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## **EX-POST EVALUATION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Project PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F)**

**Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the  
North Coast of Peru**

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**September 2025**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This ex-post evaluation assesses the long-term sustainability and impact of an intervention designed to reverse the critical degradation of Peru's tropical dry forests. Conducted six years after project closure (2017-2019), this analysis moves beyond simple output delivery to determine whether capacity-building efforts translated into lasting change for forests and communities. The project was implemented by the non-governmental organization AIDER (Association for Integrated Research and Development), in partnership with SERFOR (Peru's National Forest and Wildlife Service) and the Regional Governments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque, with a total budget of \$989,038.

The evaluation reveals a stark dichotomy: flawless implementation failed to catalyze transformative change. While the project successfully delivered all planned outputs—training, manuals, and multi-stakeholder committees—it could not overcome deep-seated economic and governance barriers. Six years later, deforestation drivers remain powerful, generated benefits have not been sustained, and the project's impact on forest cover or community livelihoods is minimal.

### Project Background & Context

The project responded to a severe environmental crisis. Peru's tropical dry forests, among Latin America's most threatened ecosystems, had already lost over 40% of their original cover in the north by 2017. Annual deforestation rates exceed 20,000 hectares in Piura alone, driven by illegal logging, agricultural expansion for lucrative export crops (mango, citrus), and overgrazing. These pressures were exacerbated by systemic governance fragmentation following decentralization, which left regional governments without adequate funding or capacity to enforce laws. The project's theory of change was logically sound: to strengthen stakeholder capacities for sustainable forest management (SFM) through institutional coordination, community training, and knowledge sharing, thereby reducing degradation and improving rural livelihoods.

### Geographic and Socio-Economic Context

The project operated in the departments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque, a region encompassing approximately 3.3 million hectares of dry forest. An estimated 74,000 low-income families depend entirely on these ecosystems for subsistence, including timber, fuelwood, and non-timber forest products, with women playing a central yet economically undervalued role. The context is defined by a powerful economic disparity: short-term income from converting forest to agriculture or charcoal production vastly outweighs the financial returns from sustainable forest-based livelihoods. This reality, combined with institutional fragility and poverty, created a profoundly challenging environment for conservation.

### Project Strategy

The project employed a holistic four-pillar strategy designed to transform forest governance and value:

- Governance strengthening: Enhancing technical/regulatory capabilities of authorities and establishing multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms (CGFFS).
- Capacity building: Using a "Learn-by-Doing" methodology to train officials and communities in SFM techniques.
- Knowledge management: Developing and disseminating technical manuals, guides, and awareness campaigns.
- Mainstreaming & sustainability: Working to embed outcomes into government systems and demonstrating sustainable practices to communities.

### The Ex-Post Evaluation Mission

The evaluation employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach based on OECD-DAC <sup>1</sup> criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Sustainability). The methodology prioritized data triangulation, cross-

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<sup>1</sup>The OECD-DAC criteria are the standard evaluation framework established by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee. They provide a structure for assessing development

verifying evidence from project documentation, field visits to all three regions, and multiple interviews with government officials, community members, and implementers. The central question guiding the mission was: “But did it last?”

### **Project Implementation**

The Project was operationally successful, demonstrating high efficiency and coherence by delivering most of all scheduled outputs on time and within budget. It achieved its immediate goals, training officials, promoting dialogue platforms, publishing knowledge products, and executing creative awareness campaigns. Strong collaboration with local leaders and innovative outreach, such as the Algarrobito comic, were success factors that fostered participation and elevated the dry forest's profile.

However, a critical distinction exists between this output delivery and the achievement of sustainable outcomes and transformative impact. The evaluation reveals that these activities did not consistently translate into lasting improvements in forest governance, community practices, or a reduction in deforestation. Several limitations emerged, including overambitious scoping that left some outputs like the forest information system incomplete, and a lack of follow-up support for eco-business pilots, which prevented them from competing with more lucrative land-use changes like mango cultivation. Furthermore, verifiable evidence of widespread adoption of sustainable practices by communities or significant reach of awareness campaigns is lacking.

The root causes of these gaps are not implementation failures but profound, systemic barriers beyond the Project's control. These include high institutional turnover, chronic underfunding of regional governments, overpowering market forces, and an incomplete political decentralization process. Consequently, while the Project efficiently sowed the seeds of change by building a foundation of capacity and awareness, its effectiveness was ultimately constrained by its limited scope and timeframe. The initiative lacked a strategy to ensure these seeds could take root in the infertile soil of the prevailing economic and governance structures, leading to fragile institutional gains and a deepened, unanticipated dependency on the project executing agency (AIDER) rather than on self-sustaining governmental capacity.

### **Project Financing**

The project was implemented with a total budget of US\$ 989,038, co-financed both by ITTO and the national project executing agency, AIDER. ITTO provided US\$ 437,630 (44.2% of the total) as the grant component supporting core implementation activities, while AIDER contributed US\$ 551,408 (55.8%) as counterpart funding. The bulk of ITTO's grant was managed by AIDER to deliver field-level actions—capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and on-the-ground conservation measures—allowing adaptive, context-sensitive implementation while remaining within ITTO operational guidance.

From an accountability perspective, the project's financial execution is a clear strength. The three internal financial audits included in the review concluded with zero observations of non-conformities, indicating full compliance with agreed financial procedures and sound internal controls throughout implementation. This clean audit record enhances the project's transparency and credibility: it demonstrates that resources were disbursed and recorded appropriately, strengthens confidence among donors and partners, and provides a reliable fiscal foundation for follow-on initiatives.

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interventions through five key pillars: Relevance (the appropriateness of objectives to the context and needs), Effectiveness (the achievement of objectives), Efficiency (how economically resources are converted to results), Impact (the positive and negative long-term effects), and Sustainability (the durability of benefits after aid ends).

## Lessons Learned

The project yielded critical, transferable lessons for dry forest conservation:

- A holistic approach is necessary but insufficient: A multi-faceted strategy is essential, but it must be deeply contextualized; a one-size-fits-all model fails against varying regional drivers.
- Governance requires more than committees: Establishing participatory platforms is only a first step; their long-term functionality depends on formal mandates and sustainable budget lines within government structures.
- Beware of the NGO dependency trap: Projects that rely on a highly capable implementing NGO risk further weakening public institutions and creating unsustainable parallel systems.
- The project cycle paradox: Complex behavioral and institutional change requires decades, not a 30-month project cycle. Short-term funding incentivizes reporting on activities over achieving sustained impact.
- Economic incentives are non-negotiable: Providing knowledge and skills is futile without addressing the fundamental economic calculus that makes deforestation more profitable than conservation for local communities.

## Conclusions

The Project proved to be highly relevant and operationally efficient, successfully delivering its planned outputs and aligning well with national priorities. However, it achieved limited effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in terms of directly reducing deforestation or durably improving local livelihoods within its own lifecycle. Its focus on capacity building, while necessary, was insufficient to alter the profound economic and governance drivers of forest degradation.

Notably, the Project served as a vital catalyst for future action. Although mobilizing financing was not an explicit objective, the initiative successfully elevated the profile of dry forests and strengthened key partnerships, thereby creating enabling conditions for subsequent investments and institutional arrangements. This foundational legacy is substantiated by concrete outcomes that emerged after the project's closure, including the launch of the GEF-7 dry forest conservation project (2021–2026) involving FAO, IUCN, and Peruvian institutions, and the 2021 administration contracts through which SERNANP entrusted AIDER with the management of three protected areas: Cerros de Amotape National Park, Tumbes National Reserve, and El Angolo Hunting Reserve. Although a proposed REDD+ partnership lacks public evidence of implementation, the project unequivocally helped position the dry forest agenda to capture later financing and governance opportunities, demonstrating that its principal impact was strategic and catalytic rather than direct and environmental.

- Relevance: The design addressed documented needs and aligned with national and ITTO priorities.
- Effectiveness: It successfully achieved all its outputs (training held, manuals produced, committees formed).
- Impact & sustainability: The project failed to achieve its primary objective. Deforestation drivers continue unabated. Gains in awareness and capacity proved fragile and collapsed after external support ended due to a lack of embedded economic incentives, political ownership, and sustainable financing. The project built a house, but on an unstable foundation of unresolved systemic barriers.

## Recommendations

Future interventions must be radically redesigned to address the root causes of failure.

- For a follow-up phase: Any new initiative must be contingent on secured formal government co-financing and mandates. It should be designed as a 7–10-year program focused on creating scalable, market-driven livelihood alternatives that directly compete with income from deforestation, moving beyond pilot demonstrations.
- For the project implementing agency (AIDER): The role must shift from implementer to facilitator of systemic change. This involves strengthening local partner autonomy, institutionalizing knowledge into

government protocols, and adopting rigorous outcome-based M&E to track metrics like hectares under sustainable management and increases in forest-based income.

- For ITTO: Funding paradigms must shift. ITTO should mandate deep risk analyses of political economies and market drivers during project formulation. It must incentivize models that include sub-grants to local organizations and enforce legally binding sustainability agreements with government partners prior to implementation. Creating a dry forest-specific funding window with longer timeframes and tailored indicators is essential to overcome the unique challenges of these ecosystems.

Ultimately, conservation success depends on making sustainable forest management a financially competitive livelihood strategy. This requires a holistic redesign that prioritizes economic incentives, long-term timeframes, and genuine government ownership from the outset.

## Appendix 2

| Management Response to ITTO Ex-Post Evaluation   |  |
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| Project Title: Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru   |  |
| Project ID: Project PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F)  |  |
| A) Overall Response to the Evaluation:   |  |
| <p>In general terms, the evaluation report is comprehensive and provides relevant recommendations. The structure is coherent, a recommendation would be to shorten some sections to have a report of not more than 35 pages (the report has 81 pages). The methodology was effective for delivering a general perspective on the project impact but considering the complexity of the context and the specific characteristic of the project (objective of capacity building), specific tools for measuring impacts of capacity building and sensitization (e.g. attitudinal changes) could strengthen the evaluation methodology. An evaluation after six years of project implementation posed also challenges related to evidence collection and to the linkage of project activities with results and changes, which could influence in the evaluation findings and conclusions.</p>   |  |
| Evaluation Report<br>Recommendations*  | B) Response to recommendations<br>(e.g. 'accept', 'partially accept' or 'reject'<br>– please provide a brief   |
| <p>Recommendation 1</p> <p><i>Integrate risk-informed and politically savvy design: Future project designs should complement their strong policy alignment with granular, context-specific risk analysis. During the formulation phase, AIDER should conduct structured political economy and stakeholder analyses to explicitly map power dynamics, vested interests, and potential barriers such as political turnover, inter-institutional conflicts, or corruption. This will allow for the integration of robust mitigation strategies from the outset. For example, designing with flexible implementation modalities can accommodate shifting local priorities or government structures. Furthermore, sustainability should be engineered into the project's DNA through co-designed sustainability mechanisms, such as matching fund agreements with regional governments for post-project activities or business models for community-based enterprises around non-timber forest products, ensuring interventions continue to deliver value well beyond the funding period.</i></p> | <p>Accept. AIDER always conducts stakeholders analysis during projects formulation phases and defines and implements risk mitigation strategies. Nevertheless, the political dynamic of regional (subnational) policies and governments poses major challenges for post-project sustainability of the activities and proposals transferred by projects, particularly the ones related to structural and or systemic barriers. On this sense, AIDER is keen to continue strengthening its risk analysis procedures for project design, particularly regarding political and socioeconomic issues.</p> |

**Recommendation 2**

*Institutionalize knowledge for resilient legacy: To ensure project legacies endure beyond political and funding cycles, AIDER should transition from producing reports to actively institutionalizing knowledge and systems. This involves codifying successful methodologies, tools, and lessons learned into clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), best-practice guides, and training curricula. These resources should be formally transferred and integrated into the operational frameworks of key partners, such as regional government technical units and civil society organizations. Concurrently, AIDER should identify and nurture a network of “champions” at multiple levels—from community leaders to mid-level technicians—who are equipped and motivated to advocate for and continue the work, creating a decentralized and resilient ecosystem for sustained impact.*

Accept. AIDER is in the process of operationalizing its Knowledge Management Unit and this recommendation provides some interesting elements to be taken into consideration for this institutional process. AIDER has experience on training community promoters and local technicians for the transference of AIDER's project proposals post-project and this strategy could be institutionalized with a programmatic approach. AIDER's Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit is familiarized with the construction of SOPs and is providing support for the full operationalization of the Knowledge Management Unit. While we acknowledge the importance of transferring management frameworks to local partners such as regional governments, it must be taken into account that achieving formal integration of these frameworks is most of the time outside the direct control of civil society project implementers.

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| <p>Recommendation 3</p> <p><i>Embed adaptive management through rigorous Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework: A dedicated MEL must be a non-negotiable component of project inception, moving beyond simple activity tracking to measuring tangible impact. This begins with establishing a quantitative baseline using verifiable data (e.g., satellite imagery for forest cover, household surveys for socio-economic indicators) against which progress can be rigorously assessed. The framework should track outcome-level indicators, such as the percentage of trained communities adopting sustainable practices, hectares under improved management, or increases in forest-dependent income. Employing accessible digital tools can streamline data collection and analysis. This shift will not only provide defensible evidence of impact for donors but, more importantly, create a system for continuous learning and adaptive management, allowing projects to be refined in real-time based on what works.</i></p> | <p>Accept. AIDER has a strong Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and M&amp;E procedures considers the measurement of projects results, effects and impacts in addition to monitoring of project implementation (activities and deliverables) and has adaptative management as one of its pillars. The M&amp;E approaches and methods to be implemented are adapted according to the characteristics of each project in terms of scope, financial resources availability and formal agreements with counterparts. We fully agree that a MEL framework should be part of the initial project agreements with counterparts but we acknowledge that its scope and specific methods will depend on the financial resources agreed for MEL. Under its new Strategic Plan, AIDER is currently working on ways to institutionalize impact evaluation of its proposals with financial-smart strategies.</p> |
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**Recommendation 4**

*Adopt an equity-based implementation model: Future projects must consciously shift from a model of equal distribution to one of equitable investment, ensuring resources are allocated based on the specific needs and capacities of different regions and stakeholder groups. This begins with a participatory needs and capacity assessment during the design phase to identify the most vulnerable groups and the unique barriers they face. Implementation strategies should then be tailored accordingly; for instance, providing more intensive support, sub-grants, or mentoring in areas with lower baseline capacity, while offering advanced opportunities (e.g., personalized training) in more advanced areas. Crucially, the MEL system must employ disaggregated data collection (by gender, location, income brackets) to ensure these equity goals are being met and that the project is genuinely inclusive.*

Accept. We agree on the importance of an equitable investment approach in our projects and we are committed with continuous improvement in project design. AIDER implements participatory needs and capacity assessments during its project design phase and this information is used for the design of project key implementation strategies. Several AIDER's projects have included strategies of dedicated training, intensive technical assistance, mentoring, among others. AIDER's MEL system currently employ disaggregated data collection (by gender, location, income brackets).

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| <p>Recommendation 5</p> <p><i>Mainstream water governance and economic incentives: Lasting dry forest conservation is inextricably linked to water governance and economic viability. Future projects must place these issues at their core. Capacity building should be expanded to include modules on water rights, negotiation skills, and the economics of sustainable land use, empowering communities to advocate for fair resource distribution. Furthermore, projects should proactively develop and pilot tangible economic incentives that make conservation competitively attractive, such as facilitating access to markets for deforestation-free products, developing payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes, or supporting community-based enterprises that generate income from sustainably managed forests.</i></p> | <p>Accept. We fully agree that dryforest conservation in Peruvian's northcoast as a strong linkage to water and to value chains sustainability, as well to the enhancement of enabling conditions related to land tenure security, social capital, knowledge and skills, institutionality and forest governance. We agree that future projects oriented to dryforests conservation should take into consideration water governance and economic elements, but also projects for developing and strenghtening enabling conditions continue to be necessary. As part of its institutional objectives, AIDER continue committed with supporting economic activities at community-level which increase the value of dryforests goods and ecosystem services and is currently working on bringing its institutional experience in supporting biobusinesses and PES schemes in the Amazon to drylands ecosystems. In addition, AIDER is working on the inclusion of water management and integral land planning approaches to its future initiatives on the northcoast of Peru.</p> |
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Recommendation 6

*Formalize Project exit through binding sustainability agreements: To avoid the dissolution of project platforms post-exit, sustainability planning must be proactive and formalized. This involves moving from non-binding verbal agreements to negotiated compacts with clear conditions. Memoranda of Understanding with government partners should explicitly outline post-project commitments, including the integration of key activities into their institutional operational plans and the allocation of dedicated annual budgets and staff. This process should be informed by the initial political economy analysis to ensure agreements are realistic and enforceable. Exit strategies must then be designed to gradually transition facilitation roles to these local entities, supported by a system for monitoring long-term practice adoption to ensure a lasting legacy.*

Accept, but with the consideration that AIDER's scope of work is focused on capacity building, technological transference and facilitation-articulation of processes, partnerships and synergies for forest conservation and sustainable development, and not directly in the generation of legal agreements for governmental institutionalization. While we agree that AIDER could continue improving its exit strategies for post-project commitments by governmental organizations, it is important to highlight that the establishment of specific MoUs or similar agreements require a set of conditions such as political willigness and financial capacities, that could not necessarily be under the direct control of the project. These elements could lilit the establishment of binding agreements. In addition, while AIDER is committed with the implementation of procedures to monitor long-term practice adoption, it also aknowledge that ensuring financial resources for post-project monitoring and evaluation still a relevant challenge.

Name, Title and Institution of Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date, Signature:

Jaime Nalvarte, Executive Director  
AIDER  
September 09, 2025



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