



2021-2025

VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAM



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

VCA
VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION

IMPACT OVERVIEW
& REFLECTIONS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The content of this document reflects the work of local communities, initiatives, and grassroots organizations. We extend our gratitude to all the partners who trusted WWF to collaborate and co-create, as well as to those whose shared vision and support enabled meaningful co-design and collaboration that brought these examples to life. We also thank like-minded donors, such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for their support.



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1

INTRODUCTION

Voices for Just Climate Action: A Flagship initiative to deliver Inclusive Conservation

Inclusive Conservation has emerged as a response to decades of conservation practice shaped by top-down assumptions about who should decide over land, resources, and ecosystems. Meanwhile, around the world, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have long acted as custodians of some of the planet's most biodiverse and ecologically intact territories. Yet, their governance systems, knowledge, and rights have often been marginalized or overridden. Inclusive Conservation challenges this legacy by shifting the center of gravity from externally driven conservation to approaches in which local rights-holders define visions, priorities, and terms for collaboration.

Within WWF, this agenda has gained prominence as the network increasingly recognizes that conservation is most effective, just, and enduring when Indigenous Peoples and local communities are not just “included,” but are recognized as primary actors with inherent rights, knowledge systems, responsibilities, and authority over their lands and waters. This shift is neither solely technical nor procedural, but also requires confronting longstanding power imbalances and rethinking how international conservation organizations operate, partner, and facilitate, as well as the role to play.

It is in this broader transformation that the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) program became a flagship initiative for WWF in advancing Inclusive Conservation.

Being formally a climate justice program under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Power of Voices framework (2021-2025), it sought to emphasize the connections between climate justice, biodiversity, land rights, and community resilience.

The program brought together 6 organizations: South-South-North, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Slum Dwellers International, Fundación Avina, Hivos, and WWF. This Alliance placed the leadership of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other historically marginalized groups at the heart of climate and nature solutions. Rather than treating "inclusion" as participation in pre-designed interventions, VCA sought to create the conditions for locally rooted organizations and movements to shape their own climate and conservation agendas; and for international actors, including WWF, to play a supportive and accountable role.

Across seven countries and more than 200 local partners, the program demonstrated what inclusive and rights-based conservation and climate action can look like when power shifts in practice. For WWF, VCA became a learning space in which teams worked to align nature-based solutions with community-defined visions, strengthen rights-based approaches, and deepen our understanding of how to collaborate without reproducing the very forms of exclusion that Inclusive Conservation seeks to overcome.



This report reflects WWF's journey within the VCA Alliance, highlighting how this experience has advanced our understanding of Inclusive Conservation: not only as a concept or set of principles, but as a transformative practice. It distills lessons on partnership, governance, movement building, and deep listening with those who live with, depend on, and care for nature. Ultimately, the VCA program helped reinforce that when rights-holders lead, climate adaptation and conservation outcomes become more resilient and sustainable.

THE PROGRAM FOCUSED ON THREE PILLARS

1

Locally led solutions

Mutual capacity building with civil society and local groups to co-create climate adaptation solutions that benefit both people and nature.

2

Movement building

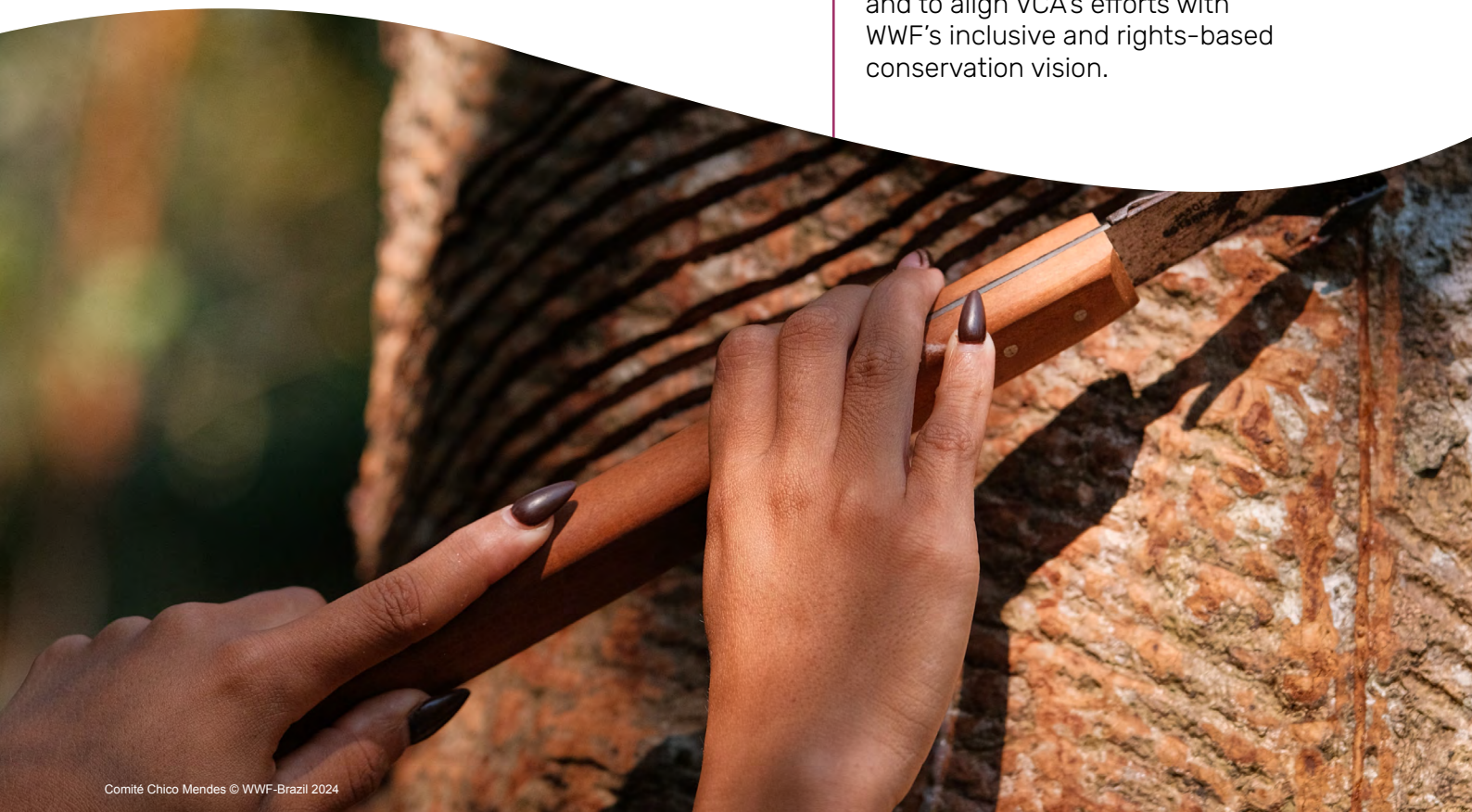
Amplifying local voices at regional, national, and global levels to reshape the climate debate based on lived realities.

3

Lobby and advocacy

Influencing policy and finance to enable the implementation of locally led solutions and visions for climate-resilient futures.

Each Alliance partner brought a unique contribution. WWF's main role was to position nature as a foundation for just, sustainable, and locally led nature-based solutions, and to align VCA's efforts with WWF's inclusive and rights-based conservation vision.



2

OVERVIEW OF IMPACT

The impact achieved through VCA marks an important step in WWF's shift toward more inclusive and rights-based conservation. Supporting 76 locally led climate initiatives, including 16 nature-based, demonstrated that when local rights holders define their own priorities, solutions are rooted in the very social and community fabric that will sustain them over time. Reaching 1.4 million people and helping manage over 470,000 hectares of territories showed that community stewardship can also operate at scale, while strengthening both social resilience and ecological integrity.

Importantly, the Alliance as a whole influenced 99 climate-related policies and helped create or facilitate 45 multistakeholder forums where grassroots leadership grew and shaped the enabling environment for climate and nature solutions. With 3.5 million people reached through awareness efforts across the Alliance, VCA also helped amplify local narratives that challenge traditional top-down debates and discussions.

6 ALLIANCE
MEMBERS

WWF, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Fundación Avina, Hivos, Slum Dwellers International, and SouthSouthNorth, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

7 COUNTRIES

Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Paraguay, Tunisia, and Zambia.

80+
IMPLEMENTATION
SITES

MUTUAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

248 local
partners

431 local CBOs, associations,
and networks apply inclusive,
intersectional, gender, and/or
feminist **frames of analysis**
in their work.

50% of the budget was allocated
to local or grassroots
organizations.

AMPLIFYING VOICES

248 NEW
COLLABORATIONS

with formal or informal coalitions or networks, youth and/or women-led networks or organizations, 20 Telecenters, and 30 community radios strengthened

500+

journalists,
communicators, and
citizen journalists trained
in climate reporting, digital
storytelling, and social
media advocacy

7

new digital
platforms
applied at the
regional and
global level

LOCALLY-SHAPED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

779 LOCAL SOLUTIONS
AND INITIATIVES
SUPPORTED

that contributed to climate
justice, climate resilience,
and adaptation.

**PEOPLE IMPACTED: 100,000
DIRECTLY & 2.2 MILLION
INDIRECTLY:**

thought solutions that enhance food
security, improve water and sanitation
access, raise awareness, advocate for
change, and strengthen capacity to adapt to
climate change.

**IMPACTED AREA, 8,300 HA
DIRECTLY & 350,000 HA
INDIRECTLY:**

through Locally led Nature-Based Solutions



© Voices for Just Climate Action, 2020

LOBBY AND ADVOCACY

120 DECISION-MAKING SPACES ACCESSED:

local voices influenced policies on land rights, access to finance, gender equality, social inclusion, expanding civic space, at local, national, and global levels, and utilized media alliances and digital activism to reach new audiences.

121 LAWS AND POLICIES INFLUENCED:

on topics such as locally led adaptation, inclusive climate governance, and equitable access to climate finance.

CLIMATE FINANCE FOR LOCALLY SHAPED SOLUTIONS

NEXT LEVEL GRANT FACILITY:

The Voices for Just Climate Action Alliance set up a small grant of €3.5 MILLION, disbursing 522 grants to hard-to-reach groups.

For WWF, these outcomes are more than numbers: they represent evidence that shifting power to rights-holders makes conservation achievements more durable and helps us improve as an organization in the service of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

3

THE NEXT LEVEL GRANT FACILITY

A key achievement of the VCA program was establishing the Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF), a small-grants mechanism designed to support grassroots organizations, Indigenous communities, and local activists with limited access to traditional funding. Regional teams adapted funding frameworks to ensure responsiveness to local needs, and contracted local fund managers for grant disbursement, with WWF serving as the fiduciary partner.

Initiatives supported in each country and their impacts:

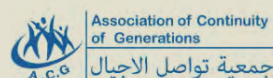


Community-led solutions © WWF-Brazil, 2024

The NLGF in Bolivia implemented by Comuna, combined climate justice, Indigenous rights, and local innovation. It supported 37 initiatives across seven departments, impacting about 2,000 people and directly engaging 2,103 families. The projects addressed emergencies like floods and droughts and focused on adaptation and advocacy. Notably, 194 women and youth participated in restoration activities, 263 received disaster risk reduction training, and improved water access to 209 families, alongside mental health support and biodiversity tourism opportunities for Indigenous communities.



NLGF in Paraguay provided flexible support to protect human rights and environmental defenders, focusing on Indigenous and rural communities. Implemented by CODEHUPY, it funded 129 grants benefiting over 93,000 people across 229 communities, including the Ayoreo, Yshir, and Guaraní. The initiatives included legal aid, water-harvesting systems, wells, communication support, advocacy, and fire management equipment.





NLGF in Brazil managed by Fundo Casa Socioambiental, focused on protecting environmental and human rights defenders and supporting climate-related emergency responses. The fund provided 64 grants, impacting around 41,950 people directly. This included 29 rapid-response grants for relocation and legal aid, funding for 18 organizations to bolster community defenses of human rights, and support for 13 grassroots projects. Notably, 55% of grantees were women, emphasizing Indigenous and Quilombola leadership. Outputs included legal and psychosocial aid, food security actions, advocacy events, and communication materials.



NLGF in Tunisia implemented by the Arab Institute for Human Rights (IADH) with support from WWF North Africa, the NLGF in Tunisia provided small-scale, flexible climate finance to community organizations focused on water security, nature-based solutions, and women's economic agency. 12 sub-grantees, solutions granted included tree planting, cistern installation, and rainwater harvesting for urgent drought relief, eco-gardens, firebreaks, and supporting women's economic empowerment. Grantees included 2,170 people in 2024 (975 of whom were women), more than 750 native trees were planted, 20 hectares restored, 10 cisterns installed, and multiple workshops and trainings were provided to local CSOs.



© WWF

Main Lessons from the MECHANISM

The NLGF exemplifies how shifting power to local rights-holders can bring Inclusive Conservation principles to life. Implemented in four WWF-led countries, it provided valuable lessons for future locally led funding mechanisms.

1. **Administrative compliance remained a significant barrier for many grassroots actors:**

Procurement, reporting, and due diligence requirements often exceeded local capacities and slowed disbursement. While mentorship and accompaniment by local fund managers and local WWF teams helped bridge some of these gaps, the NLGF experience highlighted the need for simplified compliance frameworks, core budget allocations for partner support, and flexible systems that uphold accountability without reproducing exclusion.

2. **The NLGF's multi-stakeholder governance structure promoted inclusivity and representation but added operational complexity:**

multiple institutional and governance bodies within the NLGF and VCA hindered efficiency. An explicitly defined leadership structure could enhance functionality and inclusiveness.

3. **Capacity development should be part of core implementation:**

investing in local capabilities through mentorship is vital. While the NLGF demonstrated commitment to accompaniment, future budget allocations for such support will need to be formalized as core costs to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

4. **Monitoring systems must be agile, qualitative, and collaborative,**

as no collaborative design for monitoring was designed across countries, ensuring data consistency and meaningful aggregation proved difficult and resulted in mixed reporting units and uneven levels of detail. This underscores the need for an inclusive, harmonized monitoring system that can accommodate flexible inputs while enabling reliable, comparable impact tracking.

5. **Climate and logistical shocks shaped implementation:**

floods, droughts, heatwaves, and territorial remoteness across Bolivia, Paraguay, Tunisia, and Brazil disrupted many planned activities. This underscores why locally led adaptation and conservation must remain adaptive, flexible, with contingency planning and decentralized logistics capable of adjusting to real-world disruptions.





6. Safety and confidentiality were critical: in contexts with criminalization of environmental defenders, low-visibility interventions (such as relocation, legal aid, and psychosocial support) could not always be publicly reported and yet were essential for protecting lives and territories.

7. The demand for grants exceeded available resources: requests for water infrastructure, NbS support, drought relief, and defender protection often surpassed budgets. This signals the need for better alignment between resource levels and community needs, and the need for scaling funding for locally led adaptation at national and global levels.

Overall, the NLGF has demonstrated its value in high-risk, low-access contexts and in locally led, rights-based financing and has proven to be a fast, flexible, and locally grounded mechanism with high demand and rapid disbursement. Its learnings have already informed advocacy strategies and contributed to global debates on Locally Led Adaptation (LLA). Future impact will depend on adopting the above lessons to build an improved framework.

4

COUNTRY-LEVEL IMPACT

INDONESIA

Background

In Indonesia, WWF-VCA operated in Papua, a region that is home to more than 200 Indigenous Papuan peoples who have inhabited the island for over 40,000 years. Despite its extraordinary ecological value and rich cultural heritage, Papua today is marked by deep structural inequalities. Decades of contested political integration, large-scale in-migration, militarization, and extractive development have profoundly reshaped Papuan society. Indigenous communities have seen their ancestral lands converted to mining, logging, and plantation concessions, often without meaningful consultation, compensation, or recognition of customary rights. As a result, Papuans remain under-represented in political and economic spheres, while at the same time facing persistent human rights concerns, limited access to basic services, and erosion of their traditional governance systems (Minority Rights Group, 2018).

These vulnerabilities intersect with climate risks: sea-level rise, flooding, forest degradation, and industrial expansion threaten food systems, livelihoods, and the ecological integrity of some of Indonesia's last intact primary forests. Although many of these forests lie on customary Papuan land, Indigenous governance institutions are

disproportionately affected as cultural, social, and ecological pressures converge.

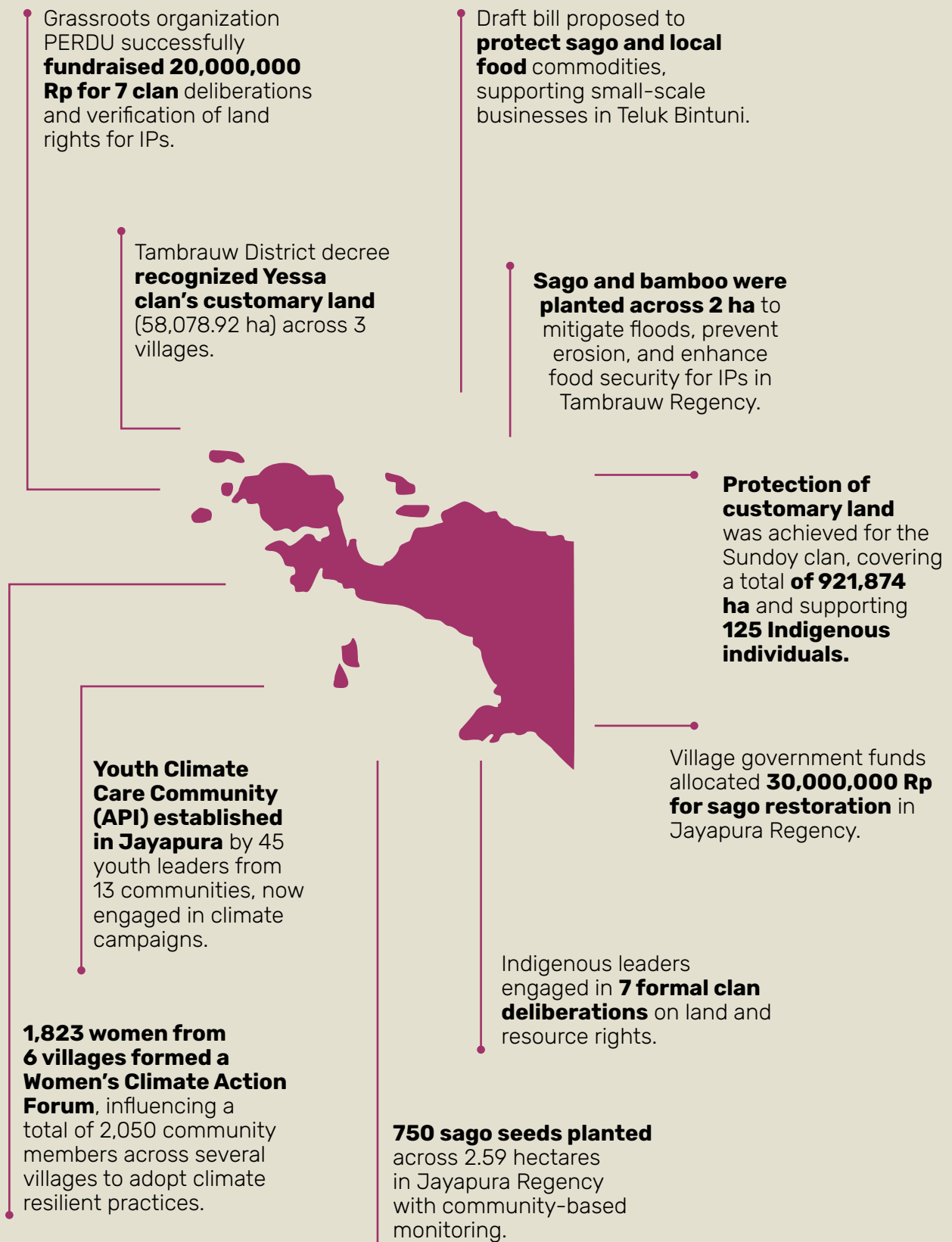
WWF has worked in Indonesia for over two decades, partnering with provincial governments, customary authorities, universities, and civil society to strengthen community forest governance, secure natural resource rights, and promote sustainable land-use planning. In Papua, WWF's longstanding presence has positioned it as a bridge between grassroots Indigenous organizations and national policy processes, helping amplify Papuan voices in debates traditionally dominated by external actors.

Through the VCA program, WWF collaborated with local CSOs across 26 villages in Asmat, Jayapura, Tambrau, and Teluk Bintuni. Its initiatives between 2021 and 2025 focused on supporting Indigenous communities to secure land tenure, strengthen customary governance, diversify food systems, and adopt climate-adaptive livelihoods, while safeguarding cultural identity and promoting women's leadership. VCA also created opportunities for Papuan communities to bring their perspectives into provincial and national climate discussions, so that adaptation strategies could reflect the lived realities, rights, and aspirations of Papuans.



Papuan landscape © Diana Francés, 2024

Overview of Impact



The map shown corresponds to Papua, Indonesia.

Stories of Impact

Preserving the local food wealth of the Grime Nawa Valley

In the Grime Nawa Valley of Jayapura, revitalizing sago-based food systems is crucial for enhancing climate resilience, cultural integrity, and food security among Indigenous Papuan communities. Sago groves have historically provided food security and clean water, but recent trends towards store-bought foods and land pressures have jeopardized this. Despite Papua's biodiversity, it faces significant food insecurity, with over 9% of households affected, compared to a national average of 4%.

Indigenous leaders, youth groups, and women's associations, with support from WWF-VCA, have worked to restore and diversify sago groves, modernize processing methods, and highlight sago as a nutritious staple. This effort includes documenting traditional sago varieties and engaging in tree restoration. These restored landscapes are part of Sawesuma's 3,800-hectare customary forest, intertwining ecological health with cultural continuity. By reclaiming sago, communities are also rejuvenating their culture and regaining control over their livelihoods and forests.

This work was led by Bambang Birawa

OTHER INSPIRING SUCCESS STORIES

Sasi: Reviving Tradition for Adaptation in Papua, where the Yessa clan is revitalizing a governance system that limits resource use in specific areas, promoting ecosystem health. Rooted in Papuan law and cosmology, it emphasizes locally-led, rights-based conservation.

Participatory mapping for securing ancestral land rights to address inequalities and empowering communities in climate and conservation efforts.

If you want to learn more, **[click here.](#)**

Background

Tunisia, a North African country of nearly 12 million people, is among the most climate-vulnerable nations in the Mediterranean. Social and economic inequalities, especially for rural women who lack access to land, finance, and inheritance rights, intersect with climate impacts. Women in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, such as the 20,000 clam harvesters in the Gulf of Gabès, face declining incomes due to sea-level rise and ecosystem degradation.

Youth face a different but equally entrenched challenge: chronic unemployment, limited access to dignified economic opportunities and shrinking prospects for local livelihood diversification, especially in rural and coastal areas where climate shocks intensify water scarcity, soil degradation and resource depletion. These overlapping vulnerabilities restrict people's rights, participation and decision-making power over natural resources, creating cycles of marginalization that climate change continues to deepen.

WWF-VCA focused its interventions on two sites where these dynamics are particularly acute: the Kerkennah Islands and Beni Khedache. The Kerkennah Islands, with just 13 meters maximum elevation, are highly exposed to rising seas, water scarcity, and degraded fish stocks. These pressures undermine fishing, agriculture and tourism, the main livelihoods for 43% of the population. Beni Khedache, a rural oasis zone with 26,000 inhabitants, is threatened by drought, desertification and extreme heat. Agriculture and tourism, which employ two-thirds of the working population, are increasingly vulnerable, with income losses reaching 50% during heatwaves.

Yet, these same regions are home to powerful forms of traditional ecological knowledge, such as jessour, charfia and majjen systems, which embody locally led adaptation and stewardship.

Through VCA, WWF worked with the local partners Association de Citoyenneté et Développement Durable Gabès (ACDD) and Association de Continuité des Générations (ACG) to empower women, youth, artisanal fishers and farmers. Together, they worked to secure socio-economic rights, revive traditional knowledge, diversify climate-resilient livelihoods and ensure that local actors have a meaningful voice in shaping Tunisia's climate and natural resource policies.



Local partners' gathering, Beni Khedache, Tunisia © ACDD, 2023

Overview of Impact



Stories of impact

Local communities in Beni Khedache lead locally driven climate solutions

In southern Tunisia, Beni Khedache faces climate challenges such as drought and floods, exacerbating inequalities among rural women, youth, and smallholder farmers, who are often excluded from land governance and decision-making. VCA partners helped initiate a transformative process in which communities gained a voice in shaping their climate futures through the Local Action Plan for Climate (PLAC), developed by ACDD and supported by WWF. This participatory initiative brought together municipal officials, civil society, and community groups as equal partners, positioning them as rights-holders and co-decision-makers.

The PLAC not only addresses technical climate issues but also rebalances power dynamics. Through community consultations, residents co-designed nature-based solutions, such as water harvesting and soil rehabilitation, which improve agricultural productivity, create jobs, and enhance local stewardship of resources. This collaborative approach built trust between municipal authorities and civil society, enabling access to UN funding for locally prioritized projects. Women and youth were trained in climate adaptation and leadership, empowering them to engage in municipal governance.

Overall, Beni Khedache exemplifies inclusive governance and community agency, demonstrating the potential of local knowledge in transforming climate strategies when institutions are open to sharing power.

***This work was led by
Association de Citoyenneté
et Développement Durable
Gabés (ACDD)***



OTHER INSPIRING SUCCESS STORY

Empowered women in Tunisia's Kerkennah island are front actors in climate-related governance. Despite historically being excluded from decision-making, these women leaders have united to form the first women-led Group for Development of Fisheries and Agriculture.

If you want to learn more,
[click here](#).

KENYA

Background

Kenya, with a population of over 54 million, is among the most climate-vulnerable countries in Africa.

The nation has experienced recurrent droughts, floods, and rising sea levels, disrupting agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and tourism. Rural communities, particularly smallholder farmers and pastoralists, have been the hardest hit as they depend on rain-fed systems increasingly destabilized by climate variability. These impacts intersect with socio-economic inequalities, leaving women, youth and marginalized groups highly vulnerable.

Through the VCA program, WWF focused its work on the counties of Marsabit, Samburu, Baringo, Garissa, Nakuru, Narok, Kajiado, Kilifi and Meru, which are regions rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage but under great ecological stress. WWF collaborated with thirteen local partners to promote community involvement in decision-making processes, empower youth and women in climate and conservation discussions, and influence climate finance procedures at ward and county levels. A key achievement was supporting the co-development of county climate policies that reflected local realities rather than generic frameworks, thereby ensuring stronger ownership and implementation.



Marsabit County, Kenya © Chris Kiriimi, 2024

Overview of Impact

247 partners engaged.

130+ climate solutions supported. 485,924 ha under restoration. Over 2 million people impacted positively.

In Garissa, women and youth launched the **movement “Hands off our Acacia Trees”** to restore forests by seed collection and seedling preparation.

Over 99 Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPCs) have been established in Nakuru, Marsabit, Nyandarua, Samburu, and Garissa counties. A dedicated WCCPCs Facilitators Manual was developed to guide capacity building and ensure sustainability.

Climate Change Act revised in Garissa County with participation from local communities and with participatory climate risk assessments.

County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) guidelines mandated 1–2% of all county budgets for climate interventions.

13 local CSOs are empowered to influence climate processes at the county level, ensuring that community voices remain central in climate governance.

8 climate-related frameworks developed and reviewed, including the National Climate Change Action Plan (2023–2027), Climate Change Amendment Act 2023, and county-level policies in Nakuru, Garissa, Kilifi, and Kajiado.

20 acres of degraded land in the Kiborgoch community conservancy in Baringo County were restored through reseeded. 572+ hectares of the degraded Mt Marsabit ecosystem are being actively restored through the community-led Ramat model, saving 13,000 Indigenous trees.

Indigenous women and youth used Radio Mchungaji to **engage male elders on conservation; 150 farmers in 5 groups adopted climate-smart agriculture in Samburu.**

60 Indigenous women and youths were empowered to take the lead in locally led solutions through the construction of Kitchen garden structures, the establishment of Acacia seed banks, and the construction of poultry structures within the Shurr 200 community. This was reached through tree nurseries and education in Garissa.

Kisumu, Nandi, and Vihiga counties are committed to a joint water resource facility during the “Journey of Water” campaign, with 600+ participants following the Malewa River’s path from source to tap.

Stories of impact

In Marsabit, Kenya, the decline of the umbrella thorn acacia poses a significant threat to local communities, particularly impacting women who collect firewood and medicinal plants. Through WWF's VCA initiative, women in Marsabit formed the Urbisa movement to address these challenges. Rather than being passive beneficiaries, they were empowered to take action on their own terms.

Urbisa focused on the acacia loss as a critical issue, leading to a women-led seed collection and banking campaign aimed at restoring drylands. The VCA supported these women by providing technical assistance, linking them to county restoration plans, and facilitating access to climate finance. This initiative not only recognized women's roles as conservation leaders but also integrated local knowledge into ecosystem restoration, enabling women to shape their agenda and engage directly with external actors.

***This work was led by
Nature and People as
One (NAPo)***



OTHER SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY-LED STORY

The Kiborgoch community conservancy in Kenya. The Endorois are an agro-pastoralist Indigenous People of around 45,000–60,000, whose identity, spirituality, and livelihoods are deeply tied to the Lake. Working with Endorois leaders and community groups, they co-designed the restoration of 10 acres of degraded land through reseedling and community-managed grass seed banks.

If you want to learn more,
[click here.](#)



Endorois Community reseeding land around Lake Bogoria, Kenya © Baringo County Conservancies Association, 2025

Background

The Kafue Flats landscape, in Zambia's Lower Kafue Basin, is one of Southern Africa's most climate-sensitive regions.

This vast floodplain system spans 6,500 km² and hosts two national parks, Blue Lagoon and Lochinvar, as well as a large Game Management Area. It provides critical ecosystem services, such as water provision, fisheries, and hydropower generation, for millions of people. Yet the Kafue Flats face growing pressures from unsustainable agriculture, overfishing, deforestation and the escalating impacts of climate change. Communities across the region, including pastoralists, smallholder farmers, women and youth, often experience droughts, floods, soil degradation and rising temperatures. These impacts continuously threaten food, water and energy security. Marginalized groups, such as low-income families, rural communities, the elderly, the youth and other groups, remain

especially vulnerable. Poverty, limited land rights and reduced access to public services are only a few of the challenges that worsen the effects of climate change.

Through the VCA program, WWF Zambia worked alongside Hivos, Slum Dwellers International, Akina wa Africa, South South North, and a network of local partners to strengthen civic space and empower communities to co-create inclusive climate solutions. The WWF-VCA interventions in Lusaka, Kafue, Chirundu, Siavonga, Chikankata, Mazabuka and Itezhi Tezhi focused on the water-food-energy-health nexus, supporting grassroots organizations to advance climate adaptation rooted in local knowledge and priorities. WWF-Zambia, through its local partners, has helped amplify citizen voices, foster collaboration among civil society and connect local solutions to national and global platforms.



Kafue Flats view, Zambia, © Diana Francés, 2024

Overview of Impact

10+ locally led climate solutions supported:

restoration of streams, promotion and management of wellfields and springs, check dams, river restoration, agroecology and community seed banks across the Kafue landscape.

3000 youths empowered to be part of the Local Conference of Youth movement and to advocate for climate justice.

\$922,115 in government and donor funding secured to support community-driven climate adaptation efforts.

22 CSOs increasing their capacity in gender-responsive programming & climate-smart agriculture.

18 policies or law influenced or amended, e.g: Climate finance for community-led climate action included in the Constituency Development Fund and Community Development Agreements in Zambia's Climate Change Act of 2024 included, ensuring local communities benefit from carbon credit projects.



Stories of impact

Building climate resilience through locally led solutions in Mulendema Chiefdom

The Mulendema Chiefdom, located in the Mumbwa district in Zambia's Central Province, faces severe climate-related challenges, particularly water scarcity and food insecurity. Prolonged droughts have dried up perennial streams and depleted hand pumps, forcing women and children to walk long distances for water, a burden that deepens social inequalities and disrupts education. These conditions threaten livelihoods and exacerbate vulnerability among marginalized groups, including households with persons living with disabilities.

To address these challenges, the VCA program, led by its local partner By Life Connected (BLC), supported a locally owned initiative focused on water harvesting and regenerative agriculture. The solution centers on constructing cascading check dams using locally sourced materials to slow runoff, recharge groundwater and provide year-round water access.

This infrastructure underpins nine community gardens, which now benefit approximately 1,190 people across 170 households. Beyond improving nutrition, the gardens generate income through vegetable sales, which as a result contributes to household resilience and poverty reduction.

Importantly, the entire planning and decision-making process was led by the *Mulendema core-group cooperative society*, a community decision-making platform consisting of local women, youth, elderly, and persons with disabilities. Community members in this core group met regularly to exchange experiences, discuss priorities and concerns, and

adjust actions. Only this way were the solutions and implementation processes culturally appropriate, as well as ownership secured. In addition, community-driven data collection was conducted to inform strategy adaptation, facilitated by BLC.

WWF-Zambia complemented these efforts by funding organic gardening workshops, providing treadle pumps for efficient irrigation, and supporting protective fencing and shallow wells. The VCA program and its local partners also contributed with training on sustainable agriculture and water management, toward building capacity for long-term climate resilience.

Ultimately, this locally led, inclusive approach demonstrates the added value of building equitable partnerships with local groups and rights holders for long-term success. In fact, this pilot in Mponda seniority now serves as a scalable model for other areas within the Mulendema Chiefdom and the wider province.

This work was led by Life Connected



BOLIVIA-PARAGUAY

Background

The Chaco-Pantanal landscape spans over Bolivia and Paraguay. The Gran Chaco, the continent's second largest forest, and the Pantanal, the world's largest freshwater wetland, provide vital ecosystem services.

Yet both are under intense pressure from expanding cattle ranching, agro-industrial soy monocultures, speculative land grabs, and poorly regulated infrastructure. Deforestation, unsustainable agriculture, fires, and escalating climate impacts are reshaping local economies, often to the benefit of large landholders and agribusiness while eroding traditional livelihoods.

Most Indigenous Peoples and campesino families live in conditions of structural poverty, with high dependence on rain-fed agriculture, small-scale livestock and forest resources. Recurrent droughts and floods, combined with soil degradation and rising temperatures, directly undermine food production, drinking water availability and herd health, pushing people into debt, seasonal migration and informal labor. Access to health, education, markets, digital connectivity and climate-resilient infrastructure is limited, especially in remote areas. Women and youth are frequently concentrated in the lowest-paid, most insecure segments of local economies, with less access to land titles, credit, extension services and decision-making spaces.

Marginalized groups, including the Ayoreo in voluntary isolation and other

Indigenous communities whose territories overlap with agricultural frontiers, remain especially vulnerable due to insecure land rights, overlapping concessions, and weak enforcement of social and environmental safeguards.

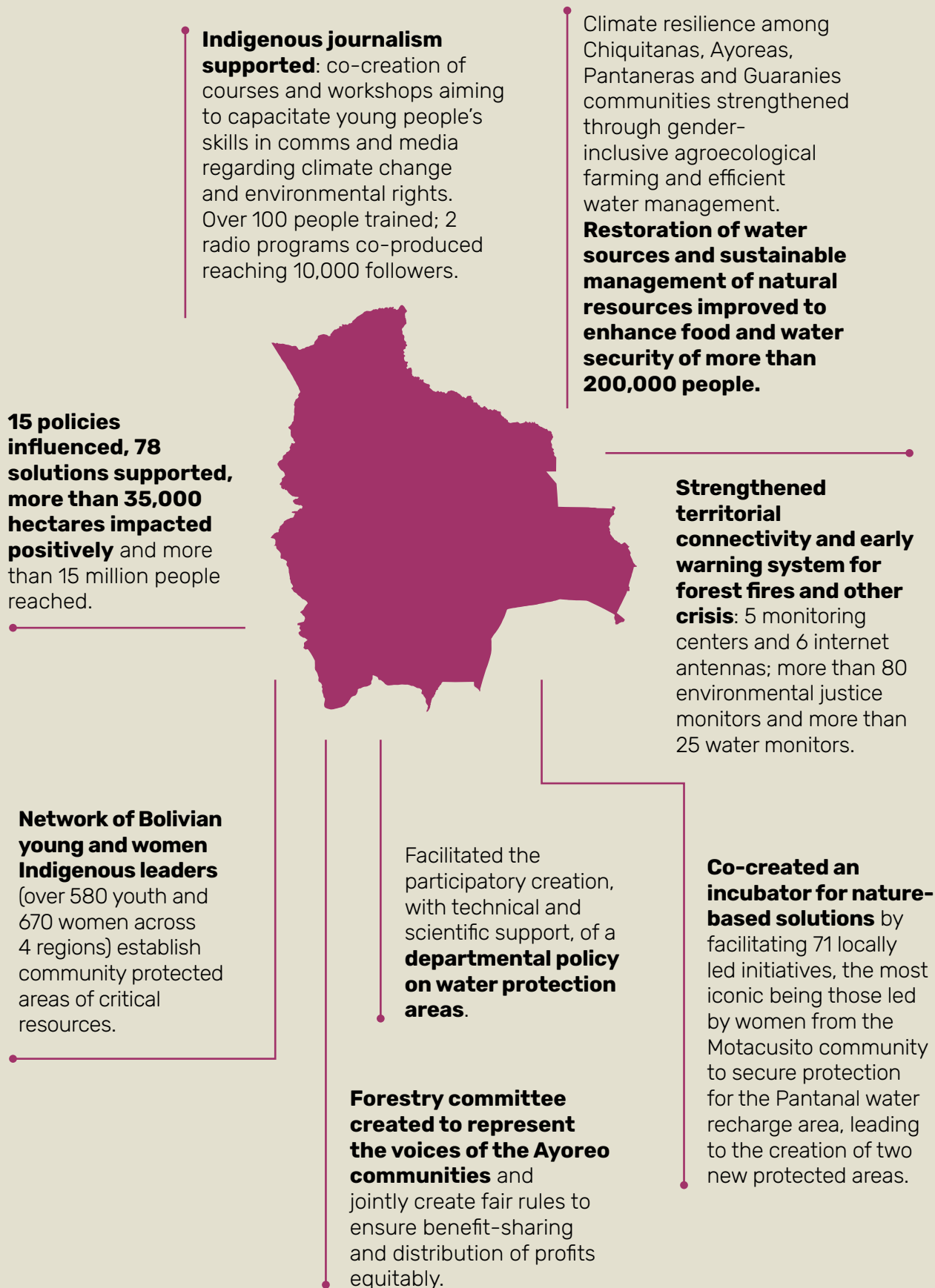
Through the VCA program, WWF worked with Fundación Avina and a broad network of local partners to support Indigenous and grassroots organizations in strengthening territorial governance and advancing inclusive climate adaptation. WWF helped establish environmental and territorial monitoring centers, promote youth engagement in conservation and co-develop adaptation plans. By connecting local voices to regional and global arenas, WWF-VCA fostered Indigenous leadership and showcased locally led solutions that link forest and wetland conservation to just, sustainable livelihoods.

Women Leading the Way: Protecting Motacusito in Bolivia.



Indigenous School of Journalism, Bolivia © EPI, 2023

Overview of Impact: BOLIVIA



OTHER INSPIRING SUCCESS STORIES

In Puerto Suárez, Bolivia, women have taken the lead in creating and managing protected areas, overcoming a history of male-dominated decision-making regarding land and resources. Their unity led to the establishment of the Motacusito Community Protected Area, fostering a more equitable future.

Stories from the frontlines: indigenous journalism in Bolivia.

In the Gran Chaco region, the Indigenous Journalism School (EPI) supports Indigenous peoples facing poverty and rights challenges. By promoting Indigenous-led journalism, EPI enhances freedom of expression and amplifies local voices affected by climate change, bridging local experiences with global narratives to strengthen conservation efforts.

If you want to learn more,
[click here.](#)



Water monitors, Bolivia @WWF-Bolivia, 2023

Overview of Impact: PARAGUAY

10 policies influenced, 10 climate solutions supported, 122,449 ha impacted positively, 83,443 people impacted.

Women's Collective of the Gran Chaco Americano **empowered over 200 grassroots women's groups and 5,000 people across 40 remote communities** to adapt to climate change, monitor biodiversity and access digital markets.

Climate justice reporting strengthened by **training local and indigenous communicators**, analyzing over 1,100 news articles, funding impactful stories and hosting two national environmental journalism awards and festival.

Loma indigenous community of the Guaraní Ñandeva people and the Marina Kué colony in the Paraguayan Chaco received **title to its first 10,000 hectares of ancestral territory**.

Collaborated in **creating #LosMédanosNoSeTocan campaign** with other 80 CSOs, reaching 15,000 citizen signatures.

Co-creation of Jaguarete brigade in Paraguay, actively involved in **capacity building for fire management, control and prevention**.

Territorial **connectivity strengthened** through **45 community radio stations and 12 telecenters** installed.

Stories of impact

Land rights restoration: Marina Kué and Loma

The community of Marina Kué in Curuguaty, Paraguay, has endured decades of dispossession, violence, and legal limbo stemming from Paraguay's deeply unequal land ownership system that dates back to the Stroessner dictatorship era. On June 15, 2012, the Curuguaty Massacre occurred when police in riot gear attempted to evict around 60 landless campesino families occupying Marina Kué, a disputed territory of roughly 2,000 hectares claimed by a powerful landowner. The forced eviction escalated into a violent confrontation, where 11 people lost their lives, and many were wounded and arrested.

After the massacre, the campesinos faced criminalization: community members were accused with fabricated evidence and lack of due process, and many faced destruction of personal belongings. After years of advocacy supported by WWF, VCA partners, and civil society allies, the Asociación de Familiares y Víctimas de Marina Kué achieved a breakthrough: in 2023, a law expropriated 1,748 hectares in favor of the community, granting legal recognition through the National Institute for Rural and Land Development (INDERT).

Meanwhile, hundreds of kilometers away in Paraguay's Chaco region, the Loma Indigenous community of the Guaraní Ñandeva people secured legal title to 10,000 hectares of ancestral territory land, after more than 40 years of struggle. While these communities are distinct (one campesino and one Indigenous), their victories are connected by a shared fight against structural inequality and for territorial rights. Together, these victories represent steps toward agrarian justice, dignity and healing.

***This work was led by
Asociación de Familiares y
Víctimas de Marina Kué***

Loma people celebrating the historic event © VCA-Paraguay 2023



OTHER INSPIRING SUCCESS STORY

The Women's Collective of the Gran Chaco Americano is a movement of individuals, groups and organizations of indigenous, rural, small producer, artisan, peasant and migrant women that promotes the strengthening of their local organizations.

If you want to explore this wonderful story of collective effort, **[click here.](#)**

Background

The Amazon, spanning 6.7 million km² across nine countries (with 60% lying in Brazil alone) is the world's largest rainforest and a vital climate regulator. Under mounting political and economic pressures, the Amazon recently approached a tipping point. Deforestation surged in the early 2020s, driven by agribusiness, mining, land grabbing and infrastructure expansion. Weak enforcement and shrinking civic space under the Bolsonaro administration intensified threats to biodiversity, Indigenous rights and climate stability.

Within the VCA program, WWF-Brazil worked with Hivos, SSN, Fundación Avina,

IED and a broad coalition of local partners to strengthen environmental defenders and activist networks. Efforts focused on amplifying Indigenous and youth voices, advancing gender equity and protecting territories and cultures. WWF supported coalitions such as the Chico Mendes Committee, Amazon Forest Collective and Escola de Ativismo, linking over 60 civil society organizations across nearly all Amazonian states.

Through VCA, WWF helped secure spaces for grassroots representatives in climate policy, promoted nature-based solutions in national commitments and elevated climate justice narratives globally.



Drone view of road in Acre, in Brazil's North Region © WWF-VCA Brazil team, 2021

Overview of Impact



Stories of impact

Facilitating unusual alliances for collective advocacy

The Juruena River basin in Mato Grosso, within Brazil's Legal Amazon, faces intense climate and development pressures: accelerating deforestation, rapid agribusiness expansion and a strong push for large energy and infrastructure projects that threaten rivers, biodiversity and traditional livelihoods. Fishers, smallholder dairy producers, rural families and Indigenous Peoples in the basin depend on intact waterways, floodplains and forests for food security and grazing.

These communities are particularly vulnerable to new dams and the cascade of roads, transmission lines and associated impacts that accompany them.

In light of this, WWF–VCA Brazil supported the Juruena Vivo Network, a local coalition of Indigenous Peoples, farmers, researchers and NGOs committed to environmental preservation, cultural diversity and social participation in the region's sustainable development.

The collaboration began by recognising these communities as rights-holders and ensuring their voices could shape critical decisions about the construction of new dams. Through dialogue and skill-sharing sessions, the partners worked together to raise awareness among local rights-holders not only of the basin's importance for climate and biodiversity, but also of their own rights and opportunities in participatory environmental management.



IndiCommunity-led alliance gathering. © Rede Juruena Vivo, 2025

When the proposed Castanheira Hydroelectric Plant (planned to flood 94.7 km²) resurfaced amid a broader package of more than a hundred planned projects, the Juruena Vivo Network, strengthened by technical and financial support from WWF, scaled up coalition-building and community organising to confront this threat. VCA funding and capacity-building enabled local partners to prepare accessible technical analyses, communicate risks clearly to the community members, coordinate legal strategies and mobilize diverse stakeholders to push back.

This mobilization brought fishers, small business holder families and Indigenous communities together around a shared goal. Using joint technical materials, public outreach and legal actions (including a technical note from the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office), the coalition pressured federal agencies to reassess the project's viability. Their coordinated efforts led the Energy Research Company to halt hydropower studies for Castanheira, decline to renew its registration with the national regulator and express no interest in pursuing the project. Castanheira was subsequently removed from the Federal Government's Ten-Year Energy Expansion Plan 2030.

Blocking the Castanheira project prevented large-scale flooding and ecological degradation, strengthened local resilience, affirmed inclusive participation of vulnerable groups and consolidated the Juruena Vivo Network, supported by WWF-VCA, as a decisive force for protecting free-flowing rivers and advancing a just, locally led model of sustainable development.

This work was led by Rede Juruena Vivo



OTHER INSPIRING SUCCESS STORY

The state of Acre, in the far west of Brazil bordering Peru and Bolivia, has already lost over 40,000 hectares of forest to deforestation, and yet, local youth continue resisting to keep forests and communities intact. A strengthened, youth-led organization is continuously working to turn resistance into institutional power, turning it into resilience. If you want to know more about the exemplary work of this youth group, **[click here.](#)**

***This work was led by
Comité Chico Mendes***



Comité Chico Mendes



Committee Chico Mendes community gathering © Comité Chico Mendes, 2024

5

MAIN INSIGHTS: LESSONS LEARNED AND THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Integrated approaches are essential for lasting impact

Addressing climate change and nature challenges requires continuous recognition of the connections among ecosystem health, livelihoods, and rights. Conservation is not separate from people's material conditions; it depends on them. Future programs must therefore embed livelihoods, wellbeing, safety, and economic agency into the core of nature-based strategies, rather than treating them as secondary or optional dimensions. Inclusion and equity targets and indicators must be embedded from the very start of any initiative; otherwise, they risk being superficial or overlooked entirely, ultimately diminishing a project's effectiveness.

In VCA, the Theory of Change recognized the link between ecosystem integrity, climate resilience and civic space, but inclusion and equity targets were not always embedded as core performance indicators from the outset. While tracking meaningful power shifts can be challenging, its impact needs to be reported at outcome-level in the context of nature conservation.

Bottom-up governance strengthens both inclusivity and effectiveness

Although VCA aimed to strengthen civic space and local leadership, the governance structures of the program remained partly centralized, with limited formal representation of grassroots partners and rightsholders in the various program decision-making spaces. This created tensions between ambition and practice. For example, in rural contexts, especially where Indigenous Peoples and remote communities are involved, meaningful co-creation requires extended timelines for trust-building, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, and iterative adaptation. When these realities remain far from the program's higher-level decision-making, they go unconsidered; this hampers both inclusivity and effectiveness.

As reported by the implementation teams (January, 2026), if VCA were to be redesigned, more time should be allocated to ensuring local partner representation in the program's governance bodies, as well as formalizing accountability for decisions to rightsholders. Concretely, future programs should formalize ongoing participatory engagement of rightsholders at program governance level and establish sense-making, needs identification and co-creation processes with rightsholders.

Equitable partnerships must shape program design, not only implementation

VCA was composed of a wide network of partners, in recognition that collaboration across large organizations, local actors, and governments is critical for achieving climate justice and resilience. On the one hand, 6 international organizations formed a large consortium that fostered innovation but also represented different standpoints and ways of working. For WWF, this meant stepping out of our institutional comfort zone to work with unusual allies. Different organizational cultures, risk appetites, advocacy styles, and accountability systems required continuous negotiation. This complexity is not a weakness, but it is precisely what forces more honest conversations about power, legitimacy and added value between organizations.

However, equitable partnering cannot stop at coordination meetings or subcontracting arrangements. In most instances, strategic priorities and budget decisions were largely predefined before local actors could meaningfully shape them. True equity requires shared agenda-setting from the design phase, transparency on budget distribution, and a jointly agreed definition of success. It also requires clarity on who speaks on whose behalf in policy, advocacy, and debate spaces.

Flexible operational systems are critical for inclusive delivery

VCA demonstrated that operational systems, from reporting formats to contracting procedures, budget approvals, and timelines, directly shape who can participate and who cannot. The Next Level Grant Facility, for example, showed that simplified and more flexible procedures can effectively enable locally led approaches. However, budget allocation (how much and when) is not a neutral administrative decision; it determines the extent to which local leadership is genuinely resourced.

During the program, internal WWF financial rules were reported as the main barrier to achieving percentage targets for funding local partners. While contracting speed was largely adequate, time-consuming approval processes and compliance requirements limited flexibility and delayed disbursements. In addition, the implementation teams indicated that a minimum 18-month period was necessary for adequate partner selection, joint design, and participatory MEL setup (January, 2026).



© Comité Chico Mendes, 2024

Internal transformation and alignment with the Inclusive Conservation Best Practices is work in progress

The VCA program has contributed to awareness-raising within WWF on inclusive conservation and human rights-based approaches. It helped formalize the mandate for Inclusive Conservation across several WWF offices. And yet, a more fundamental shift in organizational culture will still require further change. Decision-making authority, control over narrative framing, and financial oversight largely remained centralized. Decolonizing conservation and organizational practices also requires confronting institutional incentives, including branding visibility, risk tolerance, and hierarchical approval systems.

Without aligning internal systems, performance metrics, and leadership accountability with the Inclusive Conservation vision, transformation remains partial. The shift from a managing and implementing actor to an ally of rights-holders is ongoing and requires sustained leadership commitment, not only project-level experimentation.



Policy influence requires continuity beyond project cycles

Even though the program supported advocacy at multiple levels, it was clear that policy-influencing efforts directly shaped by grassroots actors resulted in powerful outcomes locally. As reflected in WWF's Inclusive Conservation vision, efforts to move beyond representing communities to resourcing their participation in national and global fora are urgent. Participatory policy platforms and collective advocacy coalitions during the program's scope proved credible and politically resilient.

However, sustained influence over climate finance allocation and locally led adaptation policy integration requires longer-term engagement and strategic alliances beyond project cycles. In addition, more meaningful impact on structural climate finance flows globally was limited during the program.

Securing long-term financial autonomy for grassroots initiatives remains a challenge

Despite the program's locally led nature through direct sub-granting to local partners, many grassroots organizations remained dependent on project-based funding, with limited core budget support and limited long-term institutional strengthening. The funds enabled pilots but did not always translate into sustainable self-fundraising capacity of the CSOs.

While the program strengthened capacities in proposal development and advocacy, pathways toward long-term financial autonomy, such as direct access modalities, pooled community funds, or diversified revenue models, were not always institutionalized. Inclusive Conservation implies not only participation in projects but durable control over resources. Addressing this requires structural reform in donor funding architecture, not only improved local capacity.



Papuan drone view, Indonesia © Julian Hahne, 2023

Why we are here.

To stop the degradation of the world's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAM 2021-2025



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