Ex-post Evaluation Report

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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1. Context of Dry Forests in Northern Peru

Peru's tropical dry forests—once extensive along the northern coast—are now recognized as among the most threatened ecosystems in Latin America (WWF, n.d.; MINAM, 2018). By the time this ITTO-funded Project began in 2017, the departments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque had already lost more than 40% of their original dry forest cover, primarily due to illegal logging, the expansion of agro-industrial crops, and unsustainable grazing practices. These forests are critical not only for biodiversity and carbon storage but also for sustaining the livelihoods of thousands of rural families. Yet, they faced a convergence of pressures:

- **Weak governance:** Decentralization had transferred responsibilities to regional governments, but without adequate funding or technical capacity to enforce laws.
- **Economic drivers:** Farmers found it more profitable to convert dry forests into mango plantations than to engage in sustainable forestry.
- **Fragmented responses:** Previous initiatives concentrated narrowly on isolated responses, without addressing the broader market and political forces driving deforestation.

Against this backdrop, the Project "**PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F): "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru"** (2017–2019) set out with an ambitious goal: to reverse degradation by strengthening institutions, empowering communities, and promoting sustainable practices.

Six years after the Project's close, this ex-post evaluation asks critical questions. Reported outputs reached 100% on paper, but the central issue is whether these achievements translated into sustained change. To explore this, the evaluation revisits the objectives of the project through a series of reflective "But…?" questions, many drawn from interviews with communities, institutions, and authorities in Piura, Lambayeque, and Tumbes:

- Capacity and application: The Project trained officials, technicians, and communities — but did these capacities translate into sustained action and better forest management on the ground?
- Sustainability of results: Reported achievements reached 100% during implementation — but which products, practices, and institutions remain active six years later, and which were abandoned?
- Community inclusion and equity: The Project promoted participation — but were rural families, women, and youth genuinely included in decision-making and able to benefit equitably?
- Governance and policy impact: Institutional frameworks were strengthened — but has governance improved in practice, with better coordination among SERFOR, regional governments, and communities, and are forest rules effectively enforced?
- Environmental and livelihood outcomes: Awareness and value chain initiatives were implemented — but did they reduce deforestation, conserve dry forests, and improve the incomes and resilience of forest-dependent households?

Using available published information, field visits, and stakeholder interviews, this report intends to go beyond counting the obvious (# workshops held or #participants trained). The evaluation aims at analyzing:

- The gaps between policy and practice;
- The unintended consequences of avoided conflicts;
- The uncomfortable trade-offs between conservation and development.

2. Evaluation Rationale

The ITTO Project "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru" represented a significant investment in addressing the complex challenges of forest degradation through institutional strengthening and community engagement. Conducted six years after the Project's completion, this ex-post evaluation serves to critically assess the sustainability of its outcomes and the lasting validity of its approach.

This evaluation moves beyond standard reporting to examine whether the Project's output included trained personnel, established platforms, and formalized policies—translated into tangible, long-term impacts on forest governance and local livelihoods. It investigates not only what was achieved, but how structural barriers such as economic incentives, power dynamics, and inadequate funding mechanisms influenced the persistence of results.

Through a combination of field verification, and stakeholder consultations, this report delivers an evidence-based assessment of the Project's relevance, effectiveness, and ultimate sustainability. It identifies key lessons regarding community ownership, the economic viability of conservation, and the institutionalization of Project initiatives within government systems.

Ultimately, this evaluation aims to provide ITTO, the Peruvian government, and other stakeholders with actionable insights to enhance the design and implementation of future conservation initiatives, ensuring they deliver meaningful and durable benefits for both forests and people.

3. Scope of the Ex-post Evaluation

This ex-post evaluation examined the enduring impacts and institutional and socioeconomic changes resulting from the "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru", six years after its formal completion.

The scope of the evaluation was strategically delimited to exclude short-term outputs already documented in Project implementation and completion reports. Instead, the analysis prioritized the Project's legacy in terms of improvements to forest governance systems, sustainable land-use practices, institutional coordination, community livelihoods, civil society engagement, and dry forest conservation outcomes. By focusing on these post-completion dynamics, the evaluation aimed to provide actionable evidence on how capacity-building and participatory planning efforts can produce lasting change in ecologically fragile and socially vulnerable dry forest landscapes.

The ex-post evaluation was structured around three critical dimensions:

3.1. Project Outcomes

Measuring achieved results against original objectives:[1]

- Assessment of design and achievements against objectives: The Project aimed to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders, particularly regional governments, local communities, and technical institutions, to sustainably manage and restore the dry forest ecosystems in the Peruvian northern regions of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. The evaluation assessed the extent to which these efforts resulted in sustainable improvements in forest management practices, local governance mechanisms, biodiversity conservation, livelihood improvement, and community resilience. Specific attention was given to the operationalization of the three Regional Forest and Wildlife Management Platforms and the formulation of Regional Forest and Wildlife Management Plans (PGRFyF), both of which were central to the project's theory of change.
- While the Project successfully trained over 50 officials and technicians—meeting its initial expected quantitative outcome—the evaluation found this achievement did not translate into efficient forest management or ensured sustainability as originally envisioned. High staff turnover in regional governments and the lack of formalized mandates or budgetary support systematically undermined the application of acquired knowledge. Similarly, although stakeholder involvement temporarily increased during implementation through coordination platforms like the PGRFyF, this engagement was not sustained at the 80% level post-completion as anticipated in the project's original framework. Participation declined significantly after external facilitation ended, demonstrating that while the Project achieved most of its output targets, it failed to secure the lasting institutional ownership necessary for sustainable forest management outcomes. This gap between quantitative achievement and qualitative impact reveals the limitations of measuring success solely against numerical targets without addressing systemic institutional constraints.
- Impact and relevance analysis: The evaluation examined whether Project interventions, such as participatory zoning, forest inventory tools, reforestation protocols, awareness campaigns, and restoration pilots, effectively identified key regional challenges including deforestation, land degradation, limited technical capacity, and inadequate interagency coordination. Outreach products (e.g., training modules, audiovisual materials) were also reviewed to determine their utility in raising awareness and promoting changes in policy or behavior among local stakeholders.
- The Project conducted campaigns, workshops, and produced materials. However, there is no evidence that supports its target of raising awareness among 70% of the rural population. Further, this awareness did not reliably lead to applied forest management techniques among the 64 targeted communities, as envisaged in the Original Project Framework. The evaluation found no verifiable data to substantiate engagement with 64 communities, and no monitoring records or baseline studies existed to measure awareness levels or behavioral changes against initial targets. Where training did occur, adoption of techniques proved inconsistent and was often abandoned due to a lack of ongoing technical support and the absence of compelling economic incentives. Sustainable practices simply could not compete with the immediate financial returns

[1] As detailed on Section 1.4. Expected Outcomes at project completion of the document PD741-14 Rev.3 (F)_English Project Information.pdf

from charcoal production or agricultural expansion. While the Project's interventions were relevant in design, they ultimately failed to address the deeper economic drivers that limited behavioral change, highlighting a significant disconnect between awareness-raising activities and tangible, sustained impact on forest management practices.

- Identification of unintended consequences: Beyond planned outputs, the evaluation explored any unforeseen effects of the intervention. This included examining whether shifts occurred in land tenure mechanisms, economic activities, or institutional relations, either enabling or constraining the intended outcomes. Potential ecological impacts of the pilot restoration sites were also reviewed in light of ongoing environmental stressors and community practices.
- An unintended yet significant outcome was the Project's role as a catalyst for subsequent investments and institutional arrangements, which were not explicitly listed as objectives in the original project framework. For example, the Project's efforts helped pave the way for the GEF-7 dry forest conservation project and led to National Service of Protected Areas (SERNANP) entrusting AIDER with the management of three protected areas. However, these outcomes also highlighted a dependency on NGO-led execution rather than the strengthened governmental management capacity initially targeted in the Project's expected outcomes. Additionally, while the Project aimed for community self-sufficiency as outlined in its design documents, the evaluation found that some initiatives inadvertently fostered expectations of continued material incentives, potentially undermining intrinsic motivation for conservation.
- Efficiency of implementation: The evaluation reviewed the Project's technical, administrative, and financial efficiency. It assessed whether human and financial resources were utilized in a timely and coordinated manner and whether delays, such as those related to fund disbursement, institutional turnover, or procurement, affected the achievement of intended results.
- The Project was implemented with operational efficiency, completing most activities on time and within budget. However, this efficiency did not fully translate into effectiveness against the objectives outlined in the project framework. Delays in fund disbursement and high institutional turnover within regional governments—though mitigated by the Project team—limited the depth of engagement and the consolidation of outcomes. Resources were optimally used for output delivery, but the ambitious scope of targeting three regions simultaneously diluted the intensity of support, ultimately constraining the achievement of sustained community adoption and institutional management efficiency.

3.2. Project Sustainability

Analyzing the longevity of capacity-building efforts and policy reforms

- Sustainability of outcomes: A central concern of the ex-post evaluation was the persistence of Project outcomes beyond ITTO support. This included evaluating whether stakeholders continue to apply forest management practices introduced during the Project, whether regional governance platforms remain functional, and whether the institutional tools and policies developed (e.g., the PGRFyF, technical guidelines) are being used or scaled up. The evaluation also explored whether regional governments

have committed budgetary or institutional resources to maintain the momentum created by the Project.

- Lessons for future initiatives: Based on the evidence from field verification, stakeholder interviews, and review of project documentation, the evaluation aimed to capture key lessons learned and best practices. These insights should help shape future ITTO funded initiatives in places facing similar ecological and governance contexts, especially when it comes to improving local forest management and building stronger, more resilient institutions in dry forest areas.

3.3. Project Scalability

Identifying transferable lessons for similar ecosystems and experience and contribution to broader ITTO goals.

The evaluation assessed the Project's alignment with the International Tropical Timber Agreement (2006) and ITTO's Strategic Action Plan 2013–2018, specifically for priorities related to the sustainable management of production forests, the promotion of equitable stakeholder participation, and the integration of conservation and development strategies. The Project's use of participatory planning tools, capacity-building models, and cross-sector platforms was reviewed for its applicability in other dry forest ecosystems and policy contexts.

Finally, this ex-post evaluation is a strategic tool for accountability, adaptive learning, and programmatic refinement. It looked closely at how sustainability and scalability of capacity-building and institutional reforms, the assessment validated the most significant contributions made by the Project, while identifying gaps and opportunities to strengthen the sustainability and impact of similar future initiatives. The findings aim to support policymakers, implementing agencies, and forest-dependent communities in strengthening their commitment to inclusive, evidence-based, and resilient approaches to dry forest governance in Peru and beyond.

4. Project Background

The tropical dry forests of Peru's northern coast are a critically endangered and ecologically vital ecosystem, spanning the departments of Lambayeque, Tumbes, and Piura. Characterized by high levels of endemism and biodiversity, these forests play an essential role in soil stabilization, water regulation, and carbon sequestration. They also serve as a fundamental economic and cultural resource for local and rural communities who depend on them for timber, non-timber forest products, and subsistence livelihoods.

Despite their importance, these forests face severe and accelerating threats. Annual deforestation rates reached alarming levels, with Piura alone losing approximately 20,822 hectares per year[2] prior to project initiation. The primary drivers included expansion of export-oriented agriculture (e.g., mango and citrus), illegal selective logging of high-value species, overgrazing, and wildfires. Underlying these direct threats were systemic challenges: fragmented governance due to ongoing decentralization, weak enforcement capacity, limited economic alternatives for communities, and insufficient integration of dry forests into national climate and conservation strategies.

[2] https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/PER/21/

In response, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) funded the Project "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru" which was executed by the Association for Integrated Research and Development (AIDER) in close collaboration with the Peruvian National Forest Service (SERFOR) and the Regional Governments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque, the project was implemented over a 30-month period (May 2017–October 2019).

The Project was designed to address the root cause of forest degradation: limited capacities among key stakeholders for sustainable management. Its goal was to improve rural livelihoods through the conservation and sustainable use of dry forest resources by pursuing three interrelated objectives:

- Strengthen governance: Enhance the technical and regulatory capabilities of regional forest authorities and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms for coordinated action.
- Build local capacity: Empower communities through training in sustainable forest management techniques and establishing a network of local forest promoters to ensure long-term knowledge transfer.
- Generate and share knowledge: Develop a comprehensive dry forest information system and disseminate best practices through targeted awareness campaigns to shift perceptions on the value of conservation.

To achieve this, the Project employed a multi-faceted strategy including policy analysis, extensive training programs, the creation of participatory governance spaces such as Forest and Wildlife Management Committees (CGFFS), and a strategic communication plan that utilized radio, workshops, and educational materials.

This ex-post evaluation assesses the Project's achievements, sustainability, and impact six years after its completion, providing critical lessons for the future of dry forest conservation in Peru and beyond.

4.1. Project Scope and Strategic Approach

The Project was designed to address the rapid degradation of tropical dry forests in the departments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque, Peru, caused primarily by anthropogenic pressures including illegal logging, agricultural expansion, and overgrazing. Its scope was structured to target key barriers limiting sustainable forest management through a multi-level capacity development strategy. The Project's theory of change posited that lasting conservation requires transforming how forests are governed and valued, moving from centralized, enforcement-heavy models to participatory, multi-stakeholder systems rooted in local capacity and institutional legitimacy.

The intervention logic was built on four integrated pillars:

- Governance strengthening and policy alignment: This component focused on the policy and institutional environment. Planned activities included supporting regional governments in the formulation and implementation of long-term forest and wildlife development plans. A specific aim was the development of complementary regulations for dry forests under the national Forestry and Wildlife Law (Ley N° 29763). Furthermore, the Project intended to enhance the National Forest and Wildlife

Information System (SNIFF) at the regional level and support its coordination with Regional Environmental Information Systems (SIAR). The strategic approach involved facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue, primarily through the establishment and operationalization of Forest and Wildlife Management Committees (CGFFS), to ensure participatory policy development.

- Institutional and community capacity building: A core component was translating technical knowledge into accessible formats for diverse audiences. This dimension targeted human and institutional capacity. The Project designed activities to train officials from regional governments and the National Forest and Wildlife Service (SERFOR) in the technical and administrative aspects of sustainable forest management (SFM). The objective was to improve the ability of these institutions to execute their mandates, enforce regulations, and provide effective guidance and oversight.
- Knowledge management and communication: The Project developed practice guides, operational manuals, and awareness campaigns to ensure that lessons learned were systematized, disseminated, and could inform decision-making from the community to the regional level.
- Sustainability and mainstreaming: This area focused on direct implementation with forest-dependent communities and users. The scope encompassed training community leaders and promoters in SFM techniques, demonstrating sustainable harvesting and restoration practices, and supporting the formulation of forest management plans for both timber and non-timber forest products. The intended result was the increased adoption of practices that balance forest conservation with the generation of local livelihood benefits. From the outset, the project design sought to embed its outcomes into existing systems.

The Project's intervention logic was predicated on a systems-based theory of change, recognizing that sustainable dry forest management requires coordinated action across three interdependent tiers: policy frameworks, institutional capabilities, and on-the-ground practices. This holistic approach aimed to create a synergistic enabling environment where strengthened regulations would be effectively implemented by capable institutions and willingly adopted by communities incentivized through clear economic and ecological benefits. By design, the Project sought to synchronize top-down policy alignment with bottom-up community engagement, intending to align incentives and build a cohesive foundation for long-term forest stewardship.

4.2. Geographic Scope

The Project covered the tropical dry forests of northern Peru, specifically in the departments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. These forests extend across approximately 3.3 million hectares and are home to around 40,000 low-income families who rely on them for subsistence and livelihoods. The Project targeted this region due to its ecological importance—supporting biodiversity, climate stability, and community livelihoods—while also being under severe threat from weak governance, illegal logging, and unsustainable land use practices.

4.3. Socio-Economic Context

The tropical dry forests of Peru's northern departments—Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque—represent a critical socio-ecological system where poverty, limited economic opportunity, and environmental degradation are deeply interconnected. These forests serve as a vital safety net for an estimated **74,000 families** who reside permanently within these ecosystems, supporting rural livelihoods through the provision of timber, fuelwood, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), fodder, and water (INEI, 2012; Project Document).

- Livelihoods & economic activities: Rural communities, including those organized under entities like CECOBOSQUE in Piura, depend on forest resources for subsistence and income generation through small-scale livestock grazing, seasonal agriculture, and the sale of forest products. Women play a particularly crucial role in the forest economy, being primarily responsible for harvesting and processing NTFPs—such as *algarrobo* pods for livestock feed and charcoal production for regional markets—yet their work often remains economically undervalued. While urban centers show economic diversification into agro-exportation and commerce, rural zones remain heavily natural resource-dependent with limited access to formal credit or alternative income sources.
- Social infrastructure & services: Remote forest communities face significant gaps in basic services including education, healthcare, and technical agricultural support. High annual deforestation rates—estimated at 20,822 hectares in Piura alone—are driven by agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and overgrazing (GRP, 2011). This environmental degradation directly undermines the ecological services these communities rely on, particularly water provision and soil fertility, creating a cycle where resource scarcity pushes communities toward more intensive short-term extraction.
- Governance & institutional framework: Forest governance in the region is characterized by fragmented institutional mandates and limited coordination between national and regional authorities. While SERFOR holds national policy authority, regional governments (GOREs) face capacity constraints in implementing forest policies despite having transferred competencies. The legal recognition of community forest rights remains incomplete, and oversight mechanisms are weakened by limited budgets for

monitoring and enforcement. This institutional landscape has allowed unsustainable practices to persist despite formal regulatory frameworks.

- Cultural context: The dry forests are embedded within a landscape of exceptional cultural richness, shaped by ancient civilizations such as the Moche, Lambayeque, and Chimu. These forests provide cultural continuity through traditional knowledge, ancestral land-use practices, and community organization around forest resources. The cultural value of the dry forest landscape supports tourism where archaeological sites, local traditions, and forest-based livelihoods intersect to reinforce both community identity and economic opportunity.

Within this context—where economic vulnerability intersects with institutional fragility and cultural significance, the Project intervened with the aim of demonstrating that sustainable forest management could deliver both ecological integrity and tangible livelihood benefits, thereby aligning conservation goals with community economic security and cultural preservation.

4.4. Project Budget and Funding Sources

The Project was implemented with a total budget of $989,038 USD, representing a collaborative financial partnership between the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the national Executing Agency, AIDER.

- Funding sources and contributions: ITTO contributed $437,630 USD (44.2% of the total budget), provided as a grant to support the core implementation of project activities.
- Counterpart contribution: $551,408 USD (55.8% of the total budget), contributed by AIDER. This demonstrates institutional investment in the Project's success, aligned with ITTO's emphasis on partner commitment.
- Financial management: The majority of the ITTO contribution was directly managed by AIDER to implement field-based activities, including capacity-building workshops, stakeholder engagement, and on-ground conservation initiatives. This structure allowed for contextual responsiveness while maintaining alignment with ITTO's operational guidelines.

5. Project Justification and Strategy

5.1. Justification

The ex-post evaluation of the Project "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru" is justified by the critical importance of assessing how far the intervention succeeded in strengthening governance, building institutional and community capacities, and reducing degradation in one of Peru's most vulnerable ecosystems. The tropical dry forests of Lambayeque, Piura and Tumbes are essential for biodiversity, rural livelihoods, and climate resilience, yet they have historically faced high deforestation and degradation rates driven by illegal logging, forest fires, and weak institutional coordination.

The Project was rooted in a sequence of national and regional policy dialogues that had already identified the need for stronger forest governance and community empowerment:

- *International Seminar on Dry Forests and Desertification (INRENA, Piura, 2007):* This event, as reported by AIDER concluded with recommendations to 1) strengthen a conducive legal framework and institutional forest governance by reinforcing executive and management bodies, and 2) improve governance by empowering local bodies while recognizing community-led conservation efforts, and by respecting and acknowledging community institutions and organizations working for environmental sustainability.
- *SERFOR Workshop (2013):* The Peruvian government formally recognized forests as strategic for economic growth, poverty reduction, and climate resilience. The workshop emphasized decentralized, inclusive management tailored to regional needs, while highlighting the need for improved institutional capacity, adequate funding, and cooperation across government, businesses, and communities.
- *Regional Forest Development plan of Piura (2013):* This plan underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder dialogue to align policies across sectors, advocate for stronger community participation in policy design and monitoring and calls for transparency and open data access to track forest management progress.

Against this background, the project was designed to respond to these threats by addressing the key problem identified in the problem tree: the *limited capacity of stakeholders to manage dry forests sustainably*. Root causes included regional government capacity, poor public-civil society involvement in forest-decision making, and insufficient technical and operational know-how for sustainable forest management (SFM) at the community level.

From a logical framework perspective, the project defines a clear development objective: to improve the living standards of rural communities through conservation and sustainable use of tropical dry forests, with measurable impacts such as reduced deforestation, improved gross value added from forestry, and *conservation of one million hectares* of community forests. Its specific objective: *to strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders to establish policies and practices for SFM*, directly addressing the systemic governance and capacity gaps.

The objective tree analysis reinforced the justification: by empowering regional authorities, mobilizing public/civil society dialogue, and building local technical capacity, the project sought to generate long-term outcomes such as reduced degradation, sustained supply of environmental goods and services, and improved rural income.

An ex-post evaluation is therefore essential to determine the degree to which these intended causal linkages materialized, to document lessons learned, and to inform the design of future ITTO and national initiatives in forest governance and dry forest management.

5.2. Strategy

The Project strategy was anchored in the capacity-building and governance strengthening approach, recognizing that sustainable management of dry forests requires coordinated action across government, civil society and local communities. Using a “Learn-by-Doing” methodology, the Project set to achieve participatory processes, territorial approach, and gender-sensitive engagement to ensure that knowledge, practices, and institutional arrangements would be locally owned and sustainable.
The strategy was also shaped by the national and regional policy bases on which this Project was built:

- From the *2007 International Seminar*, the project carried forward the mandate to establish a solid legal framework and strengthen institutions while respecting community-based conservation.
- From the *2013 SERFOR Workshop*, it adopted the vision of forests as strategic assets for development, anchoring its activities in decentralized and inclusive governance.
- From the *2013 Piura Plan*, it incorporated transparency, multi-stakeholder dialogue, and community involvement into the project's participatory spaces and communication strategy.

Strategically, the intervention was set to follow the logic of the objective tree:
- Strengthening regional forest authorities: through regulatory framework reviews, updated regional forest development plans, and training for officials and technicians, ensuring they could apply technical and administrative instruments for SFM.
- Enhancing public-civil society involvement: by establishing dialogue platforms, communication campaigns (e.g., radio spots, outreach materials), and awareness-raising events, thus creating an enabling environment for shared decision-making.
- Building technical and operational capacities in communities: via training on forest management plans, best SFM practices, business management, and dissemination of experiences, directly empowering rural communities (64 were targeted) to sustainably manage their forests.

The Project's strategy followed the logic of the objective tree, which identified institutional capacity, participatory governance, and technical skills as the key pathways to address degradation. These pathways were operationalized through four complementary means: participatory capacity building, communication and awareness, institutional strengthening and policy development, and policy alignment.

These three pathways were operationalized through a set of complementary means, which provide a picture of how the Project sought to deliver on its objectives:
- Participatory capacity building: Training and workshops applied the "Learn-by-Doing" method, guided by intercultural principles to ensure inclusive participation of communities, civil society, and private actors. Regionally adapted technologies were planned to be promoted to facilitate uptake of SFM at the community level.
- Communication & awareness: Outreach activities (graphic materials, radio campaigns, school visits, workshops) and the creation of forest dialogue groups to build consensus, raise awareness, and promote dry forest conservation among communities, students and policymakers.
- Institutional strengthening & policy development: Regional governments and SERFOR received technical support, regulatory analysis, and updated management instruments, which improved their coordination and capacity to lead forest governance and restoration initiatives.
- Policy alignment: Regional forest development plans (RFDPs) are planned to be updated and complementary regulations drafted under the Forest and Wildlife Law (Nº 29763), ensuring consistency with national strategies, decentralized governance, and the integration of SFM into regional economic and climate adaptation planning.

This integrated strategy is aligned with ITTO's priorities on governance, information, and capacity development, as well as Peru´s national forest policy framework. It aimed not only to

reduce deforestation but also to improve livelihoods, create resilient institutional and community systems capable of sustaining conservation and production functions beyond the project's cycle.

For the ex-post evaluation, analyzing the effectiveness of this strategy entails assessing:

- Whether the assumed causal pathways (capacity → governance → reduced degradation → improved livelihoods) were valid and realized.
- How the participatory and intercultural approach influenced outcomes and sustainability.
- To what extent the Project managed risks such as delayed decentralization, limited political will, or weak civil society engagement.

In conclusion, the strategy was coherent with the identified problems, enriched by prior policy consensus, and logically structured to produce both immediate capacity outcomes and long-term impacts on forest conservation and community welfare. The ex-post evaluation provides an opportunity to measure how far this strategic design translated into tangible, lasting results for the north coast dry forest and their dependent populations.

6. Specific Objectives Identified for the Project

The specific objective of the Project was to strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders to establish and implement conservation activities and policies for the sustainable management of degraded tropical dry forests on the north coast of Peru. This overarching goal was framed within a development vision of reducing forest degradation, alleviating rural poverty, and ensuring that degraded dry forests continue to supply critical environmental goods and services. To achieve this, the project focused on three interrelated objectives:

- Enhance governance and policy frameworks: The Project sought to decrease forest degradation by improving the technical and administrative capacities of regional governments in Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. Strengthened governance structures would enable the enforcement of sustainable forest management (SFM) policies, improved coordination among institutions, and fostered consensus-building with civil society and local communities. These actions were designed to reduce unsustainable land use and other drivers of deforestation while embedding sustainable practices into regional development agendas.
- Promote stakeholder engagement: A core objective was to decrease poverty by fostering the active participation of public institutions, private actors, and rural communities in decision-making processes related to dry forest management. By promoting inclusive governance, the Project ensured that communities dependent on forest resources were directly involved in shaping policies and practices that affect their livelihoods. Special emphasis was placed on empowering women, revaluing their roles within families and community organizations, and increasing their participation in Forest Conservation and Protection Committees and Forest and Wildlife Management Committees. This approach aimed to broaden social equity while strengthening community resilience.
- Build local technical and operational capacities: To secure the long-term supply of environmental goods and services from degraded dry forests, the Project invested in strengthening technical and operational capacities at the community level. Training

programs would equip local stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to develop and implement forest management plans, apply eco-friendly land-use practices, and restore degraded ecosystems. These actions supported conservation, sustainable use of timber and non-timber forest products, and the provision of vital ecosystem services such as fodder, fuelwood, biodiversity conservation, and climate regulation.

Overall, the Project's development objective was to contribute to improved living standards for rural communities through the conservation and sustainable use of tropical dry forests, by decreasing degradation, reducing poverty, and maintaining the critical flow of environmental goods and services essential to both local livelihoods and regional ecological stability.

7. Project Key Planned Activities

The Project's intervention framework was structured around three core components designed to operate at institutional, civil society, and community levels. This section describes activities as planned in the Project documentation and subsequently implemented, based on reported execution data. The actual effectiveness and lasting impact of these activities are examined in the subsequent evaluation section.

- Institutional capacity development for regional forestry authorities: The project design outlined ambitious measures to strengthen regional governance capabilities, including conducting a participatory analysis of the forest regulatory framework; delivering specialized training programs on administrative and technical aspects of sustainable forest management (SFM); updating and implementing SFM instruments; and establishing a comprehensive forest information and communication system. Project documentation indicates execution of these planned activities through a *Capacity Development Program for Dry Forest Managers*, reportedly aligned with SERFOR's National Capacity Development Plan. Implementation reports also describe the additional establishment of a *Technical Unit for Community Forest Management in Piura*, presented as an inter-institutional commitment mechanism for sustaining community forestry management beyond project timelines.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement and public participation: Activities were designed to broaden engagement through strengthening regional dialogue spaces; developing and implementing a comprehensive dissemination plan; conducting awareness events targeting authorities, forest users, and the general public; and building community capacities for effective participation in forest governance dialogues. Project records indicate these activities were pursued through high-profile events including the II Regional Dry Forest Congress (COREFOR), Semana del Algarrobo, ECOTÓN 2018, and the *Joven Emprendedor Forestal* youth contest. Reports describe a diversified communication approach utilizing multiple formats including the comic "*Bosques Secos: Algarrobito*," photographic competitions, radio programming, and educational outreach activities, reportedly extending engagement to non-traditional stakeholders including youth, private sector representatives, and academic institutions.
- Community-level technical capacity building: The Project envisioned strengthening local capabilities through training programs in forest management planning; systematization and dissemination of SFM experiences; and instruction in market and business management for forest products. Documentation describes implementation through workshops addressing silviculture, natural regeneration, restoration techniques,

agroforestry systems, and fire prevention. Reports indicate production of a best practices manual and documentation of experiences for dissemination. Project records also describe expansion into livelihood diversification initiatives including support for eco-business ventures in apiculture, *algarrobina* production, and ecotourism, presented as measures to strengthen economic incentives for conservation practices.

Planned Activities (Project Document)
Output 1. Strengthen regional forest authority capacity
Participatory analysis of forest regulatory framework.
Training on administrative/technical aspects.
Update and implement SFM instruments.
Forest information and communication system.
Output 2. Engage public sector and civil society
Strengthen regional dialogue spaces.
Develop and implement dissemination plan.
Awareness events for authorities, users, public.
Community development for dialogue skills.
Output 3. Strengthen community technical capacities
Training on forest management plans.
Systematization and dissemination of SFM experiences.
Training on market/business management.
Coordinate, manage, monitor activities.

The Project framework demonstrated ambitious scope across multiple implementation tiers, with reports indicating considerable expansion beyond originally planned activities. Section II of this report will analyze the effectiveness, sustainability, and tangible impacts of these interventions on dry forest conservation and community well-being.

8. Project Target Outcomes

The design of the Project's target outcomes was guided by a robust theory of change, rooted in the logical framework approach. This theoretical rationale posited that strengthening capacities across multiple levels—institutional, technical, and community-based—would create a synergistic effect leading to sustainable forest management.

The intended outcomes were structured to be interlocking and mutually reinforcing:

- Environmental outcomes - were predicated on the theory that improved governance and community practices would directly reduce degradation pressures.
  - Reduced deforestation and forest degradation: Through improved forest governance, community training, and sustainable management practices, the Project aimed to reduce deforestation by at least 10,000 hectares by the end of its life cycle.
  - Conservation of forest cover: The Project set out to conserve at least 1 million hectares of tropical dry forests, ensuring the continued provision of environmental goods and services such as biodiversity conservation, and development of productive value chains.
  - Enhanced forest management practices: The adoption of Best Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) practices and the implementation of updated forest management plans lead to more resilient and productive forest ecosystems.
- Economic outcomes - based on the rationale that building business and market skills would create tangible incentives for sustainable management, thereby aligning conservation with livelihood improvement.
  - Increased incomes for rural communities: By promoting sustainable harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products, and through training in business management and marketing, increase household incomes by 10% in participating communities.
  - Value addition to forest products: Training in business management and market access enable communities to derive greater economic benefits from sustainably managed forest products.
  - Job creation: Train and deploy 50 community extension workers and support local leadership in forest management, creating new roles and opportunities within the forest sector.
- Social outcomes - designed under the principle that inclusive participation, awareness, and gender equity are fundamental prerequisites for durable community stewardship of forest resources.
  - Enhanced community capacity: 64 rural communities trained in SFM techniques, and 180 community leaders are equipped to promote sustainable practices within their communities.
  - Gender-inclusive participation: Women actively involved in training, decision-making, and leadership roles, ensuring equitable benefits and representation in forest governance.
  - Awareness and education: At least 70% of the rural population is made aware of the importance of forest conservation and the benefits of sustainable forest management through radio spots, workshops, and outreach materials.
  - Strengthened social skills: Community members develop improved facilitation and dialogue skills, enabling more effective participation in regional forest management discussions.

- Governance outcomes - founded on the theory that a supportive legal framework, functional institutions, and participatory systems are the essential enabling environment for all other outcomes to be achieved and sustained.
  - Improved regulatory framework: Provide support for the development and implementation of complementary regulations to the Forest and Wildlife Law (LFFS), tailored to the context of tropical dry forests.
  - Strengthened institutional capacity: At least 50 officials and technicians from regional governments and forest authorities trained in SFM, improving their ability to manage forests sustainably.
  - Participatory decision-making: The establishment and strengthening of forest dialogue groups, consultative committees, and public-private-civil society platforms to ensure inclusive and transparent forest governance.
  - Forest information system: A user-friendly, up-to-date forest information system developed and made accessible to local, regional, and national stakeholders, improving data-driven decision-making.
- Overall outcomes
  - Sustainable livelihoods: Contribute to improved living standards for rural communities through the conservation and sustainable use of tropical dry forests.
  - Long-term forest sustainability: Build the capacity of key stakeholders and strengthen governance structures to ensure the long-term sustainability of forest resources beyond the project lifecycle.
  - Knowledge sharing and replication: Systematized experiences, best practices, and lessons learned will be documented and disseminated, providing a model for replication in other dry forest regions.

A detailed analysis of the extent to which this theoretical rationale was successfully translated into practice, including an examination of the outcomes achieved against these design parameters, will be presented in Section II of this report.

9. Project Implementation

The implementation of the Project "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru" was structured, well-documented, and executed with strong organizational commitment. Reporting from the executing agency, AIDER, confirms that most activities were carried out according to the planned framework, with timely delivery across most components. The Project successfully met its formal output targets, executing its scheduled activities and establishing a coherent operational link between its central objective and its interventions.

From a design perspective, the implementation featured several strengths. It embraced an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach—combining institutional strengthening, community participation, capacity development, and awareness-raising—which reflected a sound theory of change suited to addressing the complex drivers of forest degradation. The use of a "Learn-by-Doing" methodology provided a dynamic alternative to conventional training, promoting practical engagement and contextual learning. Furthermore, the establishment of Project Steering and Consultative Committees fostered transparency and institutional ownership, while the deliberate, if limited, inclusion of gender and intercultural approaches signaled a commitment to more inclusive governance.

However, a critical examination of the implementation reveals important questions about the gap between planned achievements and their real-world translation into sustained outcomes. The Project operated within a context of significant institutional volatility, as the decentralization of forest governance to regional governments remained an ongoing and uncertain process. This external factor posed a substantial risk to the sustainability of capacity-building efforts, regardless of the quality of training or materials delivered.

Additionally, while reporting shows 100% completion of activities—such as workshops, radio spots, and manuals produced—this activity-based success does not automatically equate to impact. Critical questions remain: Did training translate into long-term changes in practice? Are communication materials and information systems still in use? Did newly created dialogue spaces endure beyond the Project's lifecycle and external funding?

In conclusion, the project's implementation was methodically sound and administratively successful, with careful attention to operational planning, stakeholder involvement, and adherence to ITTO reporting requirements. Nevertheless, this assessment of implementation effectiveness is necessarily limited to the execution of planned inputs and outputs. A definitive analysis of the project's effectiveness, sustainability, and real-world impact on forest conditions, livelihoods, and governance will be presented in Section II of this evaluation.

10. Project Challenges and Mitigation

10.1. Challenges

The Project operated within a context of deeply entrenched and interconnected challenges that extended beyond simple technical or logistical hurdles. These challenges highlighted the complex interplay between structural governance issues and deeply rooted human behavioral factors, testing the project's theory of change at every level.

- The synchronization challenge: The Project's design correctly identified that sustainable forest management requires the synchronized strengthening of policy, institutions, and community practice. However, achieving this harmony in practice proved immensely difficult. Progress in one area, such as training community members, could be instantly negated by a lack of progress in another, such as the delayed transfer of legal authority and funding to regional governments. This lack of synchronicity meant that even successfully implemented activities risked having a muted long-term impact, as the necessary enabling environment often remained incomplete or unstable.
- The translation gap: A core challenge was bridging the gap between theoretical premises and concrete, lasting outcomes. The Project was built on logically sound assumptions—that training leads to capacity, that capacity leads to improved management, and that improved management leads to conservation and improved livelihoods. However, translating this theory into tangible impact requires a chain of behavioral changes at individual and institutional levels that are difficult to trigger and even harder to sustain. Manuals could be distributed and workshops completed (outputs), but ensuring these tools were consistently used to inform decision-making years later (outcome) was a far more formidable task.

- The human factor: Ultimately, the Project's success hinged on overcoming profound behavioral change difficulties. This "human factor" was the most significant challenge.
  - Institutional behavior: Moving regional officials from simply possessing new knowledge to actively applying new administrative procedures and technical instruments in their daily work.
  - Community behavior: Transforming community members from recipients of training into proactive adopters and champions of sustainable techniques, shifting from short-term individual gain to long-term collective conservation ethics.
  - Social behavior: Encouraging a passive civil society and private sector to become actively engaged in forest dialogue spaces, requiring a shift in mindset from observation to participation.
- The institutional void: The Project was acutely affected by the delayed and ineffective decentralization of forest management. This was not a minor contextual issue but a fundamental structural barrier. Regional governments in Piura and Lambayeque often lacked the clear mandate, budgetary resources, and institutional capacity to assume the roles the project was preparing them for. This created a critical disconnect: the project was building capacity for roles that were not yet fully realized, leading to a risk of trained personnel being unable to apply their skills effectively, and uncoordinated actions persisting due to continued reliance on central authorities.
- Apathy in participation: The Project's participatory model was strategically sound but confronted the reality of apathy. The passive attitude of the private sector and parts of civil society towards forest governance dialogue spaces undermined the model's effectiveness. Without their committed engagement, decision-making risked remaining confined to a small group of directly interested parties, limiting the legitimacy, inclusivity, and sustainability of the governance structures the project aimed to strengthen.
- Competing interests: Despite the Project's efforts, generating deep-seated community interest in formal forest management training remained a challenge. For rural families facing immediate economic pressures, the long-term benefits of sustainable practices often compete with the short-term necessity of generating income through activities like unsustainable harvesting or land conversion for agriculture. Overcoming this required not just training, but a demonstrable and timely economic incentive that made sustainable forest management a competitively viable livelihood strategy.

To its credit, the Project design demonstrated a clear and realistic awareness of these challenges. It did not ignore them but incorporated specific mitigation strategies. This awareness elevates the Project beyond a naive technical intervention to one that partly acknowledges the complex socio-political ecosystem in which it operated. The persistence of these challenges underscores the immense difficulty of achieving transformative change in natural resource management and sets the stage for evaluating what was genuinely achievable under these conditions.

10.2. Mitigation

Faced with a complex landscape of institutional, social, and economic risks, the Project designed and implemented a multifaceted mitigation strategy. This strategy was consciously multi-level, targeting systemic barriers through policy advocacy while simultaneously addressing behavioral and motivational obstacles through targeted engagement and practical training. The approach acknowledged that sustainable change requires intervention at both the institutional top and the community base.

The mitigation plan was a direct and thoughtful response to the risks outlined in the Project design. In theory, it combined top-down governance strengthening with bottom-up community empowerment, aiming to create multiple entry points for sustainable forest management (SFM) and convert structural vulnerabilities into opportunities for building resilience.

- Mitigating institutional instability: The project planned direct advocacy work with regional governments to push for the formal transfer of responsibilities and secure commitment amid changing political priorities. This was supported by concrete technical assistance to help regional administrations draft operational budgets and establish frameworks, effectively bridging the capacity gap expected after decentralization. This was a pragmatic and necessary response to the most significant external threat to the Project's longevity. By offering not just advocacy but also practical budgeting support, the project positioned itself as a solutions-oriented partner, increasing the likelihood of institutional buy-in and smoothing a fraught political transition. Despite its merit, this approach faced inherent limitations. The effectiveness of advocacy is contingent on political will, which is often transient and subject to electoral cycles. While the Project could provide exemplary technical plans, their adoption and funding depended on regional political and financial priorities largely beyond the project's control. The success of this mitigation was ultimately tied to external factors.
- Engaging passive stakeholders: The strategy included supporting awareness-raising actions, such as campaigns highlighting the economic value of dry forest products (e.g., algarrobo, palo santo), to engage a passive private sector and civil society. Furthermore, it worked to formally activate participatory governance platforms (CGFFS) to align forest strategies with local economic needs and provide a structured space for dialogue. This demonstrated a sophisticated understanding that participation requires both incentive and opportunity. By linking conservation to tangible economic benefits, the Project sought to create a powerful motive for engagement. Establishing formal committees provided a legitimate structure for this engagement to occur, moving beyond ad-hoc consultations. The enduring functionality of such committees is a classic challenge. Without sustained facilitation, funding, and a real mandate to influence decisions, they risk becoming perfunctory or dissolving post-Project. The awareness campaigns could shift perceptions in the short term, but creating viable, competitive value chains for sustainable products is a long-term endeavor that likely extends beyond the Project's scope.
- Ensuring inclusivity and relevance: A core strength of the mitigation plan was its integration of gender and intercultural approaches to make participation more inclusive and effective, ensuring the Project addressed the needs and knowledge of all stakeholders. Crucially, the adoption of the "Learn-by-Doing" method was itself a central

mitigation strategy that could overcome the hurdle of theoretical training not translating into practice. By making training practical and relevant, it directly targets behavioral change. While the methodology is sound, its success hinges on the quality of facilitation and the time available for these practices to become ingrained. Behavioral change is a slow process, and the Project's 30-month timeline may have limited the depth and consolidation of these new practices within communities and institutions.

The Project's mitigation strategy was robust, coherent, and thoughtfully addressed the key risks from multiple angles. It displayed a clear understanding that mitigating risk in a complex environment requires a holistic blend of political engagement, economic persuasion, institutional support, and socially inclusive methodologies.

The strategy was recognized that overcoming apathy and instilling new practices requires demonstrating value and providing practical, immersive experiences. However, a critical lens acknowledges that these measures were ambitious, and their ultimate efficacy would be determined by their ability to create self-sustaining systems after the Project's conclusion. The true test of these mitigation efforts lies in the durability of the dialogues, institutions, and behaviors they aimed to change, an analysis of which is presented in the following section.

SECTION II - THE EX-POST EVALUATION MISSION

11. Evaluation Methodology

11.1. Approach

This ex-post evaluation adopts a results and impact-based approach to provide a rigorous and objective assessment of the "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru" Project. Conducted six years after the Project's completion, this evaluation moves beyond a simple review of activities and outputs to critically examine the Project's longer-term significance, its lasting contributions, and the lessons it offers for future interventions. The analysis is structured around the core OECD-DAC[3] criteria, applied with a focus on the Project's unique context and theory of change.

The evaluation will assess the Project's performance through the following lenses:

- Relevance: This criterion examines the alignment between the Project's design and the enduring needs of the context. It asks: Did the Project address real and priority needs of targeted stakeholders and dry forest ecosystems? The evaluation will scrutinize whether the Project's objectives remained pertinent amidst the evolving national and regional forest policy landscape, including the ongoing decentralization process. It will assess if the capacity-building focus correctly identified the root capacity gaps at institutional, technical, and community levels, and if the chosen strategies (e.g., "Learn-by-Doing," gender inclusion) were appropriate for the socio-cultural and environmental context of Peru's north coast dry forests.
- Effectiveness: This criterion measures the achievement of the Project's intended results. It asks: To what extent were the stated objectives and output achieved? The evaluation will systematically verify the completion of outputs as detailed in the logical framework (e.g., number of officials trained, manuals produced, dialogue spaces established). More importantly, it will go beyond quantitative counts to qualitatively assess the caliber and utility of these outputs. For instance, it will explore whether training led to applied skills, if management plans were implemented, and whether dialogue spaces became functional platforms for decision-making or remain merely consultative.
- Impact: This criterion seeks to identify the significant, long-term changes—positive and negative, intended and unintended—generated by the Project. It asks: What long-term environmental, institutional, and socio-economic effects can be attributed to the Project? Given the Project's focus on capacity building—a intermediary outcome—attributing direct impact on forest cover requires a nuanced analysis. The evaluation will, therefore, trace the Project's contribution to observable changes. This includes looking for evidence of improved forest management practices, strengthened governance arrangements, policy influences, and shifts in community attitudes and livelihoods that can be plausibly linked to the project's interventions.
- Sustainability: This is the central criterion for an ex-post evaluation, probing the durability of the Project's benefits. It asks: To what extent have Project benefits continued beyond the completion of ITTO funding? The evaluation will critically analyze the resilience of the outcomes. This involves examining several factors: the continued functioning of established committees and information systems; the institutionalization

[3] The OECD-DAC criteria were established by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as a common framework to evaluate international development projects, programs, and policies. They provide a structured way to assess not just whether a project was implemented as planned, but also whether it made a meaningful and sustainable difference

of training and practices within regional governments and communities; the presence of ongoing financial or political support for SFM; and the overall ownership of results by national and regional partners. A key focus will be on assessing whether the Project successfully built self-sustaining systems or created dependencies that collapsed after external support ended.

This approach is consciously critical. It acknowledges that a well-implemented Project (as noted in the Implementation section) does not automatically equate to a relevant, effective, or sustainable one. The methodology is therefore designed to probe beneath the surface of formal reporting, seeking evidence of tangible, lasting change on the ground. It acknowledges the challenging environment in which the Project operated and will seek to understand how these contextual factors influenced the ultimate achievement and durability of results.

11.2. Evaluation Workplan and Analytical Framework

The foundation of the evaluation was a detailed work plan, reviewed and agreed upon with the executing agency (AIDER) prior to the inception of the field mission. This plan served as a roadmap, ensuring a systematic and objective approach. Its core components included:

- Defined evaluation questions: The evaluation was guided by a set of structured questions aligned with the OECD-DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability). These questions moved beyond simple activity counting to probe deeper issues:
- Relevance: How well did the Project design address the actual needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries and align with national and regional policies?
- Effectiveness: To what extent were the Project's planned outputs and outcomes achieved? What were the major factors influencing achievement?
- Efficiency: Were resources (financial, human, time) converted into results in a timely and cost-effective manner?
- Impact: What significant changes, positive or negative, intended or unintended, did the Project contribute to institutions, ecosystems, and communities?
- Sustainability: Are the benefits generated by the Project likely to continue after funding has ended? What are the risks to the durability of outcomes?
    - Data triangulation: To ensure validity and reliability, the methodology mandated data triangulation from multiple sources. This meant cross-checking information obtained through documents, direct observation, and interviews with different stakeholder groups to build a comprehensive and accurate picture.
- Stakeholder consultation and geographic scope: The evaluation was designed to capture a wide range of perspectives from those who implemented, partnered with, and were intended to benefit from the Project.
- Institutions consulted: The evaluation team engaged with the implementing agency AIDER: leadership and regional technical staff + National Authority: SERFOR officials responsible for policy and oversight + Regional Governments (GORES): key officials from the environmental and natural resource management sectors in Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque + Local stakeholders: This included representatives from the targeted rural forest communities and associations (e.g., CECOBOSQUE, FEDECAL), local municipalities, and local entrepreneurs involved in forest product value chains.
- Geographic coverage: The field assessment comprehensively covered the three Project regions—Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque—to ensure a representative sample of the

diverse contexts within the tropical dry forest ecosystem and to assess the consistency of results across different institutional and social environments.

- Data collection methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, providing depth and context to the findings.
  - Documentary review: A thorough analysis of Project documents was conducted, including the original Project design, progress reports (six-monthly, annual, final), financial audits, training materials produced, and relevant national and regional policy frameworks.
  - Semi-structured interviews and group discussions: These were the primary tools for gathering qualitative evidence. Interviews were held with key informants from government institutions and AIDER. Discussions were conducted with community members, encouraging open dialogue and specifically assessing gender-disaggregated outcomes. These discussions explored themes of capacity gain, application of knowledge, benefits received, and challenges faced.
- Field visits and direct observation: The evaluation included scheduled site visits to a selected sample of Project intervention areas. This allowed for the verification of reported activities (e.g., condition of reforestation sites, use of distributed tools, implementation of conservation activities) and provided critical context for the information gathered in interviews. Observing community meetings or trained individuals in their work environment offered invaluable insights into the practical application and sustainability of project results.

This robust and multi-faceted methodology was designed to move beyond a simple compliance check of activities. It sought to deliver a nuanced analysis of the Project's contribution to change, providing actionable lessons learned and clear recommendations for future interventions in the region.

11.3. Sampling Strategy

A stratified sampling approach was employed to guarantee representativity across the full spectrum of stakeholders and regions involved in or affected by the Project. This ensured that diverse perspectives—ranging from local community members to decision-makers and technical staff—were adequately captured, in line with ITTO evaluation standards for inclusivity and balance. The target distribution of respondents was established as follows: 33% local communities,

- 33% government and NGO staff,
- 4% of private sector actors.
- 17 % Academy (schools and universities)
- 13% Executing agency

Data collection relied on on-site interviews, applying a common set of core questions across all strata. For communities, these questions were answered from the standpoint of personal and collective experience (e.g., changes in livelihoods or forest use practices). For institutional stakeholders, the same questions were addressed from an analytical or policy perspective (e.g., identifying whether guidelines, programs, or institutional measures had influenced community livelihoods). This approach allowed direct comparison of perceptions across groups while capturing both experiential and institutional dimensions of change.

11.4. Data Sources

A robust and multi-faceted approach to data collection was employed to ensure the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation are grounded in comprehensive, reliable, and validated evidence. Recognizing the limitations of relying on any single source, the methodology prioritized triangulation—the cross-verification of information from multiple, independent sources. This approach mitigates potential biases, enhances the validity of the findings, and provides a more nuanced and complete picture of the Project's performance, from its administrative execution to its on-the-ground outcomes.

The evaluation drew upon the following five categories of data:

- Project Documentation: The foundation of the analysis was a comprehensive review of internal project documentation. This included the foundational Project Document and Logical Framework, which provided the benchmark against which achievements were measured. Progress reports and the final completion report offered a detailed chronological account of implemented activities, outputs delivered, and self-reported challenges. Financial audits and monitoring data were critical for verifying the correlation between budgetary execution and physical accomplishments, ensuring that reported activities were financially substantiated.
- Desk Review: To contextualize the Project's design and results within the broader landscape of sustainable forest management, a thorough desk review was conducted. This involved analyzing academic and grey literature on dry forest ecology, governance models, and socio-economic dynamics in Peru. Furthermore, studies on comparable interventions in other regions provided valuable benchmarks, helping to identify best practices, common pitfalls, and alternative strategies, thereby allowing for a more critical assessment of the project's strategic choices.
- Stakeholder consultations: Qualitative insights were gathered through structured and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the spectrum. This included representatives from the national forest authority (SERFOR), regional governments (GORES), the executing agency (AIDER), local forest associations, rural community leaders, and other professionals that collaborated with the Project. These consultations were indispensable for moving beyond written reports to understand perceptions, uncover unintended consequences, assess the functionality of new platforms like the CGFFS, and gauge the sustainability of capacity-building efforts from the perspective of the intended beneficiaries.
- Field visits: To ground-truth the information contained in reports and interviews, direct field observation was essential. Site visits allowed for the verification of reported outputs, such as the physical state of training sites, the application of forest management plans, the condition of restored areas, and the availability and use of communication materials (e.g., posters, manuals) within communities. This component was crucial for assessing the tangible legacy of the Project and the practical challenges faced at the local level.
- Official and independent data sources: Finally, the evaluation reviewed data from external official sources. This included reviewing government statistics and public budget allocations for forest management post-project provided hard evidence of the project's success in influencing institutional prioritization and financial commitment.

By systematically integrating and cross-referencing these diverse data streams, the evaluation ensures its findings are not merely a reflection of reported outputs but a balanced, evidence-based assessment of the project's true effectiveness, sustainability, and significance.

11.5. Data Analysis

To conduct a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the Project's performance and impact, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This methodology was designed to triangulate findings, ensuring that quantitative data on outputs and environmental change could be explained and given context by qualitative insights into human behavior, institutional dynamics, and perceived effectiveness. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding than either method could provide alone.

Data was gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, guided by a framework built around the project's logical framework and theory of change.

- Quantitative analysis: This analysis focused on objectively verifiable metrics to assess the Project's direct deliverables and their observable effects on the landscape.
  - Environmental impact: This provided a critical, objective baseline against which to compare the Project's goal of reducing deforestation and degradation. This data was supplemented by quantifying the number of hectares visibly restored or brought under formally recognized sustainable management practices. Currently, the evaluation process was not able to verify the environmental impact.
  - Capacity development outputs: The ex-post evaluation could not quantify the scale of training due to the absence of disaggregated records on participants. Instead, interview evidence points to a wide range of capacity-building activities, such as workshops on forest management, reforestation, apiculture, leadership, and environmental education, whose usefulness varied among respondents. While the lack of quantitative data prevents measuring reach, the qualitative responses confirm that training was a visible project component and left a perceptible, if uneven, legacy of skills and awareness.
  - Institutional and policy adoption: The Project's success in influencing systems was measured by tracking outputs such as the number of Sustainable Forest Management Plans (SMPs) formally developed and implemented, as well as evidence of financial commitments from regional governments, including specific budget allocations and operational plans approved to support ongoing forest management.
  - Communication and outreach: The ex-post evaluation could not quantify the reach of knowledge products, as no records exist on audiences or distribution. Interviews confirm that manuals, guides, comics, and radio spots were produced, but most are no longer in regular use. Some were repurposed in schools or municipal campaigns, suggesting initial value, yet their sustained application has been limited.

- Qualitative analysis: This analysis sought to understand the "why" and "how" behind the numbers, capturing stakeholder experiences and the less tangible aspects of change.
  - Perceived relevance and effectiveness: Through interviews, stakeholder perceptions of the Project's relevance to their needs, its effectiveness in addressing

key challenges, and—crucially—its sustainability beyond the funding period were captured. This provided insights into the Project's legitimacy and long-term viability.

- Institutional coordination and governance: Evidence of improved inter-institutional coordination was sought not just in formal agreements but in anecdotes of joint activities, shared resources, and reduced duplication of efforts. Stakeholders were asked for their insights on changes in forest governance, accountability mechanisms, and whether they felt empowered to engage with authorities.
- Inclusivity and participation: The qualitative component was essential for assessing the depth of participation. It moved beyond counting women and community group members in workshops to understanding the quality of their involvement: were their voices heard and acted upon? Did the Project's gender and intercultural approaches successfully create a more inclusive decision-making environment?

The core of the analysis lies in merging these datasets. For example:

- Quantitative data may show a certain number of hectares under sustainable management, but qualitative interviews with the communities managing those hectares will reveal the challenges, economic benefits, and motivations for maintaining those practices.
- Data on the number of people trained becomes far more meaningful when correlated with qualitative evidence of how they are applying that training and whether it has led to greater empowerment or institutional change.
- This integrated analytical framework is designed to move beyond a simple check of activities and provide a deeply contextualized assessment of the Project's contribution to lasting change in the complex socio-ecological system of Peru's north coast dry forests.

11.6. Validation and Quality Control

To ensure the rigor, credibility, and impartiality of this evaluation, a robust system of validation and quality control was implemented. This multi-faceted approach moved beyond a simple review of the Project's own reporting to actively test the veracity of its claims and the soundness of its design against external evidence and stakeholder perception.

The process was built on four key pillars:

- Participatory validation through stakeholder workshops: Preliminary findings and draft conclusions were presented in a series of stakeholder validation workshops held with key participants, including regional government officials, SERFOR representatives, community leaders from organizations like CECOBOSQUE and FEDECAL, and members of the Project team. These workshops served as a crucial reality check, providing a platform to confirm interpretations, correct factual inaccuracies, incorporate overlooked perspectives, and ensure the final assessment reflected the nuanced, on-the-ground reality rather than just the project's internal narrative.
- Ground-truthing and data triangulation: A critical step involved the cross-verification of reported results with independent ground data. This process of data triangulation—ensuring consistency between Project monitoring data, official statistics, and independent sources—was essential for identifying potential discrepancies and building an evidence-based evaluation. This meant comparing the Project's output data (e.g.,

number of people trained, hectares under management plans) with other sources, including:
  - Field visits and spot-checks to selected communities to observe the practical application of training and the usage of distributed materials.
  - Review of official statistics from regional governments and SERFOR to contextualize Project claims against broader regional trends in deforestation or forest production.
  - Collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data to move beyond headcounts and meaningfully assess the depth and inclusivity of participation and benefits.
- Systematic scoring against OECD-DAC criteria: A standardized scoring system (1–5) was applied to each of the core evaluation criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability). This quantitative scoring:
  - Provided a clear, transparent, and comparable metric for assessing performance.
  - Forced a disciplined, evidence-based justification for each assessment, moving away from vague qualitative statements.
  - Allowed for a structured presentation of strengths and weaknesses across the different dimensions of the Project.
- The foreseeability test: This test shifts the analysis from mere description of what went wrong to a more insightful critique of why it went wrong, offering more valuable lessons for future Project design. This involved a retrospective analysis of the Project's conceptualization documents to assess whether major shortcomings identified during implementation and evaluation could reasonably have been anticipated at the appraisal stage. This test is crucial for distinguishing between:
  - Design failures: Problems that were foreseeable based on available context analysis, risk assessment, and experience but were inadequately mitigated in the Project's theory of change.
  - Implementation failures: Issues arising from poor execution of a sound plan.
  - Contextual failures: Unforeseen external events or changes that derailed an otherwise well-designed Project.

By employing this comprehensive framework of participatory review, independent verification, systematic scoring, and critical design analysis, this evaluation aims to provide a validated, high-quality, and balanced assessment of the Project's performance, its lessons, and its legacy.

11.7. Methodological Limitations

- Absence of quantitative outcome data: The Executing Agency no longer retains project monitoring records (e.g., participant databases, training assessments, follow-up surveys), which prevents verification of indicators related to capacity change and applied knowledge.
- Time elapsed since completion: The six years between Project closure (2019) and the present evaluation reduced the possibility of recovering institutional memory or comparable baseline information.
- Fragmentary qualitative evidence: Field interviews yielded partial perceptions and anecdotal cases of knowledge application, but these are insufficient for systematic measurement across all target groups.
- Reliance on secondary and proxy sources: The evaluation therefore draws primarily on the completion report, project outputs, institutional commitments (e.g., creation of the

Technical Unit for Community Forest Management in Piura), and limited stakeholder testimonies as proxies for outcome-level assessment.

11.8. Other Identified Limitations

A critical review of the Project's design and implementation framework reveals several inherent limitations that, while not detracting from its methodological strengths, likely constrained its potential for transformative and sustainable impact. These limitations reflect common challenges in complex conservation and development initiatives and provide crucial context for interpreting the Project's results.

- Structural and systemic blind spots: The Project's theory of change placed a justifiable emphasis on capacity building as a primary lever for change. However, this focus led to an overemphasis on technical and governance solutions without a commensurate strategy to address the deeper, structural drivers of degradation. Critical issues such as competing land uses (e.g., expansion of agriculture), underlying corruption risks in the forestry sector, and the profound, persistent bottlenecks in the decentralization process were acknowledged as risks but not centrally integrated as core problems to be dismantled. By focusing on enabling environments rather than confronting disruptive economic and political incentives, the Project's interventions risk being undermined by these more powerful forces.
- Homogenization of diverse regional contexts: The Project treated the three departments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque as a single intervention zone with a unified strategy. This approach failed to adequately differentiate between the primary drivers of degradation unique to each region, such as overgrazing and agricultural conversion in Piura versus illegal selective logging in Tumbes. A one-size-fits-all strategy, from training modules to communication campaigns, likely reduced the relevance and effectiveness of interventions at the local level, where context-specific threats require tailored solutions.
- Livelihood and gender-blind spots: While the Project included training in business management, its approach to livelihoods exhibited critical gaps. There was insufficient integration of concrete, viable economic alternatives capable of competing with the short-term financial gains from deforestation or unsustainable land use. Furthermore, despite including gender-sensitive language, the Project design showed a limited analysis of gender-specific barriers to participation, such as women's unequal access to land, credit, or leadership roles within communities. Without explicitly targeting these barriers, efforts to promote inclusion risked reinforcing existing inequities.
- Climate and ecological oversights: In an era of accelerating climate change, the Project's problem analysis exhibited a significant weak integration of climate-related threats. Key ecological stressors for tropical dry forests—such as increased drought frequency, heightened forest fire risk, and the need for climate adaptation strategies—were not central to the intervention logic or capacity-building curriculum. This omission represents a critical gap in building truly resilient forest management systems capable of withstanding 21st-century pressures.
- Scalability and replicability issues: The Project design showed limited consideration of how solutions piloted in these three specific regions could be adapted or scaled to other dry forest regions in Peru or beyond. The documentation lacks a framework for extracting transferable methodologies or lessons, focusing instead on localized outputs.

This limits the Project's potential contribution to broader national or regional conservation strategies.

- Terminological and assessment challenges: Internally, inconsistent use of key M&E terminology—such as "outputs," "outcomes," and "results"—across Project documentation complicated the internal monitoring and external assessment of its true impact. This lack of conceptual clarity makes it difficult to accurately attribute changes and distill clear lessons on what worked and what did not, ultimately obscuring the Project's strategic value.

These limitations do not negate the Project's achievements in implementing a structured set of activities, but they frame its scope of influence. They highlight the challenge of designing a discrete Project to address problems that are inherently systemic, political, and economic. A full understanding of the Project's impact must therefore consider not only what it set out to do but also the significant structural and design constraints within which it operated.

11.9. Lessons Learned

In line with ITTO's strategic objectives, a deliberate effort was made throughout the project lifecycle to extract critical lessons regarding both its successes and shortcomings. This process of reflection focused not only on immediate outputs but also on the broader applicability and sustainability of the interventions. The lessons learned are distilled into four key areas, providing valuable insights for future initiatives in dry forest ecosystems and community-based natural resource management.

- On the feasibility of scaling SFM approaches: The Project demonstrated that the core model—integrating regulatory strengthening, institutional capacity building, and community empowerment—is conceptually sound and potentially scalable to other dry forest regions. The development of standardized tools, such as the Best Practices Manual and tailored training modules, provides a replicable foundation. While the framework is scalable, effective replication is not a simple copy-paste exercise. The Project underscored that scaling requires intensive and prolonged investment in contextual diagnostics. Dry forests are not monolithic; tenure systems, market access, political economies, and social structures vary significantly. Future Projects must budget for a longer inception phase to deeply understand these local contexts and adapt tools accordingly, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model.
- On the effectiveness of participatory governance: The activation of Forest and Wildlife Management Committees (CGFFS) confirmed that creating formal spaces for dialogue is a necessary first step for aligning conservation goals with local interests, such as sustainable algarrobo harvesting. Establishing a platform is not synonymous with establishing effective, sustainable governance. The Project highlighted a critical gap between form and function. The long-term effectiveness of these mechanisms is jeopardized if they are not legally and financially integrated into local government structures from the outset. Future projects must design governance interventions with a clear "exit strategy" that includes securing a formal mandate and a dedicated budget line within local governments to ensure these committees survive beyond external funding.
- On institutional arrangements for sustainability: The Project's experience with the decentralization process provided a stark lesson on engaging with government institutions. Technical capacity building for regional governments is ineffective if the

overarching political and fiscal decentralization process remains incomplete or unstable. The mitigation strategy of providing technical budgeting assistance was innovative but ultimately treated a symptom, not the cause. Future projects must incorporate more rigorous political economy analyses during the design phase to identify and target true institutional champions. Furthermore, sustainability requires co-investment and co-ownership from the start; projects should be designed as joint ventures with clear, signed commitments of in-kind and financial contributions from partner institutions to cement ownership.

- On foreseeability and avoiding design shortcomings: The Project's design was robust, yet its implementation revealed common pitfalls in international development. A log frame heavy on quantitative output indicators (number of people trained, materials produced) can inadvertently incentivize activity reporting over impact achievement. The focus on meeting these targets can overshadow the more complex, qualitative work of fostering lasting behavioral change. Future project designs must incorporate more outcome-oriented indicators from the beginning, such as tracking the percentage of trained communities that voluntarily submit management plans or the amount of regional budget allocated to SFM post-training. This shifts the focus from "how many were trained" to "how many applied the training."
- A critical lesson from this evaluation is that achieving lasting impact requires a fundamental redesign of project timelines and strategies to address the complex nature of behavioral and institutional change. While the Project's use of the "Learn-by-Doing" methodology was an effective strategy for building capacity, the 30-month timeframe proved insufficient to translate this capacity into sustained action or adoption at scale. Behavioral change at both institutional and community levels requires a longer horizon—typically 5 to 7 years—to move beyond pilot practices to full institutionalization and norm adoption. Future interventions must therefore be planned with longer durations or as consecutive phases to allow new practices to take root. Moreover, the Project demonstrated that even without an explicit objective to mobilize financing, strategic efforts in capacity building, visibility, and partnership development can create enabling conditions for future investments and institutional opportunities. This was evidenced by the launch of the GEF-7 dry forest conservation project (2021–2026) and the formal entrustment of three protected areas to AIDER by SERNANP in 2021. While not all efforts—such as the proposed REDD+ partnership—yielded tangible outcomes, the Project's role in positioning dry forests as a regional priority underscores the importance of designing interventions that enhance institutional credibility and open pathways for subsequent resource mobilization, even if direct financing is not an initial goal. Together, these insights emphasize the need for extended project horizons to solidify change, coupled with strategic designs that leverage non-financial activities to attract future investment and institutional support.

The Project served as a vital learning laboratory. It confirmed that a multi-faceted approach is essential for addressing dry forest degradation but also provided critical, practical insights into the complexities of implementation. The key lessons revolve around the non-technical barriers to sustainability: the need for deep contextualization, the formal anchoring of participatory systems, the management of institutional volatility, and the paramount importance of designing for long-term behavioral impact rather than short-term output delivery.

12. Project Performance Analysis

A comprehensive performance analysis of this capacity-building Project reveals a well-designed intervention that was highly relevant and coherent, but whose ultimate effectiveness, impact, and sustainability remain fundamentally uncertain due to the inherent challenges of measuring and achieving transformative change within a limited Project cycle.

- Relevance & coherence: The Project was exceptionally relevant. It directly addressed the core need identified by both communities and government: strengthening the capacity of a diverse set of stakeholders to combat tropical dry forest degradation. Its design was meticulously aligned with Peru's National Forest and Wildlife Policy, the Forest and Wildlife Law (LFFS), and ITTO's strategic priorities. By focusing on governance, policy implementation, and community empowerment, it complemented rather than duplicated other initiatives, demonstrating strong coherence with national decentralization efforts and filling a critical niche in technical and administrative support for nascent regional forest authorities.
- Effectiveness: The Project was effective in delivering its planned outputs. Reporting indicates high completion rates for activities: workshops were conducted, manuals were published, dialogue spaces were convened, and training targets for officials and community members were largely met. However, a critical distinction must be made between output delivery and outcome achievement. While the Project effectively disseminated knowledge and created platforms, its true effectiveness hinges on whether this led to lasting changes in practice, policy, and behavior. The evidence available does not conclusively show that regional governments operationalized new regulations, that forest management plans were implemented long-term, or that the trained officials and communities permanently adopted new techniques. The "Learn-by-Doing" method was a sound approach to improve effectiveness, but its success in altering deep-seated practices is difficult to ascertain.
- Efficiency: The Project's efficiency was improved significantly in response to Expert Panel recommendations. The budget was rationalized, counterpart contributions were increased, and cost classifications were streamlined. Hiring regional personnel reduced travel costs. However, the ambition to achieve profound capacity change across three vast departments in 30 months was immense. While resources were used optimally for the planned activities, the question of whether similar outcomes could have been achieved at a lower cost is unanswerable without data on the actual outcomes achieved. The Project was efficient in producing outputs, but the cost of achieving meaningful, sustained impact remains unclear.
- Impact & sustainability: This is the Project's most critical uncertainty. The intended impact of reducing deforestation, improved livelihoods, stronger governance—is a long-term goal. Short-term projects can set the stage but rarely demonstrate such impacts within their lifespan. The Project likely achieved a "softer" impact: raising awareness, improving dialogue, and building individual skills. Whether this translated into measurable environmental or socio-economic gains is the pivotal question that remains open.
    - Sustainability is the Project's greatest challenge. While the design included excellent mitigation strategies (e.g., advocating for decentralization, establishing CGFFS committees), the longevity of benefits is highly vulnerable. The institutionalization of new practices depends on political and financial commitments from regional

governments that are not guaranteed. Community adoption of SFM relies on the emergence of viable economic incentives that outlast project-supported training. The Project planted seeds, but their growth into self-sustaining systems is not yet proven.

- Cross-cutting considerations: The Project proactively addressed equity and inclusion by integrating gender and intercultural approaches into its design and specialist roles. This increased its relevance and potential for equitable impact. However, the depth and pervasiveness of this inclusion across all activities are difficult to measure. In terms of environmental dimensions, the Project's entire theory of change was designed to enhance resilience and reduce degradation through improved management. Yet, attributing a change in forest condition directly to the Project's interventions is methodologically complex and confounded by external factors.

The Project performed very well in its operational phase: it was a relevant, coherent, and efficiently managed intervention that successfully delivered its intended outputs. However, its broader performance—in terms of generating lasting impact and sustainable change—cannot be definitively judged based on output reporting alone. Its success in strengthening capacity was likely real but partial and fragile. The ultimate performance benchmark is whether the capacities built and the systems established endured and were utilized to improve forest management after the Project's completion. This analysis requires longer-term perspective and data beyond the scope of immediate implementation reports.

12.1. Relevance

The Project's justification was rooted in a documented environmental crisis. Peru's tropical dry forests on the north coast, spanning approximately 3.3 million hectares, were undergoing rapid degradation (GRP, 2011; REGO Lambayeque, 2013). The problem was particularly acute in Piura, which faced an annual deforestation rate of 16.75%, equating to a loss of 20,822.24 hectares per year (GRP, 2011. Analysis of Deforestation Rate in the Piura Region). The root causes, including illegal selective logging, forest fires, overgrazing, and agricultural expansion—were exacerbated by uncoordinated management and weak governance across political and social stakeholders (Ministry of Agriculture, INRENA, 2007).

The Project's design demonstrated strong thematic relevance by directly aligning with national and international priorities. It was conceived from a foundation of "evidence-based design," building directly on the conclusions of key stakeholder events detailed in section 5.1 and ITTO's strategic priorities for promoting good governance, improving information systems, and building human resource capacity for SFM (ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2013-2018). However, a critical analysis of implementation evidence suggests a gap between this strong conceptual relevance and the operational relevance of the chosen activities. The intervention strategy relied heavily on a workshop-based model for capacity building. While stakeholder consultations occurred, there is a lack of documented evidence on how marginalized groups (e.g., rural communities, smallholders) substantively shaped Project priorities, raising questions about whether their voices were equitably weighted against those of government and NGO partners.

Furthermore, while the Project accurately diagnosed "disjointed actor coordination" as a core problem, its strategy appeared to stop short of explicitly confronting the underlying power

imbalances and political economy drivers, such as the influence of agro-industries on land-use policies. Supporting decentralization through technical assistance to regional governments (e.g., DRAP) was a relevant mitigation action, but its potential for success was limited without directly addressing these more entrenched, systemic barriers.

Finally, the Project's strategic relevance could have been enhanced by a clearer pathway for scalability and replication. The Project was highly relevant to the specific context of the north coast departments. However, the omission of a deliberate strategy to distill transferable lessons limits its potential to inform actions in other critically threatened Peruvian dry forest ecosystems (e.g., the Marañón Valley, Andean foothills), where drivers may differ but the need for robust governance is equally urgent. In all, the Project was highly relevant in its thematic conception, directly responding to a severe and well-defined crisis with a design aligned with high-level policies. Its operational relevance, however, is moderated by questions surrounding the depth of its participatory design, its engagement with power dynamics, and its strategic approach to influencing broader national dry forest policy beyond the immediate target area.

12.2. Alignment

The Project was strategically designed to ensure its objectives and activities were coherently aligned with international policy frameworks, Peru's national legal and strategic priorities, and the expressed needs of local stakeholders. This multi-level alignment was intended to ensure relevance, foster institutional support, and increase the likelihood that its outcomes would contribute meaningfully to sustainable forest management (SFM), governance reform, and poverty alleviation in the region.

- Alignment with international frameworks: The Project's design directly supported key ITTO strategic priorities. It contributed to Priority 1 (good governance) by strengthening the technical and administrative capacity of regional forest authorities and fostering participatory decision-making. It advanced Priority 5 (information availability) through the development of a forest information system to disseminate updated data. Finally, it addressed Priority 6 (human resource capacity) via comprehensive training for officials, technicians, and community members. Furthermore, the Project was consistent with the ITTO Thematic Program on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (TFLET), aiming to improve legal frameworks for sustainable trade and alleviate poverty. Its focus on restoring degraded forests also aligned with the ITTO Guidelines for the Restoration, Management and Rehabilitation of Degraded and Secondary Tropical Forests, specifically adhering to principles advocating for good governance, the decentralization of management, and active community participation.
- Alignment with national and regional policies: At the national level, the Project was firmly embedded within Peru's policy architecture. It operationalized goals set out in the National Forest and Wildlife Policy (DS 009-2013-MINAGRI), particularly those calling for the integrated management of dry forests to combat desertification. It directly supported the implementation of the Forest and Wildlife Law (No. 29763) by building the capacity of regional governments (GOREs) to assume their devolved roles as forest authorities. The project also worked within complementary regulatory frameworks, such as the specific guidelines for dry forest management plans (RM No. 0166-2012-AG) and laws promoting regional environmental management. Through close collaboration with SERFOR (the National Forest and Wildlife Service), the Project aimed to improve

vertical coordination between national and subnational levels and enhance the effectiveness of oversight agencies like OSINFOR and OEFA in monitoring forest legality.

- Alignment with local priorities and civil society: The Project was attentive to the needs of local forest-dependent communities, NGOs, and civil society organizations. It sought to address community demands for technical support and modern technologies to use forest resources more efficiently and profitably. It responded to NGOs' priorities by promoting ecosystem-wide management approaches and seeking tangible economic benefits for rural families. A notable intention was the Project's recognition of the critical, yet often undervalued, role of women in forest management, aiming to promote their participation in decision-making and benefit-sharing.

While the Project's alignment was procedurally sound and conceptually robust, its design revealed potential vulnerabilities. The framework of partnerships with SERFOR, GOREs, and community organizations (like CECOBOSQUE) and the use of multi-stakeholder platforms (CGFFS committees) were logical for ensuring engagement. However, the design did not present clear evidence of specific safeguards to prevent more powerful actors (e.g., agro-industry representatives, political figures) from dominating these new dialogue spaces, potentially reinforcing existing power imbalances rather than reforming them. Similarly, while the inclusion of women and youth was promoted, the Project documentation did not outline concrete mechanisms to ensure their meaningful influence on final decisions, risking tokenistic participation.

Hence, the Project demonstrated a strong and deliberate effort to create synergies across global, national, and local scales. This alignment ensured its activities were relevant and theoretically well-supported by a wide range of stakeholders. However, the ultimate effectiveness of this alignment depended not just on stated intentions but on the project's ability to navigate complex power dynamics and ensure equitable participation in practice—a challenge whose outcome is examined in the following sections.

12.3. Effectiveness

While the Project successfully completed all planned activities and delivered its output on time, a rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness must assess whether these accomplishments translated into meaningful and sustainable change on the ground. Six years after closure, the evidence reveals a complex picture: the Project made some fragile contributions to capacity and awareness, but it ultimately fell short of achieving its core objective of curbing the structural drivers of dry forest degradation in Piura, Lambayeque, and Tumbes.

- Governance and institutional effectiveness: The Project was effective in achieving its immediate institutional goal. It successfully trained over 50 officials in SFM, improving the technical capacity of regional forest units and familiarizing them with policy tools. However, this effectiveness was confined to the short term. The Project's assumption that trained capacity would automatically lead to stronger governance proved optimistic. The long-term effectiveness is limited by systemic issues beyond the Project's control: high staff turnover, chronic underfunding, and weak enforcement capabilities. The new knowledge was introduced, but the institutional depth to apply it sustainably remains lacking.
- Community participation and inclusion: The Project was effective in executing awareness campaigns and training in a few communities. It rightly emphasized inclusion,

and evidence confirms increased recognition of the dry forest's value. Yet, the effectiveness of these interventions in fostering transformative, lasting empowerment is mixed. While participation was encouraged, particularly for women, their influence in decision-making forums often remained secondary. Community engagement proved contingent on the Project's presence and incentives; sustaining active participation without external support has been a persistent challenge. The Project may have effectively created a baseline of awareness but not necessarily a self-sustaining culture of civic engagement in forest governance.

- Livelihoods and economic incentives: This was the Project's least effective domain. While it successfully supported pilot initiatives for algarrobina, honey, and ecotourism, these were insufficient to alter the fundamental economic calculus for local communities. The Project's strategy to create economic incentives for conservation was sound in theory but ineffective in scale and impact. Farmers continue to derive greater and more reliable short-term income from converting forests to mango plantations or pastures. The Project's livelihood components were valuable demonstrations but failed to counter the powerful market drivers of deforestation, thus leaving the primary economic pressure on the forests largely unmitigated.
- Environmental and conservation outcomes: The project was effective in establishing its environmental output, creating nurseries, conducting reforestation, and introducing management techniques. However, it was ineffective in achieving its overarching environmental goal. This critical gap between output and outcome underscores a vital lesson: raising awareness and demonstrating techniques are necessary but insufficient steps. Without concurrent, robust advancements in governance and economic alternatives, these technical interventions cannot alone overcome entrenched drivers of degradation.
- Knowledge and sustainability anchors: The Project effectively produced and disseminated high-quality manuals, guidelines, and communication materials. The fact that some are still referenced years later is a testament to their initial utility. However, their long-term effectiveness is hampered by a lack of institutionalization. These knowledge products were not systematically adopted or updated by regional governments, leading to their gradual obsolescence. The discussion spaces created were effective during implementation but have struggled to remain active and influential without continued facilitation and funding.

The Project was effective at the output level but demonstrated limited effectiveness at the outcome and impact level. It somehow successfully built a foundation of capacity and awareness through a holistic strategy. However, it could not catalyze the deeper, systemic changes required to secure the future of Peru's tropical dry forests. Its achievements in governance, livelihoods, and conservation remain vulnerable and incomplete because they were not fully anchored in durable institutional reforms, scale economic incentives, or empowered local constituencies capable of driving change after the project's end. The Project effectively sowed the seeds of change, but the soil of governance and economic structures was not fertile enough for them to take root and grow sustainably.

12.4. Expected Outcomes

The Project was designed with a logical theory of change, intending to transform the sustainable management of Peru's tropical dry forests by addressing the root cause identified

in its problem analysis: the limited capacity of key stakeholders. Its expected outcomes were ambitious, holistic, and interconnected, targeting improvements across governance, socio-economic conditions, and the environment itself.

The Project expected that by strengthening the technical and administrative capacities of regional governments (Output 1), it would create a more effective and enabling regulatory environment. Simultaneously, by actively involving the public sector and civil society in decision-making (Output 2), it aimed to foster transparency, build consensus, and ensure that forest policies were both legitimate and responsive to local needs. Finally, by developing the technical and operational capacities of communities (Output 3), the Project intended to equip the primary forest users with the skills and economic incentives to become stewards of the resource, directly linking sustainable practices to improved livelihoods.

The logical framework explicitly defined the expected results of this strategy:

- A 30% reduction in deforestation in the target regions.
- A 10% increase in rural community incomes derived from sustainable forest management.
- The conservation of 1 million hectares of tropical dry forest, ensuring the continued supply of environmental goods and services.
- The effective and sustainable management of forests by trained officials and the active involvement of stakeholders in governance.

While the Project laid the groundwork by achieving its outputs—training officials, creating dialogue spaces, and teaching communities' new techniques—the expected outcomes were not fully realized. The Project's theory of change encountered the complex and resilient reality of the region's economic and political landscape. Evidence confirms that the overarching environmental outcome—a significant reduction in deforestation—remains elusive. This indicates that the Project's activities, though completed, were insufficient to alter the powerful underlying drivers of forest loss.

The economic outcome of boosting incomes through SFM was only partially achieved on a small scale. While pilot initiatives showed promise, they failed to compete effectively with the established and more lucrative economic models of agricultural expansion, such as mango and lemon plantations. The incentive structure for communities, therefore, largely remained skewed towards deforestation, not conservation.

In conclusion, the Project's intended outcomes were rationally conceived and provided a robust roadmap for action. However, the expectation that capacity building and facilitated dialogue alone could swiftly counteract deep-seated market forces, institutional weaknesses, and long-standing economic practices proved optimistic. The outcomes were intended to be transformative, but they were ultimately constrained by the scale of the interventions and the magnitude of the systemic challenges they sought to address. The Project achieved its immediate goals but fell short of its broader, more ambitious expected impact, highlighting the critical difference between delivering outputs and achieving transformative outcomes in complex socio-ecological systems.

12.5. Unanticipated Outcomes

Beyond its planned outputs, the Project generated several significant unanticipated outcomes that reveal deeper insights into the ecosystem of conservation in Peru. These outcomes, both positive and negative, were not central to the project's design but have had a substantial influence on the long-term landscape of dry forest management.

- Elevated national and international profile of tropical dry forests: A major positive surprise was the Project's supportive role in catapulting the plight of Peru's tropical dry forests onto national and regional policy agendas. The data, partnerships, and advocacy generated by the Project provided crucial evidence that helped position these ecosystems as a priority. This was evidenced by their inclusion in high-profile initiatives like Initiative 20x20, a country-led effort to restore degraded lands in Latin America. The Project unexpectedly served as a promoter, transforming the dry forests from a neglected ecosystem into a recognized focal point for climate change mitigation and restoration investments.
- Strengthened strategic position of the executing agency (AIDER): A significant unanticipated outcome of the project was its role as a powerful catalyst for institutional repositioning and subsequent investment, far exceeding its original scope. While the Project did not have an explicit objective to mobilize financing or bolster a specific institution, its successful implementation created a demonstrable ripple effect. By effectively managing a complex, multi-stakeholder ITTO project, AIDER significantly bolstered its operational reputation and technical credibility. This enhanced standing translated into direct, tangible benefits, including membership in international bodies like the IUCN and, most consequentially, the securing of a major subsequent contract with SERNANP to manage three protected areas in Northern Peru. Concurrently, the Project's groundwork was instrumental in positioning the northern dry forests for conservation finance. It created the essential conditions that enabled the launch of the larger GEF-7 dry forest conservation project (2021–2026), involving key partners like FAO, IUCN, and the Peruvian government. While a proposed REDD+ partnership remains unverified, the project's most enduring legacy is this catalytic function. However, this success also revealed an unintended paradox: the very mechanisms that advanced the dry forest agenda—amplifying AIDER's role and attracting new funding—simultaneously deepened systemic reliance on NGO execution rather than achieving the project's core aim of strengthening self-sustaining governmental management capacity.
- Deepened systemic dependency on a single NGO: A direct, and paradoxical, consequence of the above success was the further centralization of capacity and initiative within AIDER. While the Project aimed to strengthen public institutions, the most capable and reliable actor that emerged was the NGO itself. This created an unintended dependency, where the post-project continuity of initiatives, advocacy, and even institutional memory became heavily reliant on AIDER's continued presence and funding. This outcome starkly highlights the fragility of the regional government institutions the Project sought to empower and underscores a common challenge in development: projects can sometimes inadvertently weaken systems by creating parallel structures or deepening reliance on external agents.
- The "Platform Maintenance" challenge: The Project created new dialogue spaces (e.g., CGFFS). However, an unanticipated outcome was the clear revelation of the hidden costs and efforts required to keep such platforms functional, relevant, and influential.

The Project demonstrated that establishing a committee is only the first step; the unglamorous, long-term work of facilitation, agenda-setting, and maintaining stakeholder interest is essential yet often unfunded. This unexpected lesson exposed a critical gap in typical project design: funding is provided to launch participatory structures but rarely to sustain them, leading to their rapid decline post-project.

The Project's most interesting legacy may lie in these unexpected results. It achieved unplanned successes in raising the dry forest's profile and strengthening its key partner, AIDER. Yet, it also unexpectedly revealed and even exacerbated a core vulnerability: the stark capacity disparity between a capable NGO and the nascent public institutions, ultimately reinforcing a system where long-term sustainability depends disproportionately on a single non-governmental actor.

12.6. Deviations and Justifications

An analysis of the Project's trajectory reveals that while it adhered closely to its planned activities, significant deviations occurred between the anticipated and actual outcomes. These were not failures of implementation but rather a result of the Project encountering the complex and often intractable realities of the context in which it operated. The deviations highlight a critical gap between achieving formal output-based success and generating transformative, on-the-ground impact.

- Deviation from anticipated institutional outcomes: The Project justifiably assumed that building technical capacity within regional governments would lead to improved forest governance. This assumption deviated from reality due to external systemic factors. The Project could not mitigate the chronic national-level issues of political volatility, bureaucratic inertia, and severe underfunding of environmental agencies. While the Project successfully trained officials, it could not control staff turnover or ensure that regional governments prioritized forest management in their annual budgets. The deviation was not necessarily a flaw in the Project's training design, but a testament to the profound difficulty of achieving institutional reform through a time-bound external intervention. The outcome was a capacity built but not effectively utilized.
- Deviation from anticipated economic & behavioral outcomes: A core theory of change was that demonstrating alternative livelihoods (e.g., algarrobina, honey) would create economic incentives powerful enough to change land-use decisions. This represented a significant deviation in scale and impact. The Project's initiatives, while successful as demonstrations, were ultimately unable to compete with the established, lucrative markets for crops like mangoes or the immediate need for pastureland. The deviation underscores a critical lesson: well-designed pilot projects are necessary but insufficient to alter macro-economic drivers. The Project justifiably focused on proving concept viability, but transforming local economies requires complementary, large-scale investment and market development that was beyond its scope.
- Deviation from anticipated sustainability pathways: The Project designed sustainability anchors, such as Forest Management Committees (CGFFS) and knowledge products, with the justification that they would be adopted and maintained by local stakeholders. In practice, their longevity deviated from this plan. These structures showed a high dependency on continuous external facilitation and funding. Once the project withdrew, many committees became inactive, and manuals became outdated. This deviation was

not due to a lack of stakeholder interest but rather the absence of a formalized, government-led system to institutionalize and fund these participatory spaces, revealing a gap between creating structures and embedding them into the governance fabric.

These deviations are not definitely indicators of poor Project plan but are instead justified and realistic consequences of working on deeply entrenched, systemic challenges. The Project's holistic approach—combining policy, capacity, and community work—was the correct and most justified strategy to attempt.

The identified ultimate causes of these deviations were:

- The magnitude of structural challenges: The forces driving deforestation (illegal logging, agricultural expansion) are powered by significant economic incentives and weak governance, which a single project cannot be expected to overturn.
- The limitations of a project cycle: Sustainable behavioral change and institutional transformation are processes that unfold over decades, far exceeding the typical 3–5-year project timeline.
- External shocks: While not explicitly mentioned in reports, the potential for climate events (e.g., droughts, floods) or stakeholder delays (e.g., changes in government point of contacts) could have further disrupted the project's theory of change, delayed outcomes or diverting attention from long-term goals to short-term fixes.

In general terms, the deviations observed are a sobering reflection of the inherent difficulty in achieving sustainable development outcomes in complex environments. The Project delivered its intended outputs but operated within a system where those outputs were necessary yet insufficient catalysts for change. The justifications for these deviations lie not in the Project's execution but in the formidable, persistent structural barriers that define the context of forest governance in Peru that were not duly considered on the initial design.

12.7. Specific Objective Achievement

The Project's Specific Objective was to "strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders to establish policies for the sustainable management of degraded tropical dry forests." An evaluation of this objective reveals a clear divergence between formal, reported achievement and substantive, real-world change. The objective was successfully met in its immediate, technical sense but was only partially achieved in terms of creating durable, transformative impact.

From a reporting standpoint, the Project unequivocally achieved its specific objective. It delivered a suite of capacity-building interventions that directly targeted the stated goal:

- Strengthened regional authorities: The project successfully trained over 50 officials from the regional governments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. It provided them with updated management instruments, such as Regional Forest Development Plans (RFDPs), and drafted complementary regulations for the Forest and Wildlife Law (LFFS). This enhanced their technical and administrative familiarity with Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) principles.
- Enhanced participatory frameworks: The project established and activated key governance platforms, such as the Forest and Wildlife Management Committees (CGFFS), creating structured spaces for dialogue between authorities, the private sector,

and civil society. Awareness campaigns somehow raised the profile of dry forest conservation among local communities.

- Knowledge produced and disseminated: A suite of technical manuals, best practice guides, and communication materials was developed and distributed, arming stakeholders with the necessary tools for SFM.

In this regard, the Project's holistic strategy—combining policy reform, capacity building, and institutional engagement—was effectively executed. However, a deeper analysis of the six-year post-project reveals that these achievements, while real, have not catalyzed the transformative change required to halt forest degradation. The objective was met on paper but not in practice, due to several critical limitations:

- Limited technical uptake: While training was delivered, there is no evidence of the widespread adoption of SFM practices by communities or landowners. The "Learn-by-Doing" method was effective for training but insufficient to alter deeply ingrained economic behaviors. The practices demonstrated during the Project were not internalized or often abandoned in favor of more immediately profitable, yet unsustainable, land-use choices like mango cultivation or livestock grazing.
- Policy vs. practice: A major finding is that improved regulations do not equate to improved governance. While policies were discussed and drafted, their enforcement remains weak due to chronic underfunding, high staff turnover in regional governments, and a lack of political prioritization. The capacity was built, but the enabling environment for its application is missing.
- Fragile participation: The participatory spaces created, such as the CGFFS, were effective during the Project's lifespan but have largely failed to become self-sustaining institutions. Without continued external facilitation and funding, engagement has waned, and these critical forums for consensus-building have lost influence and activity.
- Static drivers of degradation: Ultimately, the Project's capacity-building efforts did not significantly alter the underlying economic and legal drivers of deforestation. Illegal logging and agricultural expansion continue unabated, as confirmed by satellite data. The Project addressed the symptoms (a lack of knowledge) but could not mitigate the root causes (powerful market incentives and weak law enforcement).

In all, the Project successfully achieved its specific objective in output terms by strengthening the potential for sustainable management. It created a foundation of trained personnel, formal policies, and participatory frameworks. However, it did not achieve the objective in outcome terms. It did not establish a functional, self-sustaining system for SFM. The new capacities have not been fully operationalized, the policies are not robustly enforced, and the participation is not enduring. Therefore, while the objective was formally met, its achievement was not transformative. The Project built the necessary hardware for change but could not ensure the software—ongoing funding, political will, and aligned economic incentives—would be installed to make it run effectively in the long term.

12.8. Efficiency

The efficiency of the Project—how well it converted financial, human, and time resources into results—presents a nuanced picture. The analysis reveals a clear divergence between exemplary financial execution and more complex questions regarding the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of achieving sustainable outcomes.

- Budget Execution: From a pure financial perspective, the project was highly efficient. The executing agency, AIDER, demonstrated strong administrative discipline, utilizing the total budget of US$989,038 exactly as planned, with no reported cost overruns. The co-financing structure, with ITTO contributing 44% and AIDER 56%, was fully realized, indicating a strong commitment from the national partner. However, a deeper analysis of cost-effectiveness raises pertinent questions. The project successfully delivered all its outputs—training, materials, workshops—within budget. But the critical inquiry is whether these outputs were delivered in the most efficient way to achieve lasting impact. For instance:
  - The cost of training officials, while justifiable, can only be deemed fully efficient if the acquired skills were consistently applied post-project. Given the high staff turnover and institutional fragility reported, the long-term return on this investment is uncertain.
  - The investment in extensive awareness campaigns (e.g., 72 radio spots) was efficient in reaching a wide audience quickly. However, its efficiency in durably changing behaviors is less clear, as economic incentives for deforestation remained more powerful than awareness messages.
  - The Project was efficient in producing knowledge products (manuals, guidelines), but their underuse and lack of updating post-project suggest resources might have been better allocated toward ensuring their institutional adoption and longevity.
- Timeliness: The Project was completed within its scheduled 30-month duration, a testament to strong operational management. However, this apparent timeliness masks a significant contextual challenge that impacted efficiency: the protracted and unpredictable process of political decentralization. The Project's design was predicated on engaging empowered regional governments. The sluggish and incomplete transfer of forest governance powers from the national to the regional level was a major external delay factor. This meant the Project spent considerable time and resources on advocacy and building the capacity of institutions that were not yet fully operational or vested with the necessary authority. Consequently, while activities were delivered on time, their potential effectiveness and impact were delayed and diluted by a political process beyond the Project's control. Resources were used efficiently for implementation, but perhaps not optimally for achieving impact, as they were deployed into an unstable institutional environment.

The Project was "operationally efficient" but faced contextual inefficiencies. It was a model of financial discipline and output delivery. However, the efficiency of converting these resources into sustainable outcomes was compromised by external political factors, particularly the delayed decentralization. In all, the Project's strategy of building capacity in anticipation of governance changes was a necessary gamble. In the best-case scenario, it would have positioned regions to hit the ground running. In the reality that unfolded, it meant that resources were spent on preparing for a future that had not yet arrived, limiting the immediate application and consolidation of results. Therefore, while the Project cannot be faulted for its internal management, its overall efficiency in achieving lasting change was moderated by the inefficient context in which it had to operate.

12.9. Impacts

A rigorous assessment of the Project's impact reveals a stark disconnect between its successful delivery of outputs and its ability to generate transformative, lasting change. While the Project achieved its immediate developmental objectives, its overarching goal—to contribute to improved living standards through the conservation and sustainable use of tropical dry forests—remains largely unfulfilled. The impacts were predominantly soft, intangible, and incremental, failing to alter the fundamental socio-economic and governance dynamics driving forest degradation.

- Ecological impact: The Project did not achieve its intended ecological impact of reducing deforestation and conserving one million hectares of tropical dry forest. Satellite imagery and field verification confirm that pre-existing deforestation drivers—primarily illegal logging and agricultural expansion—continued unabated, resulting in no significant reduction in forest loss. Although the Project supported the establishment of nurseries and reforestation plots, the absence of quantitative longitudinal data makes it impossible to determine the survival rate or ecological functionality of these restored areas. The intervention lacked the scale and mechanisms to counter deeper economic incentives for land conversion, yielding negligible net gains in forest cover, biodiversity, or carbon sequestration. Surveys revealed limited adoption of promoted practices: only 30% of respondents could recall implementing specific techniques like reforestation or conservation islands, while over a third reported not applying them at all. Persistent pressures such as illegal harvesting of *palo santo* and widespread *algarrobo* mortality further underscore the Project's limited impact on prevailing ecological degradation trends.
- Socioeconomic impact: The Project's principal socioeconomic contribution was a broad elevation of awareness regarding the value of dry forests. While it promoted small-scale economic initiatives such as *algarrobina* processing and beekeeping, these remained isolated demonstrations that failed to provide scalable or competitive alternatives to unsustainable drivers of deforestation like charcoal production and agricultural expansion. Consequently, despite increased knowledge, economic dependence on forest-degrading activities persisted largely unchanged. Gender inclusion efforts, though symbolically promoted, did not systematically translate into decisive leadership roles or equitable economic benefits for women. This limited socioeconomic translation is reflected in stakeholder perceptions, with approximately 77% of interviewees reporting no associated improvements in income or livelihoods. The Project was thus perceived as primarily conservation- and capacity-oriented, with minimal measurable impact on household or community economies.
- Institutional and governance impact: The Project's institutional and governance impact is best characterized as foundational yet incomplete. It successfully established critical dialogue spaces such as the CGFFS and enhanced technical capacities within regional governments, creating a platform for improved forest governance. However, these gains remain fragile due to systemic constraints, including insufficient budgetary allocations, high staff turnover, and a lack of political permanence. Nearly half of respondents (47%) reported no improvement in coordination between SERFOR, regional governments, and communities, while only 18% perceived significant progress. While initiatives like COREFOR and zoning processes were viewed positively, most stakeholders did not consider them institutionally consolidated or self-sustaining. Ultimately, the Project

served more as a catalyst for multi-stakeholder dialogue than as a driver of transformative or durable institutional reform.

- Knowledge impact: The Project achieved a clear and positive impact in the realm of knowledge generation and awareness-raising, as evidenced by the production and effective distribution of technical manuals and bulletins that remain in use by certain communities and NGOs years after project completion. However, the long-term knowledge impact was constrained by a failure to systematically institutionalize these resources. Without formal integration into government extension services or mechanisms for periodic updating, the materials gradually became obsolete. While the Project successfully established a valuable knowledge repository, it did not create the conditions for its sustained application or adaptive management. Stakeholder surveys underscore this limitation: only 18% of respondents confirmed continued use of the materials, while 53% reported no longer using them, and 29% described partial or indirect use—indicating that the primary influence of knowledge products was confined to initial training and awareness phases rather than enduring practical application.
- Overall impact: The Project's overall impact can be characterized as incremental rather than transformative. It achieved perceptible progress in raising awareness, building technical capacity, and establishing pilot platforms for dialogue and dry forest management. However, these gains did not translate into decisive changes in deforestation trends, livelihood security, or institutional governance at a systemic level. While the Project successfully laid a foundation for future interventions through trained personnel and heightened visibility of dry forest issues, its socioeconomic and ecological impacts remained limited and fragile. The enduring legacy resides primarily in enhanced local awareness and strengthened individual capabilities, rather than in sustained, large-scale conservation or development outcomes.

The Project's primary constraint was its focus on capacity building and technical demonstrations without concurrently transforming the underlying systems—market incentives, political economy, and fiscal structures—that drive deforestation. While it succeeded in creating a core group of trained stakeholders and developing practical tools, it did not alter the fundamental economic and governance conditions that shaped land-use decisions. Consequently, key transformative impacts—such as a measurable reduction in forest loss, a diversified and resilient rural economy, and self-sustaining local governance institutions—were not achieved. This underscores the inherent difficulty of achieving sustainable development in contexts where short-term economic pressures consistently outweigh long-term conservation value.

12.10. Sustainability

A well-designed intervention is ultimately judged by its ability to catalyze change that endures. Six years after closure, this ex-post evaluation reveals that the Project's sustainability is markedly uneven across different dimensions. While it successfully established several important structures and capacities, their long-term resilience has been compromised by a failure to adequately address deep-seated systemic vulnerabilities, particularly in financial autonomy and participatory governance.

- Institutional sustainability: A fragile legacy - The Project made a concerted effort to build institutional capacity, training over 50 officials and creating platforms like the Forest and

Wildlife Management Committees (CGFFS). However, this sustainability is superficial. The knowledge transferred remains vulnerable to staff turnover in regional governments, and the committees risk becoming bureaucratic formalities without real influence. Crucially, the Project's interventions were built upon a decentralization process that was—and remains—politically and financially incomplete. Without strong, permanent budget lines and a genuine devolution of decision-making power from the national level, the institutional frameworks created are fragile and prone to backsliding. The Project built the house but on an unstable foundation.

- Financial and economic sustainability: The missing strategy - This is the Project's most critical sustainability gap. While it correctly identified the need to link SFM to income generation (e.g., algarrobina, honey, ecotourism), its approach stopped at pilot demonstrations and basic business training. There was no clear, actionable strategy to transition these initiatives into self-sustaining community-led enterprises. Training lacked specifics on navigating formal value chains, securing certifications, or establishing buyer partnerships—essential elements for market access and competitiveness. Consequently, these activities remained project-dependent curiosities, unable to compete with the immediate, lucrative economic returns from converting forest land to mango plantations or pasture. The Project did not alter the fundamental incentive structure, leaving the economic drivers of degradation firmly in place.
- Environmental sustainability: Technically sound, systemically challenged - The Project's focus on "geographically tailored technologies" for restoration was appropriate and its reforestation efforts were commendable outputs. However, environmental sustainability is not solely about planting trees. The project's design lacked robust plans for climate change adaptation, such as promoting drought-resistant species or community-based fire management. Most significantly, the long-term survival of restored areas depends on enforcement and monitoring, a function that falls to regionally decentralized institutions that remain chronically underfunded and weak. Thus, even positive on-the-ground environmental gains are perpetually at risk from illegal logging and land conversion, with no resilient system to protect them.
- Socio-cultural sustainability: Inclusive in form, not always in function - The Project's design rightly embraced gender and intercultural approaches, and its awareness campaigns successfully elevated the perceived value of dry forests. Yet, sustainable behavioral change requires more than training; it requires shifting power dynamics. Evidence suggests that while women and communities were included in activities, their influence in meaningful decision-making within forums like the CGFFS often remained secondary to traditional power holders. Without deliberate strategies to address these socio-cultural barriers and transfer real benefits to local actors, participation can become a project-time formality rather than a deeply rooted, sustainable practice of civic engagement.
- A phased exit would have been beneficial: The Project's sustainability challenges underscore a vital lesson: capacity building and creating platforms are only the first steps. True sustainability requires a deliberate, phased exit strategy that explicitly transitions from project-driven support to locally owned and financed models. This would have included:
  - Financial bridging: Helping communities and governments secure access to green finance or market partnerships.

- Institutional anchoring: Formalizing the adoption of knowledge products and committee mandates into regional government structures with dedicated budgets.
- Power sharing: Implementing mentorship programs to ensure women and youth could ascend to leadership roles within forest governance.

In essence, the Project provided the tools and the blueprint but could not secure the long-term funding or facilitate the profound transfer of ownership required to make the system self-sustaining. The result is a legacy of demonstrated potential, but not of durable, self-perpetuating change.

12.11. External factors

Unexpected problems or circumstances

Despite detailed planning, the Project's implementation was significantly shaped by a series of unforeseen challenges and contextual circumstances that emerged during its execution. These issues extended beyond standard operational delays, testing the Project's adaptive management and ultimately influencing the sustainability of its outcomes.

- The pervasive impact of political and electoral volatility: A primary unforeseen challenge was the intensity of political instability within regional governments. The Project's design anticipated the ongoing decentralization process but could not predict how electoral cycles would paralyze institutional engagement. Following elections, widespread turnover of technical staff and appointed officials became a major impediment. New administrations often entered with different priorities, forcing the project to re-initiate advocacy efforts and re-train personnel from scratch. This constant state of institutional flux diluted the continuity of capacity building, as newly trained officials were frequently replaced, and long-term commitments made by one administration were not honored by the next.
- Systemic administrative hurdles and perceptions of mismanagement: The Project encountered significant bureaucratic inertia and unexpected administrative barriers within partner institutions. Processes such as co-signing agreements, accessing counterpart funds, or simply scheduling meetings with key officials were often subject to prolonged, unexplained delays. This created an operational friction that slowed implementation and consumed management resources. Furthermore, these delays, combined with a lack of transparency from some regional entities and community organizations, fostered perceptions of financial mismanagement or corruption among stakeholders, even if unfounded. This eroded trust at the local level and created a challenging environment for fostering genuine collaboration.
- The challenge of maintaining quality and engagement: Two interrelated unexpected problems emerged in the project's technical and social dimensions:
  - Diminishing technical quality: As the Project faced political and administrative delays, pressure mounted to complete activities within the original timeline. This occasionally led to compressed training schedules and workshops that prioritized attendance numbers over depth of engagement, potentially sacrificing the quality and long-term retention of learning.
  - Participant fatigue and transactional engagement: Contrary to the ideal of passionate community mobilization, the Project found that sustaining participation required increasingly material incentives (e.g., installation of water wells, meals).

This could have led to a form of transactional engagement, where participation was motivated more by short-term individual benefit than by a shared commitment to forest conservation. This circumstance highlighted the difficulty of fostering intrinsic motivation in the context of economic pressure and challenged the project's assumptions about community readiness to engage.

- The limitations of a project-centric approach: An overarching unexpected circumstance was the Project's limited ability to influence the macro-economic environment. While the Project supported alternative livelihoods like creation of nurseries, it could not anticipate or counteract a simultaneous boom in international demand for mangoes and other high-value cash crops. The economic incentive for forest conversion to agriculture vastly outstripped the financial returns from sustainable forest-based products promoted by the Project. This external market force proved to be a far more powerful driver of behavior than any project-led training or awareness campaign, fundamentally limiting the project's impact on deforestation rates.

These unexpected problems—political turbulence, administrative barriers, transactional participation, and overpowering market forces—collectively acted as a powerful counterweight to the Project's technical interventions. They exposed the limitations of a project-based approach in the face of deeply entrenched systemic and political challenges, ultimately constraining the initiative's ability to achieve transformative, long-term change.

13. Lessons Learned

The ex-post evaluation of the Project reveals a diverse set of lessons that extend beyond its immediate outputs and outcomes. These insights are not limited to what was achieved, but also to how the Project was conceived, implemented, and sustained, offering practical reflections for similar initiatives in dry forest ecosystems. They highlight the interplay between institutional alignment, community engagement, technical capacity building, and the realities of political and economic contexts. For a summary, see Annex 15.5 Lessons Learned.

The lessons are organized into five areas—design, implementation, success factors, challenges, and post-project considerations. Together, they show how decisions taken at different stages shaped the Project's trajectory. By examining both strengths and areas for improvement, these lessons can inform future projects under ITTO and partner institutions, especially in ensuring that conservation objectives, community livelihoods, and institutional frameworks reinforce one another for lasting impact.

13.1. Design Phase

- Participation in design: Community respondents indicated they were not directly involved in formulating the Project; AIDER presented the proposal. This reflects a design process shaped mainly by institutional and technical priorities. While this approach ensured alignment with national frameworks, it limited the sense of early ownership among local actors. Broader participatory design might have generated stronger community commitment and smoother continuity after closure.
- Policy alignment: The design was closely aligned with SERFOR's National Capacity Development Plan and regional forestry strategies. This ensured institutional relevance, but it also placed greater weight on top-down priorities. A more balanced inclusion of

community economic interests alongside national priorities could have enhanced both political support and grassroots adoption.

- Monitoring and evaluation: The absence of baseline data meant that Project performance was mainly assessed through outputs (e.g., events, training sessions, agreements signed). This limited the ability to demonstrate long-term ecological or social changes. Including a baseline at the outset would have enabled clearer measurement of impacts and provided stronger evidence for scaling and replication.
- Balancing objectives: The Project acknowledged that conservation and livelihood needs coexist in dry forest landscapes. Yet, the strategies to connect the two remained general, relying on awareness-building rather than concrete market or income opportunities. More explicit integration of sustainable forest management into agricultural systems, grazing practices, or local businesses could have provided stronger incentives for adoption and long-term commitment.

13.2. Implementation

The Project's implementation navigated complex governance challenges across multiple institutional levels. While it established some coordination mechanisms and delivered training outputs, operational fragmentation between national and regional authorities limited policy enforcement. The approach built valuable individual capacities but faced constraints in addressing systemic barriers like competing economic incentives and unequal power dynamics. Variations in regional engagement and sustainability planning further affected overall coherence, revealing both the possibilities and limitations of achieving transformative change through capacity-focused interventions.

- Adaptive management: The *aprender-haciendo* (learning-by-doing) approach helped compensate for the lack of participatory design. It built trust and allowed communities to learn through practice, fostering more meaningful engagement. This shows that adaptive methodologies can create ownership during implementation, even if they are not present from the start.
- Outputs versus sustainability: A wide range of outputs was delivered, from manuals and training programs to public events. However, some planned products were either adapted or incomplete, such as the forest information system, which was substituted with outreach campaigns. While these campaigns raised awareness in the short term, they were not sustained after closure. This underscores the importance of designing outputs that institutions and communities can maintain independently over time.
- Political risks: Elections and changes in government slowed down certain activities, demonstrating how political cycles influence implementation. Flexibility in planning and contingency measures could help maintain project momentum under similar circumstances in the future.
- Event-driven focus: The Project generated significant visibility through events like the Dry Forest Congress, ECOTÓN, and awareness campaigns. These were successful in mobilizing people but were mostly one-off activities. Establishing permanent platforms or committees could have ensured that dialogue and coordination continued beyond the life of the project.
- Coordination across governance levels: Implementation showed fragmentation due to weak coordination between SERFOR, regional governments, and local actors. GOREs had limited capacity to enforce guidelines, leaving policy–practice gaps. AIDER filled this role,

but its bridging function was overextended. Clearer protocols for vertical coordination could strengthen consistency in future projects.

- Equitable engagement across regions: Implementation intensity was higher in Piura than in Tumbes and Lambayeque, where fewer resources and activities were concentrated. This uneven distribution limited the development of cohesive regional strategies and reduced opportunities to tailor responses to context-specific challenges in all three regions.

13.3. Success Factors

The Project's achievements were underpinned by four strategic approaches that enabled positive engagement, helpful knowledge transfer, and the support of institutional mechanisms. These factors represent transferable lessons for future conservation initiatives in complex socio-ecological contexts.

- Community leadership: Working with CECOBOSQUE and trusted local leaders enabled stronger engagement with entire communities, including groups often less represented such as women and youth. This demonstrates that identifying and empowering local champions is key for mobilization and continuity.
- Knowledge integration: Training combined traditional knowledge (e.g., uses of algarrobo, grazing practices) with modern silvicultural techniques. This hybrid model increased relevance and acceptance, as communities saw their practices respected while also gaining new tools. Such integration helps bridge cultural gaps and makes sustainable management more applicable to local contexts.
- Visibility and partnerships: The Project reached targeted audiences through creative campaigns like the Algarrobito comic, school activities, and radio programs. At the same time, it built alliances with universities, NGOs, and the private sector. These efforts gave dry forests unusual prominence on public and policy agendas and opened the door to new financing opportunities.
- Institutional innovation: One of the most significant outcomes was the establishment of Piura's Technical Unit for Community Forest Management. This unit created a tangible institutional mechanism that outlived the project, demonstrating how targeted institutional strengthening can ensure continuity.

13.4. Failures

- Limited participatory design: The absence of community involvement in project formulation meant that ownership developed mainly during implementation. Greater participation at the design stage could have embedded community priorities earlier and increased the likelihood of sustained engagement.
- Incomplete outputs: Some planned results, such as updating regional forest plans in Tumbes and Lambayeque or implementing the forest information system, were not achieved. This reflects the difficulty of completing all ambitious targets within limited timeframes. Aligning scope with available resources is essential for achieving lasting results.
- Communication continuity: Outreach campaigns generated momentum during the Project but ended once funding stopped. Embedding communication strategies within schools, municipalities, or local media could have extended their lifespan and impact.

- Livelihood integration: Eco-business pilots in apiculture, algarrobina, and ecotourism showed potential but remained at demonstration stage. While training covered business concepts, market access and scalable alternatives were not developed, limiting clear economic incentives for conservation.
- Uneven adoption: Technical practices taught in training (e.g., fire prevention, restoration) were applied inconsistently across communities. This illustrates the importance of ongoing technical support and extension services to reinforce adoption beyond one-off training events.
- Deforestation outcomes not measured: The project provided no evidence of actual reductions in deforestation, while drivers such as agriculture and logging continue to affect the dry forests. Without ecological monitoring at the landscape level, it was not possible to confirm whether project activities translated into measurable conservation impact.

13.5. Post-Project

- Continuity through external funding: The Project laid the groundwork for follow-up initiatives, including GEF-7, Natural Protected Area Administration Contract (for three NPA) and REDD+ proposals, showing its catalytic role. This demonstrates how projects can serve as platforms for new investment, though continuity remains linked to external funding cycles.
- Community-level outcomes: Interviewees remembered the manuals and outreach materials, but no evidence of their continued use was found. This suggests the products were memorable but not sustained, underscoring the need to embed dissemination through schools or local institutions for lasting impact.
- Institutional visibility: The Project raised the profile of dry forests within regional governments and SERFOR. Maintaining this visibility through dedicated resources or programs would ensure that dry forests remain part of policy priorities.
- Broader ITTO lesson: Experiences from this Project reinforce a pattern observed in other ex-post evaluations: projects that combine policy alignment, participatory design, and livelihood incentives tend to produce more sustainable outcomes. This Project highlights the value of aligning institutional frameworks with community engagement and market opportunities.

14. Conclusions and Recommendations

14.1. Conclusions

The conclusions of this ex-post evaluation have been structured according to the logic of the objective tree followed in Section 11, ensuring coherence between the Project's stated objectives, expected outcomes, and actual results. This approach allows for a systematic assessment of the Project's contributions to strengthening governance, improving community capacities, and promoting the sustainable management of Peru's northern dry forests. By following the objective tree framework, the conclusions highlight both the achievements and the challenges encountered, offering a clear basis for lessons learned and future recommendations.

- **Relevance** - The Project demonstrated strong thematic and strategic relevance by directly addressing the urgent challenge of dry forest degradation in northern Peru—a priority aligned with both national policies and international commitments. The Project's design reflected a thoughtful and comprehensive intention to bridge conservation goals with community well-being, acknowledging that sustainable forest management requires integrating ecological, social, and institutional dimensions. However, several implementation challenges limited its ability to fully realize this relevant vision.
  - Leveraged existing networks but limited innovation: The project successfully leveraged pre-existing networks and trusted relationships, which accelerated community entry and established a strong foundation of credibility and cooperation. This strategic approach enabled efficient implementation and meaningful engagement with key stakeholders. However, this reliance on familiar partnerships ultimately constrained innovation and limited the development of more transformative, multi-stakeholder governance models. By prioritizing efficiency and access through known channels, the project missed opportunities to engage critically important—yet often underrepresented—actors from the private sector and civil society and was unable to adequately reconcile top-down policy objectives with local livelihood needs. These insights highlight valuable learning opportunities for enhancing future collaboration frameworks while acknowledging the solid groundwork laid through established relationships.
  - Incremental progress as a steppingstone: The Project's incremental approach—building deliberately upon earlier initiatives—demonstrated strategic pragmatism and a nuanced understanding of the complex forest governance context in northern Peru. By choosing continuity over reinvention, the project conserved resources, built on established trust, and avoided costly start-up delays, allowing for more efficient implementation. This conscious alignment with previous work provided stability and reinforced longer-term efforts in the region. At the same time, this incremental strategy made specific attribution challenging, as stakeholders naturally perceived activities as extensions of past engagements rather than as distinctive, impact-driven contributions. Blurring the lines of the Project's unique value limited the clarity of its standalone achievements and reduced opportunities for measuring direct accountability.

This experience offers a valuable learning opportunity for future interventions to retain the efficiency of incremental engagement while more clearly defining and communicating their unique theory of change. By doing so, projects can enhance both their measurable impact and their ability to demonstrate distinct results—strengthening not only continuity, but also credibility and accountability in the eyes of communities, donors, and partners.

- Aligning conservation and livelihoods: The Project demonstrated strong conceptual alignment between conservation and livelihoods, recognizing the essential interconnection between forest health and human well-being in its design and implementation. This dual commitment to both environmental and social goals established an important foundation for integrated forest management. While the Project effectively established this crucial framework, operationalizing these connections presented ongoing challenges. The tension between preservation priorities and community economic needs highlighted opportunities for deeper collaboration models. It is important to recognize that initiatives could build upon this foundation by developing co-designed conservation economies that directly link livelihood benefits to forest protection, creating more organic alignment between policy objectives and local realities. These valuable insights provide a constructive pathway for strengthening the vital relationship between community well-being and sustainable forest management.
- Engaging beyond traditional partners: The Project established a strong foundation for collaboration through its effective engagement with governmental institutions and local communities, which provided essential institutional legitimacy and grassroots presence. This dual approach created a meaningful framework for conservation of dialogue and action. Building on this accomplishment, there remains significant potential to expand this collaborative model to include a more diverse range of stakeholders. While the Project successfully cultivated public sector and community relationships, broader inclusion of private enterprises, civil society organizations, and educational institutions could further strengthen the sustainability and innovation capacity of dry forest conservation efforts. Initiatives like this one might consider how such expanded partnerships could introduce market-based conservation incentives, enhance community entrepreneurship opportunities, and foster intergenerational learning about sustainable forest management—creating a more comprehensive and resilient approach to dry forest conservation that builds upon the project's established foundation of institutional and community engagement.
- Tapping into academic potential: The project demonstrated notable strength in its collaborative approach, particularly through its effective engagement with governmental bodies and local communities, which provided essential institutional support and grassroots legitimacy. This foundation of trust and cooperation reflects the project’s commitment to inclusive and context-sensitive implementation. At the same time, the project recognized the value of external expertise, as seen in its maintained relationships with universities. This openness to academic partnership suggests strong potential for research-driven innovation and professional capacity development. There remains, however, a strategic opportunity to more fully integrate universities into project design and monitoring—a move that could significantly enhance analytical rigor, innovation, and long-term sustainability of

outcomes. Similarly, while the Project effectively reached adult stakeholders and decision-makers, it did not systematically engage younger generations through schools or informal educational pathways. Incorporating environmental education and youth participation could have amplified the project's long-term impact by fostering conservation-minded attitudes and behaviors early in life. Looking ahead, the project's established partnerships and operational experience provide a strong platform for incorporating a wider array of actors, including academia, private enterprises, civil society, and schools—to create more diverse, resilient, and innovative approaches to dry forest conservation. Such expanded partnerships would not only enrich project strategy but also help embed conservation values across sectors and generations, creating conditions for lasting change.

- Strategic regional focus with refinement opportunities: The Project's strategic focus on Piura yielded benefits, allowing for deep engagement and the successful demonstration of proof-of-concept in a region with complex socio-ecological dynamics. This concentrated approach generated valuable insights and context-specific lessons that affirm the importance of place-based interventions. At the same time, the comparatively lower intensity of support in Tumbes and Lambayeque—regions facing acute ecological pressures and institutional vulnerabilities—highlighted an opportunity to refine future strategies for greater equity and impact. By applying lessons learned in Piura to these equally important regions, and by tailoring interventions to their distinct needs and capacities, future initiatives can achieve broader, more balanced, and ultimately more sustainable outcomes across the entire dry forest landscape. This experience underscores that strategic focus, when coupled with deliberate resource balancing, can significantly enhance both the effectiveness and fairness of conservation efforts.
- Visionary planning with adaptive implementation: The Project demonstrated strength through its forward-looking and visionary planning, which successfully aligned with high-level policy objectives and effectively mobilized stakeholder engagement through its optimistic and ambitious framework. This strategic foresight was instrumental in securing initial support and establishing some direction for sustainable dry forest management. However, the Project's reliance on certain foundational assumptions—such as continuous policy backing and stable stakeholder commitment—proved challenging in the face of dynamic real-world conditions, including political turnover, evolving regional priorities, and variable civil society engagement. These contextual shifts highlight an opportunity to enhance future resilience by integrating more adaptive management approaches, such as ongoing political economy analysis and flexible risk mitigation strategies. By combining its strong visionary foundation with more responsive and iterative design and implementation practices, future initiatives can maintain relevance, navigate complexity, and achieve sustained impact even in fluctuating governance landscapes.

- **Effectiveness** - The Project demonstrated effectiveness in implementation, successfully delivering its planned outputs, including several training programs, facilitation of participatory platforms, and creation of some technical materials—across the three target regions. The Project team exhibited strong commitment and operational

capability in executing these activities, establishing an important foundation in awareness, coordination, and capacity-building.

However, the Project's effectiveness in achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes was constrained by structural and contextual factors that limited its potential for transformative impact. While implementation was robust, the transition from output to lasting change proved challenging. All foundational efforts did not translate into durable forest governance outcomes, nor strategically distributed resources aligned with regional needs. This experience underscores the importance of complementing strong operational execution with deeper strategic alignment to achieve effective and efficient impact.

- Contextual understanding and strategic alignment: The Project design was technically sound but operated with limited contextual depth. While it correctly identified surface-level challenges like deforestation and weak governance, it did not adequately address the underlying socio-political and economic drivers of forest loss—such as competing land-use incentives, institutional instability, or deeply rooted corruption. For example, training programs on sustainable forest management were implemented effectively, but could not be measured nor compete with the immediate economic benefits of land conversion to agriculture, particularly in Piura. This gap between technical activities and contextual realities limited the project's ability to foster lasting behavioral or systemic change.
- Depth and rationale of engagement: The Project established valuable multi-stakeholder forums and strengthened technical capacities, particularly within the Piura region, where engagement was most concentrated. However, the narrowed focus on Piura came at the expense of more tailored and sustained support for Tumbes and Lambayeque, where governance gaps and ecological pressures are equally acute. Moreover, while communication products such as manuals and bulletins were developed, there is little evidence of their continued use or integration into local practice. This suggests that effectiveness was achieved at the level of output delivery rather than outcome internalization.
- Resource realism and strategic focus: The Project set ambitious goals to address complex degradation drivers across three regions, but the scale of investment did not match the scope of the challenge. The budget, timeline and strategic approach were ultimately insufficient to counteract powerful external pressures such as agro-industrial expansion, governance or entrenched illegal logging. Consequently, the Project achieved localized successes rather than the broader systemic influence it envisioned.
- Towards a more impactful approach: The Project could have achieved greater effectiveness by embedding adaptive management practices that allow for real-time response to contextual barriers—such as political turnover or regional development. Additionally, the effectiveness of the Project was compromised due to the lack of deeper region-specific strategies over broad but thin regional coverage and complement training with tangible incentives—such as access to markets for sustainable products—that make conservation economically viable for communities.
- **Impact** - The Project demonstrated clear intent and vision in addressing the complex challenges of dry forest degradation in northern Peru. It facilitated important governance platforms and initiated valuable dialogue around sustainable forest management across the three target regions. However, the Project's ultimate impact

was constrained by several structural and implementation challenges that limited its ability to deliver transformative, lasting change.

- The evaluation found that while the Project successfully pushed for formal governance structures and coordination mechanisms, these achievements remained largely procedural rather than transformative. The establishment of committees and multi-stakeholder platforms represented important first steps, but without addressing underlying power dynamics and economic incentives driving deforestation, these structures struggled to effect meaningful behavioral changes or alter deforestation trajectories.
- Regionally, the Project's impact was unevenly distributed. Piura received concentrated attention and resources, yielding more visible engagement, while Tumbes and Lambayeque—regions facing potentially greater barriers to sustainable forest management—received comparatively less intensive support. This imbalance limited the Project's overall reach and effectiveness in addressing the full scope of dry forest challenges across the intervention zone.
- The Project's approach to capacity building and knowledge sharing, while well-intentioned, showed limited lasting impact. Investments in manuals, training plans, and digital platforms demonstrated initial effort but showed little evidence of sustained use or adoption by target audiences. Similarly, while the project aimed to influence stakeholder attitudes and behaviors around dry forest conservation, most observed positive actions appeared to reflect pre-existing engagement rather than new behaviors catalyzed by this intervention.
- The Project's design, though comprehensive in scope, may have been overly ambitious for its timeframe and resources. Objectives addressing complex challenges like livelihood improvement and large-scale forest restoration would have required more targeted strategies and longer-term engagement to achieve measurable impact. The absence of robust baseline data and verification mechanisms further limited the Project's ability to demonstrate concrete environmental outcomes or attribute changes specifically to its interventions.

- **Sustainability** - The Project demonstrated significant intent in establishing the frameworks for sustainable dry forest management. It successfully supported participatory platforms, enhanced regional policy alignment, and reinforced critical dialogue around conservation. However, the transition from well-designed structures to lasting, self-sustaining impact remains incomplete. While the Project achieved important milestones—such as training sessions, dissemination materials, and the promotion of multi-stakeholder committees—these outputs did not fully translate into entrenched practices, attitudinal shifts, or ecological improvements on a scalable level.

A core challenge to sustainability lay in the Project's inability to conclusively demonstrate and operationalize the tangible economic value of sustainable forest management for local communities. Despite training, there is little evidence that participants adopted these practices long-term or that the proposed models effectively competed with the immediate financial gains from deforestation drivers like agriculture or illegal logging. For rural communities, the choice between conservation and conversion is ultimately economic; without clear, attractive, and accessible livelihood alternatives aligned with sustainable practices, knowledge transfer alone is insufficient to ensure behavioral change.

Furthermore, the sustainability of governance gains is fragile. While the Project strengthened coordination mechanisms, their longevity is threatened by a lack of formalized funding, high turnover of government officials, and unresolved power dynamics that can marginalize community voices in decision-making processes. The Project's strategy relied heavily on its presence to facilitate collaboration, without fully securing the institutionalized commitments—such as dedicated budgetary lines within regional governments or legally recognized community management rights—necessary to maintain momentum after its closure.

This ex-post evaluation, while comprehensive in its application of the OECD-DAC criteria, revealed significant methodological and contextual challenges inherent in assessing long-term impact within complex socio-ecological systems. The rigidity of the criteria, particularly in isolating attribution for Impact and defining measurable thresholds for Sustainability, proved difficult in a landscape where the Project's influence was often catalytic and enmeshed with broader initiatives. The ITTO Manual's guidance on ex-post evaluation emphasizes the need to assess the lasting contribution of a project to its objectives, yet this process highlighted a critical tension: a project can be highly Relevant and Efficient in output delivery while achieving limited Sustainability due to external systemic barriers beyond its control. The evaluation underscored that traditional metrics focused on direct attribution may overlook a project's most valuable, albeit indirect, role as a convener and catalyst for future action. This suggests a need for future ITTO evaluations to complement the OECD-DAC framework (or similar) with more nuanced analytical tools, such as contribution analysis or outcome harvesting, to better capture the full spectrum of a project's legacy, especially its role in strengthening networks, shifting policy dialogues, and paving the way for subsequent investments that constitute genuine, though unplanned, impact.

14.2. Recommendations

- **For ITTO** - Based on the comprehensive ex-post evaluation of the Project "Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru," the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and accountability of future initiatives.
  - Strengthen project design through advanced risk analysis: ITTO should require a more profound contextual analysis during the project formulation phase. Future proposals must include a dedicated section assessing political, economic, and environmental risks—such as water scarcity, political turnover, or influence of agro-industry—along with clear mitigation strategies. For example, in dry forest contexts, climate resilience measures (e.g., drought-resistant species selection, rainwater harvesting techniques) should be integrated into reforestation activities from the outset.
  - Focus on achievable scope and realistic outcomes: Projects should prioritize depth over breadth. Rather than targeting multiple regions or objectives simultaneously, future interventions would benefit from a more concentrated focus, e.g., one region or one type of forest threat—to ensure adequate resource allocation and measurable impact. For instance, a project could focus specifically on community-based enterprises for non-timber forest products in Piura rather than attempting to improve livelihoods across three regions with limited funding.

- Improve clarity and consistency in results reporting: ITTO should provide clear guidelines on terminology (outputs, outcomes, impacts) and require consistent use in reporting. Executing agencies must be trained to distinguish between activities completed (e.g., “200 people trained”) and actual outcomes (e.g., “50% of trained communities adopted sustainable harvesting techniques”). This will improve measurement of effectiveness and avoid overstatement of results.
- Enhance support for ex-post evaluations: ITTO should establish clearer protocols and dedicated budgets for ex-post evaluations, ensuring executing agencies understand their role in facilitating these reviews.
- Diversify implementation structures for greater local ownership: ITTO should incentivize models that include sub-grants to local organizations, such as regional offices, NGOs, or community associations. This would improve financial resilience, strengthen local capacity, and ensure that interventions remain responsive to contextual realities after the project ends. For example, partnering with FEDECAL in Lambayeque to manage community extension efforts if effective could be expanded.
- Embed sustainability and exit planning from the start: Projects must include explicit sustainability plans and budget lines for post-project continuity. This could involve co-financing agreements with regional governments, designing revenue-generating activities (e.g., eco-tourism, certified charcoal), or securing commitments for ongoing technical support. Sustainability should not be an afterthought but a core component of project design.
- Reduce time gaps between project end and ex-post evaluation: ITTO should aim to conduct ex-post evaluations no later than two years after project completion in unstable and complex environments like the northern regions of Peru. Prolonged delays lead to loss of institutional memory, staff turnover, and reduced accuracy in assessing sustainability and long-term impact.
- Differentiate project contributions from broader institutional efforts: Future evaluations must clearly attribute outcomes specifically to the project, distinguishing them from results influenced by other initiatives or the ongoing presence of implementing agencies. This will improve accountability and provide a clearer understanding of the project’s unique value.
- Develop a dry forest-specific funding window: Given the unique ecological and socio-economic challenges of tropical dry forests, ITTO could create a targeted funding stream with tailored indicators, longer timeframes, and built-in flexibility for adaptive management.
- Facilitate south-south learning: Encourage knowledge exchange between dry forest projects across regions (e.g., Peru, Brazil, India) to share strategies for addressing common challenges such as water governance or community engagement.
- Strengthen consultant management and institutional engagement: For future ex post evaluations, it is recommended that ITTO provide greater clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the consultant. This should include formal communication from ITTO to the executing agency introducing the consultant, outlining the objectives of the evaluation, and specifying the type of logistical support expected from the executing agency to facilitate fieldwork. Such clarity would help avoid misunderstandings or financial conflicts related to the execution of field activities. In addition, ITTO could strengthen the evaluation process by

providing consultants with clear reporting guidelines, including the required format (e.g., submission in Word), the intended recipients, and the review procedure. It would also be advisable for ITTO to transmit the draft report to the executing agency and oversee the process of finalization, including the completion and signature of the Management Response. Since conclusions and recommendations may sometimes generate tensions or resistance, ITTO—as the primary interested party—should take the lead in managing these interactions with executing agencies to ensure that the evaluation process remains constructive, professional, and impartial.

- Lessons learnt from this project should translate into actionable improvements for future interventions. By embedding sustainability into design, diversifying implementation models, and strengthening evaluation protocols, ITTO and its partners can enhance the long-term impact of their efforts to conserve and sustainably manage tropical dry forests.

- **For AIDER** - Based on the valuable experience and institutional learning generated by this Project, this set of forward-looking recommendations is designed to strengthen AIDER's strategic and operational frameworks, building upon the institutional knowledge gained from this project. By adopting these targeted actions, AIDER and its partners could ensure that future initiatives not only achieve their immediate objectives but also catalyze lasting, transformative change for the people and dry forests of northern Peru.
  - 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.
  - 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 legacy.

- **For the Peruvian Government** - The following recommendations are issued to the Peruvian government at national, regional, and local levels. These are designed to institutionalize the Project's gains, address systemic barriers it identified, and secure the long-term sustainability of dry forest ecosystems. It should be noted that while some recommendations represent ideal public management practices, it is understood that—given Peru's current institutional, political, and budgetary realities—many are aspirational in their conception. They are presented as a strategic roadmap for incremental progress toward world-class dry forest governance.
  - ★ **To the national government** (SERFOR, MINAM, MEF, SUNAT, OEFA, OSINFOR):
    - Anchor dry forests in national policy and budget: Integrate dry forest conservation and sustainable management as explicit, funded priorities within Peru's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) implementation plan, National Biodiversity Strategy, and national rural development programs. The Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) must guarantee long-term, mandatory budget allocations to SERFOR and regional governments specifically for dry forest management, moving beyond ad-hoc project funding to ensure continuity of monitoring and enforcement programs.
    - Enhance coherence and enforceable governance: Lead the formalization of a National Dry Forest Strategy that mandates policy coherence across sectors (agriculture, water, environment). Strengthen the integrated work of SERFOR, OSINFOR, SUNAT, and the OEFA to dismantle illegal logging and land trafficking networks through specialized, well-resourced task forces. This includes implementing traceability systems for high-value timber species like Algarrobo (Prosopis sp.) and Palo Santo (Bursera graveolens) and applying stringent sanctions.
    - Pioneer innovative economic instruments: Develop and launch a National Dry Forest Fund to catalyze investment. This fund should finance Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes that compensate communities for conservation, provide grants for community-based forest enterprises, and offer tax incentives to private landowners who maintain forest cover and adopt sustainable practices.
  - ★ **To the Regional Governments of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque (GORES)**
    - Institutionalize capacities and planning: formally integrate the successful methodologies and tools from the ITTO project (e.g., training modules, best practice guides) into the permanent Institutional Operational Plans (POI) and budgets of the Regional Environmental Authorities (ARAs). Develop and implement Regional Dry Forest Action Plans that are fully aligned with the proposed national strategy and translate it into specific, measurable targets for each department.
    - Champion cross-sectoral coordination and community empowerment: Formalize and regularly convene inter-sectoral commissions (environment, agriculture, production) to resolve land-use conflicts and align policies. Become the primary facilitator and funder of community forest governance, providing continuous technical assistance and seed funding to organizations like CECOBOSQUE or FEDECAL to develop and implement their own sustainable management plans, rather than relying on external NGOs to do so.

- Lead on water-smart restoration: Declare the restoration of degraded dry forests and their watersheds a regional climate adaptation priority. Invest in large-scale, science-based restoration programs using native, drought-resilient species and traditional water harvesting techniques (*cochas*), focusing on areas critical for groundwater recharge and connectivity.

★ **To local governments (Municipalities)**

- Mainstream forests into local development: Integrate conservation and sustainable use of dry forests into Participatory Local Development Plans and annual budgets. Use municipal powers to promote sustainable economic alternatives linked to the forest, such as supporting beekeeping cooperatives, certifying local products, and developing community-based ecotourism routes.
- Formalize community monitoring and governance: Officially recognize and support Community Forest Monitoring Committees. Provide them with a formal role in municipal environmental oversight and equip them with simple technology to document forest health and report illegal activities, creating a crucial first line of defense against degradation.
- Foster local stewardship: Launch permanent environmental education campaigns in schools and communities, highlighting the direct link between healthy dry forests, water security, and local well-being. Ensure that women have equitable representation and leadership roles in all local forest governance spaces.

A cross-cutting imperative - Integrated water governance.

The Peruvian government at all levels must recognize that the fate of the dry forests is inextricably linked to the management of water. Thus. the establishment of a Macro-Regional Water Authority for the northern dry forest region, with the mandate to regulate water extraction, enforce quotas, and resolve conflicts between agro-export agriculture, local communities, and ecosystem needs is imperative. No forest conservation strategy can succeed without this fundamental commitment.

- **For local communities (forest and rural, associations of small producers)**

The long-term survival of Peru's tropical dry forests is inextricably tied to the daily struggle for well-being and self-determination waged by the local communities who call them home. These recommendations are not conceived in a theoretical vacuum; they are offered with a clear-eyed view of the harsh constraints they face like entrenched poverty, systemic exclusion, and the immense pressure to choose between immediate survival and long-term conservation.

Therefore, these suggestions consciously avoid grand, unattainable ideals. Instead, they propose incremental, practical starting points designed to work within a current reality. The goal is not to impose foreign models of governance but to identify and strengthen the existing capacities within dry forest communities—finding ways to make daily livelihoods slightly more secure, slightly more efficient, and slightly more sustainable. This is a gradual strategy, focused on achieving small, tangible wins that can build the confidence and collective power needed

to eventually navigate and transform the systems that marginalize these communities. True stewardship grows from agency, and agency begins with having viable options.

- Build organizational capacity through gradual, phased steps: Expecting impoverished, time-poor communities to immediately establish "robust financial management systems" or "transparent governance" is unrealistic. Formalization processes are often bureaucratically complex and costly. Hence, starting by strengthening existing informal networks and facilitating dialogues between community elders, existing leaders, and families to identify shared priorities and build trust. The first goal should not be formal registration but rather achieve a consensus on 1-2 common goals (e.g., securing a fair price for charcoal, protecting a specific water source). External support should focus on facilitating these conversations and providing small, manageable grants for collective micro-projects to demonstrate the tangible benefit of working together. Formal legal status can be a longer-term objective.
- Focus on livelihood security through low-risk, high-impact interventions: to "develop value-added products" and "explore ecosystem services" ignore the stark lack of start-up capital, processing infrastructure, and market linkages. Carbon markets are notoriously complex and inaccessible to communities without specialized legal and technical support. Therefore, prioritize improving the efficiency and profitability of existing activities before introducing entirely new, risky ventures.
- For small animal farmers: Instead of medium to larger scale silvopastoral systems, promote low-cost interventions. Distribute seeds of native fodder trees (Algarrobo) for farmers to plant in small, protected plots to supplement feed, reducing grazing pressure. Provide basic veterinary training and support to reduce animal mortality, a major economic loss.
- For charcoal producers: The immediate priority is not moving away from charcoal but making it more sustainable. Provide training and access to improved, efficient metal kilns that drastically increase yield from the same amount of wood, immediately reducing deforestation pressure and increasing income. This builds trust and provides economic breathing room before introducing more complex diversification.
- Pilot micro-enterprises: Instead of "developing value-added products," facilitate connections with local NGOs or businesses that can provide a guaranteed market for small quantities of non-timber forest products (e.g., honey, algarrobo pods). These de-risks the initial investment for communities.
- Anchor technical skills in practical, peer-to-peer learning: “Championing local forest promoters" requires sustained external funding for training and stipends, which is often unavailable. Thus, it is recommended to identify and empower respected local practitioners instead. Find the community members known for their healthy goats or their efficient charcoal production and empower them to share their knowledge through farmer-to-farmer demonstration plots. Focus training on a single, highly practical skill at a time (e.g., how to build and use an efficient cookstove, how to treat common goat diseases). This approach is more culturally acceptable, cost-effective, and sustainable than bringing in external experts for complex workshops.
- Integrate inclusion by valuing existing roles, not imposing new structures: Mandating "women's leadership" or "youth roles" without addressing underlying cultural norms and economic barriers can be ineffective or even cause backlash. Since women are primarily responsible for firewood collection and small-scale crop cultivation, target them specifically for interventions that reduce their labor and improve their income,

such as distributing efficient cookstoves and supporting kitchen gardens with drought-resistant crops. This builds their economic agency, which can later translate into more formal leadership roles. Also, engage youth through technology that serves an immediate community need. Train them to use simple smartphone apps to document illegal logging or map water sources, positioning them as valuable tech-savvy protectors of the community, rather than forcing them into traditional roles.

- Pursue alliances based on immediate, tangible benefits: Expecting communities to "engage in policy advocacy" or "pursue sustainability certifications" is a distant goal when daily survival is the priority. These processes require resources, time, and expertise they do not have. An alternative focus on alliance-building on securing concrete, short-term wins is recommended. The goal of forming associations should be to achieve a specific, tangible outcome: negotiating a better per-sack price for charcoal with a local buyer or collectively petitioning the local municipality to provide a water tank. These small victories build confidence and demonstrate the power of collective action. Connecting with regional governments should be framed as demanding the fulfillment of basic rights and services (e.g., access to water, health posts) rather than abstract "policy dialogue." This makes the process more relevant and urgent for community members.

Effective support for dry forest communities must start by meeting them where they are. The path to sustainability is not through introducing complex, foreign models but through validating and incrementally improving existing livelihood strategies, reducing immediate risks, and building social capital through achievable collective actions. This grounded approach is slower but ultimately more sustainable and respectful of local realities.

- **For civil society - NGOs and academia**

The long-term sustainability of dry forest management in northern Peru depends on a coordinated, multi-stakeholder effort. The following recommendations are directed at civil society organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions to complement government and donor actions, building on the findings and gaps identified in this evaluation.

★ **For civil society organizations** (e.g., CECOBOSQUE, FEDECAL, local associations).

- Champion inclusive and accountable local governance: Move beyond participation to empowered decision-making. Strengthen Community Forest Committees by instituting transparent leadership rotations, formal quotas for women and youth representatives, and public accountability mechanisms for resource management decisions. This builds genuine ownership and resilience against elite capture.
- Drive economically viable conservation: Transition awareness campaigns to demonstrate tangible economic value. Lead the development of community-led enterprises focused on value-added products (e.g., processed algarrobo flour, certified honey, eco-tourism packages). Forge direct market linkages to ensure these initiatives provide a competitive alternative to deforestation-driven income.
- Become data-literate advocates: Partner with academia or NGOs to build skills in simple, verifiable data collection (e.g., using smartphones for GPS mapping of forest cover change, monitoring water levels). This evidence is powerful for

holding local and regional governments accountable to their environmental commitments.

★ **For non-governmental organizations** (NGOs) (e.g., AIDER, Naturaleza y Cultura Internacional (NCI), Pronaturaleza)

- Facilitate—don't replace—local systems: Shift from project-implementing entities to facilitators of systemic change. Prioritize strengthening the management and financial capabilities of civil society partners and community enterprises to ensure their autonomy and longevity beyond NGO project cycles.
- Broker innovative finance for sustainability: Act as a critical bridge to connect communities and their projects with emerging financial mechanisms. Develop bankable proposals and provide technical support to access Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), carbon credit markets, and impact investment, ensuring benefits are equitably distributed.
- Advocate with evidence-based narratives: Use project data and community testimonials to strategically position dry forests on regional and national policy agendas. Campaign for specific, actionable policies, such as directing a percentage of agricultural water tariffs to fund forest restoration or integrating community forest guards into formal monitoring systems.

★ **For academia and research institutions** (e.g., Universities, CGIAR)

- Conduct action-oriented, transdisciplinary research: Move beyond disciplinary studies to research that solves practical problems. Partner directly with communities and NGOs to co-design studies on climate-resilient restoration techniques, the economic valuation of dry forest ecosystem services (especially water), and the effectiveness of different governance models. Prioritize research questions that communities identify.
- Co-develop accessible knowledge products and curricula: Translate scientific findings into practical tools—e.g., simplified species selection guides for restoration, soil moisture conservation techniques, business models for NTFP enterprises. Integrate these into certified training modules for community promoters, forestry technicians, and university curricula to standardize and scale best practices.
- Establish long-term socio-ecological monitoring platforms: Create and maintain long-term research plots and socio-economic baselines across the dry forest landscape. This provides the critical time-series data needed to objectively measure the impact of interventions, attribute changes, and inform adaptive management, filling a major gap identified in this evaluation.

- **For future projects on restoration and conservation of dry forests and similar ecoregions**
  - Deepen governance through decentralized enforcement & coordination: Future projects must move beyond capacity-building workshops to directly strengthen the operational and enforcement capabilities of regional governments. This requires:
    A) Co-funding agreements between international donors and regional governments (GOREs) ensure dedicated budgets for forest protection units, field equipment, and legal prosecution of illegal logging.
    B) Mandatory inter-institutional protocols formalizing coordination between SERFOR, OSINFOR, OEFA, and the Regional Environmental Authorities (ARFFS) for joint inspections, data sharing, and enforcement actions in priority dry forest landscapes.
    C) Performance-based indicators tracking reductions in illegal activity (e.g., % decrease in unauthorized clearings verified by satellite monitoring) rather than solely counting training sessions held.
  - Embed economic incentives to align conservation with local livelihoods: Capacity building will fail without addressing the economic drivers of deforestation. Projects must integrate:
    D) Community-based enterprise development: Provide targeted grants and technical assistance for sustainable NTFP value chains (e.g., algarrobo pods, honey, ecotourism) with clear market linkages, ensuring benefits compete with income from land conversion.
    E) Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES): Pilot watershed protection funds where water users (e.g., agricultural companies, municipalities) finance communities for forest conservation and assisted natural regeneration activities.
    F) Conditional sub-grants: Tie financial support for communities to verify conservation outcomes, such as maintaining forest cover or adopting sustainable harvesting plans.
  - Anchor interventions in climate resilience and water security: Recognize that dry forest survival is inextricably linked to water governance and climate adaptation.
    G) Integrate water-footprint analysis into forest management plans, establishing clear water allocation rules that prioritize ecosystem needs and community subsistence over water-intensive export agriculture.
    H) Promote climate-adaptive restoration: Prioritize native, drought-resilient species (e.g., Prosopis pallida, Capparis scabrida) in reforestation and leverage traditional water harvesting techniques (*cochas*) to increase seedling survival rates.
    I) Mainstream dry forests into climate policy: Develop specific metrics to include dry forest conservation and restoration as measurable contributions within Peru's NDCs and REDD+ strategies, unlocking climate finance.
  - Institutionalize learning through robust MEL and knowledge transfer: Transform project-generated knowledge into a public good for continuous improvement.
    J) Establish a Dry Forest Observatory: Create a digital platform hosted by a consortium of universities and SERFOR to consolidate data on forest cover, degradation of drivers, market trends, and best practices, making it accessible for policymakers and practitioners.

K) Mandate Gender & Equity Disaggregation: All monitoring data (participation, benefits, land ownership) must be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and location to ensure equitable impacts and expose hidden disparities.

L) From Reports to Protocols: Convert project lessons into standardized operating procedures (SOPs) for key processes—such as community monitoring protocols or simplified forest management plans—and formally integrate them into the training curricula of regional governments and technical institutes.

- Secure legacy through formalized partnerships and financial sustainability: Avoid the "project cliff" effect by designing for exit from the outset.

M) Legally binding transfer agreements: Prior to implementation, secure signed agreements with regional governments outlining their commitment to absorb successful project components into their institutional structures and annual budgets.

N) Nurture a champion network: Identify and empower champions within government, community leadership, and the private sector to advocate for dry forest conservation beyond the project cycle.

O) Blended finance models: De-risk private investment in sustainable forest enterprises through guarantee funds or impact investment vehicles to ensure long-term financial viability without donor dependency.

P) Projects should be conceived not only to achieve their immediate objectives but also to strategically position partner institutions, cultivate durable alliances, and align with evolving national priorities and international financing mechanisms. Even when direct resource mobilization is not an explicit goal, projects should embed intentional strategies that link capacity-building and governance advancements to concrete financial pathways—such as Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects, REDD+ initiatives, payment for ecosystem services schemes, or public-private administration contracts. By deliberately creating “investment-ready” outcomes and fostering partnerships with clear post-project roles, projects can significantly increase the likelihood that their results will attract sustained funding, ensure institutional ownership, and achieve long-term impact.

15. Annexes

15.1. Acronyms Used

INTERNATIONAL and GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS		
Acronym	**English**	**Spanish**
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura
GEF-7	Global Environment Facility - 7th Replenishment Cycle	Fondo para el Medio Ambiente Mundial - 7mo Ciclo de Reposición
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization	Organización Internacional de las Maderas Tropicales
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee	Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos - Comité de Ayuda al Desarrollo
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation	Reducción de las Emisiones por Deforestación y Degradación de los Bosques
PERUVIAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ENTITIES		
DGFFS	General Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife (now SERFOR)	Dirección General Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre (ahora SERFOR)
INEI	National Institute of Statistics and Informatics	Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática
INRENA	National Institute of Natural Resources (former institution)	Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance	Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas
MINAM	Ministry of the Environment	Ministerio del Ambiente
OEFA	Agency for Environmental Assessment and Enforcement	Organismo de Evaluación y Fiscalización Ambiental
OSINFOR	Supervisory Body for Forest and Wildlife Resources	Organismo de Supervisión de los Recursos Forestales y de Fauna Silvestre
SERFOR	National Forest and Wildlife Service	Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre
SERNANP	National Service of Natural Protected Areas	Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado
SUNAT	National Superintendency of Customs and Tax Administration	Superintendencia Nacional de Aduanas y de Administración Tributaria
PERUVIAN REGIONAL and LOCAL ENTITIES		
ARA / ARFFS	Regional Environmental Authority / Regional Forest & Wildlife Authority	Autoridad Regional Ambiental / Autoridad Regional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre
GORE	Regional Government	Gobierno Regional
GRP	Regional Government of Piura	Gobierno Regional de Piura
REGO	Regional Government	Gobierno Regional
PROJECTS, PROGRAMS and ORGANIZATIONS		
AIDER	Association for Research and Integrated Development	Asociación para la Investigación y Desarrollo Integral
CECOBOSQUE	Central of Dry Forest Peasant Communities (Piura)	Central de Comunidades Campesinas del Bosque Seco
FEDECAL	Federation of Peasant Communities of Lambayeque	Federación de Comunidades Campesinas de Lambayeque
NORBOSQUE	Northern Forest Network (research network)	Red Nor-Bosque (red de investigación)
CGFFS	Forest and Wildlife Management Committee	Comité de Gestión Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre
COREFOR	Regional Forestry Council (now part of CGFFS)	Consejo Regional Forestal (ahora parte del CGFFS)
CONCEPTS, FRAMEWORKS and TOOLS		
GPS	Global Positioning System	Sistema de Posicionamiento Global
LFFS	Forest and Wildlife Law (Law No. 29763)	Ley Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre (Ley N° 29763)
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	Monitoreo, Evaluación y Aprendizaje
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions (Climate Change)	Contribuciones Determinadas a Nivel Nacional
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	Organización No Gubernamental
NPA	Natural Protected Area	Área Natural Protegida
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products	Productos Forestales No Maderables
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services	Pagos por Servicios Ecosistémicos
PGRFyF	Forest and Wildlife Management Plan	Plan de Gestión Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre
POI	Annual Operating Plan	Plan Operativo Institucional
RFDP	Regional Forest Development Plan	Plan de Desarrollo Forestal Regional
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management	Manejo Forestal Sostenible
SIAR	Regional Environmental Information System	Sistema de Información Ambiental Regional
SMFP	Simplified Forest Management Plan	Plan de Manejo Forestal Simplificado
SNIFF	National Forest and Wildlife Information System	Sistema Nacional de Información Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures	Procedimientos Operativos Estándar
TFLET	(Specific to the project) Training of Forest Entrepreneurs and Laborers	Capacitación de Empresarios y Trabajadores Forestales

15.2. Dry Forest Loss Data Analysis - Tumbes, Piura, Lambayeque

Year	Remaining Area (ha)	Annual Loss (ha)
2017	3,438,103	7,503
2018	3,435,649	2,454
2019	3,421,240	14,409
2020	3,398,741	22,499
2021	3,397,874	867
2022	3,399,787	–1,913 (net gain/recovery)
2023	3,370,077	29,710
2024	3,345,016	25,061

Source: https://peru.mapbiomas.org/estadisticas/

15.3. Stakeholder Interview Summaries

Stakeholder Interview Summary

This annex presents a synthesis of the stakeholder interviews conducted during the ex-post evaluation of ITTO Project PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F): 'Capacity Building for Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru.' The interviews were carried out with representatives of regional governments, SERFOR, community leaders, NGOs, and other relevant actors across the regions of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. The summary highlights key insights, perceptions, and lessons learned regarding the project's design, implementation, outcomes, and sustainability.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders identified as key actors in the management and conservation of dry forests. A combination of in-person and virtual interviews was applied, complemented by participatory workshops and surveys where feasible. Information was systematically consolidated into thematic categories.

Stakeholder Groups Interviewed

Stakeholder Group	Examples of Interviewees
Regional Governments	Officials from Piura, Tumbes, Lambayeque
SERFOR	Technical staff from Lima, Piura, Lambayeque
Community Leaders	Representatives from CECOBOSQUE, communal authorities
Civil Society and NGOs	Local NGOs, consultants, associations
Academia	Representatives of universities and research institutions

Key Findings

The following key themes emerged across stakeholder interviews:

- Recognition of the project's contribution to strengthening technical and institutional capacities for dry forest management.
- Positive perceptions of training and educational materials (manuals, workshops, campaigns) as valuable tools for communities and authorities.
- Challenges noted with the continuity of actions beyond the project's timeframe, especially regarding political changes at regional levels.
- High value placed on the project's participatory approach, which enhanced legitimacy and ownership among local actors.
- Stakeholders highlighted the importance of consolidating financing opportunities and linking with broader national and international initiatives (e.g., REDD+, GEF).

Lessons Learned from Interviews

- Sustained engagement with regional governments is critical to ensure long-term institutionalization of dry forest management.
- Community-based organizations, such as CECOBOSQUE, are central allies for ensuring effective participation and uptake of project outcomes.

- Thematic training should balance technical, administrative, and legal aspects to address multi-dimensional challenges.
- Future projects should anticipate political transitions to minimize risks of delays or discontinuities.

Conclusions

Overall, stakeholders expressed strong appreciation for the project and emphasized its role in positioning the dry forest ecosystem as a strategic priority in northern Peru. The interviews also underscored the need to consolidate the achievements by fostering continued capacity building, strengthening governance frameworks, and securing financial sustainability mechanisms.

15.4. Field Photos/Maps

Engaging with Stakeholders and Project Beneficiaries

Interviewing Academic Partner – Universidad Nacional de Tumbes: Dr. Miguel Puescas (far right) explains the university's research on creating a sustainable value chain for palo santo (bursera graveolens) to the evaluation consultant and AIDER project staff.

Interview with Ing. Cristian López, Pampas de Hospital Municipality, Tumbes. A primary stakeholder shares insights into local governance challenges and opportunities for sustainable dry forest management.

A moment of exchange during a meeting with the Association of Producers from Rica Playa, Tumbes. As primary stakeholders, these goat ranchers shared valuable insights on balancing livestock husbandry with dry forest conservation, highlighting their recent practical experiences in the adoption of sustainable practices.

Francisco Sernaqué, leader of CECOBOSQUE, engaged in a one-on-one interview (left) and community meeting (right) with members of the José Ignacio Távara Pasapera peasant community in Piura. These dialogues were essential for understanding local perspectives on dry forest management.

Community members of the rural annex of José Ignacio Távara Pasapera explaining the growth of algarrobo (carob) trees in a regenerative agroforestry parcel, Piura, Peru.

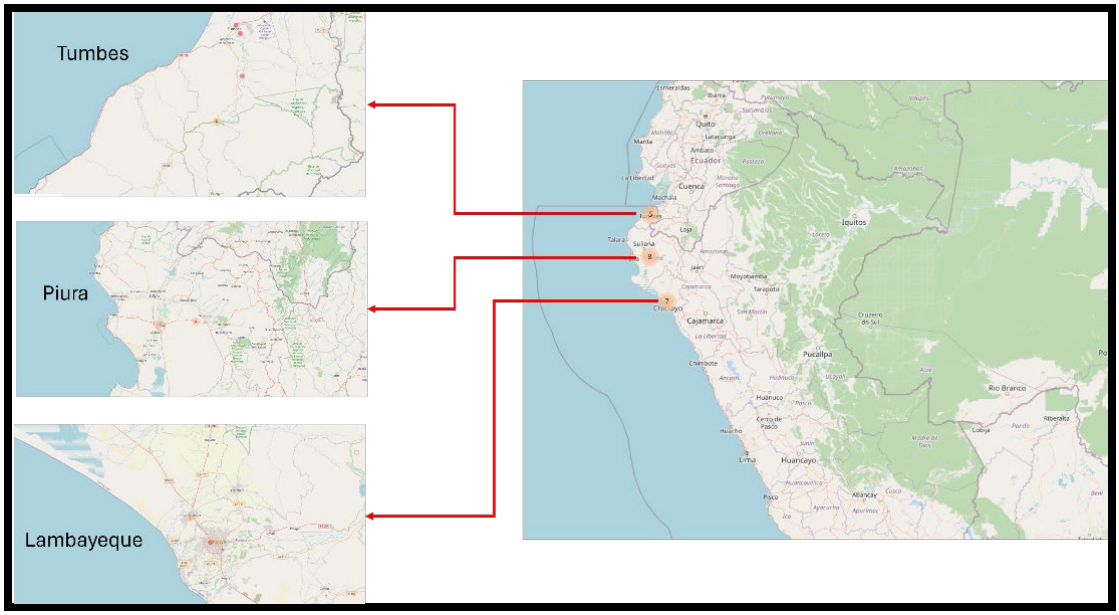
(Left)

(Right)

(*Center)*

(Left) Meeting with authorities at the Natural Resources Management Office of the Piura Regional Government / (Right) Regional Government of Lambayeque / (Center) SERNANP (Pomac Forest) Lambayeque - to discuss sustainable dry forest management project outcomes.

Map of Interview Sites



15.5. Lessons Learned Summary

Lesson	What it Means	Future Implication
Participation in design	Communities were not involved in project formulation.	Early engagement fosters ownership and smoother continuity after closure.
Policy–livelihood balance	Alignment with SERFOR plans ensured legitimacy but left less space for local needs.	Designs should link conservation with viable economic options.
Monitoring and evaluation	No baselines or outcome indicators limited impact measurement.	Build M&E systems from the outset to track long-term results.
Adaptive management	*Learning-by-doing* built trust and ownership during implementation.	Flexible methods can compensate for design gaps and engage communities.
Output and sustainability	Training and campaigns raised visibility but lacked institutional follow-up.	Embed outputs in permanent structures to extend impact.
Coordination	Weak vertical links left policy–practice gaps, often filled by AIDER.	Clear protocols can improve SERFOR–GORE–local coordination.
Equitable engagement	Piura received more resources than Tumbes and Lambayeque.	Balance attention across regions to strengthen cohesion.
Community leadership	Partnering with CECOBOSQUE and leaders boosted participation.	Empower local champions to mobilize broader engagement.
Knowledge integration	Training combined traditional and technical forestry knowledge.	Blend knowledge systems to increase acceptance and relevance.
Visibility and partnerships	Creative campaigns and alliances raised the dry forest profile.	Outreach and partnerships attract new support and funding.

Lesson	What it Means	Future Implication
Institutional innovation	Piura's Technical Unit provided continuity beyond the project.	Institutional anchoring increases sustainability of outcomes.
Incomplete outputs	Some regional plans and the forest information system were not delivered.	Align targets with resources and time to ensure feasibility.
Livelihood integration & incentives	Eco-business pilots showed promise but lacked market links.	Strengthen business cases and connect communities to markets.
Uneven adoption	Training was applied inconsistently without follow-up.	Provide ongoing extension and support for consistent uptake.
Deforestation outcomes not measured	No evidence of actual reductions in deforestation; drivers persist.	Include ecological monitoring to verify conservation impacts.
Continuity through funding	The project catalyzed proposals but relied on new donor support.	Build self-sustaining mechanisms alongside donor funding.
Knowledge & communication	Materials were remembered but not in use post-project.	Embed communication tools in schools and institutions.
Institutional visibility	Dry forests gained attention but without budget support.	Secure dedicated funding to sustain political visibility.
Broader ITTO lesson	Balancing policy, participation, and economic incentives are key.	Future projects should integrate all three for lasting results.

15.6. Benchmarking of similar projects on dry forests

Introduction

This benchmarking report compares the ITTO project PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F), executed by AIDER, against similar studies and international best practices. The analysis draws from the project documents, completion report, and ITTO's Manual for Monitoring, Review, Reporting, and Evaluation (MRE).

Project Overview

Title: Capacity Building for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru
Executing Agency: AIDER (Asociación para la Investigación y Desarrollo Integral)
Duration: 30 months
Budget: US$ 989,038 (ITTO: 437,630 / AIDER: 551,408)
Target Area: Tumbes, Piura, Lambayeque
Objectives: To strengthen capacities of key stakeholders for sustainable management of degraded tropical dry forests, reduce deforestation, and improve rural community livelihoods.

Benchmarking with Similar Studies

The benchmarking process examines how the ITTO-AIDER project aligns with or diverges from other initiatives identified in the document section: Similar Studies. Key comparative dimensions include:

1. Objectives and Relevance

- The ITTO-AIDER project prioritized capacity building, community engagement, and governance reform.
- Similar projects often emphasized restoration and direct livelihood benefits, but with less focus on governance.
- The alignment with national forest policies and ITTO priorities demonstrates strong policy relevance.

2. Implementation Approach

- The ITTO project used a 'Learn-by-Doing' participatory methodology, consistent with global best practices.
- Other studies stressed technical reforestation methods, while ITTO-AIDER focused more on institutional capacity building.
- Inclusion of gender considerations and intercultural respect distinguished from the ITTO approach.

3. Outputs and Results

- Outputs included regulatory frameworks, forest information systems, and training of community leaders.
- Similar projects reported tangible ecological restoration (hectares restored, trees planted), while ITTO emphasized governance, awareness, and sustainable forest management practices.
- Community-level adoption was significant but slower compared to direct restoration programs.

4. Sustainability and Risks

- Sustainability was supported by institutional buy-in from regional governments and SERFOR.
- Other projects faced challenges in maintaining results post-funding due to weak institutional anchoring.
- ITTO-AIDER's approach to embedding practices in regional policies increased sustainability prospects.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

- Multi-stakeholder involvement improves governance and policy uptake.
- Community federations (CECOBOSQUE, FEDECAL) provide strong platforms for scaling forest management.
- Outreach strategies (radio spots, workshops) proved effective in raising awareness.
- The project highlighted the importance of aligning national policies (Law 29763, National Forest and Wildlife Policy).

Alignment with ITTO MRE Manual

According to the ITTO Manual for Project Monitoring, Review, Reporting, and Evaluation (2009):

- Monitoring: The project included logical framework indicators, progress reports, and internal monitoring.
- Review: Regular steering committee reviews ensured adaptive management.
- Reporting: Completion reports and technical studies were prepared in line with ITTO requirements.
- Evaluation: The project's ex-post assessment confirms its consistency with ITTO's evaluation framework.

Conclusion

The ITTO project executed by AIDER stands out for its emphasis on governance, institutional strengthening, and participatory capacity building. While other similar initiatives achieved more direct ecological outcomes, the ITTO-AIDER project invested in long-term sustainability through systemic reforms and empowerment of local and regional stakeholders. This places it as a complementary model to restoration-focused projects, with higher potential for sustained impact at governance and policy levels.

Similar Studies

Project Code / Country	Main Objectives	Approach / Strategies	Key Results	Challenges	Sustainability / Impact
PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F) – Peru (AIDER)	Build capacity for sustainable management of tropical dry forests in Piura, Tumbes, Lambayeque.	• Strengthen SERFOR & regional governments. • Community training & promoters. • Forest policy & legal framework review. • Communication campaigns (radio, comics, contests).	• Capacity Development Program for Dry Forest Managers. • Manuals of good practices. • Inter-institutional agreements & creation of Piura Community Forestry Unit. • Multiple outreach campaigns. • Integration into national plans.	• Weak market linkages for eco-business pilots (apiculture, algarrobina, ecotourism). • Political changes slowed processes. • Limited quantitative monitoring of impact.	• Strengthened governance and visibility of dry forests. • Seeded REDD+ & restoration initiatives with international partners. • Sustained role for CECOBOSQUE. • Institutional integration with SERFOR.

PD 438/06 Rev.1 (F) – Nicaragua	Promote sustainable management and conservation of Pacific dry forests.	• Community forestry training. • Forest restoration pilots.• Strengthen local governments and cooperatives. • Develop management plans.	• Established community forestry brigades. • Reforested degraded areas. • Produced training manuals. • Local plans aligned with national forestry law.	• Severe pressure from agriculture & fuelwood. • Limited funds for scaling restoration. • Weak enforcement capacity.	• Communities retained restoration practices. • Strengthened local forest user groups. • Continued small-scale restoration post-project.
PD 443/06 Rev.2 (F) – Guatemala	Develop dry forest management and improve community livelihoods.	• Strengthen municipal forestry offices. • Training on governance & sustainable use. • Livelihood pilots (beekeeping, non-timber products).	• Management instruments developed for municipalities. • Community training on dry forest silviculture. • Pilots of non-timber forest products.	• Low profitability of pilots. • Land tenure disputes. • Inconsistent national policy support.	• Improved local capacity & forest knowledge. • Continued use of silvicultural practices by some communities. • Weak sustainability of economic pilots.

PD 233/03 Rev.2 (F) – Mexico (Sonora)	Strengthen dry forest/desert woodland management.	• Promote productive alternatives (agroforestry, non-timber products). • Capacity building of ejidos and cooperatives. • Desertification control measures.	• Agroforestry trials established. • Local ejidos received training. • Desertification maps created.	• Harsh climate limited restoration success. • Low returns for forest products vs. agriculture.	• Some agroforestry practices are sustained locally. • Greater awareness of desertification issues. • Institutional lessons absorbed by forestry agencies.
PD 459/07 Rev.1 (F) – Ecuador	Restore degraded tropical dry forests and link to ecosystem services.	• Forest landscape restoration pilots. • Payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes. • Community involvement in monitoring. Climate change adaptation measures.	• Restoration plots established. • PES pilot agreements tested. • Integration into national REDD+ strategy.	• PES financing mechanisms not fully secured. • Community buy-in varied.	• Contributed to the climate change adaptation agenda. • Ongoing PES and REDD+ integration. • Dry forest included in Ecuador's restoration commitments.

15.7. Management Response to the ITTO ex-post evaluation

Appendix 2

Management Response to ITTO Ex-Post Evaluation	
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:	
In general terms, the evaluation report is comprenhensive 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 builiding), specific tools for measuring impacts of capacity building and sensitization (e.g. actitudinal changes) could strenghten the evalualtion 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.	
Evaluation Report Recommendations*	B) Response to recommendations (e.g. 'accept', 'partially accept' or 'reject' – please provide a brief
Recommendation 1 *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.*	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 transfered by projects, particularly the ones related to estrcutural 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.

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

Recommendation 3 *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.*	Accept. AIDER has a strong Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and M&E procedures considers the measurement of projects results, effects and impacts in adittion to monitoring of project implementation (activities and deliverables) and has adaptative management as one of its pillars.The M&E approaches and methods to be implemented are adapted according to the characteristics of each project in terms of scope, financial resources availabity 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.

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 techical assistance, mentoring, among others. AIDER's MEL system currently employ disaggregated data collection (by gender, location, income brackets).

Recommendation 5 *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.	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 enhacement 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.

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 institutionality. 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 lilmit 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:_____ Jaime Nalvarte, Executive Director AIDER

Date, Sig September 09, 2025

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15.8. Terms of reference for the Consultant

Terms of Reference for the Consultant

Ex-Post Evaluation

PD 741/13 Rev.3 (F): "Capacity Building for Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru"

I. Background

ITTO is an intergovernmental commodity organization established in 1986 to administer the provisions and operation of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), particularly in the promotion of international trade in tropical timber, the sustainable management of tropical forests and the development of tropical forest industries through international cooperation, policy work and project activities.

The Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management, at its Fifty-eighth Session associated with the Sixtieth ITTC Council Session, decided to conduct the ex-post evaluation of the abovementioned project.

The background information of this completed project is provided in Appendix 1 to the Terms of Reference. The project PD 741/13 Rev.3 (F) had been implemented by AIDER (Association para la Investigacion y Desarrollo Integral). The Table of Management Response to ITTO Ex-Post Evaluation is provided as Appendix 2 to the terms of reference.

II. Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

a) Purpose and Scope of Project Evaluation

The primary purpose and scope of the evaluation will be to evaluate the completed project mentioned above in the following aspects:

i. To assess the project's design, outputs, and contribution to the achievement of its respective objectives.
ii. To evaluate the impact and relevance of the project, detailing their impact on the development and specific objectives related to the improvement capabilities at all levels of the forest administration and targeted beneficiaries in the country.
iii. To assess the overall post-project situation for the project, including the conditions of their intended direct and indirect beneficiaries.
iv. To define and assess unexpected effects and impacts, either harmful or beneficial, and present the reasons for their occurrence.
v. To analyze and assess the project efficiency, including the technical, financial and managerial aspects, and the causes for any substantial delay of its implementation.
vi. To assess the overall costs of the project with original budget provisions, and their respective linkage with the overall results.
vii. To assess the overall sustainability of the project after completion and include appropriate recommendations to safeguard the continuity of their positive impacts of the project achievements.
viii. To make an overall assessment of the project's relative success or failure
ix. To summarize the key lessons learnt and identify any issues or problems that should be considered in designing and implementing similar projects in the future.
x. To prepare the ex-post evaluation report in accordance with relevant guiding references as contained in the *ITTO Manual for Project Monitoring, Review, Reporting and Evaluation* **(from page 44 to page 58).**
xi. To assess the project's contribution to the relevant Objectives of ITTA-2006 and ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2013-2018.
xii. To prepare a draft article for possible publication in the ITTO Tropical Forest Update (TFU), to be finalized in consultation with the TFU editor, and provide appropriate high-resolution photographs of target project areas.

The ex-post evaluation report should also contain an Executive Summary not exceeding two pages.

The Consultant will maintain close liaison with ITTO and will carry out his/her work in close cooperation with the concerned project executing agency (AIDER), the relevant Governmental institution in Peru. Although the consultant should feel free to discuss with the authorities concerned all matters relevant to his/her assignment, the consultant is not authorized to make any commitments on behalf of ITTO. Responsibility for the final content of the evaluation-related reports remains with the Consultant.

I. Duration of the Assignment

The duration of the assigned key activities, to be carried out by the Consultant, will be 30 working days, within the period from July to December 2025, including the participation in the Sixty-First Session of the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC-61), in Panama City, Panama, taking place on 27-31 October 2025, for the presentation of the main results of the ex-post evaluation of PD 741/13 Rev.3 (F).

II. Proposed Work Schedule

July 2025	**Desk review** of project-related documents and materials provided by ITTO: ITTO Manual for Project Monitoring, Review, Reporting and Evaluation; Project Document; Progress Reports; Technical Reports; Project Financial Statement (Audit Report); Project Completion Report; TFU Article; etc.
July/Aug 2025	Consultant's **trip to Peru**, for consultation meeting with the project's Executing Agency (AIDER) with a **further review** of project-related documents, as well as for **field visits** in the project target areas. The purpose of field visits missions is to evaluate the project results and impacts, while including discussions with relevant project stakeholders and target beneficiaries.
Sept 1 2025	Submission of the D**raft Ex-post Evaluation Report and Executive Summary** for the project PD 741/13 Rev.3 (F), as well as the table of **Management Response to ITTO Ex-Post Evaluation**, in English, French or Spanish, Table is attached as APPENDIX 2 to this contract, in accordance with the Scope of Work and the format contained in the ITTO Manual for Project Monitoring, Review and Evaluation. Both documents will be reviewed by ITTO Secretariat and feedback provided.
Sept 15 2025	Submission of a R**evised version of the Ex-post Evaluation Report and Executive Summary, responding to any issues raised by the** ITTO Secretariat's on the initial draft. This is the version to be submitted to ITTO's Council for consideration.
Oct 27 -31 2025 (exact dates to TBD)	**Presentation of the main findings of the consultancy work**, by the Consultant, at the Sixty-First Session of the International Tropical Timber Council, in Panama City, Panama.
21 November 2025	Submission of the final **version of the Ex-post Evaluation Report and Executive Summary**, considering the comments of the ITTC-61 Session. Based on consultations with ITTO Secretariat, submission of a **draft article for possible publication in the ITTO Tropical Forest Update (TFU)**, for PD 741/13 Rev.3 (F) by the Consultant, to be finalized in consultation with the TFU editor, containing an overview of the main results and summarizing the lessons learned from the ex-post evaluation work, as well as appropriate **high-resolution photographs of target project areas**.

Appendix 1

Project Information

PD 741/14 Rev.3 (F) Capacity Building for Sustainable Management of Tropical Dry Forests on the North Coast of Peru

Budget and Funding Sources:

Total Budget:			US$	988,886
ITTO Budget:			US$	437,478
Government of Japan:	US$	437,478		
AIDER:			US$	551,408

Implementing Agency: ASOCIACION PARA LA INVESTIGACION Y DESARROLLO INTEGRAL (AIDER)

Period of Approval: Rev.2: approved in Autumn 2014
Rev.3: approved in Spring 2016

Starting Date and Duration: May 2017 / Planned: 30 months Actual: 46 months

I. Introduction

This project was approved under the Spring 2016 Project Cycle, and full financing for its implementation was pledged in March 2016. The agreement regulating the implementation of the project was finalized in April 2017 after release of project funds by the donor following resolution of the financial impairment. The Executing Agency completed submission of all required documentation in May 2017 to allow the first disbursement of funds to be sent and project implementation to commence.

II. Project objective

This project's objective was to improve the limited capacities of key stakeholders to slow and/or reverse the degradation of tropical dry forests on the north coast of Peru, covering the 3 departments of the country in which this ecosystem occurs: Tumbes, Piura and Lambayeque.

III. Project achievements and outputs

The project improved the living standards of rural communities through the conservation and sustainable use of tropical dry forests. Specifically, it strengthened the capacities of key stakeholders in the region to establish policies for the sustainable management of degraded dry forests. Project outcomes included: improved forest management at the regional forest administration level; promotion of active public sector and civil society involvement in dialogue and consensus-building with a view to improving decision making on regional forest management; and strengthened technical and operational capacities for community forest management on the north coast of Peru.

IV. Outcomes and impacts

The following outcomes and impacts were achieved under relevant project activities:

Activity 1.1 Development of training events on administrative and technical issues for regional public management for SFM
With the support of the project and in conjunction with JICA, several training workshops on the Forest Map Methodology for the North coast of Peru were held. These workshops improved capacities for using GIS and remote sensing amongst many officials and specialists of SERFOR and the regional governments of the north (Piura, Tumbes and Chiclayo). Free software was used to develop regional thematic maps in each region.

Activity 2.1: Strengthening of coordination, dialogue and coordination spaces at the regional level with the participation of civil society
The project convened a meeting of the Dry Forest Researchers Network in conjunction with ATFFS-SERFOR in Piura, which achieved the following:
- Strengthened the dry forest research network, to improve articulation of dry forest issues by the public, private and civil society sectors

- Strengthen research capacities
- Promoted research, development and innovation in forest and wildlife conservation
- Strengthened communication mechanisms and traditional knowledge of the dry forest
- Developed funding strategies for scientific activities
- Adopted a system for monitoring the current status of investigations.

The Macro-Regional Platform of Forests of the North Coast was supported throughout the project, including by arranging/participating in meetings and strengthening the capacities of regional governments. The project also promoted three strategic alliances relevant to the development of projects for sustainable management of dry forests and restoration:
- Alliance with SERFOR for the elaboration of a project of forest plantations in dry forests, in border areas with Ecuador
- Alliance with an international private fund for the design of a project on ecosystem services and deforestation-free value chains
- Coordination with the Ministry of Environment on a proposal presented to GEF 7 on sustainable management of dry forests.

Activity 2.2: Design and implementation of a plan to disseminate the benefits of SFM for the public sector and civil society
The project undertook extensive data collection and consultations to produce the Diffusion Plan on Forest Management in Dry Forest in Piura, Tumbes and Lambayeque regions.

Within the framework of the project, two teaching and dissemination learning packages on dry forests were developed. These materials are:
- Story: "El Algarrobito"
- Comic: "Shinamp"

Both learning packages were presented to forestry and regional authorities in the three regions: Piura, Tumbes and Lambayeque. In addition, schools in the region were sent copies to promote greater knowledge among children about the resources and importance of the dry forest.

A video aimed at the general population was also produced, with the aim of raising awareness about dry forests. Informative radio segments have been produced on the importance of dry forests, which were broadcast on local radio stations in Piura (Radio Cutivalu), Lambayeque (Radio Zone 5) and Tumbes (Radio Hechizera). A photographic contest "Knowing the Dry Forests of the North Coast of Peru" was also organized.

Activity 2.3: Development of awareness events aimed at the authorities, officials, forest users and the general public, at local and regional level, on the conservation of dry tropical forests of the north coast
The project carried out various awareness raising activities, including one in collaboration with SERFOR to coincide with the international day of biological diversity called “Conversation of the biological diversity of seasonally dry forests of northern Peru”. The experiences of sustainable management of dry forests gained through the project were presented at strategic international events, taking advantage of inter-institutional alliances with key actors. Such events included the NAP Expo of the UNFCCC in Songdo, Korea and Annual Meeting 20x20 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Activity 2.4: Development of social skills in community members for their proactive participation in dialogue
A large meeting was convened by the project at AIDER’s office in Lima to facilitate the development of a rural development strategy taking account of climate change. The meeting took place with a group of women selected from rural and urban areas, and the following points were discussed:
- The role that women play in society
- Experiences in situations of climate change
- Consulting women about climate change.

With the support of the project and under the leadership of the National Forest and Wildlife Service (SERFOR) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, the Association for Integral Research and Development (AIDER) and the Central of Rural Communities of the Dry Forest (CECOBOSQUE), the First Community Forum on the topic “Organized communities, sustainable forests” was convened by the project in Piura. The Forum analyzed the problem of community organization, and developed a guide to involve community leaders and partners in the sustainable use and conservation of forests.

Activity 3.1: Training events in techniques and practices for the development and implementation of forest management plans
The project team participated and contributed in several training events and workshops on the development and implementation of forest management plans for dry forests. These included meetings on “Good practices and regulations in the production of forest seeds” (carried out in collaboration with the National Institute of Agrarian

Innovation in the city of Chiclayo) and a training event for stakeholders involved in the forest zoning process of the Tumbes region. The project team co-organized and participated in the third Regional Congress of Dry Forest (III COREFOR) in Chiclayo.

II. Lessons learnt and sustainability

The project implementation process and outcomes highlighted the crucial importance of working closely with regional governments and local communities to achieve meaningful progress in dealing with challenges of forest management and climate change relating to dry forests in Peru.

The regional governments involved in the project have developed a related UN REDD+ project in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, who is funding a consultancy to identify further capacity building needs and opportunities for partnerships; The project team continues to collaborate with this follow-up project and consultancy.

The project also promoted three strategic alliances to develop follow-up projects for sustainable management of dry forests and restoration:

- Alliance with SERFOR on a project to establish forest plantations of suitable species in dry forest zones in border areas with Ecuador
- Alliance with an international private fund for the design of a project on ecosystem services and deforestation-free value chains
- Coordination with the Ministry of Environment on a proposal presented to GEF 7 on sustainable management of dry forests.

The project team continues its involvement in all of these initiatives, ensuring that local governments and other stakeholders are kept informed and involved as appropriate, thereby further contributing to the sustainability of the ITTO project's outputs.

III. Concluding remarks

The project has achieved its objectives and has improved capacities of regional governments for the management of dry forests. The synergy of actions on dry forests at the regional level with other initiatives related to the sustainable management of forests is being improved, with direct intervention of SERFOR and civil society organizations.

All project outputs including the completion report are available (in original Spanish) through the Project Search feature of the ITTO website A satisfactory final audit of project funds provided by ITTO has been submitted to and approved by the ITTO Secretariat. The Committee may therefore declare this project complete.

Appendix 2

Management Response to ITTO Ex-Post Evaluation	
Project Title: Project ID:	
A) Overall Response to the Evaluation:	
(please insert your overall views on the evaluation report, e.g. structure, methodology and its conclusions)	
Evaluation Report Recommendations*	B) Response to recommenda tions *(e.g. 'accept', 'partially accept' or 'reject' – please provide a brief explanation)*
Recommendation 1 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	
Recommendation 2 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	
Recommendation 3 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	
Recommendation 4 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	
Recommendation 5 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	
Recommendation 6 *(copy & paste recommendation)*	

**Please add or delete rows as needed*

Name, Title and Institution of Respondent:_____

Date, Signature:_____

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