, as well as provide alternative theories for the causal claims. Interviews will target:

- Local partners and implementers to explore implementation dynamics, contextual factors and local strategies.
- Rights holders and communities to understand lived experiences and perceived changes;
- External Validators to test our assumptions about context and alternative explanations as well as gauge broader perceptions of change and attribution. This category of stakeholders will include NGOs, local government, and community leads.

Evidence collected will then be synthesized to test the theory of change, assess alternative explanations, refine CMO configurations, draw credible conclusions about the program's contribution and identify enablers and barriers for change as well as unintended effects. A contribution narrative guideline document has been designed to guide evaluators in applying this thinking process to each of the case studies (this guideline is submitted as a separate document together with the data collection instruments). Details on sampling and data collection approach are provided in section 3.2.3 below.

3. Sampling approach and sample

The sampling approach will combine **purposive, convenience, snowballing and random sampling approaches**. Informants will include those identified in collaboration with VCA Alliance members and country programme teams, and those identified directly by the evaluation team that are available within the data collection timeframes and willing to engage. Our approach to the key target groups includes:

- **VCA Alliance Team, Governance Structures, Regional Teams, and Local Partners:** Purposive sampling ensures inclusion of stakeholders central to program design, implementation, and governance (e.g., Regional Teams, Joint Program Team, Taskforces and Steering

Committee). This is justified by their unique insights into program dynamics, relevance, and Southern leadership (EQ3, EQ7). Selection criteria prioritize diversity in roles (e.g., secretariat, finance, communications) and geographic representation across all seven countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Tunisia, Zambia, global level). For example, regional teams include representatives from AMwA, Fundación Avina, SDI, SSN, Hivos, and WWF, stratified to cover each country's thematic priorities (e.g., youth in Indonesia, indigenous groups in Brazil).

The selection of informants at the level of the case study is guided by the independent selection process of the contribution stories (see section 3.2.2). Purposive and snowball sampling is applied to select the CSO partners, Validators and communities who have been part of, have been influenced by, or have knowledge of the contribution claim in that particular case study.

- **Representatives of Local Partners and Rights Holders:** Purposive sampling targets partners engaged with specific contribution stories (3 CSOs per story, 42 total) to probe implementation and outcomes (EQ1, EQ4). Convenience sampling supplements this when accessibility is limited (e.g., remote areas), justified by logistical constraints and the need for timely data collection. Rights holders (28 FGDs, 2 per story) are randomly selected from partner-provided lists to reduce selection bias, stratified by country and demographic (e.g., women, youth, indigenous groups) to ensure marginalized voices are captured. The selection will encourage at least 75% of youth and/or women participants.
- **validators and Validators /External Experts:** Snowball sampling identifies Validators (56 total, 4 per story) through networks of local partners and national consultants, justified by their external perspective on program relevance and alternative explanations (EQ1, EQ3). The in-country consultants will discuss potential Validators in the interviews with Local Partners and Validators and forward the suggestion to the SH Evaluation team. The informants will be ultimately selected by the SH Evaluation team. Selection criteria include expertise in climate adaptation and independence from VCA funding (e.g., local government officials, non-VCA NGOs). Random sampling is applied where possible (e.g., from a list of 10+ potential Validators per country) to further reduce bias.
- **Survey:** Purposive sampling targets all past/current partners to assess capacity strengthening and partnership value (EQ2, EQ4), justified by the need to capture the full partner network.

The evaluation will draw from a variety of perspective and actors, levels of involvement and decision-making as well as types of relationship to VCA. Table 1 below summarises the evaluation targeted sample and how it has been expanded to include more contribution stories, internal and external engagements.

Based on this approach, the following **evaluation sample** is proposed.

Table 1 Evaluation sample (programme and case study level): current and proposed

	Sample currently	Proposed sample
Programme level	26 engagements (SSIs, FGDs, KIIs, and group interviews)	39 engagements (SSIs, FGDs, KIIs, and group interviews) of which 10 external

	1 survey targeting all local partners (+- 198, 90 responses or 45% uptake rate)	
Case study level	1 contribution stories in 3 countries = 3 stories	2 contribution stories in 7 countries = 14 stories
	21 CSOs (7 per contribution story)	42 CSOs (3 per story)
	9 Validators	56 Validators (4 per story)
	6 FGDs with rights holders (2 per story)	28 FGDs with rightsholders (2 per story)
Internal / external split	16% external engagements	40 % external engagements
Total	62 engagements	165 engagements and 1 survey

The detailed **evaluation samples** (at programme and at case study level) are provided in Appendix G. Included in the table is the rationale for selection and sampling methods.

3. Phase 3: Analysis, sharing findings, and validation

This section describes the processes the team will follow to analyse, report and disseminate evaluation findings.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative survey responses will be analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise key survey findings, with aggregated data highlighting trends. Cross-tabulations will help compare responses across groups, and qualitative responses to open-ended questions (minority) will be coded into themes. We could analyse by gender, by leadership group, by country, depending on the response rate. We suggest that to be relevant, a sub-group should have at least 30 responses. The exact variables for analysis will be decided later. Findings will be visualised through charts and graphs, and quantitative and qualitative data will be triangulated for verification.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data will be analysed using two complementary methods. These include thematic analysis and Causal Mapping.

Thematic analysis, using NVIVO 12, will be used to code and organise qualitative data from key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, which will be carefully analysed to identify central themes, patterns, and narratives. This analysis will address evaluation questions on relevance, coherence, effectiveness /impact, efficiency, sustainability, and partnership collaboration as suggested in the proposed evaluation matrix included as Appendix A. Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) relationships will be analysed according to the principles of Realist Evaluation. Following thematic coding findings will be triangulated across data sources (e.g. quantitative data from the survey, qualitative data from interviews and FGDs, secondary data from VCA reports and secondary data from external publications) to ensure validity and credibility. We will hold sense-making workshops with stakeholders from each of the countries, and global stakeholders to present the initial findings, gaps and any steps to address them.

Causal mapping uses OpenAI's GPT-4.0 as a key analytical method to synthesise findings, identify patterns in outcomes, and explore both expected and unexpected causal pathways and relationships within the secondary data. The Causal Mapping team will work both inductively and deductively: the AI will review documents and seek to identify changes reported by the program, and causal influences mentioned in the documents, as well as the source of evidence; similarly, the AI will be asked to seek specific evidence that supports or contradicts pre-determined categories or labels extracted for the ToC (this approach is deductive). The findings will be organised in causal maps (see Appendix C for an example), which allow us to understand and visualize interrelationships between multiple outcomes; this is especially beneficial, when there are dozens or hundreds of outcomes, as it the case for the VCA program. The causal maps allow us to present an overall synthesis picture of the outcomes reported – and what contributed to them.¹⁰

Causal maps will play a central role in the contribution analysis, providing a structured visual representation of causal relationships. Individual causal maps will be generated for each country, enabling cross-country comparisons to uncover differences in causal pathways at the programme level. These differences will be analysed in conjunction with qualitative interview data to understand the contextual and methodological factors contributing to them. Country-specific causal maps for all target countries will enable cross-country comparisons to uncover 1) common causal pathways leading to success, 2) context-specific factors driving variations and; 3) external influences, such as climate initiatives or local adaptations.

Lastly, Casual Mapping analysis will include Social Network Analysis to explore relations, which are at the core of the VCA programme, to understand how different types of stakeholders in different countries form networks, who is central, who is peripheral. It is expected that this analysis will illustrate patterns that may not have been realised during program monitoring, enhancing collective learning.

In summary: how Causal Mapping will be used

- To synthesise patterns across outcomes to understand *how* and *why* change occurred
 - Test causal and contribution links between VCA strategies (e.g., capacity strengthening, storytelling, joint advocacy) and outcomes
 - Identify enabling factors and barriers (both programmatic and contextual)
 - Support filtering and interpreting outcomes by stakeholder, country, objective, and level of change
- Apply both **inductive** (emergent) and **deductive** (ToC-based) coding approaches.

Examples of the types of maps that can be produced with Causal mapping:

- **Intended outcomes with *sentiment* coding:** map showing the causal pathways to intended outcomes, with sentiment coding (differentiating links with positive vs negative effects)
- **Validation of Theory of Change assumptions:** use the ToC labels to see the differences between the planned/intended ToC pathways and actual observed causal mechanisms and pathways and unintended outcomes
- **Unexpected factors:** Identify emerging and unexpected causal factors influencing outcomes

- Contextual policy influence maps: Maps focusing on factors related to climate adaptation and nature-based solution policies and their influences globally and in the target countries
- **Influence of societal factors:** Maps focusing on broader societal factors (e.g., digital divide, political climate, civil space) and the influence they had on interventions/outcomes

Figure 1 below illustrates the process of data analysis:

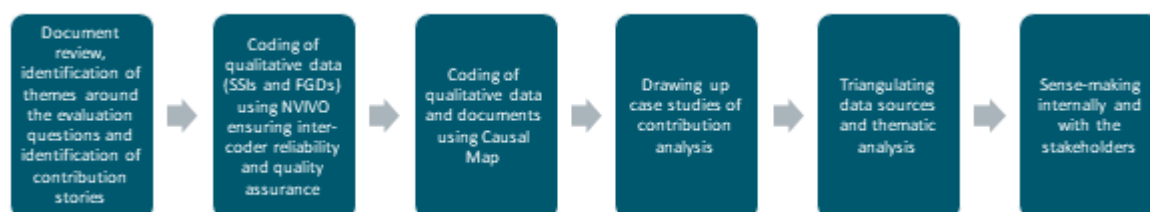


Figure 1 Process for data analysis

Triangulation strategy

This section clarifies the VCA End-Term Evaluation approach to data triangulation to strengthen the validity and credibility of findings and to explicitly address IOB's concerns about poor triangulation strategy, reliance on internal stakeholders, and insufficient use of external perspectives.

We will apply triangulation at three levels, aligned with IOB criteria and the evaluation design previously discussed, namely:

Methodological triangulation by using a variety of methods, qualitative and quantitative:

- Qualitative: Contribution Analysis, Realist-informed CMO analysis, KIIs with Validators, SSIs and FGDs.
- Quantitative: Partner survey, indicator data, outcome harvesting trends, efficiency rubric.
- Secondary data and programme documents: Annual reports, gender audit, Southern leadership review, NLGF analysis, external literature (i.e., specifically on partnerships).
- Analytical tools: NVIVO (qualitative coding), Causal Mapping (outcome and contribution pattern visualisation and Social Network Analysis).

Each evaluation question will be answered with at least two different methodological lenses (e.g., EQ1 effectiveness: CA story + survey trend + Validators validation).

Data source triangulation by using diverse sources, internal and external to the VCA programme:

- Internal stakeholders: VCA governance structures, partners, PMEL taskforce, regional teams.
- External stakeholders (40% of new sample): Validators (community leaders, local government officials, NGOs not funded by VCA), MoFA reps, sector experts and representatives from global strategic partners.
- Rights holders: marginalised groups (women, youth, indigenous peoples), to validate lived experiences of outcomes (included above as internal stakeholders).

We have increased the number of Validator and outsider interviews from 16% to 40% of total engagements as recommended, ensuring each contribution story and programme-level finding has external validation.

Perspective triangulation by carefully considering various perspectives to provide a robust, rich and useful findings and conclusions:

- Programme perspective: partner capacity, Alliance value-add, Southern leadership, participation in decision-making.
- User/rights holder perspective: inclusion, voice amplification, access to decision-making spaces, appreciation of local knowledge.
- External observer perspective: plausibility of program contribution, and assessment of alternative explanations.

How will conflicting information be reconciled?

We intend to do a thematic analysis of all qualitative data and triangulate the data. However, we do not want to use triangulation to the point of excluding outliers - hence we aim to include all perspectives even if they are not dominant. A common critique of triangulation is that it is underpinned by the assumption that is a single 'truth' that multiple methods will converge upon.

This can contradict constructivist and interpretivist perspectives that see multiple, equally valid realities.

Over-relying on triangulation may also reinforce dominant power dynamics if some data sources are privileged over others. So, we recommend using triangulation reflexively, acknowledging contradictions instead of forcing agreement. We will note these multiple perspectives, even if there is an outlier in the data.

Validation of findings and sense-making

A virtual presentation of topline findings and sense making session will be held where the ETE team will share emerging findings from the qualitative and quantitative primary data collection efforts and our document review. This meeting aims to make sense of emergent findings, hear any insights or clarifications from the VCA team and the PMEL taskforce, and verify the findings before proceeding to the reporting stage.

Reporting and Communications

We will submit the draft findings report, followed by a feedback workshop with VCA Reference Group. This session will also include collaborative formulation of draft set of recommendations. We will incorporate any feedback on the draft findings report and case studies. Following this, a validation meeting with Alliance members will be held to discuss the findings and review the draft recommendations. Finally, the ETE team will integrate feedback into the evaluation report and case studies and finalise the report, which will be shared with MoFA along with a presentation of key findings and recommendations.

The evaluation deliverables will be a comprehensive report synthesising findings across the seven countries and global insights, including an analysis of progress against MoFA basket indicators in each country.

4. Independence and bias mitigation

The selected methodology mix for the evaluation increases the validity of the process, by maximising independence and minimising bias. Additionally, this section comprehensively outlines the major limitations and potential biases in the proposed methodology, sampling strategy, case selection, and information sources, addressing their implications for reliability, internal validity, and external validity.

On the one hand, contribution analysis and realist evaluation will ensure that we test hypothesis against plausible contributing factors, within and outside the VCA program to validate or refute observed changes and describe how they actually happened. The contribution analysis methodology draws on external parties, which also reduces bias. We will look at external documents and literature, where relevant. On the other hand, by using AI-led Causal Maps the evaluation will reduce bias in the assessment of causality (how change happens, and which factors are strongly linked to change) drawing from program documents and primary data. The potential risk of transparency and ethical use of data is addressed in the section below.

Additionally, the following processes increase the independence of our data and findings, namely:

- **Selection bias for case studies:** Case studies may be chosen based on accessibility, thematic interest, or “good stories,” skewing evidence towards particular contexts or actors. Mitigation strategies:
 - Apply transparent, co-developed selection criteria (variety across themes, ToC pillars, levels of impact, and inclusion of gender/youth).
 - Use external validation through Validators and independent experts. 40% of planned qualitative engagements (66 out of 162) will be dedicated to people outside of direct program implementation (Validators). This means that we will be obtaining independent and objective views of the achievements, or lack thereof, of the VCA Alliance.
 - Randomize right-holder and validator selection where possible.
- **Bias towards effective/successful strategies:** Contribution Analysis often emphasizes “what worked,” which can over-represent positive outcomes and neglect challenges or failures. Mitigation strategies:
 - Explicitly test alternative explanations and negative/unintended outcomes.
 - Ensure interview protocols probe for barriers, failures, and missed opportunities.
 - Balance success cases with less effective examples, guided by realist evaluation (mechanisms that did not work).
 - Balanced methodology: we note that both CA and Realist Evaluation are strength-based approaches that build evidence from “successful cases” or examples of “what works”. While contribution claims are typically selected from seemingly successful examples of work, the process of building the evidence base through identifying hypothesis, alternative explanations and engaging Validators in validation can confirm, refute or adjust the claim or parts thereof. Combining CA and realist evaluation with mixed methods guided by the DAC criteria, ensures that the evaluation probes about challenges, weaknesses, gaps and unintended results for a balanced assessment.
- **Respondent sampling bias:**

- The sample size accommodates several levels of VCA program implementation – country level, and global Alliance level, and it also ensures that the different VCA governance structures are represented, including the Secretariat, the donor, the Global Programme team, the Joint Program Team. The sample at country level is intended to provide a deep dive into fourteen case studies based on the Contribution Analysis and Realist Evaluation. The breadth of information for each country will be drawn from the document review and the indicator data provided by the VCA, as well as SSIs at country level. The combined qualitative sample is a very large data set which will provide insights across the 7 countries.
- In both CA and Realist Evaluation, sampling decisions are driven by who the evaluators need to talk to in order to test their theory. Our sampling approach will, therefore, be primarily purposive and iterative. We will also use snowballing techniques to identify the Validators, and we will use random sampling to select right holders who may not have benefitted from VCA program activities to participate in focus group discussions, thus minimising bias. The full list of community participants will be put into an automatic randomiser.
- **Risks involved with thematic analysis:** We will ensure that the coding and interpretation of data is reliable by using inter-coder consistency methods, triangulation of data and sense-making sessions within the evaluation team and with VCA stakeholders. We will check the reliability of sources in conversation with VCA PMEL Taskforce, program partners, MoFA representatives and external stakeholders.

5. Ethical procedures

With regards to ethical considerations, we understand that the evaluation will work with a minority of vulnerable and marginalised groups in case study countries (e.g., indigenous groups); however, ethics clearance is not required since we will not be collecting primary data from minors. Our work will be guided by and aligned to various ethical guidelines, principles, and professional standards, some of which are highlighted here. The evaluation team will follow the guidelines provided by the UNEG (United Nations Evaluation Group) in the *Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020)*¹⁰. The focus of the evaluation team will be to balance the goal of the evaluation with the interests of the diverse evaluation participants. Therefore, the following principles will guide our research approach, conduct and decision making: integrity, accountability, respect, and beneficence.

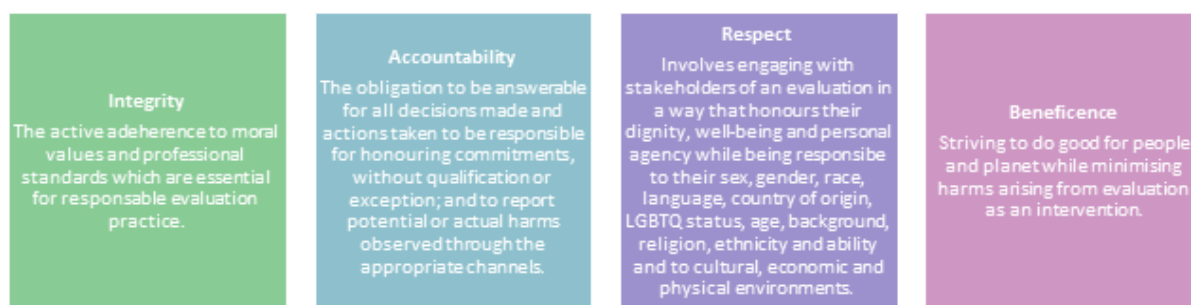


Figure 2 Principles of Evaluation (adapted from the UNEG *Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020)*)

Southern Hemisphere evaluation team is also guided by the [ethical guidelines and requirements of the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association \(SAMEA\)](#), which are a highly regarded set of ethical principles based on respect for the individual, the participant's right to self-determination, and the right to make informed decisions regarding participation in research.

In line with SAMEA and Made in Africa Evaluation principles, which emphasize ethical, context-responsive, and inclusive evaluation practice, we are committed to the following research ethics:

- Our evaluation will follow a data minimization approach: only information that is directly relevant and necessary for answering the evaluation questions will be collected. Participation in the evaluation is entirely voluntary, and we are mindful of the time and resources our participants contribute.
- No compensation will be offered for participation.
- All participants in the research are fully informed of the evaluation process and are knowledgeable of their right to participate or withdraw from the study at any point. VCA program participants and/or audiences (right holders, decision-makers, etc) targeted to participate in the evaluation will be asked to provide consent – both verbally and via a detailed information and consent form. These forms will be made available in English and local languages and will emphasize that participation in the study is voluntary.
- The confidentiality of information collected will be maintained.
- Should any participants have concerns or complaints, they may raise them directly with the evaluation team or through designated channels made available in the Communications Protocol.
- All data collected during the evaluation will be stored securely and only retained for as long as necessary to complete the evaluation and provide final reporting to stakeholders—typically no longer than 12 months after project closure. Thereafter, data will be permanently deleted using secure digital and physical destruction methods.
- Data and recordings of interviews will be stored in a password protected folder at Southern Hemisphere and not shared with third parties, unless explicit consent is provided, and only for agreed-upon purposes that align with the objectives of this evaluation.
- Should a data breach occur, all affected participants will be informed promptly through the channels agreed upon during consent processes, with support provided as needed.
- Individuals involved in the case studies will not be identifiable directly or indirectly.
- Facilitators and fieldworkers are equipped with the right skills and background (e.g., language proficiency, local knowledge, previous similar experience and context sensitivity) to facilitate workshops with the sampled group. Additionally, fieldwork training will include a review of research ethics and principles to be applied during the evaluation.
- The study process will be empowering for participants (e.g., questions are asked in a way that is pitched at the right level, interviewers are appreciative of information provided by participants, participants benefit from reflecting on the program and/or their lives).

Avoiding Respondent Fatigue:

- We will approach participants with sensitivity, recognising the value of their time and contributions. We will clarify how their input will add value to this ETE and build on (rather than repeat) previous processes
- We will work closely with the VCA team and RTs to identify the most appropriate individuals to engage based on their roles and relevance to the evaluation questions
- Questions will be shot, sharp, and clearly focused
- We will rely on existing documentation and previous monitoring data wherever possible to minimise duplication
- Where applicable, we will avoid drawing repeatedly on the same individuals by diversifying participants across VCA structures

Ethics and risks of using Causal Mapping and AI

The principles and practices mentioned above regarding ethical data collection and analysis will also apply to the use of AI-powered Causal Mapping in the evaluation (e.g., consent, anonymity and confidentiality)

- **Transparency of findings:** We acknowledge that AI-supported Causal Mapping may create “black box” outputs, reducing transparency on how causal links were inferred. The evaluation will mitigate this by:
 - The Causal Mapping team will work with both inductive and deductive coding. Working inductively means the AI will review documents and seek to identify changes reported by the program, and causal influences mentioned in the documents, as well as the source of evidence. From that it generates causal relationships that best fit the data, and thereby reduces confirmatory bias. On the other hand, through the deductive approach, the AI will be asked to seek specific evidence that supports or contradicts pre-determined categories or labels extracted for the ToC, to generate specific learnings on the validity of the VCA ToC.
 - Document decision rules clearly, including what coding, phrasing and data entry was used for the generation of each causal map.
 - Share and validate maps with stakeholders through sense-making workshops.
- **Potential misuse of findings:** causal maps risk to overgeneralize findings without considering contextual differences, or overconfidence in findings when presenting causal relationships as facts. The evaluation will mitigate this by:
 - Ensure causal maps are interpreted as one lens among others, not definitive truth
 - Share and validate maps with stakeholders through sense-making workshops.
 - Causal mapping follows established qualitative social science procedures to minimize the freedom given to the AI to make qualitative judgements, with the aim that each step of the process from coding to analysis is transparent and verifiable.
- **Ownership of qualitative data:** (e.g., outcome stories) may raise ethical concerns if not handled properly.



- Adhere to ethical safeguards: informed consent, confidentiality, data minimization, and clear data storage/retention protocols.
- **Consent and anonymity:** Participants (e.g., community members, partners) may be indirectly identifiable through quotes, case details, or small sample sizes. The evaluation will mitigate this by:
 - Remove or aggregate identifying details in transcripts, reports, and causal maps.
 - Use pseudonyms and generalized descriptions (e.g., “youth leader, Kenya”) instead of names.
 - Secure informed consent with explicit explanation of anonymity limits.
- **Third party and AI-driven privacy leakages:** Storing or processing qualitative data through third-party AI systems (e.g., causal mapping software) could expose sensitive information if security standards are weak. The evaluation will mitigate this by:
 - Use secure, vetted platforms with clear data protection agreements.
 - Apply data minimization: share only what is necessary for analysis.
 - Encrypt and password-protect files; store data on secure servers with time-bound retention.
 - Audit AI outputs to ensure no sensitive or identifying data are reproduced.
 - Maintain human oversight — treating AI as an analytical tool, not an autonomous decision-maker.

6. Gender-sensitive evaluation approaches

In addition to the general ethical procedures described above, this evaluation will consider the needs, interest and experiences of the different evaluation participants.

- **Context-Sensitive Instrument Design:** Interview and FGD guides for contribution stories probe not only what works and why but also for whom and under what conditions, with explicit questions on outcomes for women, youth, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalized groups (e.g., indigenous communities). Specific attention will be given to the involvement of and effects on women, youth and marginalized groups in the result claims.
- **Inclusive Recruitment and Sampling:** Rights holders for FGDs are randomly selected from partner-provided lists to minimize selection bias, stratified by country, gender (at least 50% women), age (at least 30% youth), and marginalized groups (e.g., indigenous peoples, gender-diverse individuals), (targets will be pursued where possible and feasible). Selection targets 75% women and/or youth participation in FGDs to prioritize marginalized voices, where possible and feasible. Validators (e.g., local government, non-VCA NGOs) are chosen via snowball sampling to validate causal claims and assess external perceptions of gender/youth outcomes, with at least one Validators per case study focusing on gender or youth.
- **Gender- and Youth-Segregated FGDs:** Where culturally appropriate and feasible (determined with VCA regional teams and local experts), FGDs are segregated by gender (e.g., women-only, men-only) or age (e.g., youth-only) to create safe spaces for open dialogue, particularly for gender- or youth-focused case studies (e.g., Brazil, Indonesia). This



accounts for social perceptions and power dynamics, ensuring participants can share experiences freely.

- **Context-Responsive Interviewing:** Regional evaluators are locals with understanding of their countries context. During interviews, they will protect anonymity, use culturally appropriate locations (e.g., community centres), and consider gender-specific opportunity costs (e.g., shorter durations for women with caregiving responsibilities). Efforts will be made to engage female interviewers to enhance comfort. Consent forms (verbal/written, in local languages) emphasize voluntary participation and confidentiality.
- **Data Disaggregation and Analysis:** The survey, directed at VCA partner organisations, will disaggregate results by leadership (according to variables such as women, youth, IPLC, disabled people and others) and who their constituencies are. FGDs with programme rightsholders will record gender, age and marginalized status of the informants. Thematic analysis and Causal Mapping assess gender norm changes, men's involvement, and youth participation, ensuring findings reflect diverse realities.

Cross-cutting issues: gender, youth and Southern leadership

To deepen the evaluation's focus, we have strengthened the evaluation's focus on gender youth and southern leadership issues.

The strengthening of a gender and youth focus has been done through a number of strategies, namely:

- Including specific evaluation sub-questions focused on gender and youth under each evaluation criteria; these evaluation questions will guide 1) the inclusion of gender and youth-focused questions into interview guidelines and 2) the criteria to sample right holders as well as Validators, who can speak about these issues. See evaluation plan in Appendix A. Added evaluation questions will aim to look into first signs of results and impacts related to gender and youth (EQ1d), strategies applied and lessons learned (EQ1e) and unexpected outcomes (EQ1f). Furthermore the evaluation will look into the coherence of gender and youth strategies (EQ3e), evidence of sustainable gender results (EQ4c), capacities of women-led and youth-led organisations (EQ4d) and programme relevance marginalized groups (EQ5c).
- Identifying at least two case studies with a focus on youth (one of the case studies, from Indonesia, already has this focus), increasing the number of interviews with youth participants and/or focused on issues affecting the youth. Similarly, identifying at least two case studies with a clear gender component, and increasing the number of interviews with women participants. Please see Appendix H for a description of case studies already identified.
- Ensuring the participation of young people as well as women in engagements with communities (see inclusive recruitment and sampling in section 3.6)
- Building on realist evaluation principles, additional interview questions will be asked to case study interviewees, to detail for which stakeholder groups the interventions and causal claims worked, and for whom they did not.
- Isolating program effects on youth and gender by disaggregating data on these two variables, at the level of the individual, on youth and women participants or beneficiaries,

and at the organisation, on youth and women-led VCA local partners (this detail is available through VCA monitoring data, the evaluation survey data and interview data). This disaggregation will be done through thematic analysis and Causal Mapping.

Regarding Southern leadership, we note that key evaluation question #3 and #7 on Partnerships explicitly addresses issues of Southern leadership, which is unpacked from the perspective of decision-making, participation and partnership dynamics; given the large number of questions already included in this evaluation, we recommend not adding additional questions to avoid diluting the evaluation findings. Explicit questions have been added on inclusion of youth, gender and marginalized groups in decision-making spaces under evaluation question #1.

Appendix 12: References

MoFA. (2024). *IOB Evaluation Criteria*.

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