

# **Independent Project Evaluation Nature for Peace**

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Project Information			
Project Title	NATURALPAZ – NATURE FOR PEACE		
ID (Atlas/Quantum)	00138286		
PRODOC	NaturalPaz is a project financed by the Multi-Donor Fund for Peace, with an investment of 3,000,000 dollars, whose general objective is to contribute to building sustainable peace and preventing new socio-environmental conflicts. To this end, green investments are promoted that involve peasant, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities in PDET municipalities with high biological and cultural diversity. To fulfill this objective, two main components have been defined:		
	<b>Component 1.</b> Strengthen capacities and promote participation in the carbon market through REDD+ projects and other sustainable agrobiodiversity use initiatives in PDET territories, benefiting both collective territories and peasant reserve zones.		
	<b>Component 2.</b> Promote low-carbon rural development projects that are resilient to climate change, participate in carbon markets, and have a financial mechanism, such as a revolving fund, that allows expanding and scaling climate solutions to other producers.		
Country	Colombia		
	Project	Intervention Territories Municipalities PDET	
	Component 1.	Puerto Asís y Puerto Guzmán (Putumayo). San Vicente del Caguán (Caquetá). Barbacoas y Ricaurte (Nariño). San José del Guaviare (Guaviare).	
	Component 2.	Planadas y Chaparral (Tolima). Algeciras (Huila). Mesetas (Meta). Yotoco (Valle del Cauca).	
Beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Most vulnerable populations in poverty situations, who are in the range of poor or extremely poor.</li><li>- Traditionally excluded population groups such as youth, women, the elderly, ethnic groups, victims of armed conflict, and peace signatories</li><li>- Civil society organizations</li></ul>		
Project dates	Project	Project start date	Project closure date
	NaturalPaz	January 7th, 2022	January 30th, 2025
Project Budget	USD \$3.000.000	Source: United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace	
Project Expenditure <sup>1</sup>	USD \$ 3.000.000		
Counterparts	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADS), Territory Renewal Agency (ART), Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN)		
Project Modality	DIM		
Implementing Agency	UNDP-United Nations Development Programme.		

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The commitment, availability, and human quality of all those mentioned made the successful development of this evaluation possible, contributing significantly to the comprehensive understanding of the project and its impacts on the territory.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADISPA – ZRC</b>	Sustainable Integral Development Association of La Perla Amazónica - Peasant Reserve Zone
<b>AFOLU</b>	Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use
<b>AMCOP – ZRC</b>	Municipal Association of Pato Settlers Peasant Reserve Zone
<b>ARR</b>	Restoration Activities
<b>ART</b>	Territory Renewal Agency
<b>ARN</b>	Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization
<b>ASBV</b>	Low-Value Subvention Agreements
<b>APR</b>	Responsible Parties Agreements
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>FEMNCAFE</b>	National Coffee Board Federation
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse Gases
<b>HLMT</b>	Hectares with Landscape Management Tools
<b>LMT</b>	Landscape Management Tools
<b>NaturalPaz</b>	Nature for Peace
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN-REDD</b>	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
<b>PDET</b>	Development Programs with a Territorial Approach
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>SGP</b>	Small Grants Programme
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
<b>UN MPTF</b>	United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WCS</b>	Wildlife Conservation Society

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project, implemented between 2022 and 2025 with a budget of USD 3 million from the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), aimed to contribute to sustainable peacebuilding in Colombia through nature-based solutions in territories prioritized by the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDET). Despite facing significant challenges that prevented the formal implementation of REDD+ projects, the project demonstrated exceptional adaptive capacity, successfully reorienting toward viable alternative strategies that generated transformative impacts in environmental conservation, territorial peacebuilding, and community empowerment.

The evaluation revealed high strategic relevance as the project effectively aligned with Colombia's national priorities and directly contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the initial design presented critical deficiencies by establishing unrealistic expectations regarding REDD+ project implementation in complex territories within a 12-month timeframe, when international experience indicates that a minimum of 24 to 36 months is required. Additionally, implementation coincided with a multifactorial crisis in the carbon market between 2022 and 2024, characterized by RENARE's inoperability, tax reform that reduced demand, and prices below the economic viability threshold.

In terms of effectiveness, the project achieved exceptional results by surpassing targets in seven of eight key indicators, notably achieving 1,400% compliance in "Nature-based Solutions with gender approach." It directly benefited 3,152 people, of whom 47% were women, distributed across 15 PDET municipalities in eight departments, while reaching more than 4,000 indirect beneficiaries. A particularly significant achievement was the successful participation of 986 peace signatories in conservation activities, demonstrating that peace signatories can be effective agents of environmental sustainability when provided with appropriate technical support.

Project efficiency was evidenced by the execution of 100% of the allocated budget over 36 months, with strategic leveraging of UNDP's pre-existing institutional capacities, including tools such as Climate Promise and the Small Grants Programme. The establishment of 46 strategic alliances enabled the leveraging of additional resources exceeding USD 23.6 million through initiatives like GEF-8 Jaguar Corridor and GEF Bio South, significantly multiplying the impact of the initial investment.

Environmental impacts achieved include the protection of 540,000 hectares of forest through 36 community agreements, deforestation reduction between 40% and 62% in critical areas, and the planting of 75,000 trees that contributed to the restoration of 480 hectares. The project allocated USD 906,579, equivalent to 30.2% of the total budget, specifically to gender actions, consolidating female leadership in 58% of the benefited community organizations.

The evaluation identified four fundamental lessons learned. First, institutional adaptive management demonstrated that UNDP can effectively utilize its available tools to reorient strategies in the face of emerging challenges successfully. Second, the sustainability architecture based on the combination of installed local capacities, institutionalization of results, and articulation with long-term programs proves effective for generating lasting impacts. Third, the complexity of REDD+ mechanisms was underestimated, evidencing that they require specific conditions and specialized teams to be viable in PDET territories. Fourth, effective environmental conservation can be successfully materialized through initiatives rooted in local capacities, without depending exclusively on sophisticated markets.

The main conclusions establish that, despite initial design deficiencies, the exceptional adaptive capacity of the team enabled transformative impacts through strategies more pertinent to the territorial context. It was proven that effective conservation does not depend exclusively on sophisticated market mechanisms and demonstrated the transformative potential of replicable environmental peace models. The systemic crisis in the carbon market evidenced the need for structural reforms before being able to make REDD+ projects viable in post-conflict territories.

Strategic recommendations include developing a high-integrity jurisdictional REDD+ strategy leveraging UNDP's regional capacities, adopting robust protocols for future climate financing projects with realistic timelines and pre-established alternative routes, and institutionalizing comprehensive protection models for environmental defenders. Additionally, scaling up successful models such as FEMNCAFE's Environmental Technical Assistance Unit, rigorous economic validation of alternative initiatives through independent market studies, and considering the incorporation of environmental criteria into reintegration programs are recommended.

The NaturalPaz project establishes a valuable precedent by demonstrating that the articulation between environmental conservation, peacebuilding, and community empowerment generates synergistic and lasting results. Its adaptive management model, differentiated territorial approach, and institutional sustainability architecture provide replicable elements for future interventions at the intersection of climate action and peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts, confirming the viability of developing interventions that simultaneously strengthen territorial peace, conserve strategic ecosystems, and generate sustainable economic alternatives for historically excluded populations.



## **I. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### **A. CONTEXT OF COLOMBIA**

1. Colombia is a megadiverse country with one of the largest forest carbon reserves in Latin America, making it a key actor in global strategies to mitigate climate change. However, it faces significant challenges related to deforestation, forest degradation, and socio-environmental conflicts associated with these dynamics. The country's deforestation rate, especially in regions like the Amazon, remains alarming, with more than 85% of forest loss concentrated in municipalities prioritized by the Territorial Development Programs (PDET).
2. The REDD+ mechanism has been adopted as a fundamental tool to address these challenges. In Colombia, REDD+ is implemented at two main scales: national programs led by the government, such as Visión Amazonia, and independent projects managed by private actors in voluntary carbon markets. These projects, which operate primarily in indigenous territories and peasant reserve zones, seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through forest conservation and sustainable management. However, their implementation has generated tensions due to territorial overlaps and conflicts over access to economic benefits derived from carbon credits.
3. The 2016 Peace Agreement marked a milestone in Colombia's recent history, but the country continues to face challenges in building sustainable peace, particularly in territories most affected by the armed conflict. These areas, many of which coincide with regions of high biodiversity, are key for sustainable development initiatives that integrate environmental conservation and peacebuilding. In this context, indigenous territories and peasant reserve zones play a crucial role. Indigenous peoples, for example, control vast forest extensions that act as carbon sinks, but require capacity strengthening and more inclusive governance to ensure that REDD+ project benefits reach their communities.
4. The voluntary carbon market, energized in Colombia by instruments such as the national carbon tax and its exemption through credit purchases, has promoted investments in sustainable projects. However, the lack of a robust system of social and environmental safeguards has limited the transformative impact of these initiatives.
5. Finally, Colombia finds itself at a crossroads where the implementation of climate mechanisms, such as REDD+, and peacebuilding must be articulated to address both environmental and social challenges. Forest protection, strengthening territorial governance, and integrating vulnerable communities into sustainable initiatives are fundamental for developing a resilient, equitable country model in harmony with its enormous natural wealth.<sup>1</sup>

### **B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

6. The Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project is framed within efforts to consolidate peace and foster sustainable development in Colombia, particularly in territories historically affected by armed conflict.
7. This project's main objective is to support the economic and social stabilization of rural communities in municipalities prioritized by the Territorial Development Programs (PDET), through the implementation of nature-based initiatives that promote environmental conservation, climate change mitigation, and the strengthening of sustainable livelihoods.
8. PDET municipalities, which represent 36% of Colombian territory, have been selected due to their high socioeconomic and environmental vulnerability. These areas concentrate 40% of the country's forests with more than 23 million hectares. However, these territories are the most affected by deforestation;

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<sup>1</sup> (PNUD, 2024)

in the 170 PDET municipalities, 85% of national deforestation is concentrated, and more critically, in the 38 PDET municipalities of the Amazon region, 67% of this phenomenon is concentrated. Additionally, they face challenges such as multidimensional poverty, the presence of illicit economies, and institutional weakness. In this context, rural communities, including Afro-descendant, indigenous, and peasant communities of the Amazon, are the main beneficiaries of this project, which seeks to generate sustainable income, strengthen local capacities, and mitigate the causes of socio-environmental conflicts.

9. One of the main strategies that NaturalPaz wanted to implement was income generation through the implementation of REDD+ projects and the sale of generated carbon certificates, supporting natural resource conservation, creating alliances between communities and the private sector for the use of innovative financial instruments, such as "blended finance" that would allow mobilizing private sector resources and fostering the execution of projects oriented toward low-carbon rural development.
10. The project also adopts an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach, recognizing the differentiated conditions between women and men in rural communities. This includes promoting women's participation in decision-making and their access to economic and social benefits. Likewise, it seeks to empower them as key leaders in conservation and climate mitigation initiatives, strengthening their role in territorial governance.
11. NaturalPaz is aligned with Colombia's international commitments within the framework of the Paris Agreement, as well as with the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Through its actions, the project seeks to contribute to fulfilling the NDC specifically in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and advancing toward net zero deforestation. This is achieved through the implementation of sustainable practices, forest management, and carbon reserve conservation, also contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### **C. STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK - PRODOC**

12. The project experienced substantial modifications in its project document, particularly in the definition and scope of its components. The circumstances that motivated changes in the NaturalPaz project's results framework were subject to evaluation in order to understand the adaptive capacity and results-based management of the implementing team. The analysis of these adjustments, which include, among others, the reduction in the number of beneficiary communities for REDD+ projects from five to three, the result of non-viability of REDD+ project pre-feasibility studies, the incorporation of new intervention zones such as the Jaguar corridor in Guaviare, and the inclusion of specific gender and sustainability indicators, allowed the evaluation to identify how the project responded to emerging challenges in the territory, local governance contexts, and technical requirements and conditions necessary to participate in REDD+ that were not achieved.

#### **D. GENERAL OBJECTIVE AND MAIN COMPONENTS**

13. The general objective is to contribute to the construction of sustained peace and the prevention of socio-environmental conflicts through green investments in PDET municipalities. This purpose is articulated through strengthening the capacities of rural communities in areas of high biological and cultural diversity, facilitating their participation in green businesses and sustainable production.
14. The programmatic structure is organized into two main components:

- a. The **first component** is oriented toward developing the carbon market through REDD+ initiatives in PDET territories, specifically benefiting collective territories and peasant reserve zones. Its implementation is projected in five communities, contemplating the design and implementation of REDD+ proposals and generating strategic alliances between the private sector and communities for economic leveraging of interventions.
  - b. The **second component** focuses on developing the carbon market in productive processes of PDET zones, directed at small associated producers. This contemplates implementing landscape management tools, with emphasis on sustainable rural production and greenhouse gas removal. Its initial phase prioritizes the coffee sector in the Sierra Nevada - Perijá and Catatumbo regions.
15. The 2023 project document update maintains the general objective, incorporating specific emphasis on implementing two main strategies. The components experience the following modifications:
- a. The **first component** maintains its orientation toward the carbon market in REDD+ projects, incorporating sustainable agrobiodiversity use initiatives in PDET territories. Coverage is adjusted to three communities for REDD+ projects, complemented with interventions in the Jaguar corridor in Guaviare and the municipalities of Ricaurte and Barbacoas in Nariño. This version strengthens gender approaches and environmental safeguards.
  - b. The **second component** preserves its focus on productive processes in PDET zones, expanding its geographical coverage to specific municipalities in Norte de Santander, Huila, Tolima, and Meta. It incorporates the participation of the National Coffee Board (FEMCAFÉ) and establishes demonstrative peasant schools as an implementation strategy. Additionally, it strengthens the climate change adaptation component.

#### E. GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

16. The Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project is implemented in municipalities prioritized by the Territorial Development Programs (PDET). These PDET municipalities are distributed across the country's six subregions: Middle Pacific, Macarena-Guaviare, South of Córdoba, Montes de María, Catatumbo, and Putumayo. Each of these zones was identified as priority due to its strategic importance for both environmental conservation and social and economic stabilization.
17. Within these subregions, the project focuses on specific communities selected through prior technical analysis developed by the Territory Renewal Agency (ART) and USAID's Páramos and Forests program. This analysis considered criteria such as forest coverage, deforestation rates, and socioeconomic and institutional conditions. For example, localities with high deforestation indices are prioritized, such as the municipalities of San Vicente del Caguán, La Macarena, and Cartagena del Chairá, in the department of Caquetá, which concentrate a significant percentage of greenhouse gas emissions from forest loss.
18. The project includes Afro-descendant collective territories and indigenous reserves located in the Middle Pacific, in departments such as Chocó and Valle del Cauca, where it sought to strengthen community governance and promote conservation of high biodiversity areas. It also covers peasant reserve zones in Catatumbo and Putumayo, areas that have been impacted by illicit economies and present potential for developing sustainable activities, such as agroforestry production and REDD+ projects.

#### **F. CHANGES IN THE PROJECT'S GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE**

19. The most notable change is observed in the substitution of two initially contemplated zones. First, the Monochoa Indigenous Reserve was excluded from the project because approval from the community to initiate the process could not be obtained. As an alternative, the corridor prioritized for Jaguar conservation and management in the department of Guaviare was included, specifically in the Charras deforestation nucleus, where conservation, tourism, and sustainable agrobiodiversity use initiatives would be implemented.
20. Additionally, the Western Cordillera Community Council of Nariño was excluded due to two main factors: the exacerbated growth of armed conflict in the region, which made it impossible to execute project activities, and the embargo of the Community Council by the National Mining Agency, derived from non-payment of the surface canon of a mining concession area. As an alternative, activities were redirected toward the municipalities of Ricaurte and Barbacoas in Nariño.
21. Therefore, the final geographical coverage of Component 1 was established in the following zones and with the following organizations:
  - ADISPA -- ZRC La Perla Amazónica
  - AMCOP -- ZRC del Pato Balsillas
  - Villa Catalina Indigenous Reserve
  - Community nature tourism organizations in the Jaguar corridor
  - Organizations with sustainable biodiversity use and utilization initiatives in Ricaurte and Barbacoas, Nariño
22. Regarding Component 2, "Advancing toward the carbon market in productive processes of PDET zones that benefit small associated producers," significant modifications in geographical coverage and implementation partners are also identified.

Initially, it was planned that to develop the coffee sector revolving fund pilot, work would be done with the National Coffee Federation in the following regions and PDET municipalities:

  - Sierra Nevada - Perijá Banana Zone (department of Cesar): municipalities of Agustín Codazzi, Becerril, La Jagua de Ibirico, La Paz, Manaure, Puerto Bello, Valledupar.
  - Catatumbo (department of Norte de Santander): municipalities of El Carmen, Hacarí, Convención.
23. However, in the implementation process, the project incorporated a second strategic partner: the National Coffee Board Federation - FEMCAFÉ, an organization that emerged in 2018 as an articulation process led by reintegration collectives, oriented toward developing productive actions to strengthen regional agrarian systems.

Consequently, Component 2's geographical coverage was expanded to include not only Catatumbo municipalities in Norte de Santander (El Carmen, Hacarí, and Convención), but also:

  - Huila (Algeciras)
  - Tolima (Chaparral and Planadas)
  - Meta (Mesetas)
24. This geographical expansion was directly related to the location of associative figures linked to FEMCAFÉ.
25. These changes in geographical coverage represent strategic adaptations of the project in the face of realities and challenges encountered during implementation, maintaining focus on PDET territories and prioritizing zones where favorable conditions existed for developing planned activities.

## **G. BUDGET AND COUNTERPARTS**

26. The Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project has a total budget of 3,000,000 US dollars, financed by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace (UN MPTF) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).
27. The NaturalPaz Steering Committee was installed on April 22, 2022, as a space for strategic project governance, with participation from the Government of Colombia, United Nations agencies, and representatives of international cooperation. Throughout its four sessions held between 2022 and 2024, it was consolidated as an inter-institutional mechanism that articulated entities such as the Ministry of Environment, ART, ARN, UNDP, UNEP, the technical secretariat of the United Nations Multi-Partner Fund, and the British Embassy.

## **H. IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD**

28. The project was designed to be implemented in 24 months; however, a no-cost extension was requested, extending from 24 to 36 months. A displacement in the project's start date of approximately two months is observed, moving from November 2021 to January 2022, and the closing date is moved to January 31, 2025.

# **II. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE, AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION**

## **A. MAIN OBJECTIVE**

29. The evaluation of the NaturalPaz project has as its main objective to assess the results achieved compared to what was expected to be accomplished, identifying successes and opportunities for improvement, as well as lessons that can increase the sustainability of project benefits and improve UNDP's general programming.
30. This evaluation has a dual purpose:
  - Allow the Territory Renewal Agency, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace (MPTF Colombia), the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), and UNDP to meet their accountability objectives.
  - Capture good practices and lessons learned for future interventions.
31. The scope of the evaluation covers all activities implemented between July 2022 and January 2025 in territories prioritized by the project, with a specific focus on zones included in the Territorial Development Programs (PDET).

## **B. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

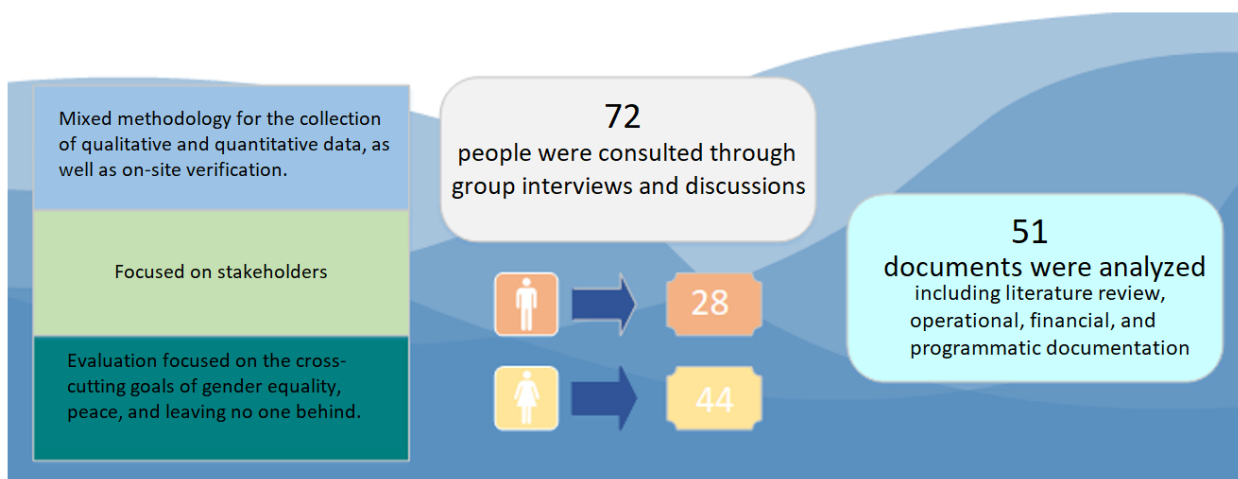
32. The evaluation of the NaturalPaz project seeks the following specific objectives:
  - Determine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of results achieved in the project's two components.
  - Identify achievements obtained, opportunities for improvement, challenges, and propose recommendations to optimize the implementation of similar initiatives that promote environmental peacebuilding.
  - Evaluate the project's orientation toward conflict key factors relevant to peace consolidation in Colombia.
  - Analyze alignment with Colombia's National Peace Consolidation Policy and national priorities.
  - Assess how the UN's added value has been leveraged in the intervention context.

- Determine to what extent the project has contributed to reducing conflict factors in the country and its contribution to achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 16.
  - Evaluate whether the project has effectively promoted the Women, Peace and Security agenda, fostering women's participation in peacebuilding processes and gender equality.
  - Validate key processes implemented to date and identify improvement alternatives through innovative participation and data collection instruments that involve all stakeholders.
33. This evaluation is conceived as a prospective exercise that supports UNDP, PBF, MPTF, involved social organizations, and governmental counterparts in perfecting project implementation and evaluating its management and results.
34. The evaluation will integrate a transversal approach based on peace consolidation, gender equity, and environmental sustainability, in addition to the principle of leaving no one behind.
35. Ultimately, this evaluation seeks to generate practical recommendations that guide future projects and contribute to strengthening strategic planning at the intersection of climate action and peacebuilding in Colombia.

### III. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

36. The evaluation of the Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project was based on available data and results delivered from the project's inception until the time of its evaluation. A field mission was conducted to verify project results and have the opportunity to speak with beneficiaries and the project's field technical team.
37. The evaluation process is developed within the framework of UNDP's Evaluation Plan, UNDP's Strategic Plan and its Evaluation Policy, and is likewise governed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) quality standards and employs five main analysis criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.
38. Additionally, the evaluation incorporates a series of priority transversal criteria that include the principle of leaving no one behind, gender equity, environmental sustainability, and peace consolidation. The detailed methodology applied is available in Annex I of the report.
39. The approach focuses on assessing accumulated results and achievements of the project in its two main components. These components will be evaluated with an integral perspective, identifying lessons learned, best practices, and opportunity areas to guide future initiatives at the intersection of climate action, sustainable development, and peacebuilding.
40. The evaluation also focuses on changes made during project implementation and will seek to value the results achieved from project reorientation, the adaptive management that allowed reaching the obtained results, and lessons learned achieved both in implementation, but also extracts recommendations associated with project design.

Figure 1. Summary of evaluation methodology



Source: Own elaboration.

#### A. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS

41. The evaluation process of the Nature for Peace (NaturalPaz) project used a mixed methodological approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to guarantee a rigorous, integral, and representative analysis of the project's results and impacts. The specific methods employed are described below:
  - a. **Documentary Review**
  42. A review was conducted of relevant documentation and information generated during project implementation. This includes, but is not limited to, the project document and its modifications, quarterly and annual reports, and minutes of project steering committee meetings. Likewise, the systematization of training processes, concrete products, and communication elements developed by the project.
  43. Information about the design context, carbon markets, REDD+ project implementation in Colombia, and the region was reviewed, as well as data associated with carbon credit commercialization in local, voluntary, and formal markets.
  - b. **Semi-Structured Interviews**
  44. Among the key actors interviewed are:
    - Institutional Actors: Project technical and management team, implementing partners Small Grants Program (SGP), WCS, Travolution, and project steering committee members, including MPTF staff, ARN. Details of participants are attached in Annex 2.

**c. Field Mission**

45. Visits were made to a sample identified by the project team to directly observe implemented activities, interact with beneficiary communities, and validate reported results. During the mission, it was possible to interview and interact with the UNDP field team as well as the team contracted to provide technical assistance. Likewise, there were results presentation meetings with beneficiaries, communities, and organizations about project results. Narrative and photographic records were achieved that document evidence of achievements reached and conditions under which interventions were developed. Mission agenda in Annex 1.

**d. Theory of Change Reconstruction**

46. The TOC was reconstructed based on results achieved by the project, considering the revised Project Document, making comparisons with the initial TOC.

**IV. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION**

47. The main challenge was that the systematization of project results was developed in parallel with the evaluation and other final reports, which delayed review and analysis, but without significantly affecting the evaluation.
48. The evaluation mission attempted to cover the greatest number of beneficiaries and implementation zones, as well as hold meetings with key personnel in the project office in Bogotá. Due to an unexpected flight change, a visit to beneficiaries in Guaviare had to be cancelled with only a few hours' notice, which was unfortunate but escaped the control of the project coordination team.
49. Likewise, attempts were made to have a meeting with the RT from the regional office in Panama, who provided advice to the project; unfortunately, the meeting could not be arranged during the evaluation period. Similarly, with the USAID Colombia team, since during this period USAID began its closure process.

**A. QUALITY AND ETHICS INDICATORS**

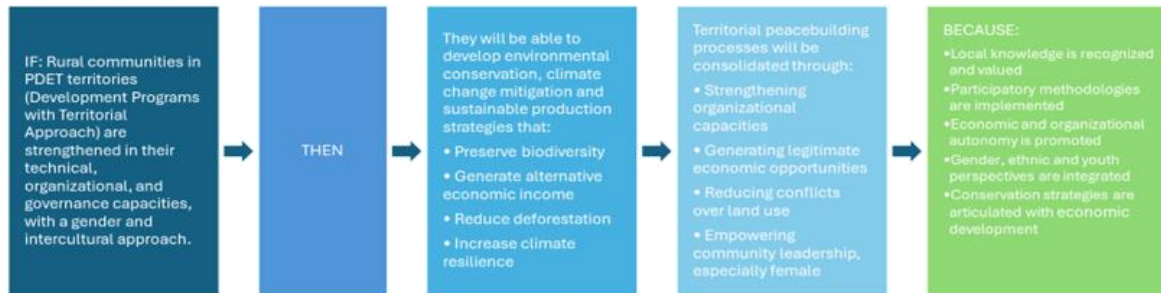
50. The evaluation was conducted in strict compliance with ethical standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). This includes guaranteeing confidentiality of collected data, informed participation of all involved actors, and respect for cultural traditions and values of beneficiary communities.

**B. RECONSTRUCTED THEORY OF CHANGE**

51. The underlying logic of the project design was evaluated, its validity regarding factors that determined changes in the project document, and the reconstruction of the TOC was based on results achieved from project adjustment.



Figure 2. Reconstructed Theory of Change



Source: own elaboration

## 52. Expected Impacts:

- Effective ecosystem conservation
- Sustainable income generation
- Social fabric strengthening
- Peacebuilding from territories

## V. FINDINGS

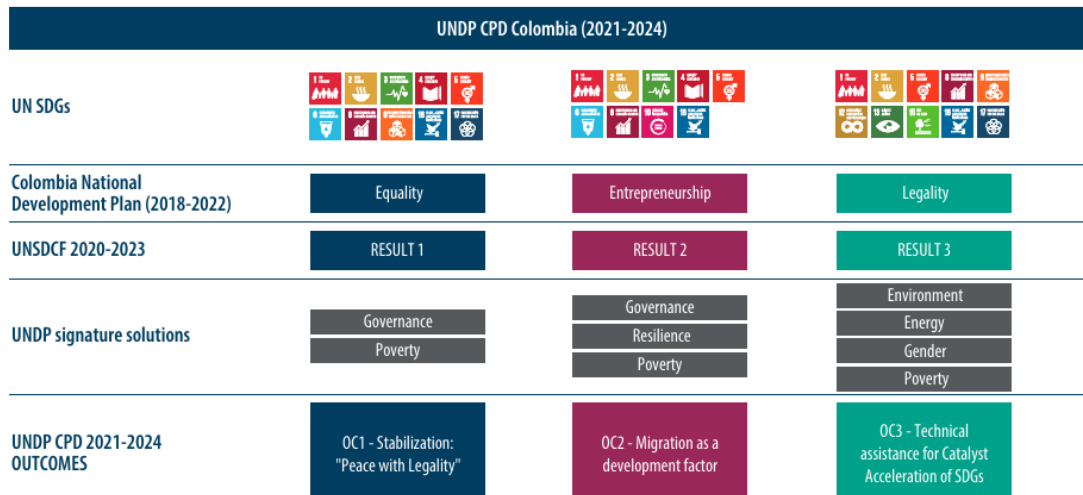
53. The following presents the findings describing the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and elements associated with the sustainability of project results.

### A. RELEVANCE FINDINGS

#### Finding R1. Solid strategic alignment with national institutional frameworks

54. The NaturalPaz project demonstrated high strategic relevance by effectively aligning with UNDP's Country Programme Document (CPD) 2021-2024 and Colombia's national priorities. This relevance materialized in three dimensions: territorial stabilization in PDET municipalities (responding to peace needs), acceleration of catalytic SDGs through nature-based solutions (addressing climate commitments), and application of transversal gender and environmental sustainability approaches (aligned with normative frameworks). The direct contribution to SDGs 10, 13, 15, 16, and 17 consolidates the project as a pertinent response to the needs for territorial and environmental peacebuilding in post-conflict territories.

Figure 3. Alignment with results and objectives of CPD 2021-2024.



Source: UNDP IEO

## Finding R2. Questionable relevance of REDD+ approach in specific PDET contexts

55. The initial design presented critical relevance problems by establishing unrealistic expectations about developing functional REDD+ initiatives in 12 months, when international experience indicates minimum timeframes of 2-3 years:
56. Required phases: 1-2 years for pre-feasibility studies and technical design, 6-12 months for validation under international standards, 3-6 months for registration and initial credit issuance, plus monitoring cycles extending several years.
57. Underestimated structural barriers: Legal uncertainty in land tenure (documented problem in PDET zones), insufficient community governance (later recognized as critical enabling condition), and incomplete regulatory framework (absence of binding safeguards, RENARE limitations).
58. Deficiencies in territorial diagnosis: Based on a preliminary USAID diagnosis, the project did not delve into real deforestation drivers per zone, pre-existing socio-environmental conflicts, or real capacity of community organizations to manage complex projects.
59. Limited but existing contingencies: Although the design included a general alternative action route for cases of REDD+ unfeasibility (redirection toward sustainable biodiversity use initiatives and value chains), this contingency lacked specificity regarding detailed decision criteria, precise threshold metrics, and specific risk mitigation strategies per territory.
60. This disconnection between design ambitions and territorial realities explains why the project only completed the pre-feasibility phase, requiring an adaptation that, although successful and facilitated by the general contingencies foreseen in the project document, had a predominantly reactive character due to the lack of specificity in activation and implementation mechanisms of said alternatives.

### Finding R3. Temporal misalignment with carbon market dynamics

61. The project's temporal relevance was adverse when implemented during a multifactorial carbon market crisis: loss of international credibility (The Guardian 2023 investigation on "phantom credits"), deficiencies in the Colombian system (RENARE inoperative September 2022-2023), tax reform reducing demand (50% non-causation of carbon tax), and prices below viability threshold (7 vs. 15 USD/tCO<sub>2</sub>e required). This unfavorable context, crystallized in Sentence T-248/2024 questioning operation under private law logics, confirms that the project's timing was not pertinent for implementing carbon market strategies, requiring reorientation toward more contextualized approaches.

#### LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE CARBON MARKET

Colombia had an insufficient regulatory framework:

- a) Law 1819 of 2016, modified by Law 2169 of 2021 (Climate Action Law), established the carbon tax and the non-causation mechanism through bonds
- b) Resolution 1447 of 2018 regulated the monitoring, reporting, and verification system
- c) The National Emissions Reduction Registry (RENARE), a crucial digital platform for public project tracking, was inoperative from September 2022 until the end of 2023 due to a lawsuit before the Council of State

This regulatory vacuum left the Colombian government "navigating blindly" regarding active projects and without the capacity to adequately supervise the market.

President Petro's government implemented a tax reform (2022) that reduced by 50% the possibility of non-causation of the carbon tax through bonds, which significantly decreased demand and prices in the domestic market, directly affecting the viability of projects under development, such as those of NaturalPaz.

In July 2024, the Constitutional Court issued the first tutela ruling (T-248) on REDD+ projects in indigenous territories, examining the conflict of the Baka Rokarire project in the Pirá Paraná community in the Colombian Amazon.

The ruling established that the market operated under private law logics when it should function under the framework of international human rights law. It identified systematic violations of fundamental rights of indigenous communities and pointed to shared responsibility between developing companies and the Colombian State for the lack of an "ethnic approach" in regulation. This ruling, although after NaturalPaz's main period, legally crystallized the structural problems that the project had already identified during its implementation.

**Finding P4. UNDP establishes high-integrity standards for REDD+ projects through jurisdictional approaches and socio-environmental safeguards misaligned with project approach.**

62. Through its High-Integrity Carbon Markets Initiative (2023), UNDP establishes that REDD+ projects must be implemented under jurisdictional or nested approaches to guarantee greater scale, permanence, and coherence with NDCs, aligning with the Paris Agreement and net-zero emission goals for 2050 UNDP Climate Promise. Simultaneously, it defines social and environmental integrity as an indispensable requirement, demanding respect for indigenous peoples' rights through Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), gender safeguards, equitable benefit distribution, and integral impact assessment that contributes to multiple Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>2</sup>
63. The NaturalPaz Project correctly incorporated both Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and safeguards in developing enabling conditions, applying them transversally in capacity building work and in developing technical information on deforestation and Pre-feasibility Studies on REDD+, thus establishing foundations for future interventions.

**INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE CARBON MARKET**

The voluntary carbon market was going through a credibility crisis. In January 2023, precisely when NaturalPaz was conducting its REDD+ pre-feasibility analyses, the British newspaper The Guardian published a devastating investigation into the voluntary carbon market. In collaboration with the German weekly Die Zeit and the organization Source Material, the media revealed that, according to their analyses:

- a. More than 90% of forest carbon credits certified by Verra (the world's largest certifier) would be "phantom credits" without real emission reductions. Projects would have systematically overestimated deforestation threats by approximately 400%. Only 8 of 29 examined REDD+ projects showed evidence of significant deforestation reductions.
- b. This investigation, based on satellite data analysis and academic studies from Cambridge University, pointed to fundamental methodological problems in estimating "baselines" (estimates of what would have occurred without the project), questioning the integrity of the entire certification system.
- c. Prominent companies like easyJet and Nestlé publicly abandoned their compensation plans through carbon credits, reorienting toward direct decarbonization of their operations. A drop in carbon credit demand was projected for 2023-2024, further deteriorating a market that already had insufficient prices for the viability of many projects.
- d. Companies that had used these credits (Shell, Disney, Gucci, among many others) were exposed to accusations of "greenwashing," increasing the perception of reputational risk associated with carbon credits.
- e. The sector attempted to respond to the crisis through defense and counter-responses. Verra published several communications questioning the methodology of studies cited by The Guardian, arguing that the "synthetic controls" used were inadequate for REDD+ projects and did not consider specific local factors. In November 2023, Verra presented a complete reform of its REDD+ system, consolidating five methodologies into a single framework and promising to use technologies like AI, drones, and remote sensors for more precise measurements. Standardization initiatives: The Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) promoted new guidelines to identify high-quality credits.

The transition from individual projects toward jurisdictional approaches covering entire regions was accelerated, with greater governmental participation.

<sup>2</sup> 1. UNDP's High-Integrity Carbon Markets Initiative | United Nations Development Programme.

## **B. COHERENCE FINDINGS**

### **Finding C1. Exceptional adaptive coherence in strategic reorientation.**

64. The project demonstrated outstanding adaptive coherence by maintaining the underlying logic of the design (linking conservation, economic development, and peacebuilding) through alternative instruments when the REDD+ strategy proved unfeasible. This coherence materialized in the fluid transition toward nature-based solutions, community organizational strengthening, and development of local initiatives that preserved the original objectives with more pertinent methods. The capacity to rearticulate components without losing conceptual coherence, evidence solidity in the project's theoretical foundations, confirming that problems resided in specific instruments, not in the general intervention logic.

### **Finding C2. Effective transversal coherence in gender and environmental peace approaches.**

65. The project maintained solid transversal coherence by systematically integrating gender, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding approaches in all interventions. This coherence is evidenced in: allocation of 30.2% of the budget (USD 906,579) to specific gender actions, incorporation of 55% female professionals in technical teams, and development of 14 Nature-based Solutions with a gender approach that articulated conservation, economic autonomy, and intergenerational transmission. The organic integration of 986 peace signatories in conservation activities and the consolidation of inclusive organizational structures confirm methodological coherence between territorial peace and environmental sustainability.

### **Finding C3. Institutional coherence through shared governance architecture.**

66. NaturalPaz established robust institutional coherence through a governance architecture that effectively articulated governmental actors, United Nations agencies, and international cooperation. The Steering Committee functioned as a strategic coherence mechanism from April 2022, while the consolidation of 46 strategic alliances with more than 30 institutional actors ensured alignment with public policies and long-term programs. The successful articulation with complementary initiatives (GEF-8 Jaguar Corridor: USD 8.3 million, GEF BioSur: USD 15.3 million) and joint work with SGP and Climate Promise, evidence programmatic coherence that transcends the project cycle and establishes institutional continuity.

## **C. EFFECTIVENESS FINDINGS**

### **Finding E1. Exceptional surpassing of quantitative management indicators**

67. The project demonstrated outstanding effectiveness by surpassing targets in 7 of 8 key indicators, with extraordinary results in "Nature-based Solutions with gender approach" (1,400% compliance), "Strategic alliances achieved" (153%), "Conservation initiatives" (152%), and "Perception of improvement in quality of life" (132%). The only indicator slightly below target was "Hectares improved with LMT" (94% = 3,274 of 3,475 hectares), explained by external factors (drought in Mesetas and displacement of ETCR Mariana Páez). This systematic surpassing of targets evidences adaptive effectiveness that compensated for REDD+ unfeasibility through more effective alternative strategies.

Figure 4. Degree of compliance with management indicators



Source: NaturalPaz Project Final Report

68. These quantitative data confirm what was observed in the qualitative analysis: despite not having achieved implementing formal REDD+ projects due to the structural barriers identified, the NaturalPaz project was highly successful in reorienting its efforts toward viable alternatives that generated concrete results in terms of conservation, territorial governance, and improvement in community quality of life.
69. The only indicator slightly below target (improved hectares) is explained by the adverse conditions documented in the municipality of Mesetas (Meta), where a prolonged drought, aggravated by the displacement of ETCR Mariana Páez, generated the departure of several project participants and the loss of plant material established in affected areas.
70. In general terms, administrative procedures have been efficient, although sometimes not appropriate for the realities and capacities of organizations operating at local and territorial scales.
71. Interviews evidenced installed capacity in administrative processes and procedures in the benefited organizations. However, some complaints from interviewed people highlighted that procedures sometimes extend and are not compatible with the territorial reality. An example of this is the request for electronic invoicing in areas of the country where there is not yet a formalized economy and a clear accounting system. Likewise, it was highlighted that administrative capacities achieved by participating in the project improve in many cases their possibility of accessing other resource sources. Similarly, they highlighted the accompaniment of the project's administrative staff, who provided training and follow-up at all times, which is reflected in the final execution achieved.

## **Finding E2. Integral territorial effectiveness with amplified coverage and family approach**

72. NaturalPaz achieved exceptional territorial effectiveness by directly benefiting 3,152 people distributed demographically in 1,281 women (40.6%), 1,421 men (45.1%), 227 girls (7.2%), and 223 boys (7.1%), surpassing original targets and successfully implementing an integral family approach that recognized the family unit as the nucleus of territorial transformation.

### **Strategic geographical coverage:**

73. Implementation reached 15 PDET municipalities distributed across 8 departments (Huila, Nariño, Tolima, Norte de Santander, Meta, Putumayo, Guaviare, and Caquetá), with strategic incorporation of new zones that compensated for necessary exclusions: the Jaguar Corridor in Guaviare replaced the Monochoa Indigenous Reserve (without community approval), while municipalities of Ricaurte and Barbacoas in Nariño replaced the Western Cordillera Community Council (exacerbated armed conflict and embargo for mining surface canon).

### **Distribution by components and populations:**

74. Component 1: 1,270 direct beneficiaries distributed in organizations such as ADISPA-ZRC La Perla Amazónica, AMCOP-ZRC del Pato Balsillas, Villa Catalina Indigenous Reserve, community tourism organizations of the Jaguar Corridor, and agrobiodiversity initiatives in Nariño.
75. Component 2: 1,882 direct beneficiaries mainly through FEMNCAFE, concentrating 986 peace signatories in productive transformation and conservation processes.
76. Indirect beneficiaries: More than 4,000 people, including 1,575 men and 675 women from FEMNCAFE, plus populations from municipalities in Putumayo, Guaviare, and Caquetá.



### Effectiveness in population diversity:

77. The project demonstrated effective differential effectiveness by integrating multiple population groups: 986 peace signatories (31.3% of total), Afro-descendant, indigenous, and peasant communities, with special emphasis on traditionally excluded populations such as female heads of household, victims of armed conflict, and rural youth without productive opportunities. The implementation of 38 conservation and sustainable biodiversity use initiatives surpassed quantitative and qualitative expectations, confirming effectiveness in applying inclusive approaches that are territorially pertinent and integrated ethnic, generational, and gender diversity.

Figure 5. Direct and Indirect Beneficiaries by Component

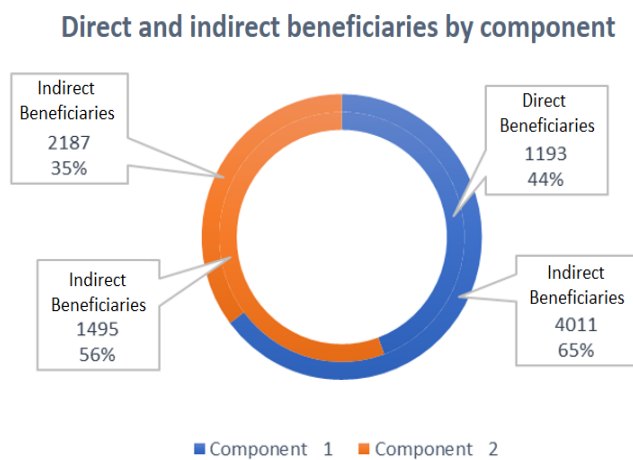
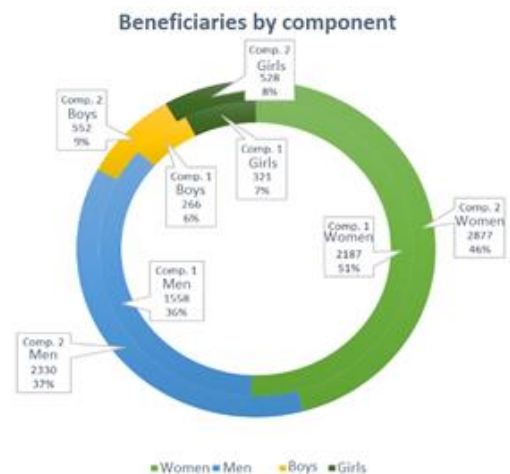


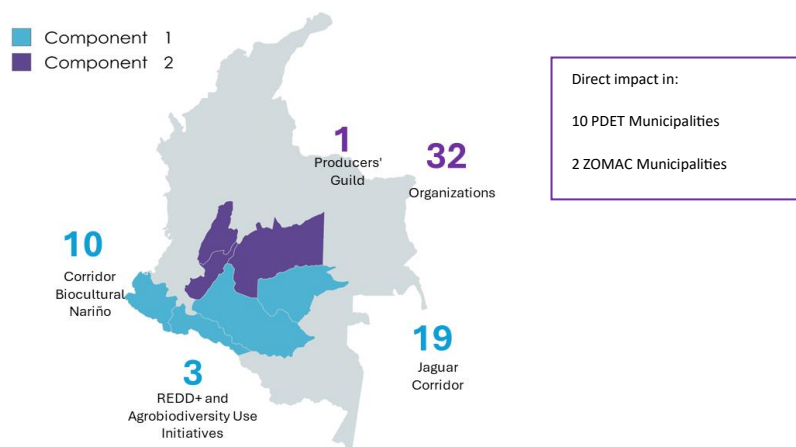
Figure 6. Beneficiaries by gender and generational group



Source: Own elaboration based on Project information.

Source: Own elaboration based on Project information.

Figure 7. Beneficiary organizations by implementation zones

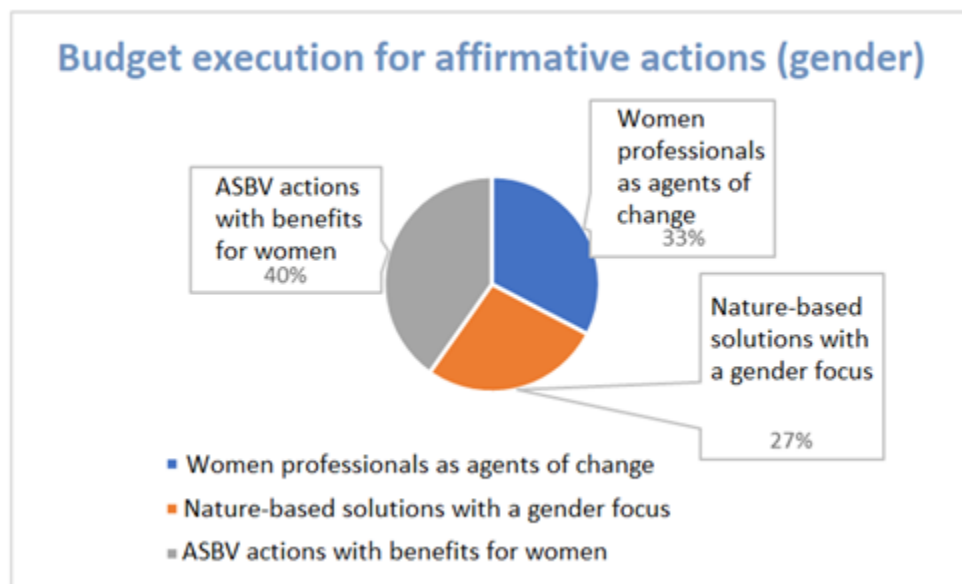


Source: NaturalPaz Project Final Report



78. The main beneficiaries in terms of transfers are distributed among peasant and indigenous groups (38.95%), who concentrate most of the transfers, reflecting the project's commitment to capacity strengthening and improving living conditions in these territories. Additionally, the project allocates funds to organizations dedicated to environmental conservation and sustainable tourism, as well as to Afro-descendant communities and peace agreement signatories. This resource distribution underlines a strategy to address the complexity of socio-environmental and reconciliation challenges in regions affected by conflict in Colombia.
79. Additionally, it is relevant to note that 30.2% of the total budget (equivalent to USD 906,579.00) was allocated to implementing actions strategically designed to address and overcome gender barriers, promoting equity and female empowerment. Specifically, the integration of female professionals as agents of change, the development of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) with a transversal gender approach, and the execution of LSVAs that generated direct benefits for women. This approach sought to promote participation, leadership, and empowerment of women at all levels of project interventions.

Figure 8. Budget execution in gender actions



Source: NaturalPaz Project Final Report

**Finding E3: The NaturalPaz project successfully demonstrated that peace signatories can be effective agents of environmental conservation and sustainable development when provided with appropriate technical support, organizational strengthening, and market linkages that align with their territorial realities and peacebuilding objectives.**

80. The project achieved significant measurable results with 986 peace signatories directly benefited across multiple territories. Through FEMNCAFE, 330 hectares of Landscape Management Tools (LMT) were implemented, generating impacts across 1,882 hectares of productive units in 4 PDET municipalities and 2 ZOMAC municipalities. The environmental impact was substantial, with 75,499 trees planted and an estimated potential capture of 39,178 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent over 20 years.
81. The project's most strategic achievement was the consolidation of FEMNCAFE's Environmental Technical Assistance Unit, ensuring long-term sustainability beyond project completion. The trainer-of-trainers methodology proved highly effective, with leaders from each associative figure becoming knowledge replicators within their organizations. This approach allowed organic dissemination of learning in environmental traceability, agroecology, farm governance, and bio-inputs. The three demonstrative farms established in Tolima, Cundinamarca, and Valle del Cauca now function as "living peasant schools," providing continuous platforms for climate adaptation innovation and horizontal knowledge exchange among peace signatories.
82. A fundamental element in the success of working with FEMNCAFE is that the project gave the organization freedom to develop the Environmental Sustainability Strategy internally, requesting support when necessary, recognizing their autonomy, a situation that was acknowledged by the organization in interviews.
83. The project successfully linked conservation activities with income generation, addressing a critical need for legitimate livelihood alternatives in post-conflict territories. Peace signatories accessed new income sources through sustainable tourism, beekeeping, nurseries, agro-industry, and bio-inputs, while improving the resilience of their productive systems to climate change. This economic diversification proved essential for territorial settlement and peace consolidation, evidencing that environmental initiatives can simultaneously strengthen social fabric, reduce conflicts over land use, and provide viable alternatives to illicit economies.

**Finding E4. Effectiveness in female empowerment and environmental leadership**

84. The project demonstrated outstanding gender effectiveness, achieving 47% direct female beneficiaries, 77.4% female participation in peasant initiatives, and consolidation of female leadership in 58% of community organizations. Women developed technical capacities in agroecology, nurseries, beekeeping, and product transformation, leading 14 Nature-based Solutions that integrated ancestral knowledge with technical innovation. *The incorporation of 12 female professionals (55% of the technical team) as territorial change agents established local referents and mentoring processes, confirming effectiveness in transforming traditional roles and female economic empowerment.*

**D. EFFICIENCY FINDINGS**

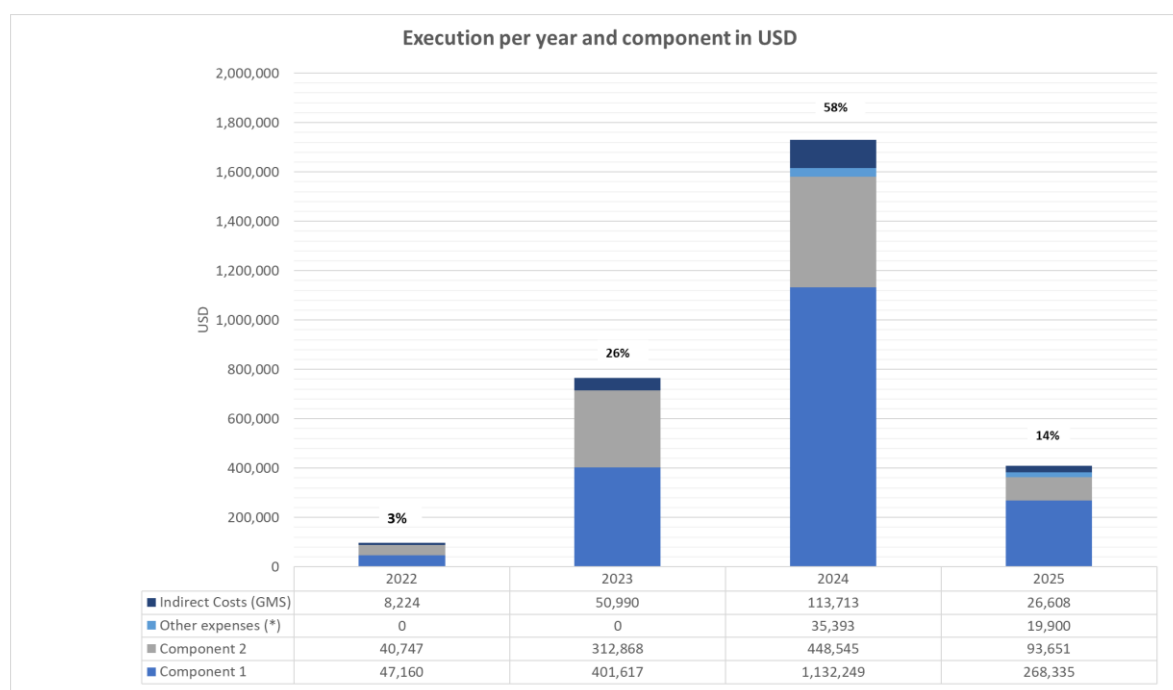
**Finding EF1. Exceptional financial efficiency with adaptive management**

85. The project demonstrated outstanding financial efficiency by executing 100% of the USD 3 million allocated in 36 effective months, with strategic optimization concentrating 58% of execution in 2024 following 2023 adjustments. Budget distribution (Component 1: 61%, Component 2: 31%) reflected efficient prioritization according to technical complexity. Initial challenges (difficulties forming

specialized teams, extension of selection processes) were overcome through adaptive management that maximized results without additional resources, evidencing efficiency in strategic reorientation and leveraging windows of opportunity.

86. The Project effectively began activities on July 22, 2022, with a planned implementation period of 24 months. Cumulative execution by 2023 was 29%; during this year, a no-cost time extension to 36 months was requested and approved, making corresponding changes to the project document. As a result, the project's administrative closure was January 31, 2025.
87. The project's annual execution is shown in Figure 9, where it is observed that 2024 was the period with the highest execution based on reviews and adaptations made to the project document in 2023, and likewise, there is 100% execution until closure.

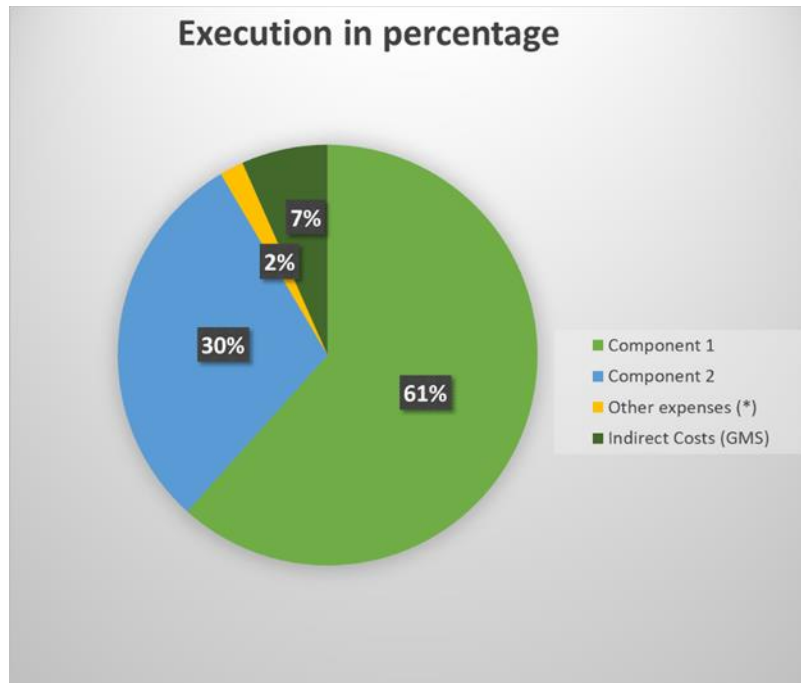
**Figure 9. Project Execution in USD**



Source: NaturalPaz Project ()<sup>\*3</sup>

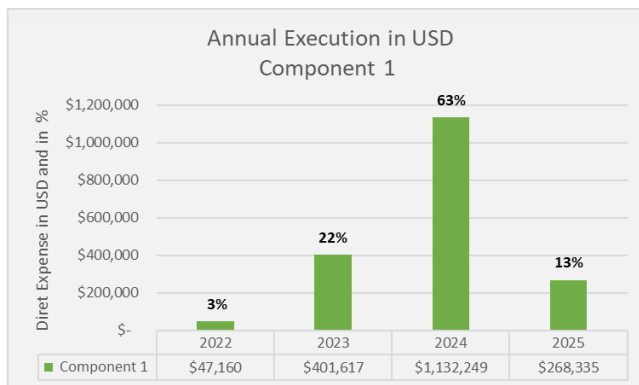
<sup>3</sup> (\*) Otros gastos -Servicios contractuales de Gestión del proyecto (Gastos de oficina, conectividad etc.), Evaluación del Proyecto, Consultoría externa.

Figure 10. Financial execution in % by Component and other expenses



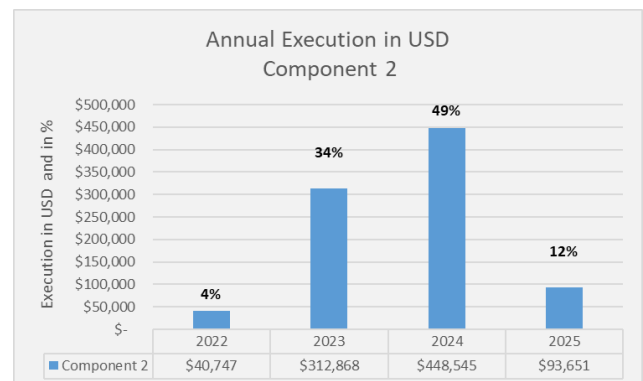
Source: Own elaboration based on NaturalPaz information

Figure 11. Annual execution in USD of Component 1.



Source: Own elaboration based on Project information.

Figure 12. Annual execution in USD of Component 2.



Source: Own elaboration based on Project information.

88. Annual execution by component shows that for Component 2 activities, execution concentration was lower in 2024 than in Component 1, since the weight of activities was not focused on REDD+ issues, and therefore could advance better in 2023 and onwards.

89. The main challenges of the project's first year included difficulties forming the team specifically in REDD+ thematic due to scarcity of experts who were already captured by the private sector, which generated delays in developing Terms of Reference for pre-feasibility studies. NGO selection extended

until 2023, while establishing agreements with communities, initiating training processes, and conducting prior studies also required considerable time, reflected in low 2022 execution.

**Finding EF2. Operational efficiency through leveraging UNDP's installed capacities.**

90. NaturalPaz evidenced exceptional operational efficiency by leveraging UNDP's pre-existing capacities to compensate for design deficiencies and achieve positive results. The project effectively utilized available tools (Climate Promise, Small Grants Programme) and knowledge from other ongoing initiatives to reorient strategies in record time. This systemic efficiency, hardly replicable by other implementing instances, allowed closing the project with positive results despite structural obstacles, confirming that efficiency resided not only in financial management but in institutional capacity for adaptive management.

**Finding EF3. Efficiency in impact maximization through strategic alliances.**

91. The project achieved amplifying efficiency by establishing 46 strategic alliances that multiplied the impact of invested resources. Articulation with GEF-8 Jaguar Corridor (USD 8.3 million) and GEF BioSur (USD 15.3 million) ensured financial continuity 2.7 times greater than the original budget, while project formulation for COP 9,036 million with FEMNCAFE evidence efficiency in resource leveraging. The consolidation of 32 community organizations with installed capacities (peasant promoters, monitoring systems) optimized the cost-benefit ratio by establishing lasting structures that transcend the project cycle.

**E. SUSTAINABILITY FINDINGS**

**Finding S1. Solid institutional sustainability with lasting installed capacities.**

92. The project established solid foundations for institutional sustainability through strengthening 32 community organizations that now have active peasant promoters, their own technical assistance units, and community monitoring systems. The consolidation of FEMNCAFE's Environmental Technical Assistance Unit, the three demonstrative farms functioning as "living peasant schools," and the trainer-of-trainers methodology ensure continuity of technical and organizational capacities. The strengthening of local structures capable of maintaining conservation actions independently of external interventions confirms robust institutional sustainability.

**Finding S2. Uncertain economic sustainability of developed alternative initiatives.**

93. The alternative economic initiatives implemented (nature tourism, agrobiodiversity, community utilization) present uncertain economic sustainability that requires rigorous validation. Although 63.2% of the 38 initiatives produced direct income and generated positive impacts in ecological restoration and social cohesion, critical uncertainties persist: absence of market studies confirming medium-term viability, exact figures of income vs. operational costs, analysis of dependency on external subsidies, and evaluation of self-sustainability capacity. This economic uncertainty represents the main risk for sustainability of achieved benefits.

**Finding S3. Sustainability is threatened by increased security risks.**

94. The project's success in female empowerment and environmental leadership generates incremental security risks that threaten sustainability in PDET territories. In Colombia, the crisis of environmental

defenders (8,000 at risk, 763 threats in 2023, 28 women murdered 2016-2024) materializes specifically in NaturalPaz with a peasant leader facing death threats and community leaders requiring approval from armed groups for project activities. This increase in vulnerabilities associated with environmental leadership represents a direct threat to the sustainability of initiated processes, evidencing that community empowerment in conflict contexts generates negative externalities that require specific attention.

## **F. TRANSVERSAL APPROACHES OF THE PROJECT**

### **a. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **Finding A1: Effective conservation through community governance and nature-based solutions.**

95. The NaturalPaz project consolidated an integrated environmental sustainability model that articulates ecosystem conservation, climate mitigation, ecological restoration, and strengthening of local capacities, generating significant and lasting environmental impacts through community governance and territorial appropriation.
96. The effective protection of 540,000 hectares of stable forest through 36 community grant agreements and deforestation reduction between 40% and 62% in critical zones demonstrated the effectiveness of conservation strategies based on local governance. This active conservation generates substantial climate impacts, avoiding the emission of approximately 9 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, equivalent to removing 1.9 million automobiles from circulation. The implementation of 330 hectares of Landscape Management Tools projects additional capture of 39,178 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 20 years, while REDD+ pre-feasibility analyses identified a mitigation potential exceeding 17 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 40 years, confirming the high climate value of intervened territories.
97. Ecological restoration of 480 hectares through planting 75,000 trees established functional biological corridors that improved ecosystem connectivity in fragmented landscapes. The 38 conservation and sustainable biodiversity use initiatives consolidated an integrated model that combines active restoration with sustainable utilization, diversifying landscapes with native species that offer habitat to pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects. The implementation of 14 Nature-based Solutions with gender approach integrated conservation of water sources, agroforestry systems, green filters, and biodigesters, strengthening climate resilience of productive systems while generating simultaneous environmental, social, and economic benefits.
98. Strengthening environmental capacities in 32 community organizations and more than 40 local leaders through the Training and Capacity Strengthening Plan (TCSP) installed lasting technical, organizational, and political competencies for sustainable territorial management. The consolidation of peasant promoters, community monitoring systems, and participatory governance schemes established local structures capable of maintaining and scaling conservation actions independently of external interventions. The three demonstrative farms functioning as "living peasant schools" and knowledge transmission through trainer-of-trainers methodologies ensured replicability and sustainability of implemented environmental practices, consolidating a technically solid and culturally appropriate community environmental management model.

### **b. PEACE CONSOLIDATION**

#### **Finding B1. Territorial peacebuilding through environmental sustainability.**

99. The NaturalPaz project demonstrated that the articulation between environmental conservation and peacebuilding generates synergistic results that simultaneously strengthen territorial stabilization,

social cohesion, and institutional sustainability. The project's integrated strategy consolidated a comprehensive environmental peace model that demonstrates the transformative potential of linking conservation with territorial peacebuilding.

100. Linking 986 peace signatories to sustainable economic alternatives based on conservation and bio-commerce generated effective processes of territorial rootedness and transition toward legality. 63.2% of the 38 implemented initiatives produced direct income, while strengthening technical and organizational capacities facilitated transformation from military roles toward productive and environmental functions. This economic transition, articulated with the protection of 540,000 hectares of forest through 36 community agreements, established material foundations for stabilization of populations in reintegration processes and prevention of return to illicit economies.
101. Strengthening 32 multi-ethnic community organizations and participation of 47% of women as direct beneficiaries consolidated inclusive and representative territorial governance structures. Joint workspaces in conservation, ecological restoration, and agro-tourism enterprises functioned as confidence-building mechanisms among peace signatories, host communities, and traditionally excluded groups. The consolidation of peasant promoters and horizontal knowledge networks strengthened local capacities for conflict mediation, territorial self-regulation, and consensual decision-making, reducing external dependencies and conflicts over access to natural resources.
102. Institutionalization of "environmental peace" approaches through 46 strategic alliances with more than 30 institutional actors ensured the incorporation of project methodologies and results in public policies and long-term cooperation programs. Articulation with initiatives like GEF-8 Jaguar Corridor (USD 8.3 million) and GEF BioSur (USD 15.3 million) guaranteed financial and institutional continuity, while intergenerational transmission of environmental and peace values through 190 girls and boys established cultural foundations for process sustainability. This integrated model demonstrated that environmental conservation, when adequately articulated with peacebuilding processes, generates more lasting and transformative results than isolated sectoral interventions.

### **c. GENDER EQUITY**

#### **Finding C1: Effective participation and transformative leadership of women in territorial processes.**

103. The project implemented an integral affirmative action model that allocated USD 906,579 to specific gender initiatives, achieving 47% direct female beneficiaries and 58% of community organizations consolidating female leadership. The strategy surpassed quota approaches through structural actions that included flexible schedules, collective care spaces, environmental leadership schools, and differentiated technical training in agroecology, nurseries, beekeeping, and product transformation.
104. The incorporation of 12 female professionals (55% of technical team) as territorial change agents challenged traditional stereotypes and established local referents of technical leadership. These professionals received specialized training in security (WSAT) and behavioral sciences while developing mentoring processes with community women. Female leadership in 14 Nature-based Solutions integrated ancestral knowledge with technical innovation, consolidating organizational models that articulate environmental conservation, economic autonomy, and intergenerational knowledge transmission through the participation of 190 girls and boys in pedagogical activities.

## **Finding C2: Economic empowerment and institutional sustainability of women-led processes.**

105. Women achieved 77.4% participation in peasant initiatives and developed technical and commercial capacities that allowed them to lead ecological restoration processes, nature tourism, food sovereignty, sustainable biodiversity utilization, and agro-industrial enterprises. 63.2% of conservation initiatives generated direct income, with special emphasis on activities like school nurseries, transformation plants, eco-tourism routes, and products with environmental and cultural value led by organizations such as FEMNCAFÉ, AMUREF, ASMINAWA, ASOFAS, and ASOMUTAM.

106. Institutional sustainability of gender processes was consolidated through strengthening internal organizational structures and self-management capacities that allowed women to actively participate in green markets, territorial governance schemes like the Jaguar Corridor, and community restoration systems in Nariño, Valle del Cauca, and Amazonia. However, challenges persist in intersectional inclusion, particularly in low participation of Afro-descendant women (1.5%) and the need to achieve parity at all leadership levels, evidencing improvement opportunities for future intervention cycles that deepen approaches.

### **d. LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND (LNOB)**

107. NaturalPaz applied the LNOB principle by prioritizing PDET territories and populations with multiple vulnerabilities: 986 peace signatories, 32 community organizations (peasant, indigenous, and Afro-descendant), and rural women in situations of historical exclusion. The project identified specific intersectionalities such as female peace signatories, ethnic communities in conflict territories, and rural youth without productive opportunities, developing differentiated strategies for each group.

108. Beneficiary selection applied explicit inclusion criteria that prioritized: female heads of household, victims of armed conflict, communities without access to titled land, indigenous peoples at risk of displacement, and historically marginalized Afro-descendant populations. 47% female participation as direct beneficiaries and 58% of organizations with female leadership evidenced effective application of differentiated inclusion approaches.

### **G. GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

109. The project showed its capacity for adaptive implementation; the UNDP team effectively used available tools and connections with other initiatives such as Climate Promise and the Small Grants Programme to achieve results and expand impact, in addition to knowledge gained from other ongoing projects to redirect the project and achieve results in a short period of time with the same resource allocation. It is difficult for another implementing instance other than UNDP to have these installed capacities to face the challenges experienced and manage to close the project with positive results.

110. Institutionalization and scaling as a sustainability strategy: the project built a sustainability architecture based on three pillars: installed local capacities, institutionalization of results, and articulation with long-term programs. Thirty-two community organizations were strengthened that now have active peasant promoters, their own technical assistance units, and community monitoring systems. Strategic articulation ensured continuity: the Jaguar Corridor was connected with the GEF-8 Jaguar Corridor project (USD 8.3 million for 2026-2031), and GEF BioSur (USD 15.3 million), and FEMNCAFÉ formulated projects for COP 9,036 million. Additionally, 46 strategic alliances were



established with more than 30 institutional actors, creating a support network that transcends the project cycle and projects long-term transformative impacts in PDET territories.

111. REDD+ initiatives are complex mechanisms that require basic conditions for their viability; they can be sources of medium and long-term income, but require an expert team to trace paths of change that allow these initiatives to be successfully implemented in PDET territories. The NaturalPaz project has taken the first steps in this direction that will contribute to future interventions, achieving the objective of generating income from the REDD+ mechanism.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **A. CONCLUSIONS.**

#### **C1. Exceptional adaptive capacity compensated for critical deficiencies in the initial design.**

112. The NaturalPaz project demonstrates an instructive paradox: while the initial design presented fundamental deficiencies by overestimating the viability of REDD+ projects in complex PDET territories and underestimating known structural barriers, the exceptional adaptive capacity of the implementing team allowed successful reorientation of the intervention toward more pertinent and feasible strategies, achieving transformative impacts through community conservation, organizational strengthening, and territorial peacebuilding.

#### **C2. Proven effectiveness of alternative conservation strategies with social justice.**

113. The experience confirms that effective environmental conservation and sustainable income generation do not depend exclusively on sophisticated market mechanisms but can be successfully materialized through initiatives rooted in local identities and capacities, such as community portfolios of environmental services, nature tourism, sustainable agrobiodiversity utilization, and community conservation agreements.
114. Territorial governance actions implemented by NaturalPaz generated significant climate impacts, reducing deforestation between 40% and 62% in critical zones, which avoided the emission of approximately 9 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. The implementation of 330 hectares of Landscape Management Tools projects captured 39,178 additional tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 20 years, while REDD+ pre-feasibility studies identified a mitigation potential exceeding 17 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 40 years, confirming that effective community management can generate substantial climate impacts in PDET territories without depending exclusively on sophisticated carbon markets.

#### **C3. Exceptional results evidence transformative potential despite structural limitations.**

115. Despite not implementing REDD+ projects nor generating income from the sale of certified CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions, NaturalPaz achieved exceptional results by surpassing targets in 7 of 8 key indicators, directly benefiting more than 3,100 people, strengthening 32 community organizations, and protecting 540,000 hectares of forest, demonstrating that transformative impact was achieved through replicable models, installed capacities, and methodological innovations to integrate conservation, sustainable production, and peacebuilding.

#### **C4. The systemic crisis of the carbon market contributed to the result of REDD+ initiatives in the project.**

116. Between 2022 and 2024, the carbon market in Colombia faced a multifactorial crisis that included regulatory deficiencies (RENARE inoperative), tax reform that reduced demand, prices below the profitability threshold (7 vs. 15 USD/tCO<sub>2</sub>e required), and loss of international credibility due to

questioning of forest credit integrity, evidencing the need for systemic reforms before REDD+ mechanisms can be viable in post-conflict territories.

**C5. Conditional sustainability requires attention to economic uncertainties and security risks.**

117. The project's success in female empowerment and environmental leadership generates indirect incremental security risks for environmental defenders, while the alternative economic initiatives developed, although promising, require validation of medium-term economic sustainability through market studies and financial viability analyses that determine their self-sustainability capacity.

**B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1. Develop a high-integrity jurisdictional REDD+ strategy with a long-term approach.**

**Government of Colombia (Ministry of Environment):**

118. **R1A.** The Government should consider developing an institutional framework that allows transition from REDD+ project schemes towards jurisdictional approaches in PDET territories, reforming RENARE to allow aggregation of multiple territories under a single initiative, implementing binding safeguards, and establishing a seed fund to co-finance jurisdictional development costs. This strategy should include viability studies, regional REDD+ technical assistance centers, and legal mechanisms that guarantee equitable benefit distribution among territorial actors, including peace signatories.

**UNDP:**

119. **R1B.** It is recommended that UNDP Colombia lead a structured process of systematization and knowledge transfer of the NaturalPaz project within Colombia and toward UNDP regional and global offices specialized in forests and climate, with the objective of identifying and developing high-integrity REDD+ schemes appropriate for PDET territories that overcome the limitations of individual project approaches evidenced in the evaluation.

120. This process should include: (a) exhaustive documentation of lessons learned, identified structural barriers, and successful environmental peacebuilding methodologies developed in NaturalPaz; **and if resources are available** (b) technical exchange with successful international experiences of jurisdictional schemes (Acre-Brazil, San Martín-Peru), nested project packages, and other innovative approaches implemented by UNDP globally; (c) comparative analysis of regulatory frameworks, financial instruments, and governance models that have demonstrated effectiveness in similar post-conflict contexts; and (d) development of a technical proposal that identifies the most adequate REDD+ scheme for Colombia, considering installed institutional capacities, specific territorial conditions of PDETs, and UNDP's high social and environmental integrity standards. This collaboration should result in specific recommendations for the Government of Colombia on the design and implementation of REDD+ schemes that generate verifiable, permanent, and additional reductions, while effectively contributing to territorial peacebuilding and sustainable development in territories historically affected by conflict.

**Donors:**

**121. R1C. It is recommended that donors consider supporting both the Colombian Government and UNDP in a joint process of identifying the most appropriate REDD+ scheme for PDET territories, leveraging the valuable lessons learned from the NaturalPaz project.**

122. The NaturalPaz experience demonstrated that, although individual REDD+ project schemes faced structural barriers, the project achieved exceptional results in conservation (540,000 hectares protected), peacebuilding (986 peace signatories benefited), and institutional strengthening (32 consolidated community organizations), evidencing that there are solid territorial capacities that can be channeled toward more effective REDD+ schemes. Financing this joint identification and design process would allow capitalizing on NaturalPaz's technical, methodological, and institutional lessons learned to develop a REDD+ model adapted to the specific realities of post-conflict territories, considering alternatives such as jurisdictional approaches, nested project packages, or hybrid schemes that combine successful project elements with high-integrity standards, thus maximizing possibilities for success in future implementation of sustainable and transformative REDD+ initiatives in Colombia.

**Donors, UNDP, Government of Colombia:**

**R2. Establish robust protocols for climate financing projects.**

123. For future projects that incorporate climate financing mechanisms, adopt a mandatory phased approach that includes: (a) independent pre-feasibility studies with minimum duration of 6 months before final design, (b) realistic timelines of 36-48 months for REDD+ projects with quarterly decision milestones, (c) budgets that reflect real costs (30% minimum for technical studies and community participation), (d) strict eligibility criteria prioritizing communities with solid governance and clear tenure.

**R3. Implement a comprehensive protection protocol for environmental defenders and the technical team.**

**Government of Colombia:**

124. Strengthen implementation of structural security measures in compliance with its obligations derived from the Escazú Agreement and national human rights norms, including strengthening protection systems (e.g., agreements with the National Protection Unit, early warning systems, investigation and sanction of aggressions, in PDET territories and focused on environmental community leaders and project technical teams.

**UNDP:**

125. Design comprehensive protection protocols adapted to context, that prioritize participatory risk analysis and territorial dynamics to avoid unintended impacts and strengthen community trust; and, that are built participatorily with communities, local authorities, and human rights organizations, incorporating their knowledge and culturally pertinent security approaches.

- 126. Prioritize preventive and non-reactive approach. Prioritize prevention measures, strengthening local capacities and reducing exposure to risks, instead of focusing exclusively on relocation or emergency responses, which are also not within project scope.
- 127. Applicability in peace and environment projects. Apply this recommendation especially in projects with peace and environment focus that identify substantial or high risks for environmental leadership, ensuring that action implementation does not reinforce conflictive dynamics nor increase vulnerability of participating communities.
- 128. Incorporate gender approach: Ensure that protection actions contemplate the differentiated needs of women environmental defenders, promoting their safe and equitable leadership in community processes.
- 129. In this way, it will be guaranteed that protection is sustainable, culturally appropriate, respectful of local dynamics, and coherent with international frameworks of human rights and security.

**Donors:**

- 130. Enable flexible spending lines that allow financing protection actions in coordination with the Government and UN agencies, ensuring their effective implementation and adjustment to local realities.
- 131. This will guarantee adequate conditions for women's participation, allowing them to develop their leadership without restrictions derived from territorial risks and the creation of safe and equitable spaces, promoting greater inclusion and effectiveness in technical assistance and community development processes.

**R4. Scale and consolidate successful models with climate risk management.**

**Government of Colombia: ARN, ART.**

**UNDP:**

- 132. Replicate FEMNCAFE's Environmental Technical Assistance Unit model in other ex-combatant organizations; Consolidate the three demonstrative farms as permanent reference centers with guaranteed operational budget; Develop specific climate risk management protocols, including parametric insurance for extreme events and contingency plans for forced displacements. This should be considered in new support projects for FEMNCAFE and other similar organizations.

**R5. Validate the economic sustainability of alternative initiatives.**

- 133. For future initiatives with support of less than 18 months, incorporate conducting independent market studies of a sample of implemented conservation initiatives, with emphasis on: (a) 5-year financial viability analysis, (b) identification of sustainable value chains, (c) estimation of real income generated vs. operational costs, (d) evaluation of dependency on external subsidies, and (e) specific recommendations for each initiative on scaling, consolidation, or transition toward other models.

**R6. Institutionalize the peace-environment agenda with permanent architecture.**

**Government of Colombia (MADS, ART, ARN):**

- 134. It is recommended to consider and explore: (a) incorporate environmental criteria in all reintegration programs, (b) develop public policy instruments that recognize peace signatories as conservation

agents, (c) create specific financing lines for environmental peace initiatives, and (d) systematize and scale proven methodologies of territorial peacebuilding based on conservation.

**UNDP:**

135. Strengthen synergy between peace and sustainable development areas considering and exploring: (a) incorporate environmental criteria in all reintegration programs (b) develop public policy instruments that recognize peace signatories as conservation agents, (c) create specific financing lines for environmental peace initiatives, and (d) systematize and scale proven methodologies of territorial peacebuilding based on conservation.

**VII. Annexes (See Annexes in attached doc)**

**A. Annex 1:**

- Biocarbon Methodology
- Contribution to SDGs
- Mission Agenda
- List of Consulted Documents

**B. Annex 2:** List of interviewees

**C. Annex 3:** Terms of Reference