



# RESULTS EVALUATION

## Executive Summary

# Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation on Biodiversity and Climate Change



Evaluation of Non-Reimbursable International  
Cooperation on Biodiversity and Climate  
Change received by Costa Rica 2010-2018

## **Executive Summary**

*18 December 2020*

## Executive summary

Evaluation of Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation received by Costa Rica in 2010-2018. Mideplan

### Technical Team:

Eddy García Serrano, Evaluation Unit, Mideplan.

Ericka Valerio Mena, Evaluation Unit, Mideplan.

Carolina Zúñiga Zamora, Evaluation Unit, Mideplan

Karina Li Wing Ching, Area of International Cooperation, Mideplan.

Saskia Rodríguez Steichen, Area of International Cooperation, Mideplan.

Dirk Hoffmann, FOCELAC project, German Institute for Development Evaluation.

Nataly Salas Rodríguez, FOCELAC project, German Institute for Development Evaluation.

### Wider Technical Team:

Patricia Bolaños Chacón, Directorate of International Cooperation, MINAE (Ministry of Environment and Energy).

Ma Gabriela Mora Arce, Directorate of International Cooperation, MINAE.

Patricia Campos Mesén, Directorate of Climate Change, MINAE.

Daniela Villalta Arias, Directorate of Climate Change, MINAE.

Lesbia Sevilla Estrada, Department for Technical and Financial Cooperation, SINAC (National System of Conservation Areas), MINAE.

Patricia Marín González, Department for Technical and Financial Cooperation, SINAC, MINAE.

Ericka Campos Cartín, SEPLASA (Sectoral Planning Secretariat of Environment, Energy, Ocean and Territorial Planning), MINAE.

Angie Mighty Hall, Directorate General of Planning, MINAE.

### Evaluator Team:

Victoria Sánchez Esteban, Coordinator.

Heiner Acevedo Mairena, Thematic expert.

Ailhyn Bolaños Ulloa, Evaluator.

Lucía Alonso Blasco, Evaluator.

Yolanda Soriano Segovia, Evaluator.

### Special thanks

Cooperation agencies and evaluation informants.

## List of acronyms and abbreviations

BioCC	Biodiversity and Climate Change
CTCI	International Cooperation Technical Committee
DCC	Directorate of Climate Change (MINAE)
DCI-MINAE	Directorate of International Cooperation, Ministry of Environment and Energy
DCI-MRREE	Directorate of International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<i>DEval</i>	German Institute for Development Evaluation
DGP	Directorate General of Planning (MINAE)
FOCELAC	Competence development and networking of evaluation performers in Latin America as a contribution to the Agenda 2030
MIDEPLAN	Costa Rican Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy
MRREE	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NRIC	Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation
POLCI	Costa Rican International Cooperation Policy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIGECI	Mideplan's International Cooperation Project Management System

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The evaluation of Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation (NRIC) in the fields of biodiversity and climate change (BioCC) during the 2010-2018 period, was designed as a summative and formative evaluation, aimed at assessing the results of NRIC in these areas, the efficiency of its management system, and its sustainability. The evaluation was implemented by the Costa Rican Ministry of Planning (Mideplan) and supported by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) through the FOCELAC project (Competence development and networking of evaluation performers in Latin America as a contribution to the Agenda 2030), and conducted by the company, Red2Red.

This is the first thematic evaluation from the National Evaluation Agenda and the first on NRIC in the country. For this reason, and also because of the breadth of the topic and the level of ambition required by the evaluation, its findings and conclusions are a starting point that can be developed in subsequent evaluations.

A mixed methodological approach was applied and qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to analyse the data. Its exploratory nature enabled even greater flexibility in the evaluation process as some aspects of the reality meant that the evaluation had to be redesigned, due to the fact that some of its characteristics or behaviours had not been previously described or systematically analysed. It is important to note that the activity under evaluation did not correspond to Costa Rican state activity regarding biodiversity and climate change, but rather was limited to efforts that had received financial or technical support through NRIC.

Due to the pandemic crisis, information gathering was mostly carried out using online tools, in other words, interviews and documentary analysis. However, focus groups, theories of change contrasts, questionnaires and project analyses also featured. The combination of tools made it possible to conduct broad research and enabled information to be validated and triangulated so we could present a robust evidence-based report. However, with regard to some of the topics related to project results, we cannot always guarantee that the data offered is representative of all NRIC.

The rest of this summary includes the main **conclusions and recommendations** taken from the evaluation.

The **alignment of received cooperation with national targets and international agreements** that address the topics of biodiversity and climate change, is rated **average**, with a positive evolution over recent years. **Links to the SDGs are clearly weaker**. Furthermore, due to the way that the projects justify their alignments, especially in the case of international agreements and the SDGs, it is not clear whether there is any real understanding of its importance. The fundamental reason for these weaknesses is that there is still **no clear recognition** that NRIC should be used to advance the country's targets or that it should **never be considered exclusively as a financing tool** as there are significant costs involved.

Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation in Costa Rica reveals **a robust system that became clearer, stronger and more systematised in the period analysed** and, therefore, **fostered cooperation efficiency**. The management system **reveals some strong points**, such as the awareness of Costa Rica's dual role and the way cooperation needs are defined and structured. However, this ordered and strategic system coexists with the need to take advantage of opportunities that arise, and this means that there is less alignment with the country's targets.

Another positive aspect that should be mentioned is the process used to **order Costa Rica's contribution** in terms of South-South and triangular cooperation, which has improved over time and is now up-to-date and easy to understand.

However, there are other aspects of the management system that should be improved including: **inter-institutional coordination**, both at governance level, Mideplan-MRREE, and within institutions; the

**usefulness of the SIGECI** (Mideplan's International Cooperation Project Management System) perceived by members of the cooperation connection system; **data on NRIC** in terms of biodiversity and climate change, which is partial, fundamentally because established procedures are not always followed, meaning that not all information is communicated to Mideplan, the body in charge of compiling and systematising it; and, finally, **monitoring**, both in terms of the NRIC overall and in individual projects.

Other analyses indicate that the existence of a **national counterpart contribution, co-financing** or technical and/or political **conditioning criteria** results in **positive consequences** because it enables a wider scope of action, strengthens practices that may not be consolidated in the country (gender, participatory approaches...) and promotes new tendencies. These approaches have been known in Costa Rica for years, but they **are not usually evident** in project formulation, and even less so, in project implementation and completion.

In the same vein, projects have been detected that have established consultation and decision-making mechanisms in an effort to integrate more forms of **co-management**. However, in practice, these mechanisms tend to be little more than "consultation bodies" that are more or less fixed and redundant when it comes to decision-making. There also remains a certain level of reluctance when it comes to incorporating non-public stakeholders into project design and management, despite discourse that would suggest the contrary. It is clear that these aspects all exist **much more in declarations than in real action**.

It is agreed that there is a **need to increase South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation** due to their potential to generate lessons, share good practice and accelerate innovations. They are not alternatives to traditional cooperation as they do not substitute its contributions.

The cooperation that is supplied to Costa Rica is influenced by the international agenda as this directs its thematic content and, in some cases, there are also consultations with the recipient country to find out what its most urgent needs are. Despite this, the **predictability of resources** from cooperating sources **remains a challenge**, especially in terms of bilateral cooperation. Fulfilling the principle of **transparency and accountability varies** on the part of the cooperating partners, but, with a few exceptions, it does not usually meet the needs expressed by Costa Rica's institutions.

The **cross-sectoral incorporation of biodiversity and climate change is incipient**. Some concrete examples can already be found and the systemic perspective is gaining in importance. However, there are no mechanisms to facilitate an awareness of its importance nor tools to apply it.

The analysed projects **seek to achieve national targets** and focus, in the main part, on (1) **addressing the causes** behind the loss of biodiversity and deterioration in ecosystem service flow; and (2) mitigating the causes of climate change. These efforts have produced real results, affirming that NRIC **has contributed to achieving national targets** in selected sectors, in some cases, significantly.

It is not easy to access the results of projects as **the information they provide is insufficient** and of poor quality. However, the analysed projects **achieve the expected results**, which is made easier when there is smooth collaboration between the parties involved, an adequate model of governance and active involvement from everyone who is affected by it. Aligning the projects with the international agenda also contributes to this success as it provides a clear roadmap to follow. It becomes harder to achieve, however, when there are obstacles to accessing valuable information (from other institutions, on intervention progress or on the results that are to be evaluated) and also due to political changes, which can hinder projects that are in their implementation phase when the changes occur.

The project's products can be put to use as they are often found available on their websites. In order to be able to use them, however, their potential users need to know they exist, and this is not always the case as **there is an issue around a lack of dissemination of project products and results**.

The **results of the projects** analysed are generally **sustainable**. The projects usually have a solid technical perspective and almost always include capacity building, although this is often more visible when directed at institutions rather than at the public. Two other factors that strengthen sustainability, or at least, potential sustainability, of results are: (1) the existence of adequate monitoring in order to be able to anticipate problems; and (2) knowledge management that is complete and integrated into the project.

Furthermore, NRIC in the fields of biodiversity and climate change **has helped improve conditions so that stakeholders take ownership of results**. Some factors that improve this include: (1) the implication of interest groups and affected groups right from the initial formulation stage; (2) the beneficiary institution being the one to implement the projects; and (3) the mutual sharing of experiences as a factor that motivates organisations and communities to get involved.

Sustainability and ownership can contribute decisively to the country, incorporating or strengthening certain **conditions** that put it in a **better position to keep progressing** towards national targets. Furthermore, NRIC has helped address some core problems in biodiversity and climate change and has promoted some of Costa Rica's pioneering experiences that have subsequently been replicated in other contexts or territories. Furthermore, while they may be modest at present, some multi-level governance experiences have occurred, and there are even a few cases where action has been carried out to monitor, anticipate and prevent disaster risks for the country. The most relevant aspect is that the NRIC has helped strengthen the country's visibility and positioning at international level, strengthening and accelerating progress that Costa Rica has already achieved for itself and increasing its attraction for cooperation partners who consider it to be a reliable recipient, and other countries who want to find out more about its good practice.

The first **recommendation** is that it should **raise awareness** across the whole cooperation system regarding the **importance of projects being aligned** with national and sectoral policies. This task should be put into effect at all events and in all declarations that are carried out in relation to NRIC, and at all institutional levels: from the highest level of hierarchy, passing through the cooperation connection meetings and infiltrating the work that these connections do, in turn, within their own institutions. These statements and events could also be seen as opportunities to promote alignment with International Conventions and the SDGs, conveying their importance for the country and the commitments that have been taken on that must be fulfilled.

If project alignment is found to be lacking during the proposal application and assessment process, Mideplan can reject them. However, projects do not always follow their established course, and so, there are projects that are not aligned even though they were approved by a cooperating partner because the regulatory process established has not been followed. In these cases, the information should be raised to superior institutional levels that can communicate with, and seek clarification from, their colleagues in the institution hosting the unit that leads the project. The MRREE could also communicate this information to the cooperation partner or the agency implementing the efforts so that the consequences of non-alignment are made clear.

As the practical efficiency of the management system has been the central theme of this evaluation, a set of recommendations have been created to improve it. They include the following: (a) **strengthen and broaden knowledge in relation to the prospective model of defining needs**, with the aim of increasing the probability that all projects are aligned. (b) Work on **improving inter-institutional relations and coordination** within the system. To facilitate this, the recommendation is to start working on revitalising the International Cooperation Technical Committee (CTCI in Spanish). (c) **Get more out of the asset constituted by the cooperation connections**. Setting up regular meetings could help establish and consolidate relationships that converge in specific areas. It could also provide a training moment on topics detected as weaknesses of the system. This would all contribute to **strengthening cooperation connections**, which could thus provide support to people in their own institutions in terms of project design. (d) The SIGECI should be **specifically useful** to people who feed it with data and strategies should be put in place that enable it to provide **complete information** on the whole cooperation system, including the **project end**

documents. (e) **The development regulation for Article 11 of the LPE needs to be updated**, as it is outdated in various aspects (existence of POLCI, competencies for global monitoring and that of the projects, requirements to send documentation to Mideplan and reinforcement of the role of CTCI etc.).

The other side of the coin is to **reinforce the need to comply with the application and approval procedure established for cooperation projects**. This can be achieved using the same course of action that is followed when an approved project is flagged as not being properly aligned. Furthermore, the existence of simplified procedures needs to be shared more widely among the units, as they are currently not easy to find.

In order to produce clear information that is adjusted to the reality, **terminology on financing the initiatives needs to be clarified** and care needs to be taken over what information is uploaded onto the **project repositories** to avoid the existence of **duplicate information**.

**The implementation of projects led by Costa Rican institutions** should be fostered. In this case, however, there is a need to improve agility, as this was not highly assessed by the informants. To do this properly, it is important to make sure that the people who are in charge of implementing it, have enough time to do it, can access support from experts, whether from the same institution or elsewhere, or even that it is contracted out to consultants where necessary so that the results obtained are of the highest quality. If this option is not possible, the **presence of national coordinators** has to be guaranteed that will act as a conveyor belt between the project team and Costa Rican institutions, with the main objective being to guarantee that the lessons are not lost and that the Costa Rican institutions are not overshadowed.

**The presence of civil society and the private sector** in the design and implementation of projects should be reinforced, as their involvement helps tailor the projects to real needs and increases the likelihood of the results being sustainable. In the same vein, incorporating **communities** to a greater measure also brings significant advantages in terms of their subsequent ownership and contribution to the sustainability of results.

An effective incorporation of cross-sectional focuses and other important issues, such as the SDGs, requires more information to be shared and more awareness to be raised rather than introducing additional requirements in the application process, which can just make the process more difficult and not guarantee their incorporation. **Collaboration with other public entities** from Costa Rica could also be useful as they could facilitate tools or capacity-building processes to help incorporate these cross-sectoral issues. Likewise, **some of the foundations** that have experience working on these topics could be invited to collaborate and share their knowledge so that they participate in awareness-raising processes and, potentially, capacity-building or experience exchange processes. In this sense, **discovering specific success experiences** that civil society or private sector entities have been involved in can be more useful and efficient than a capacity-building process on how to incorporate the participatory approach, even though the best option would be to combine both.

It is necessary to **insist** to the cooperation partners on the **importance of providing relevant information** and the need for them also to **account for the work they carry out**. To do this, they could organise a roundtable and invite the main donors or agencies present in the country. It would be useful to count on the participation of the leadership of the two governing institutions. Advances in this process will be progressive and could require a sustained effort over time.

It is necessary to **improve the project management capacities of the people who implement them**. All project directors will be required to have the skills to define adequate product and results indicators, be clear on the concept of results and be able to draft informative and significant final reports. To achieve this, capacity-building training and knowledge sharing workshops can be organised in which learning takes place in a more practical sense.

More people would know about the results of projects if **the dissemination of the results was reinforced and if its available products were made available** when they have a tangible nature. Low-cost activities include publishing them in the news section of institution websites, making distribution lists and increasing dissemination activities, including online ones to foster the participation of people outside the GAM. When plans are made to exploit these products, the products are more likely to be used. Furthermore, workshops organised to launch or close project activity are very useful tools for dissemination and ownership when they are well organised. The **workshops on lessons learned**, directed at a slightly wider public, are a fantastic compliment to these activities.

In terms of **results sustainability and ownership**, the main recommendation is to strengthen the factors that are beneficial and specifically establish mechanisms to guarantee that the lessons that derive from them stay within the Costa Rican institutions. When the country has been responsible for implementing the projects, the people who participate should be encouraged to stay on and learning processes should be organised where knowledge is passed on. In addition, institutional strengthening processes should be incorporated throughout the life of the project, starting in its planning phase.

Two **additional recommendations** are included because they have been considered important enough to incorporate even though they are not directly related to any of the requested evaluation questions. These recommendations are, firstly, to improve the **external coherence and complementarity** of new projects and strengthen links between stakeholders that work in the same geographic area; and, secondly, to **hone the projects database**, in order to correct mistakes that have been detected: it is impossible to clearly identify which entity leads and coordinates project implementation; there is also imprecise information on budgets, the way the projects are administered and errors related to what information it says is available and what is available in reality.

These are the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the evaluator team in the hope that its contribution is useful for contributing to improving the Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation system for biodiversity and climate change.