WWF

THE NEXT LEVEL GRANT FACILITY

DIRECT FINANCE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

VCA
VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION

Integrated evidence and future directions from experiences in Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Paraguay, and Tunisia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF) was established under the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme to pilot a more accessible, locally led model of climate finance. Implemented between 2023 and 2025 across multiple countries, the facility aimed to reach grassroots organizations, Indigenous groups, youth, women, and other historically underrepresented actors who are often excluded from traditional funding systems.

Across all country contexts, the NLGF demonstrated that small, flexible grants can deliver meaningful results. The mechanism supported a wide range of actions, including ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, disaster response, livelihood development, and advocacy. Despite modest funding levels, the granted initiatives generated tangible environmental and social outcomes while strengthening community leadership. Nonetheless, challenges remained, particularly around reporting burdens, data aggregation, and balancing speed with compliance. And yet, these challenges are now critical lessons and recommendations for WWF and any large environmental organization seeking genuine commitment toward localization.

As such, the NLGF is a proof of possibility and a call for further transformation.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIHR – Arab Institute for Human Rights

CFN – Climate Finance Network

CODEHUPY – Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction

EIB – European Investment Bank

GCF – Green Climate Fund

IP & LCs – Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

KEF – Komite Eksekutif Flobamoratas

KOPI – Coalition of youth groups (Flobamoratas network)

LLA – Locally Led Adaptation

MEL – Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MoFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NDC – Nationally Determined Contribution

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

NLGF – Next Level Grant Facility

NTT – Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara)

PBFCC – Plataforma Boliviana frente al Cambio Climático

REDD+ – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

RT – Regional Team

SFC – Sustainable Finance Committee

SHS – Stories of Hope and Struggle

SPEAK – Indonesian youth organization

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

VCA – Voices for Just Climate Action

WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature

WWF-NA – World Wide Fund for Nature North Africa

WWF-NL – World Wide Fund for Nature Netherlands

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Over the past decade, **localisation** has emerged as one of the most significant trends across the development, humanitarian, climate, and conservation sectors. While initially framed as a question of financing, localisation is increasingly understood as a broader effort to shift power, decision-making authority, accountability, and agency towards the actors closest to the challenges and opportunities on the ground. As such, localisation is closely linked to discussions on locally led development, decolonisation, rights-based approaches and, within the conservation sector, ***inclusive conservation***[1].

Rather than focusing solely on who receives funding, the localisation agenda questions who defines priorities, who decides how resources are allocated, whose knowledge informs interventions, and who holds influence over outcomes. According to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) localisation seeks to shift resources, agency and decision-making closer to local actors, thereby addressing power imbalances embedded within international development and conservation systems (Baguios et al., 2021). Increasingly, governments, donors, foundations, and civil society organisations are recognising that achieving sustainable development, climate resilience, and biodiversity goals require stronger local leadership and ownership.

Despite growing international commitments, progress remains limited. Recent research by Publish What You Fund highlights a persistent gap between rhetoric and implementation. In its 2025 report, the organisation found that only 5.5% of project-type funding from five major donors (Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and, at the time still active, USAID) was channelled directly to local organisations, representing only US$287 million out of US$5.2 billion analysed. These findings suggest that while localisation has become a mainstream aspiration, funding systems remain largely designed to not reach the most local appropriate levels (Lewis, 2025).

The challenge is particularly significant in the context of climate and conservation finance. Countries across the Global South, which are often least responsible for global greenhouse gas emissions but disproportionately affected by climate change and biodiversity loss, continue to face substantial financing gaps. At the same time, local actors, including Indigenous Peoples, community-based organisations, grassroots movements, youth groups, and women's organisations, frequently struggle to access funding despite being at the forefront of climate adaptation, ecosystem stewardship, and social transformation efforts. For example, between 2011 and 2020, approximately US$270 million per year in international donor funding supported forest management and land tenure. And yet, only 17% of this funding went to projects that explicitly named an Indigenous Peoples' or local community organisation in their implementation, suggesting that the proportion of funding directly controlled by rights-holder organisations was substantially lower (Rights and Resources Initiative & Rainforest Foundation Norway, 2022). As a result, growing attention is being given not only to increasing overall finance flows, but also to ensuring that funding becomes more accessible, flexible, and responsive to locally defined priorities and solutions.

1 See WWF's website: https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our_focus/governance/inclusive_conservation/

It was within this broader global context that the **Next Level Grant Facility (NLGF)** was established. The NLGF was designed as an experimental financing mechanism to test whether climate action funding could be made more accessible to historically underrepresented and marginalised groups by reducing bureaucratic barriers, simplifying grant processes, and creating pathways for direct access to resources. In doing so, it sought to strengthen local agency and support locally led initiatives that may otherwise struggle to secure funding through conventional donor mechanisms.

The NLGF was implemented under the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) programme, a strategic partnership funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Power of Voices grant instrument. This grant framework aimed to strengthen civil society organisations so they could effectively engage in advocacy, influence policy processes, and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable societies. The VCA programme operated from January 2021 to December 2025 through a consortium of six organisations led by WWF-Netherlands, in partnership with Hivos, Slum Dwellers International, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Fundación Avina, and SouthSouthNorth. This alliance consortium received a total budget of €55 million to support citizen-led climate action and advocacy across multiple countries.

Within the overall VCA budget, €3.5 million was allocated to the NLGF. Between 2023 and 2025, the facility operated in seven countries across the Global South: Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Tunisia, Kenya, Zambia, and Indonesia. While the facility shared a common objective of increasing accessibility and local ownership of funding, its design was intentionally adapted to each national context, resulting in different implementation models while maintaining common principles of inclusivity, flexibility, and locally driven decision-making. As international actors continue to explore how resources, influence, and decision-making can move closer to communities and rights-holders, the NLGF offers valuable lessons on the opportunities, challenges, and implications of operationalising localisation in practice.

The evidence in this report is drawn from two complementary studies commissioned by WWF-Netherlands in 2025. These studies employed a qualitative, case-based approach to analyze the NLGF and develop strategic recommendations for any future mechanism in which WWF may be involved in co-creating or funding. Rather than attempting a comprehensive evaluation across all seven VCA countries, the methodology prioritized in-depth case study analysis of 5 of these countries:



Bolivia



Paraguay



Brazil



Tunisia



Indonesia



The insights from these country-level experiences, as well as relevant academic and gray literature, are used in this report to identify actionable ways forward. Through these case studies, the report aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on localisation and direct financing in advancing equitable climate action and biodiversity protection.

Limitations

This report should be read as a learning and reflection document rather than a formal evaluation. A dedicated evaluation of the NLGF was originally expected to provide a consolidated evidence base for this analysis but was not available at the time of writing. The report therefore draws on project documentation, interviews, and monitoring materials that varied in completeness and depth across countries, with some information unavailable or untranslated. These differences limited the consistency and depth of cross-country comparison.

The analysis is also shaped by the timing of the review. Several NLGF activities and grant cycles were still underway, while interviews with grantees had not yet been completed and could not be incorporated. The report consequently reflects primarily the perspectives of fund managers, WWF teams, and VCA alliance partners and cannot provide a comprehensive account of grantee experiences. Data on beneficiary profiles, intermediary organizations, funding, and results were also more complete in some countries than others.

Accordingly, the report focuses on the design, governance, and implementation experience of the NLGF and the lessons these offer for future localized funding mechanisms. It does not constitute an impact evaluation or assess the long-term environmental or governance effects of supported initiatives. The cross-country findings and recommendations should therefore be understood as strategic reflections based on the evidence available at the time of the review, rather than as definitive conclusions about the full NLGF portfolio.

2. THE NLGF MODEL: DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

2.1 Rationale and Theory of Change

The NLGF was established as a dedicated funding mechanism to address a persistent challenge within climate and conservation finance: the limited accessibility of funding for grassroots actors, community-based organizations, informal groups, and other rights-holder institutions.

While many climate and conservation initiatives recognize the importance of locally led action, conventional funding mechanisms often struggle to reach actors operating closest to environmental and social challenges. Complex proposal requirements, high administrative burdens, rigid compliance systems, and intermediary-heavy funding structures can create barriers for smaller organizations and emerging community initiatives. As a result, many locally led solutions remain underfunded despite their relevance, innovation and potential impact.

As such, the NLGF was designed as an experiment to test whether a simplified, more accessible grant-making model could enable historically underrepresented groups to access resources, strengthen local agency, and contribute to locally led climate action. Rather than assuming that solutions should be designed externally and implemented locally, the facility sought to create space for communities and grassroots organizations to identify and lead initiatives based on their own priorities and lived realities. Importantly, this initiative also intended to challenge WWF – as the world's largest nature conservation organization – with regards to its role as a potential enabler of localisaton efforts.

The NLGF was built around the following assumption:

> **If climate and conservation funding becomes more accessible, flexible, and responsive to local realities, then grassroots actors, rights-holders, and community organizations will be better positioned to lead locally relevant solutions and influence decision-making processes affecting their lives and territories.**

The facility therefore combined **three core objectives:**

i. Increase access to funding for organizations that often face barriers to conventional donor finance.

ii. Strengthen local agency and leadership by supporting community-led priorities and decision-making.

iii. Generate learning on alternative funding approaches that could inform future localization efforts within climate and conservation finance.

2.2 Funding Architecture

The NLGF operated within the broader VCA programme and relied on its financial, operational, and governance infrastructure.

The VCA consortium allocated approximately €3.5 million to the NLGF, of which €3,238,485 was ultimately awarded through small grants across participating countries.

The mechanism was implemented between 2023 and 2025 in: Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Tunisia, Indonesia, Kenya, and Zambia

Implementation responsibilities were shared between WWF country offices and local partners, with governance structures adapted to national contexts.

Financial flows NLGF

TOTAL VALUE OF SIGNED SUB-GRANTS:
€3,238,485

	Country	Total value of signed sub-grants	Distribution of funds
	Indonesia	€505,593	Grants to beneficiaries: **€372,206** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€133,387**
	Kenya	€877,303	Grants to beneficiaries: **€544,909** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€158,423**
	Zambia	€499,775	Grants to beneficiaries: **€332,634** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€161,125**
	Bolivia	€309,498	Grants to beneficiaries: **€285,890** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€20,452**
	Brazil	€513,929	Grants to beneficiaries: **€360,510** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€90,127**
	Paraguay	€316,098	Grants to beneficiaries: **€257,272** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€57,837**
	Tunisia	€207,133	Grants to beneficiaries: **€151,849** / Indirect costs fund manager: **€55,284**

Figure 1 – Financial flows of the NLGF to each country

2.3 Common Design Principles

Although implementation varied across countries, all NLGF models were built around a shared set of principles.

Accessibility
The facility sought to reduce barriers commonly associated with donor funding. This included simplified application processes, reduced administrative requirements, and outreach efforts aimed at reaching organizations that may not normally participate in conventional funding opportunities.

Inclusion
A central objective was to intentionally reach groups that are frequently underrepresented within climate and conservation funding ecosystems. These included Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women-led organizations, youth groups, informal movements, and other grassroots actors.

Local Ownership
Funding priorities and project concepts were generated locally rather than predefined externally. Applicants were encouraged to identify solutions grounded in local realities, priorities, and knowledge systems.

Flexibility
Countries adapted the design of the facility to reflect their own contexts, needs and stakeholder ecosystems. This enabled varying approaches while maintaining shared localization objectives.

Accompaniment and capacity support
The NLGF recognised that access to funding alone is insufficient. In many contexts, grantees received mentorship, technical assistance, administrative support, or accompaniment throughout implementation.

Learning and experimentation
The facility functioned as a pilot mechanism. Beyond achieving project outputs, a key objective was to generate evidence on how direct and locally accessible financing mechanisms can operate in practice.



2.4 Funding Windows

The exact architecture of funding windows varied between countries. However, most NLGF models combined one or more of the following approaches.

Emergency and Rapid Response Funding: Designed to provide urgent support for unforeseen events, emerging opportunities, or immediate community needs.

Characteristics:

- Fast approval processes
- Limited bureaucracy
- Small grant sizes
- Short implementation periods

Catalytic and Opportunity Grants: Designed to support new ideas, community innovations, and locally driven initiatives capable of generating broader social or environmental impact.

Characteristics:

- Flexible implementation
- Innovation-focused
- Community-defined priorities
- Potential for scaling


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2.5 Governance Models

One of the most innovative aspects of the NLGF was the diversity of governance arrangements adopted across participating countries. Rather than applying a single model, country teams adapted governance structures to local realities, institutional capacities, and stakeholder ecosystems. Across countries, governance structures typically involved some combination of WWF country offices, local fund managers, advisory committees, independent reviewers, and community representatives.

This flexibility enabled countries to experiment with different ways of balancing accountability, efficiency, inclusion, and local participation.

Key governance functions included:

(a) **Outreach and mobilisation:** Ensuring information about funding opportunities reached diverse grassroots actors and communities.

(b) **Proposal assessment:** Reviewing proposals against locally agreed criteria while attempting to maintain accessibility and fairness.

(c) **Funding decisions:** Determining which projects received support.

(d) **Financial oversight:** Ensuring responsible grant management and compliance with the broader programme requirements.

(e) **Accompaniment and support:** Providing technical guidance and problem-solving support during implementation.

3. COUNTRY CASE STUDIES



3.1 INDONESIA

3.1.1 Country profile

As the world's largest archipelagic country, Indonesia faces multiple interconnected climate and environmental challenges, including sea-level rise, flooding, droughts, landslides, and ecosystem degradation. These challenges are particularly acute for coastal communities, Indigenous Peoples, and rural populations whose livelihoods depend directly on natural resources. At the same time, Indonesia hosts a vibrant landscape of grassroots organisations, youth movements, and community-led initiatives that often struggle to access formal climate finance. The NLGF aimed to support these actors by creating a more accessible funding pathway that recognised diverse local realities and enabled communities to design and implement their own climate resilience strategies.

Geographic scope:

The NLGF in Indonesia spanned 15 provinces across the archipelago, reaching 87 communities in diverse ecological contexts including Nusa Tenggara Timur, Papua, Java, and Sumatra, and covering nearly half of the country's regions.

Implementation timeline:

The Indonesian mechanism was implemented through three funding phases, between 2024 and 2025. The first one was focused on small, rapid-response with a 72-hour turnaround for disbursement, whose projects varied between one to three months in length. The second one supported projects that would last three to six months, while the third and final funding phase occurred during 2025 to make use of a reserved small budget for potential emergency responses.

3.1.2 How funding worked

Objectives and Funding Windows:

The main objective of the NLGF in Indonesia was to expand access to flexible, locally grounded climate finance by enabling grassroots, youth, and Indigenous actors to design and implement locally led adaptation, ecosystem restoration, and livelihood resilience initiatives, while testing rapid-response and catalytic funding approaches.

To achieve this, Indonesia implemented 3 funding phases:

The first phase (mid-2024) launched three small, rapid-response projects to test how quickly the fund could channel support during local emergencies such as floods or eruptions. These once-off humanitarian pilots served primarily as proof of concept for fund disbursement and coordination mechanisms. After this initial testing period, no further dedicated emergency grants were issued. However, later projects often carried out a built-in emergency rationale, addressing urgent local needs such as droughts, floods, or ecosystem loss within broader adaptation and resilience initiatives. This reflected a gradual shift from immediate humanitarian response toward community-defined urgent action.

During this emergency or urgent-response phase, the primary need was speed. Small grants were channeled quickly to communities through pre-existing partner networks of the local fund manager, which included youth collectives, Indigenous organizations, and local environmental groups. Calls were circulated through WhatsApp and direct email communication with network members, allowing immediate identification and verification of credible actors already known to fund managers. Application requirements were minimal, and funding amounts were small, enabling fast turnaround while maintaining accountability through direct accompaniment and simplified reporting. The total budget for this phase was € 5690,14.

The second phase (late-2024) introduced the first open call, expanding the portfolio from humanitarian response to catalytic adaptation and learning. These projects used the same framework categories but focused on community-defined priorities such as ecosystem restoration, youth mobilization, and customary forest recognition. For these regular open calls, the fund manager used a more structured outreach process designed to ensure equitable access across provinces.



Announcements were shared through local partners, social media, and extended networks in East Nusa Tenggara, Papua and Java. Proposals were submitted through simplified templates and could be completed in either Indonesian or other indigenous regional languages. Where applicants were not legally registered, the local fund manager enabled participation through fiscal hosting arrangements, pairing informal or youth groups with registered partner organisations. This mechanism broadened access while ensuring compliance with financial and reporting requirements. The total budget for this phase was € 207 590, granted to 33 partners across 15 provinces.

In early 2025, as preparation began for the third and final funding phase, the fund manager reserved a small allocation for potential emergency responses. At the request of VCA alliance members, the number of approved organizational proposals increased from 20 to 27. Because the overall budget remained unchanged, the maximum grant size was reduced, compressing implementation timelines ahead of the facility's closure in July 2025. This phase also marked a shift toward broader alliance participation: SPEAK Indonesia acted as fiscal sponsor for three urban organisations in Java, while PIONEER Tanah Papua and WWF Papua accompanied three Indigenous Yessa clan groups in the Tambrauw Regency of Southwest Papua, Indonesia.



3.1.3 Governance and decision-making

Hivos

As the contracting entity with WWF-Netherlands, Hivos retained overall reporting responsibility for the Indonesia portfolio. The local implementing arm, Yayasan Humanis dan Inovasi Sosial (Yayasan Hivos), is the legal entity through which Hivos operates in Indonesia.

Fund Manager: Samdhana Institute

The Samdhana Institute was selected as the Indonesia's NLGF fund manager. Samdhana is an Indonesian-based organization established in 2003 and registered as a foundation under national law. It operates as a regional environmental trust, providing grants, capacity support, and facilitation for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, civil society organisations, and youth networks across Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Samdhana's coordination combined a small core team based in Bogor with regional facilitators in East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and Jakarta. Within the NLGF structure, Samdhana was responsible for managing the implementation of the fund in Indonesia, including issuing and administering sub-grants, overseeing financial disbursements, accompanying grantees during implementation, and consolidating progress reports.

Samdhana's approach to managing the NLGF in Indonesia emphasized accompaniment and learning rather than top-down supervision. Support to grantees began at the application stage and continued throughout implementation, focusing on strengthening organizational capacity, administrative skills, and adaptive project management.

Support & Decision-making

Applicants received direct mentoring on proposal preparation, budgeting and basic financial planning by Indonesia's fund manager. The review team worked interactively with prospective grantees, offering clarifications and feedback to help them meet eligibility and documentation requirements. This hands-on process functioned as a form of on-the-job training, particularly for first-time applicants and youth-led groups with limited donor experience.

Samdhana's programme officers maintained close communication with partners through WhatsApp groups, phone calls, and regional visits, providing guidance on both programmatic and financial reporting. Grantees were encouraged to document progress through storytelling, short videos, and reflection notes rather than relying solely on quantitative reporting.

In several cases, Samdhana paired unregistered community groups with established NGOs to provide fiscal and technical mentorship, reinforcing good financial practice and compliance skills.

In addition, peer learning workshops allowed grantees to exchange experiences, share lessons, and identify collective challenges.


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3.1.4 Implementation results

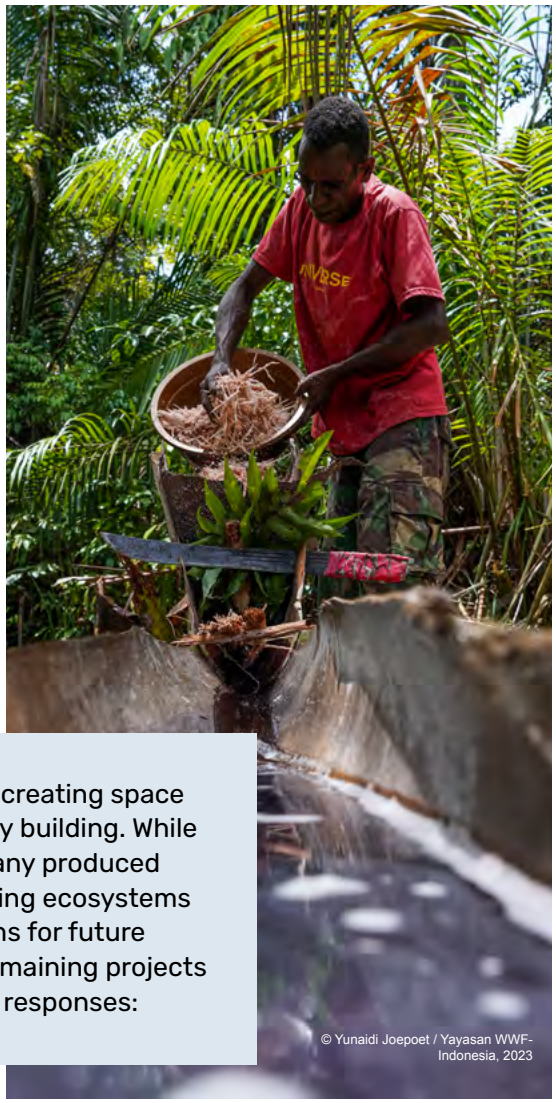
Activities reached 87 communities or village administrative areas across 15 provinces. The first two phases reached approximately 4000 rights-holders, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities; and the last phase reached directly 2535 people.

The first three pilot projects demonstrated how the Indonesian NLGF responded to different types of climate-related shocks while beginning to explore pathways from emergency assistance towards longer-term resilience.

- In East Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), the eruption of Mount Ile Lewotolok and resulting ashfall disrupted farming and local livelihoods. The NLGF supported rapid coordination with local groups and affected households, including the mobilization of relief materials and early recovery measures such as restoring access to clean water and supporting damaged gardens.

- In Central Sulawesi, in the Luwuk/Banggai area, heavy rainfall triggered flooding and landslides that damaged smallholder farms and disrupted access to villages. Local partners, supported by Samdhana, responded with emergency logistics, including water filters and materials to help communities re-establish agricultural production, alongside local coordination support.

- A third pilot in NTT responded to severe drought affecting water availability and staple crops across several islands. Although initially conceived as short-term relief, this experience subsequently informed a broader approach to community-led adaptation. Follow-up support to the Komite Eksekutif Flobamoratas (KEF) expanded the focus towards climate-action campaigns, mangrove and coral restoration, and community production initiatives including coffee and virgin coconut oil. The experience therefore provided an early example of how rapid-response funding could become an entry point for more sustained, locally driven adaptation and resilience-building.


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Catalytic projects, in addition, focused on creating space for experimentation, learning, and capacity building. While not all catalytic projects were scalable, many produced tangible adaptation results such as restoring ecosystems and strengthening governance foundations for future climate resilience. A closer look into the remaining projects funded gives us an indication of the NLGF responses:

Climate Challenge	Typical NLGF Responses
Drought and Water Scarcity	Bamboo planting, water-source protection, and reforestation in East Nusa Tenggara.
Deforestation and Forest Degradation	Mapping and advocacy for customary forests in Papua; youth campaigns on forest protection in Java.
Flooding and Coastal Erosion	Mangrove rehabilitation, coral transplantation, and shoreline stabilization in East Nusa Tenggara.
Agriculture and food systems	Agroecology, traditional crop revival, and local food enterprises in East Nusa Tenggara.
Climate advocacy and capacity building	Youth training, women's enterprises, and climate-themed awareness campaigns in Jakarta.

3.1.5 Challenges and operational lessons

The Indonesian NLGF demonstrated the opportunities and complexities of implementing a highly localised funding mechanism across one of the world's largest and most geographically dispersed archipelagos. While the model successfully reached actors often excluded from conventional funding streams, implementation revealed a number of operational challenges that carry important lessons for future direct-financing mechanisms.

A first challenge is related to geographic scale and diversity. Supporting initiatives across multiple islands required managing relationships with grantees operating in remote, disaster-prone, and hard-to-reach locations. Long travel times, high transportation costs, and uneven internet connectivity made regular monitoring and in-person accompaniment difficult. As a result, much of the communication and follow-up relied on WhatsApp, telephone calls, and photographic evidence, requiring a high degree of trust between the fund manager and beneficiaries.

A second challenge concerned financial compliance and administrative capacity. Many supported groups were informal collectives, youth organisations, or first-time grant recipients with limited experience managing external funding. Capacities to prepare budgets, maintain records, and produce financial documentation varied considerably. This was compounded by the prevalence of cash-based transactions in remote areas, where conventional financial documentation was not always available. Rather than enforcing rigid compliance procedures, Samdhana relied on adapted verification methods, including signed declarations, photographs, and continuous coaching, allowing accountability requirements to be maintained without excluding grassroots actors.

The short duration of grants, typically ranging from three to six months, also affected implementation. While these timelines were appropriate for testing ideas and responding to immediate opportunities, they limited the potential for deeper organisational strengthening, outcome monitoring, and reflection. Many partners successfully adapted activities in response to changing circumstances, including natural disasters, community needs, and logistical delays. However, the rapid pace of implementation often favoured activity delivery over learning and documentation of these adaptive processes.

Operationally, the facility also generated a significant administrative workload. Although individual grants were relatively small, each required contracting, accompaniment, monitoring, reporting, and verification. The experience highlighted that small grants do not necessarily imply lower transaction costs. On the contrary, highly distributed portfolios can require substantial coordination and accompaniment capacity if they aim to remain accessible to grassroots actors.

Several lessons emerge from these challenges. First, the Indonesian experience strongly suggests that trust-based grantmaking can be both effective and accountable when combined with close accompaniment. Relationships, mentoring, and continuous communication often proved more valuable than highly formal supervisory systems, particularly when working with informal groups and first-time grantees. Funding was most effective when viewed not only as a transfer of resources but also as a learning process.

Second, accessibility requires investment in capacity strengthening and operational support. Coaching on budgeting, reporting, documentation, and project management was essential for enabling grassroots organisations to participate successfully.

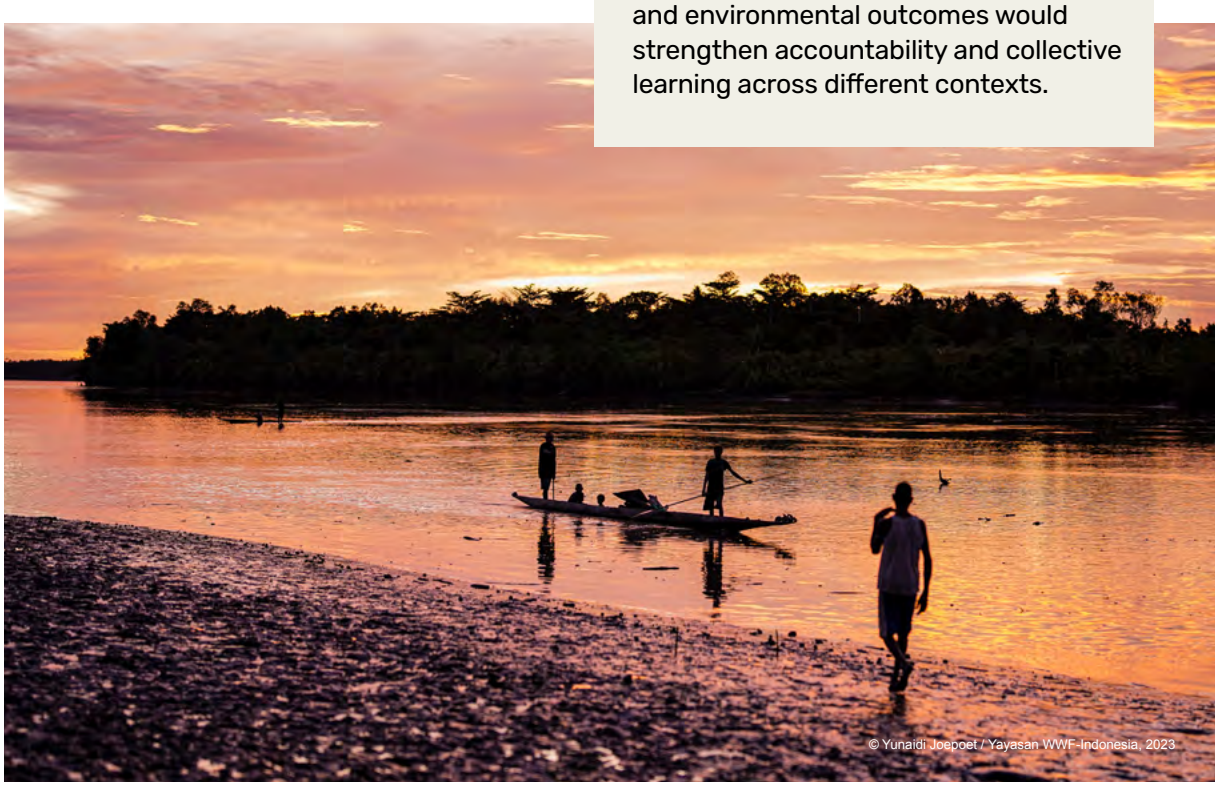

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Treating grant management as part of an organisational learning journey helped build confidence and strengthened the ability of local actors to engage with future funding opportunities.

Third, the use of fiscal sponsorship arrangements proved particularly important for inclusion. By allowing informal collectives and unregistered groups to operate through trusted host organisations, the mechanism expanded access to funding without excluding actors lacking legal status. This approach enabled the facility to reach a broader range of local actors than would have been possible through conventional grantmaking procedures.

Fourth, the experience highlighted the importance of adequately resourcing the often invisible work of facilitation and accompaniment. Translating donor requirements into processes that are meaningful and manageable for local communities requires considerable effort from fund managers. This intermediary role functioned as a critical enabling condition for localisation and should be explicitly recognised and budgeted for future mechanisms.

Finally, the Indonesia case suggests that future localised funding mechanisms should place greater emphasis on learning and outcome documentation. Storytelling, local communications, reflection sessions, and community-led documentation proved effective in capturing results and elevating local voices. At the same time, stronger systems for documenting adaptive management decisions and monitoring both social and environmental outcomes would strengthen accountability and collective learning across different contexts.


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3.2 TUNISIA

3.2.1 Country profile

Tunisia stands among the North African countries most exposed to the accelerating impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, recurrent droughts, and advancing desertification are steadily eroding natural resources and threatening livelihoods across the country. Both rural and urban communities face compounding climate stressors, yet rural households bear the heaviest burdens.

Civil society organisations play an important role in supporting local resilience and citizen participation, yet smaller organisations often face significant barriers in accessing international funding. Within this context, the NLGF provided an opportunity to test how localized and accessible finance could support community-led adaptation initiatives while strengthening the role of civil society in addressing climate and environmental challenges.

Geographic scope:

The NLGF in Tunisia spanned the regions of Béja, Jendouba, Tunis, Nabeul, Siliana, Sidi Bou Said, Tozeur, Kébili, Gabès, and Tataouine.

Implementation timeline:

The Tunisia mechanism was implemented between 2024 and 2025.

Budget:

Tunisia was initially allocated €141,000, later topped up to €225,000.

3.2.2 How funding worked

Objectives and Funding Windows:

The main objective of the NLGF in Tunisia was to provide flexible, small-scale climate finance that empowered local civil society organizations to address both urgent and chronic climate challenges, particularly water scarcity, food insecurity, and gender inequality, through practical, locally led adaptation solutions. Solutions granted included humid forest edges to arid desert zones, with efforts for tree planting, cistern installation for urgent drought relief, eco-gardens, firebreaks, rainwater harvesting, and supporting women's economic empowerment.

The priority areas for the funding windows of the NLGF in Tunisia were:

- Women's empowerment: a high number of proposals received and funded concerned projects related to women's empowerment. These included awareness raising actions for women in the agricultural sector, leadership training, and capacity building workshops for climate action and advocacy.

- Water access: due to increasingly severe droughts, several NLFG projects in Tunisia focused on improving water access and security to local communities, mostly focusing on rehabilitating cisterns. A total of 6 projects were completed, improving water access for 857 people.

- Food security: water scarcity as a result of climate change induced droughts increasingly affects agricultural productivity in Tunisia. As such, several projects established irrigation systems, tested small agroforestry solutions, and supported women farmers with purchasing new tools and critical equipment.

Tunisian framework did not establish distinct operational streams for different types of funding windows. Their framework described the NLGF primarily as a mechanism to address emergencies, unforeseen activities, or emerging opportunities, treating opportunity as a secondary dimension within the same response logic, rather than a separate window. In Tunisia, this approach resulted in a single, flexible funding channel: all proposals were submitted through one open call and evaluated using common criteria for relevance, urgency, and feasibility.



3.2.3 Governance and decision-making

WWF North Africa

At the regional level, the WWF North Africa (WWF-NA) team retained responsibility for strategic oversight, validation of selection and contracting processes, and coordination with the broader VCA alliance. This included reviewing eligibility frameworks, ensuring compliance with both donor and national legal requirements, and consolidating financial and narrative reporting for submission to WWF-NL. The regional office also provided ongoing technical accompaniment to the local fund manager, including participation in field visits, spot checks, and monitoring missions. These activities ensured adherence to programme standards and offered practical support to address compliance challenges in real time. As a result, implementation in Tunisia reflected a close working relationship between WWF-NA and AIHR, the local fund manager, combining local execution with continuous joint supervision and verification on the ground.

Fund Manager: AIHR

The Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) is an independent Arab non-governmental organization based in Tunisia, founded in 1989. AIHR aims to promote civil, political, economic, social, and cultural human rights, and to strengthen the values of democracy and citizenship.

The selection of AIHR as fund manager for the NLGF was influenced by considerations related to the country's national legal framework and institutional trust. Tunisian law prohibits direct financial transfers to informal groups or individuals. Consequently, the facility required a formally registered national intermediary capable of receiving, managing, and disbursing donor funds in accordance with domestic regulations. Within these constraints, WWF-NA, in coordination with the Tunisian partners of the VCA programme, designated AIHR as the implementing intermediary.

Support & Decision-making

The partnership between WWF-NA and AIHR was a central factor in Tunisia's successful implementation. Trust, regular communication, and problem-solving in real time helped maintain pace and consistency. The relationship was collaborative rather than hierarchical, relying on shared understanding rather than rigid procedures. Both organisations invested substantial time in coordination, and AIHR's administrative workload often exceeded what was covered by its 10% overhead. While this reflected genuine partnership commitment, it also underscored the resource intensity of operating within a tightly regulated national context. AIHR's collaboration with smaller CSOs relied on a blend of formal and relational accountability. Sub-grantees were bound by contracts and financial procedures, yet AIHR's field visits and ongoing mentorship transformed compliance from a bureaucratic requirement into a learning process. This approach strengthened CSOs' internal systems and positioned them as credible actors within their regions. These outcomes were consistent with the NLGF's broader intent to build local legitimacy and adaptive capacity.

Accessibility was one of the most significant challenges for the NLGF in Tunisia. As mentioned, national law and donor requirements imposed strict compliance obligations, yet the facility was intended to reach smaller, often under-resourced community organisations.

Therefore, the fund manager had to strike a careful balance: lowering procedural barriers through translation, outreach, and simplified tools, while ensuring full adherence to Tunisian legal standards.

This approach went beyond meeting WWF's technical and financial monitoring requirements. It also aimed to protect grantees from administrative or legal scrutiny, ensuring that each funded project complied with necessary regulations. While this safeguarded local organisations, it added to their administrative workload. The result was a model in which access widened, but bureaucracy persisted; participation improved, yet compliance continued to absorb time and resources that might otherwise have gone to implementation. Key accessibility measures included:

- Multilingual calls for proposals: All materials were translated into Tunisian Arabic and French, broadening access to both established CSOs and smaller, community-based groups.

- Radio outreach: Calls were publicised on *Essaïda FM* in regional sub-dialects, including a short radio spot explaining eligibility and application steps, and a live information session during the *EcoTalks* programme.

- Simplified templates: AIHR introduced shorter, standardised application and reporting forms, reducing technical requirements while maintaining compliance with standards from both WWF and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- Capacity-building sessions: Introductory workshops were organised to present NLGF and VCA objectives, clarify reporting obligations, and provide one-on-one guidance to prospective applicants.

3.2.4 Implementation results

Across the two funding cycles in 2024 and 2025, the NLGF in Tunisia demonstrated that relatively small grants could translate community-identified climate concerns into practical action, even within a restrictive legal and administrative environment. The facility supported 16 projects, reaching 1,170 people in the first cycle, including 975 women. Supported organisations included locally embedded CSOs working with women, youth, farmers and communities across diverse climatic contexts, from the humid forest areas of northern Tunisia to the increasingly arid regions of the south.

Implementation evolved considerably between the two cycles. During the first cycle, the NLGF's framing as a rapid-response mechanism meant that projects were expected to deliver tangible results within approximately three months. In practice, however, most community priorities were not sudden-onset emergencies. They concerned urgent but structural challenges such as prolonged drought, unreliable water access, unsafe farming conditions, seasonal fire risks, and livelihood vulnerability. This generated repeated discussion between WWF-NA, AIHR and programme stakeholders about what qualified as an "emergency".

Rather than simply applying the category from above, AIHR increasingly involved grantees in interpreting urgency from their own perspectives. This surfaced an important distinction between emergency and urgency: persistent water scarcity or livelihood insecurity may not constitute sudden shocks, yet communities experience them as immediate threats requiring action. By the second cycle, WWF-NA and AIHR consequently placed greater emphasis on projects capable of producing concrete responses, including improved water access, irrigation systems, and fire-prevention measures.

Across the portfolio, supported initiatives consequently performed three overlapping functions. Some buffered immediate shocks, including emergency water provision and disaster-preparedness activities. Others strengthened resilience and livelihoods, for example through firebreaks and forest-management activities in Tabarka, water-efficient irrigation in Tozeur, and family gardens and women-led agricultural initiatives. A third group amplified local voices, using podcasts, radio, campaigns, women's networks, and locally generated environmental evidence to strengthen participation in wider climate debates.

The second cycle also provided evidence of continuity rather than simply expanding the number of initiatives. Three organisations, Dorra, ASNEDDN, and APEDDUB, received follow-on funding to deepen activities already underway. Dorra expanded family gardens and reinforced firebreaks in Jendouba and Tabarka; ASNEDDN developed women's agricultural plots and cooperative activities in Nefza; and APEDDUB combined emergency water provision with small-scale infrastructure and training in Siliana. This demonstrated the potential of repeat funding to build on trusted relationships and consolidate locally rooted initiatives.

An important outcome was the strengthening of local organisations themselves. AIHR combined funding with orientation, field accompaniment and practical support on financial management, reporting, communication, and compliance. Communications were particularly significant: EcoTalks radio, podcasts, videos, and social media provided smaller organisations with platforms to communicate their work in their own voices and increased their visibility beyond their immediate communities. In Tataouine, for example, Youth Vision used its grant to establish a network of women's agricultural development groups that continued collaborating through WhatsApp.

Local authorities and government representatives also participated in some activities, increasing recognition of participating CSOs as credible local actors.

The Tunisian experience therefore generated results beyond individual project outputs. The combination of finance, accompaniment and visibility enabled small organisations to deliver practical climate responses while strengthening networks, skills and legitimacy. At the same time, the portfolio demonstrated how difficult it can be to fit locally identified priorities into externally defined funding categories, particularly when urgent structural vulnerabilities are required to conform to an emergency-response logic.

Across the two cycles, the NLGF reached a substantial number of local beneficiaries. In 2024, projects reported reaching 1,170 people, of whom 975 were women, while 2025 monitoring data recorded more than 1,000 beneficiaries. Across the portfolio, projects reported 1,304 beneficiary engagements related to women's empowerment, 857 related to improved water access, and 491 related to food security. These thematic figures may overlap and should therefore not be interpreted as a count of unique beneficiaries.

Demand remained high across both cycles, with 100 proposals submitted in total. Of the 59 applications received in 2024, 35 (59%) passed initial eligibility screening and 11 were ultimately funded. In 2025, 29 of 41 proposals (71%) passed screening and six awards were made. The higher proportion passing initial screening in the second cycle is consistent with the increased emphasis on applicant orientation, follow-up, and hands-on support introduced by AIHR.

	Cycle 1 (2024)	Cycle 2 (2025)
Call launched	10 May 2024	7 February 2025
Proposals received	59	41
Passed initial screening	35 (59%)	29 (71%)
Pre-selection threshold	≥3.5/5	≥3.7/5
Projects funded	11 (19% of submissions)	6 (15% of submissions)

3.2.5 Challenges and operational lessons

The Tunisian experience illustrates how locally accessible funding can operate within a highly regulated context, but also the additional effort required to make this possible. National law restricted external funding to registered CSOs, while financial and anti-money-laundering requirements placed considerable documentation demands on smaller organisations.

AIHR helped bridge this gap through simplified tools, field-based financial coaching, and continuous accompaniment. However, this came with significant transaction costs: AIHR's support role regularly extended beyond grant administration, reinforcing the need for future mechanisms to adequately resource the intermediary functions that make inclusion possible.

A central lesson was that urgency should not be equated with emergency. The emergency-only framing did not adequately reflect the realities communities brought to the fund. Chronic drought, unsafe conditions for farmers, seasonal fire risks, and water scarcity demanded timely responses but were largely structural resilience challenges rather than sudden-onset emergencies. This required AIHR and WWF-NA to repeatedly justify locally relevant initiatives within an ill-fitting programme category.

Future mechanisms should define emergency, catalytic, and adaptation objectives clearly from the outset while allowing local actors greater influence in interpreting priorities within those categories.

The experience also suggests that small grants can work particularly well when their ambition and timeframe are well matched. Three-month cycles proved restrictive, but Tunisia does not necessarily make the case for substantially longer small grants.

The study identifies approximately five to six months as a useful balance for practical initiatives: sufficient time to deliver tangible results without losing momentum. Water systems, irrigation improvements, and firebreaks produced visible outcomes and were considered particularly effective within this model.



Accessibility improved significantly between the two cycles. Multilingual calls, radio outreach, and simplified forms widened awareness, while Cycle 2 moved further from outreach towards active onboarding. AIHR followed up on missing documents, conducted field visits and organized introductory workshops, enabling smaller and less experienced CSOs to navigate formal requirements more effectively. This demonstrates that accessibility depends on active support, not only on lighter application procedures.

Finally, communications and learning acted as important multipliers of relatively small grants. EcoTalks radio, podcasts, videos, and social media gave community organisations visibility beyond their immediate projects, strengthened their legitimacy, and generated opportunities for further collaboration. Site visits and workshops similarly turned otherwise compliance-oriented monitoring into opportunities for coaching and peer learning. The main weakness was that this rich country-level learning was not systematically carried into the wider programme. Future mechanisms should therefore preserve these locally grounded approaches while creating stronger channels for lessons and evidence to inform programme-level learning and adaptation.



3.3 BRAZIL

3.3.1 Country profile

Brazil is home to globally important ecosystems, including the Amazon rainforest, Cerrado and Pantanal, and plays a critical role in climate regulation and biodiversity conservation. At the same time, Indigenous Peoples, traditional communities, environmental defenders, and grassroots organisations continue to face significant pressures arising from deforestation, land-use change, environmental crime, and climate-related disasters. While local actors are at the forefront of territorial protection and climate action, many struggle to access financial resources directly. Within the VCA programme, Brazil offered an opportunity to test how a localized financing mechanism could strengthen community leadership, support environmental defenders, and increase access to climate finance in some of the most socio-environmentally important landscapes in the world.

Geographic scope:

The NLGF in Brazil operated across the Legal Amazon, covering multiple states and territories including Pará, Amazonas, Acre, Maranhão, Rondônia, Roraima, and Amapá. The mechanism reached both urban and peri-urban populations as well as remote Indigenous territories, Quilombola communities, riverine settlements, and traditional communities.

Implementation timeline:

Implementation occurred primarily during 2024 and 2025 and was divided into two parallel funding streams. The Emergency Response Window operated continuously between February and October 2024, allowing rapid responses to threats against environmental defenders and climate-related emergencies. The Opportunity Project Window was launched through an open call process during 2024 and supported community-driven climate and conservation initiatives through more structured project grants. This dual-track model allowed the mechanism to address both immediate threats and longer-term resilience-building objectives simultaneously.

3.3.2 How funding worked

Objectives and Funding Windows:

The overarching objective of the NLGF in Brazil was to strengthen and resource local and Indigenous-led climate action by empowering frontline communities, especially women, youth, and environmental defenders, through funding for advocacy, capacity-building, emergency response, and collective mobilization.

Brazil adopted one of the clearest and most differentiated funding models within the NLGF portfolio, creating two distinct but complementary funding streams: the **Emergency Response Fund for Environmental and Climate Justice Defenders** and the **Opportunity Support for Locally Led Solutions**:

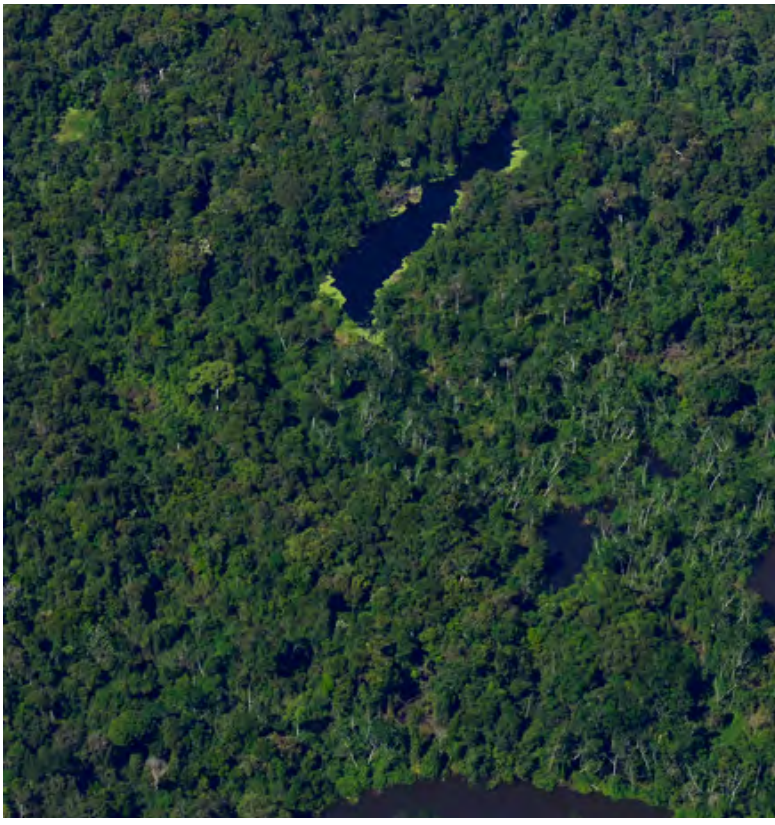
Emergency Response: this window addressed urgent needs with minimal paperwork and direct staff facilitation. It included relocation and rent support for activists under threat, legal protection, security measures such as installation of cameras and reinforced doors, and basic needs support while in hiding such as food, transport, and medical care.

Opportunity window: this channel enabled more structured, locally led projects to be submitted through the fund manager's online platform and reviewed in scheduled cycles. This included: flood response in Acre with food and hygiene kits and logistical support for communities displaced; flood response in Pará through the installation of nanotech water filters; advocacy mobilization with Indigenous leaders attending urgent hearings on mining and climate defender protection in the Amazonas and Pará.

Both windows ran concurrently during the first implementation phase. While the Emergency Response window operated on a rolling basis from February to October 2024, the locally led opportunity projects window was launched in mid-2024 through an open call. This meant that rapid emergency support and the first cycle of structured project funding were implemented in parallel, allowing the fund manager to respond to crises while simultaneously testing and refining the open-call process for locally led projects.

Budget and Financial structure:

Brazil received one of the largest NLGF allocations across the portfolio. A total of approximately R$1.35 million was allocated across both funding windows: R$446,189 was allocated through the Emergency window; approximately R$900,000 was allocated through the Opportunity window. WWF-Brazil retained approximately 5% of the budget for overall coordination and oversight, while the fund manager received approximately 13% for grant management, accompaniment, and operational support.



3.3.3 Governance and decision-making

Brazil's governance model balanced agility with accountability. WWF-Brazil acted primarily as the contractual and oversight bridge with WWF-NL, while Fundo Casa Socioambiental managed fund operations on the ground with modest overheads.

WWF Brazil

WWF-Brazil functioned primarily as the contractual recipient and oversight body. Its responsibilities included contracting arrangements with WWF-NL, fiduciary oversight, compliance monitoring, reporting, and strategic coordination within the VCA programme. Importantly, WWF-Brazil did not directly manage day-to-day grant-making operations. Instead, it delegated these functions to the local fund manager with significant prior experience in grassroots finance mechanisms.

Fund Manager: Fundo Casa Socioambiental

The Fundo Casa Socioambiental (or Fundo Casa), founded in 2005, is Brazil's longest-running socio-environmental fund. With nearly two decades of channeling micro-grants to Indigenous Peoples, riverine and traditional communities, women's and youth groups, and grassroots defenders in the Amazon, Fundo Casa has developed a reputation for combining light, accessible procedures with steady support through mentoring and accountability workshops. This maturity mattered to the NLGF. Fundo Casa was already administering multiple donor lines (including GAGGA/Power of Women and MoFA post-disaster recovery calls), so the NLGF did not require building new systems from scratch. Instead, it could plug into Casa's existing machinery (i.e., staff, tools, networks) to deliver a "speed with support" model.



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Support & Decision-making

Formal authority for grant approval and fund management rested with Fundo Casa, under contract to WWF-Brazil, which held administrative and financial oversight. WWF-Brazil was accountable to WWF-NL for compliance and reporting. The Regional Team (WWF-Brazil, Avina, Hivos, and IEB) played an advisory role (reviewing proposed criteria, budgets, and risk cases) but its input was non-binding. Strategic guidance flowed through this group, while operational control remained with Fundo Casa.

The arrangement relied on light but consistent structures rather than formal hierarchies. While Fundo Casa implemented and validated requests, managed disbursements, and consolidated reports, WWF-Brazil oversaw compliance and served as the administrative focal point with WWF-NL. The VCA's regional team acted as a collective advisory and accountability space, reviewing criteria, budgets, and risk cases. Monthly coordination meetings and ad-hoc consultations created a rhythm of joint review and quick decision-making when emergencies arose.

3.3.4 Implementation results

Emergency response grants

Between February and October 2024, the Emergency Fund supported 29 emergency interventions across the Brazilian Amazon. Of these:

- 22 interventions supported environmental and human rights defenders facing threats and violence.
- 7 interventions responded directly to climate-related emergencies.

A total of R$446,189 was disbursed through this window.

The profile of beneficiaries demonstrates the facility's intention to reach underrepresented and vulnerable groups. Among emergency beneficiaries:

- 59% were women
- 41% identified as Black
- 32% identified as Indigenous



Approximately one-third of all emergency grants directly supported Indigenous territories and Indigenous-led initiatives. The state of Pará accounted for 64% of approved emergency requests, reflecting the concentration of environmental conflicts and threats in that region. Several emergency responses achieved substantial reach. One project provided nanotechnology-based water filters following severe flooding, benefiting approximately 20,000 people through improved access to safe drinking water.

Opportunity projects

The Opportunity Projects window supported 18 community-led initiatives across the Amazon region. Projects addressed a broad range of themes including, women's leadership, environmental justice, Indigenous rights, climate advocacy, youth mobilization, territorial monitoring and, community resilience.

Rather than prescribing activities, the mechanism created space for communities to define their own priorities and solutions. As a result, funded initiatives ranged from legal advocacy and territorial defence to environmental education, community organising, and local climate adaptation efforts.

One of the most important outcomes of the Brazilian model was its ability to reach actors who typically struggle to access international climate finance. The portfolio included Indigenous organisations, Quilombola associations, environmental defenders, women's collectives, youth movements, and community-based organisations. Several grantees reported that this was their first experience directly managing externally sourced climate finance.

Beyond quantitative outputs, the mechanism strengthened participation and visibility of local actors within climate governance processes and expanded opportunities for leadership by Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.

3.3.5 Challenges and operational lessons

The Brazilian experience demonstrates both the potential and the operational realities of implementing localization-oriented funding mechanisms at scale. While the NLGF successfully reached environmental defenders, Indigenous organisations, and grassroots movements across the Amazon, implementation revealed several challenges related to timing, accessibility, learning, and institutional processes.

One of the most significant constraints was the impact of administrative and contracting procedures on implementation timelines. Although the facility was designed to provide rapid and flexible support, approximately three months were required to finalize contractual arrangements between WWF-Brazil and Fundo Casa before the first phase could begin. Similar delays occurred during the second phase when additional funding became available late in the programme cycle. As a result, many grantees faced compressed implementation windows of between five and nine months. This highlights a broader challenge for localisation mechanisms embedded within larger multi-country programmes: legal reviews, approval processes, and fund transfers occurring upstream can substantially reduce the time available for implementation at community level.

A second challenge concerned the balance between capacity strengthening and delivery speed. Before implementation, all catalytic grant recipients participated in Fundo Casa's *Oficinas de Fortalecimento de Capacidades* (capacity strengthening workshops), which covered project administration, financial reporting, communication, and safety. While these workshops delayed project start-up by several weeks, they proved critical in enabling smaller organisations and first-time grantees to navigate donor

requirements and manage funding effectively. The experience reinforced the idea that accessible finance often requires investment in organisational readiness and accompaniment.

Field implementation itself was affected by the realities of operating across the Brazilian Amazon. Long travel distances, limited connectivity, seasonal weather events, and procurement challenges often affected project timelines. These constraints were particularly relevant for Indigenous and community-based organisations working in remote territories, where logistics and communications required considerably more time and flexibility than initially anticipated. Short implementation periods therefore limited opportunities for deeper engagement, learning, and adaptation beyond immediate project delivery.

The experience also revealed several lessons regarding monitoring, accountability, and accessibility. Fundo Casa relied on straightforward reporting templates that reduced administrative burdens for grantees and facilitated portfolio-level management. However, the emphasis on end-of-project reporting created fewer opportunities for real-time reflection and learning during implementation. Future funding mechanisms would benefit from complementing standard reporting requirements with more participatory learning approaches, including storytelling, peer exchanges, photographs, and community narratives that allow local actors to document results in ways that are meaningful to them.

One of the strongest lessons emerging from the Brazilian model concerns the role of trust-based verification systems. The Emergency Fund's ability to respond within 72 hours did not result from simplified compliance alone, but from long-standing relationships with territorial networks, Indigenous organisations, community groups, and legal support organisations. These networks functioned as both referral and verification mechanisms, helping validate requests, assess risks, and accompany beneficiaries throughout implementation. Rather than relying primarily on paperwork, risk management was grounded in trusted relationships and contextual knowledge. This approach allowed Fundo Casa to respond rapidly while maintaining accountability.

The use of everyday communication tools also proved important. Requests, follow-up and accompaniment frequently occurred through WhatsApp and, in more sensitive situations, through secure messaging platforms such as Signal. In remote areas where internet access is limited and email is rarely used, communication systems had to reflect how communities already organize and communicate. Rather than requiring beneficiaries to adapt to donor systems, Fundo Casa adapted its procedures to local realities, thereby reducing barriers to access and reinforcing trust.

The Brazilian experience also highlights the importance of fiscal infrastructure for inclusion. While the Emergency Fund could often support individuals and informal groups through trusted networks, the Opportunity Fund required more extensive organisational documentation and legal registration. This created a trade-off between transparency and accessibility, as formally registered organisations were generally better positioned to meet eligibility requirements than informal collectives. The experience suggests that future localisation efforts should continue exploring mechanisms that allow informal groups to access funding through fiscal hosts or intermediary structures without sacrificing accountability.



3.4 BOLIVIA

3.4.1 Country profile

Bolivia combines immense ecological diversity, ranging from the Amazon and Pantanal to the Andes and Chaco, with a strong presence of Indigenous Peoples and community-based governance systems. Despite their central role in environmental stewardship, many Indigenous and rural organisations face barriers in accessing international funding and participating in decision-making processes. Climate change is intensifying existing vulnerabilities through droughts, flooding, and ecosystem degradation, affecting both livelihoods and territorial governance. The NLGF was implemented in this context as an opportunity to support locally led climate action, strengthen community initiatives, and increase access to resources for actors traditionally excluded from conventional funding systems.

Geographic scope:

The NLGF in Bolivia primarily focused on the Pantanal and Chaco regions, although successful applicants could emerge from other parts of the country. The Pantanal represents one of the world's largest tropical wetland systems and plays a critical role in freshwater regulation, biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods across Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay. The Chaco, meanwhile, is characterized by dry forests, recurrent droughts and home to a variety of Indigenous populations, including Guaraní, Ayoreo, Weenhayek, and Guarayo communities.

Implementation timeline:

The Bolivia mechanism was implemented through two grant cycles covering 2023-2025. Four calls were issued in total: two Emergency Fund calls and two Opportunity Fund calls. Emergency grants remained open between three and five months depending on the cycle, allowing applications to be submitted whenever urgent needs emerged. Opportunity grants operated through shorter competitive windows of 15 to 20 days.

3.4.2 How funding worked

Objectives and Funding Windows:

The overarching objective of the NLGF in Bolivia was to remove barriers that prevent local communities, activists, and grassroots organisations from accessing financial support for climate action and environmental protection.

To achieve this, Bolivia adopted a dual-window structure:

Emergency Fund: designed to respond rapidly to pressing environmental, social, and climate-related risks. Activities supported included:

- legal assistance for environmental and human rights defenders;
- emergency access to water;
- disaster response during fires, floods and droughts;
- protection of activists and communities under threat;
- documentation of environmental violations and rights abuses.

Emergency grants could mobilize resources within 72 hours and provided up to USD 5,000 per grant.

Opportunity Fund: focused on longer-term climate adaptation and conservation initiatives. Supported activities included:

- ecosystem restoration;
- water management;
- community environmental monitoring;
- disaster risk reduction;
- agroforestry;
- climate advocacy;
- community awareness and evidence generation.

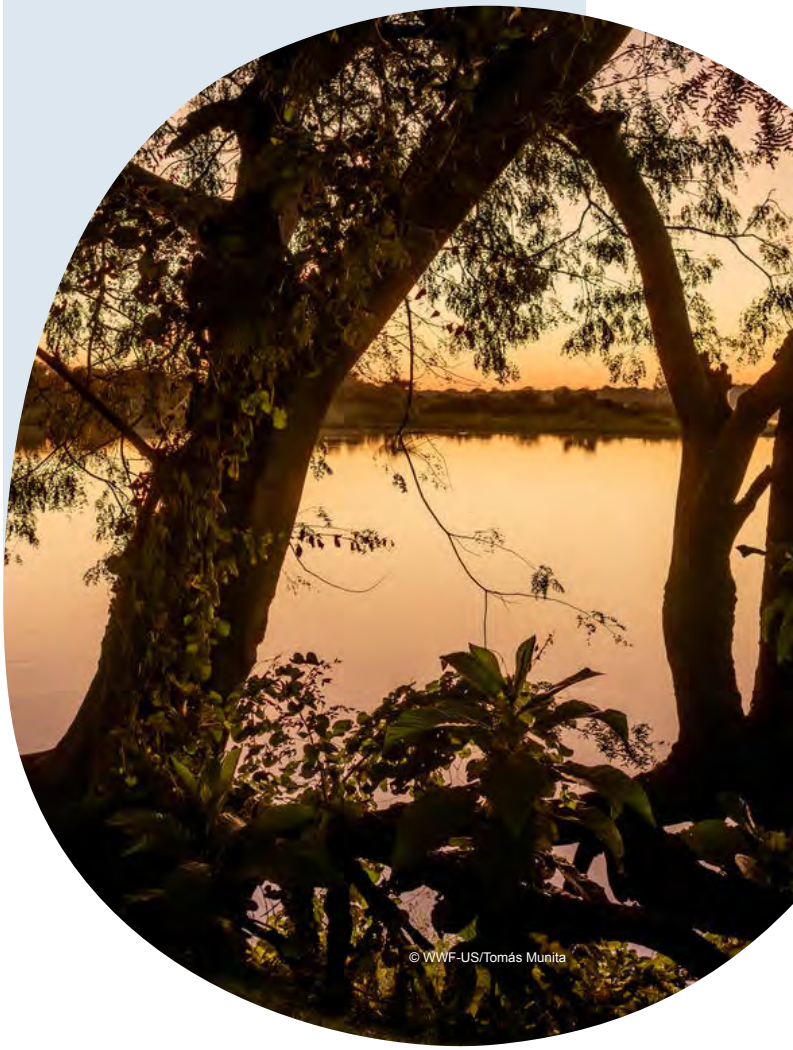
Opportunity grants could reach up to USD 10,000 per project.

Budget and Financial structure:

Bolivia received a total NLGF allocation of €326,392. Of this amount:

- €309,992 (95%) was allocated to the fund manager, Comuna;
- €16,400 (5%) was retained by WWF Bolivia for coordination and oversight;
- €246,387 had been disbursed as grants by June 2025.

Approximately 70% of available grant funding was allocated to the Opportunity Fund, while 30% was reserved for Emergencies.



3.4.3 Governance and decision-making

One of the most innovative aspects of the Bolivia model was its effort to balance accessibility with independent decision-making.

WWF Bolivia

WWF Bolivia acted as the contractual recipient of funds and provided strategic oversight. Its responsibilities included adapting NLGF guidelines to the Bolivian context, contracting the fund manager, assuring alignment with the VCA Theory of Change, and consolidating reporting for WWF-Netherlands.

Fund Manager: Comuna

Fund management responsibilities were delegated to Comuna, a member of the *Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático* (PBFCC), a network of 55 civil society organisations working on climate justice and environmental governance across Bolivia. Importantly, this was Comuna's first experience managing a small-grants facility, making the NLGF a learning opportunity not only for grantees but also for the intermediary organisation itself. Comuna was responsible for: outreach and communication, application support, eligibility screening, contracting of beneficiaries, ongoing accompaniment, and reporting and monitoring.

Advisory Committee

The final funding decisions were made by an independent advisory committee composed of practitioners who participated on a voluntary basis.

Umbrella organizations

In Bolivia, umbrella organizations served as intermediaries between the fund manager and the beneficiaries. These institutions could be NGOs, associations, or other established legal entities that possessed the necessary conditions and infrastructure (such as a bank account and legal personality) to receive the grant and disburse the funding to the beneficiaries. The umbrella institutions were identified and approached by the grantees, sometimes with support from Comuna.

The level of support provided by umbrella institutions varied, as did the conditions they posed for their involvement. Some institutions provided support without charging a fee, whereas others required financial compensation. Umbrella organizations signed a contract with the fund managers and assumed formal responsibility for the grant.

Support & Decision-making

A multi-step review process including 1) an administrative review carried out by the fund manager, Comuna, to check if proposals met basic requirements; 2) a strategic review carried out by WWF Bolivia to check if proposals matched with the VCA Theory of Change, and 3) the final review and selection carried out by an independent advisory committee, composed of practitioners working pro bono. The response time for the Emergency fund was 72 hours.

3.4.4 Implementation results

Across its two implementation phases, the Bolivia's NLGF attracted strong demand. A total of 130 applications were received, including 76 in the first phase and 54 in the second. Of these, 37 initiatives were funded: 17 through the Emergency window and 20 through the Opportunity window. The first phase funded 10 Emergency and 12 Opportunity initiatives, while the second funded seven and eight respectively. By June 2025, €246,387, equivalent to 75% of the total NLGF allocation, had been granted to beneficiaries.

The mechanism reached a diverse group of actors, including formal and informal organisations representing Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, journalists, community groups, and environmental and human rights defenders.

The Bolivia portfolio supported a wide range of locally identified priorities, from access to water and ecosystem restoration to disaster preparedness, environmental monitoring, advocacy, research, and protection of environmental defenders. Reported reach was substantial, with 1,990,335 direct and 15,380,931 indirect beneficiaries recorded. These headline figures should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously, particularly as communications and advocacy initiatives could generate very large indirect reach. One communications initiative on the vulnerability of the Pantanal, for example, reached more than 1.5 million people through social media, alongside an estimated 800,000 listeners through national radio.

More significant for the learning purpose of this report are the longer-term changes identified through interviews and outcome harvesting. At the grantee level, successfully designing and implementing an initiative strengthened confidence and leadership, particularly among women and youth. Funded activities also mobilized community contributions and strengthened collective ownership beyond the original financial investment.

At the community and landscape level, results ranged from permanent improvements in water access and agroecological production to stronger preparedness for fires, floods, and other environmental risks. In Mandiyuti, for example, traditional ecological knowledge helped identify an underground water source. NLGF-related support contributed to the development of two water collection systems, 20 agroecological family gardens, and a communal garden. The initiative subsequently contributed to the adoption of a municipal law protecting community water reserves and establishing ecological buffer zones around water sources.

Other initiatives generated similarly significant governance effects. In Motacusito, strengthened community organisation and women's leadership contributed to territorial conservation, community ecotourism, and agroecological initiatives, while the experience helped inspire new communal and municipal protected areas elsewhere in the Pantanal-Chaco region. In Los Piyos, community mobilization contributed to the establishment of a 717-hectare municipal protected area and ecopedagogical forest, protecting water sources, forests and medicinal plants while creating opportunities for community-based economic activities.

These experiences illustrate an important feature of small-grant mechanisms: significant outcomes may appear only after the formal grant period has ended. New municipal agreements, policies, alliances, and follow-on investments were often absent from final project reports and emerged through subsequent engagement

with grantees. Outcome harvesting and direct follow-up were therefore particularly valuable for identifying what implementers described as impacts that continued to emerge after project completion.

Overall, Bolivia demonstrated that small grants can generate effects at multiple levels. Resources enabled immediate local action, strengthened leadership, and organisational capacity, and in some cases contributed to wider institutional and policy change. The combination of locally generated proposals, accompaniment, and access through intermediary organisations was particularly important in enabling these outcomes.

Category	% of total
Water access	19%
Ecosystem restoration	17%
Disaster risk reduction	14%
Advocacy	14%
Research	11%
Community based monitoring	8%
Other	17%


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3.4.5 Challenges and operational lessons

The Bolivia experience also revealed several structural and operational challenges that shaped implementation. Perhaps the most consequential was the two-tranche funding model. The second allocation depended on learning and performance from the first phase, but country-level teams and the Fund Manager lacked certainty about whether, when, and at what level the remaining resources would become available. This uncertainty created pressure to demonstrate rapid disbursement and contributed to compressed application and implementation periods. The first Opportunity call, for example, remained open for only 15 days, while initiatives themselves generally had 60 to 95 days to implement.

The funding gap between phases also affected institutional continuity. Contracts for the first Comuna team ended after Phase 1 and, by the time the second tranche was available, new personnel had to be recruited. WWF Bolivia and other local partners, such as Fundación Semilla, subsequently had to repeat orientation and capacity-strengthening efforts. This experience makes a strong case for predictable funding, sufficient preparation time, and continuity of fund-management teams.

A second lesson concerns co-design and fund manager alignment. Comuna was not brought into the design discussions of the NLGF. As such, divergencies subsequently emerged around concepts, eligibility, geographic scope, emergency definitions, and responsibilities for communicating unsuccessful applications.

These differences did not prevent successful implementation, nor do they imply that fund managers must share identical perspectives with WWF. Rather, they demonstrate the value of investing sufficient time at the outset to co-design the mechanism, clarify responsibilities, and develop a shared understanding of its purpose and boundaries.

Accessibility generated another important trade-off. Umbrella organisations provided a workable solution for informal actors unable to receive grants directly, but their involvement was highly variable. Some provided support without charge, while others required payment, and levels of accompaniment differed considerably. The model therefore widened access but also created an additional layer requiring oversight and support. Future mechanisms should define the expected role of such intermediaries more deliberately, including appropriate compensation and institutional-strengthening support.

Administrative requirements also proved difficult to reconcile with the realities of grassroots implementation. Formal receipts and procurement requirements were particularly challenging in rural areas with highly informal local economies. These requirements sometimes produced unintended consequences: services that could have been purchased locally had to be sourced from formal providers capable of issuing compliant documentation.

Combined with short implementation periods, this created substantial workload for grantees, umbrella organisations, and the fund manager. This experience points to the importance of involving WWF's finance and administrative teams during fund design to identify where procedures can be proportionate to the size and risk profile of small grants.

The 72-hour Emergency window created a different operational challenge. Speed was valuable for genuinely time-sensitive situations, but keeping the window continuously available required advisory committee members to review applications at short notice. The distinction between an emergency, an urgent need, and longer-term adaptation was also not always straightforward. Comuna tended to interpret urgency more broadly, while WWF Bolivia applied the narrower eligibility boundaries established for the facility. Future mechanisms would benefit from clearer differentiation between rapid response and structural climate action, rather than expecting a single definition of emergency to accommodate both.

The independent advisory committees were nevertheless widely regarded as a strength. Members brought territorial and thematic expertise and were able to assess applicants beyond the quality of formal proposal writing, an important consideration when working with first-time grantees. However, reliance on pro bono reviewers raises questions about sustainability, especially when emergency decisions are required within 72 hours. A larger pool of reviewers and appropriate forms of recognition or compensation could strengthen this approach in future.

Finally, the Bolivia case demonstrates that monitoring and learning need to be designed and resourced from the outset. The first phase had no dedicated monitoring and evaluation allocation beyond general management costs. While Comuna gathered monitoring information, conventional reporting frequently failed to capture unexpected or longer-term outcomes.

Taken together, Bolivia's experience reinforces that effective localisation requires more than making small grants available. Time, predictable funding, co-design, trusted intermediaries, accompaniment, proportionate administrative requirements, and deliberate learning infrastructure were all enabling conditions for success.



3.5 PARAGUAY

3.5.1 Country profile

Paraguay is particularly vulnerable to climate variability, including recurrent droughts, floods, and increasing water insecurity. The country contains portions of globally significant ecosystems such as the Gran Chaco and Pantanal, while Indigenous Peoples, rural communities, and environmental defenders often face overlapping environmental, social, and economic challenges. Access to flexible funding remains limited, especially for grassroots organisations operating in remote regions. Within this context, the NLGF sought to support locally identified responses to urgent environmental and climate challenges while strengthening the role of communities and civil society actors in shaping resilience and adaptation efforts.

Geographic scope:

The Paraguayan NLGF focused primarily on the Pantanal and Chaco regions, although participation was not strictly limited to these landscapes. Projects were implemented across multiple departments and included initiatives led by Indigenous organizations, youth movements, environmental collectives, women's groups, and community associations working on issues ranging from ecosystem restoration and water security to environmental governance and citizen participation.

Implementation timeline:

Implementation occurred between 2023 and 2025 through two grant cycles. Similar to Bolivia, Paraguay adopted a model combining an Emergency Fund and an Opportunity Fund. The Emergency Fund remained open throughout the implementation period and allowed organizations to apply whenever urgent opportunities or threats emerged. Opportunity Fund calls were launched through fixed application windows designed to support longer-term locally led initiatives.

3.5.2 How funding worked

Objectives and Funding Windows:

The Paraguayan NLGF was developed to support grassroots organizations and community initiatives that would otherwise struggle to access climate and environmental funding. The mechanism aimed to strengthen local agency, increase participation in environmental decision-making, and support practical solutions to local climate and conservation challenges.

To achieve these objectives, Paraguay adopted two complementary funding windows.

The Emergency Fund provided rapid support for urgent situations, including responses to environmental threats, emerging advocacy opportunities, and immediate community needs linked to climate and environmental challenges. The objective was to ensure that organizations could act quickly when opportunities for influence or urgent interventions arose, rather than having to wait for conventional donor approval processes.

The Opportunity Fund supported larger and longer-term community-led initiatives focused on climate resilience, environmental protection, advocacy, youth engagement, environmental education, and community organizing. Unlike many traditional donor mechanisms, applicants were encouraged to define their own priorities and activities, provided these aligned with the broader objectives of climate justice and citizen participation.

A key characteristic of both funding windows was their emphasis on accessibility. Application procedures were intentionally simplified to reduce barriers faced by smaller organizations, informal groups, and first-time grant recipients. Throughout implementation, local organizations received guidance and accompaniment during preparation, implementation, and reporting phases.

Budget and Financial structure:

Paraguay received approximately €365,000 through the NLGF mechanism. A significant proportion of the budget was dedicated directly to grant-making, while a smaller allocation supported coordination, accompaniment and fund management functions. This structure reflected the facility's intention to maximize resources reaching local actors while ensuring sufficient support for outreach, administration, and monitoring. Grant sizes varied depending on the funding window. Emergency grants were generally smaller and designed for rapid deployment, while Opportunity Fund grants supported more comprehensive initiatives with longer implementation periods.



3.5.3 Governance and decision-making

One of the defining characteristics of the Paraguayan NLGF was the degree of flexibility built into both its governance arrangements and its operational model. While maintaining accountability to WWF and donor requirements, the mechanism was deliberately designed to remain accessible to communities and frontline actors facing urgent environmental, climate, and human rights challenges.

WWF Paraguay

It acted as the contractual recipient of funds and provided overall strategic oversight. Its responsibilities included adapting the NLGF framework to the Paraguayan context, coordinating with the VCA alliance, contracting and supervising the fund manager (CODEHUPY), reviewing reports, and ensuring compliance with donor requirements. An important feature of the governance arrangement was the additional oversight framework established through WWF-US. This created several operational boundaries, including restrictions around litigation support and humanitarian assistance while also ensuring WWF Paraguay did not participate directly in final proposal selection decisions.

Fund Manager: CODEHUPY

The day-to-day management of the facility was delegated to CODEHUPY (Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay), a national network of 36 human rights organisations. Given its longstanding work with Indigenous Peoples, rural communities, and defenders, CODEHUPY possessed extensive territorial knowledge and trusted relationships that proved essential for reaching target beneficiaries.

Beyond administration, CODEHUPY played a significant accompaniment role. The organisation managed the application process, conducted outreach, provided direct support to applicants through telephone and WhatsApp, coordinated implementation, monitored actions, and reported progress. Because many beneficiary groups had limited internet access or little experience interacting with donors, CODEHUPY often assisted applicants directly throughout the process.


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Advisory Team

Decision-making was supported by a flexible Advisory Team (*Equipo Consultivo*) composed of practitioners and specialists whose composition varied according to the needs of each request. The Advisory Team provided technical and territorial expertise, assessed feasibility, and helped validate proposed responses. Applications exceeding certain expenditure thresholds were further reviewed through a Core Committee process.

Core Committee

The Core Committee, according to the original NLGF proposal, including WWF Paraguay, reviewed applications exceeding the minor expense thresholds (5,000,000 or 10,000,000 Guaraníes depending on category). However, WWF Paraguay did not participate in the assessment and review committee.



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Service Providers

Given that many supported actions involved infrastructure or material provision (water systems, tools, food supplies), CODEHUPY worked extensively with local service providers. CODEHUPY took responsibility for identifying appropriate providers in remote areas, requesting and comparing quotations (*cotizaciones*), ensuring quality and adequate pricing, coordinating delivery and installation, and verifying completion through documentation provided by communities

Support & Decision-making

Communities could access support through a dedicated telephone line, WhatsApp, and direct engagement with staff, who frequently assisted applicants in identifying needs, preparing requests, and navigating implementation challenges. This approach was particularly important for Indigenous and rural communities with limited access to digital infrastructure or prior experience with external funding.

Decision-making combined speed with contextual expertise. Routine requests were reviewed internally by CODEHUPY, while more complex cases could be referred to the Advisory Team (Equipo Consultivo), a flexible group of practitioners and organisations with territorial or technical expertise.

Requests above specific expenditure thresholds required additional review through the Core Committee process. This layered approach allowed funding decisions to remain responsive while ensuring that interventions were informed by local realities, technical feasibility, and community needs. The combination of accompaniment, technical support, and contextual review helped the mechanism maintain accessibility without compromising accountability.

3.5.4 Implementation results

The NLGF in Paraguay demonstrated sustained demand for a highly accessible and rapidly responsive funding mechanism. Between November 2023 and June 2025, the facility received more than 167 requests, of which 128 were approved. By June 2025, supported actions had reached more than 1,765 families and an estimated 88,994 people across more than 23 communities. Beneficiaries included Indigenous and rural communities, environmental and human rights defenders, journalists, youth and women's organisations, volunteer firefighters, and other individuals and groups facing climate-related or human rights emergencies.

The portfolio covered two main areas: Defence of Human Rights Defenders and Climate Emergencies. Support to defenders ranged from relatively small amounts of €38 to amounts like €3,765 and included legal assistance, temporary relocation and security measures, travel to decision-making spaces, mobilization, and advocacy support. Climate-emergency interventions ranged from approximately €601 to €6,274 and included drinking-water access, rainwater harvesting and distribution systems, response to floods and other extreme weather events, equipment for firefighters, and livelihood-related support such as agroecological gardens.

The direct-assistance model proved particularly effective in reaching actors who would otherwise struggle to access conventional grant funding. Applicants did not require legal status, a bank account, or previous grant-management experience, and requests could be initiated through telephone, WhatsApp, or online forms. CODEHUPY supported applicants in articulating their needs and translating these into concrete actions, while assuming responsibility for procurement and financial administration. This significantly lowered administrative barriers for informal groups and remote communities.

The Defence of Defenders component was especially well suited to the model. In cases involving immediate threats, relocation, legal support, or urgent travel, relatively small and rapidly available amounts could generate significant immediate value. CODEHUPY's existing human rights expertise and networks also provided an important basis for assessing politically sensitive requests and handling information securely.

Climate-related requests revealed a more complex picture. Water access became a recurring priority, particularly in the Chaco, where communities face persistent scarcity rather than isolated emergencies. As implementation progressed, CODEHUPY recognised that some proposed solutions required more extensive assessment than the 72-hour response model allowed. The organisation therefore temporarily slowed some decisions, brought in specialized expertise on rural water systems, and began undertaking territorial visits to assess technical feasibility and longer-term sustainability. This adaptation represented an important shift from simply responding quickly towards improving the quality and durability of interventions.

The facility also generated an institutional outcome for CODEHUPY itself. Managing the NLGF expanded its presence and relationships among rural and Indigenous communities and strengthened its experience working at the intersection of human rights, climate impacts and environmental challenges. The process increased CODEHUPY's capacity to assess needs, evaluate climate-related requests, and coordinate environmental responses beyond its traditional human-rights portfolio.

Evidence on longer-term outcomes remains limited. Monitoring primarily captured requests, assistance provided, financial verification, and implementation evidence, while more systematic assessment of changes in resilience, organisational capacity, or longer-term community outcomes was not built into the mechanism from the outset. These results should therefore be understood primarily in terms of reach, accessibility, responsiveness, and institutional learning, rather than as evidence of longer-term climate or social impact.

3.5.5 Challenges and operational lessons

The Paraguay experience demonstrates both the strengths and inherent trade-offs of a highly accessible direct-assistance model. The mechanism was particularly effective where needs were discrete and urgent, and could be addressed through relatively straightforward interventions. However, its application to more structural climate challenges exposed tensions between speed, sustainability, and longer-term capacity strengthening.

The clearest example concerned the distinction between acute and structural emergencies. The 72-hour response model was well suited to circumstances such as immediate threats to defenders, where the need was clear, and speed was critical. Water scarcity presented a fundamentally different challenge. Although communities experienced lack of water as an emergency, it was often chronic and structural, requiring technical assessments, appropriate infrastructure, consultation, and longer-term maintenance. CODEHUPY eventually adapted by allowing more time and bringing in specialist expertise, but the experience demonstrated the limitations of using a single emergency architecture for fundamentally different types of needs.

The direct-assistance model created a second important trade-off. Removing requirements for legal registration, bank accounts and grant-management experience made the mechanism unusually accessible, but shifted much of the administrative burden to CODEHUPY. Staff had to clarify requests through repeated conversations, identify and assess service providers, obtain quotations, coordinate procurement and delivery, gather financial documentation, and monitor implementation. Limited connectivity, literacy barriers, long distances, and difficulties sourcing formal providers substantially increased this workload. The original management allocation proved insufficient, leading WWF Paraguay to advocate for increased overhead for CODEHUPY.

Similarly, the rolling application process combined important advantages with limitations. Keeping the fund continually accessible allowed emergencies to be



addressed as they occurred, rather than requiring communities to wait for a formal call. However, evaluating applications sequentially made it difficult to compare similar needs, cluster geographically proximate interventions, or negotiate economies of scale. For recurring structural needs such as water infrastructure, periodic thematic funding rounds could therefore complement rather than replace a permanently available emergency window.

The experience also highlighted questions around sustainability and dependency. CODEHUPY observed that communities sometimes developed expectations of continued assistance after an initial need had been met, requiring careful and transparent communication about the facility's limits and eventual closure. Water infrastructure raised a related concern. Some beneficiary communities already possessed infrastructure installed by other actors that had subsequently broken down or become unusable. This underscored the importance of complementing infrastructure investment with maintenance capacities, community-management arrangements, technical follow-up, and contingency planning.

Finally, monitoring and learning were insufficiently resourced at the outset. Territorial monitoring and technical follow-up emerged adaptively during implementation, but the original budget did not provide dedicated resources for extensive field verification or a structured MEAL approach. Moreover, because direct assistance deliberately removed reporting responsibilities from beneficiaries, evidence of change was largely mediated through CODEHUPY rather than articulated directly by communities themselves. Future mechanisms should retain this low administrative burden while creating simple, accessible ways for beneficiaries to contribute their own perspectives and defining monitoring expectations and resources from the beginning.


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4. CROSS-COUNTRY FINDINGS

The NLGF was implemented through different governance models, funding modalities and institutional arrangements across Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Tunisia, and Indonesia. Despite these differences, several common findings emerge. Together, they offer insights into what it takes to make climate and conservation finance more locally accessible, responsive, and inclusive.



Localisation is about both access and power

Perhaps the most important finding is that increasing access to funding does not automatically translate into increased local decision-making power. Across all countries, the NLGF succeeded in broadening access to resources. Simplified application processes, outreach through trusted networks, fiscal hosting arrangements, intermediary organisations, and direct assistance models enabled Indigenous Peoples, women's groups, youth collectives, environmental defenders, and community organisations to access resources that would otherwise remain out of reach.

At the same time, decision-making power shifted unevenly. Local actors generally determined priorities, identified problems, and proposed solutions, which represented a significant departure from externally designed interventions. However, decisions regarding funding architecture, eligibility criteria, reporting requirements, evaluation processes, and compliance systems remained largely concentrated among WWF offices, fund managers, and programme governance structures. In practice, authority over what to fund moved closer to communities than authority over how funding systems themselves operate.

The NLGF therefore further illustrates that localisation is not only a question of resource flows. It is also a question of governance, participation, and who defines the rules through which resources are allocated.



Accessibility requires intentional design

The experience across all countries demonstrates that accessibility does not occur automatically. Many of the actors in the NLGF sought to support faced barriers related to legal registration, banking access, language, literacy, communication infrastructure, and familiarity with donor requirements.

Different countries addressed these barriers in different ways. Indonesia relied heavily on fiscal hosts to enable unregistered groups to participate. Bolivia used umbrella organisations to support grassroots initiatives that lacked legal status or administrative capacity. Paraguay adopted a direct assistance model that removed many of the requirements associated with conventional grants.

Tunisia relied on intensive accompaniment to help smaller organisations navigate legal and financial compliance requirements. These experiences demonstrate that inclusion depends not only on simplifying applications, but also on investing in outreach, accompaniment, and intermediary support structures capable of connecting resources with communities.



Trust and relationships are a form of accountability

A second cross-country finding concerns the importance of trust-based approaches. Across all contexts, the effectiveness of the mechanism depended heavily on trusted relationships, local knowledge, and proximity to communities. In Brazil, Fundo Casa's long-standing territorial networks enabled emergency requests to be verified and funded rapidly. In Paraguay, CODEHUPY's close engagement with beneficiaries allowed the facility to remain highly responsive despite limited resources. In Indonesia, accompaniment and mentoring proved more effective than rigid compliance procedures in supporting first-time grantees.

The NLGF experience challenges the notion that accountability depends exclusively on documentation and formal controls. Instead, it demonstrates that accountability can also be built through relationships, transparency, continuous communication, and local verification systems. Trust did not replace accountability; it enabled accountability to function in contexts where conventional donor procedures would have excluded many intended beneficiaries.

Intermediaries remain critical to localisation

A strong finding across all countries concerns the role of intermediary organisations. Fund managers, umbrella organisations and fiscal hosts were indispensable in bridging the gap between international funding systems and local actors. These organisations provided much more than administrative support. Their contributions included outreach, mentoring, proposal development support, financial accompaniment, verification, monitoring, knowledge exchange, and conflict resolution. They translated donor requirements into locally meaningful processes and provided the infrastructure required for small and often informal actors to access resources.

The NLGF therefore suggests that localisation should not be understood as removing intermediaries altogether. Rather, it involves redefining their role. Instead of concentrating power and resources, intermediaries can serve as facilitators, connectors, and enablers of locally led action.

Flexibility depends on learning

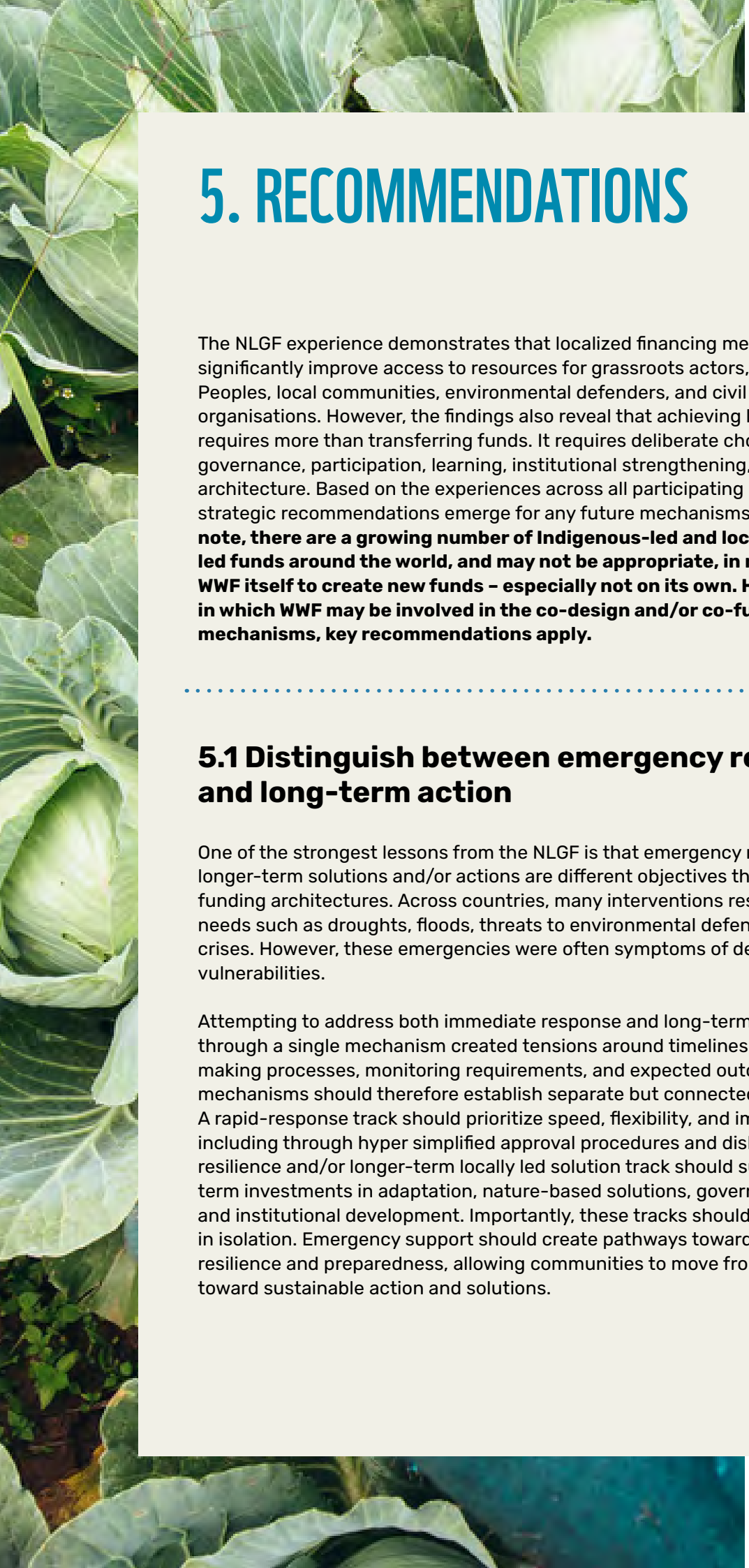
The NLGF generated multiple examples of adaptive management and flexible programming. Fund managers revised processes between funding cycles, adapted timelines, modified reporting formats, and adjusted implementation approaches in response to emerging realities. However, one common lesson is that flexibility is only effective when learning systems exist to support it. Adaptation was strongest where there were opportunities for reflection, documentation, and iterative improvement. Conversely, compressed timelines often limited the ability to capture lessons and translate them into programme improvements.

The experience suggests that learning should be seen as a core operational function rather than a supplementary activity. Monitoring, learning, and adaptation are mutually reinforcing processes and should be resourced accordingly.

Financial architecture shapes outcomes

Many of the operational challenges encountered by grantees and fund managers originated not from local capacities, but from the design of the funding mechanism itself. Shorter grant durations, delayed contracting processes, uncertainty around future funding tranches, and compressed implementation windows affected all countries to varying degrees. These constraints reduced opportunities for longer-term capacity building, learning, and adaptation. At the same time, rapid disbursement mechanisms and high upfront payments proved highly effective in enabling local actors to respond quickly to emerging opportunities and challenges. This experience highlights that funding architecture is not a neutral design choice. Decisions regarding timelines, grant sizes, disbursement schedules, and predictability fundamentally influence what local actors are able to achieve.





5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The NLGF experience demonstrates that localized financing mechanisms can significantly improve access to resources for grassroots actors, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, environmental defenders, and civil society organisations. However, the findings also reveal that achieving locally led action requires more than transferring funds. It requires deliberate choices regarding governance, participation, learning, institutional strengthening, and funding architecture. Based on the experiences across all participating countries, five strategic recommendations emerge for any future mechanisms. **Importantly to note, there are a growing number of Indigenous-led and local community-led funds around the world, and may not be appropriate, in many cases, for WWF itself to create new funds – especially not on its own. However, in cases in which WWF may be involved in the co-design and/or co-funding of such mechanisms, key recommendations apply.**

5.1 Distinguish between emergency response and long-term action

One of the strongest lessons from the NLGF is that emergency response and longer-term solutions and/or actions are different objectives that require different funding architectures. Across countries, many interventions responded to urgent needs such as droughts, floods, threats to environmental defenders, and water crises. However, these emergencies were often symptoms of deeper structural vulnerabilities.

Attempting to address both immediate response and long-term solutions through a single mechanism created tensions around timelines, decision-making processes, monitoring requirements, and expected outcomes. Future mechanisms should therefore establish separate but connected funding tracks. A rapid-response track should prioritize speed, flexibility, and immediate action, including through hyper simplified approval procedures and disbursement; a resilience and/or longer-term locally led solution track should support longer-term investments in adaptation, nature-based solutions, governance, livelihoods, and institutional development. Importantly, these tracks should not operate in isolation. Emergency support should create pathways toward longer-term resilience and preparedness, allowing communities to move from crisis response toward sustainable action and solutions.

5.2 Move beyond access towards shared decision-making

The NLGF successfully expanded access to funding, but the degree to which power shifted remained uneven. In most cases, communities were able to define problems and identify solutions, yet key decisions regarding funding parameters, evaluation criteria, governance structures, and reporting requirements remained largely controlled by programme actors.

Future mechanisms should therefore move beyond focusing exclusively on access and place greater emphasis on participation in governance and decision-making. This includes involving local actors more actively in defining funding priorities, developing evaluation criteria, and determining what success looks like in different contexts.

Particular attention should be given to integrating different forms of knowledge into decision-making processes. Technical expertise remains important, especially in areas such as water management, ecosystem restoration, and climate adaptation. However, local, Indigenous and traditional knowledge, and lived experience should carry equal weight in project design and assessment. This may require redesigning advisory committees and reviewing structures so that community representatives and local knowledge holders participate as decision-makers rather than solely as consultees.

Doing so will not only improve legitimacy and relevance but will also contribute to overcoming longstanding knowledge hierarchies that often privilege external expertise over local experience.

5.3 Invest in intermediaries and institutional strengthening as core components of localization

A recurring finding across all countries was the critical role played by intermediary organisations, including fund managers, umbrella organisations, and fiscal hosts. These organisations helped bridge the gap between international funding systems and local actors by providing accompaniment, administrative support, mentoring, verification, outreach, and knowledge exchange.

Too often, these functions are treated as overhead costs rather than as essential investments. Yet without them, many grassroots actors would have remained unable to access resources or comply with donor requirements. **As such, *direct finance* often does not mean *finance without intermediaries*; on the contrary, the realities of many**

local contexts require appropriate intermediaries to adequately support rights-holders in accessing and absorbing funds.

Future mechanisms should therefore explicitly recognize intermediary organisations as a core component of the funding architecture. This includes investing in their organisational development, staffing, systems, fundraising capacities, and long-term sustainability. Capacity strengthening should not be limited to grantees, but should extend across the broader ecosystem of actors involved in managing and supporting locally led initiatives.

Equally important is recognizing that capacity building extends beyond training. It involves accompaniment, peer learning, organisational planning, governance strengthening, and long-term institutional development. Future mechanisms should budget accordingly and create opportunities for iterative learning among grantees, intermediaries, and programme partners.

5.4 Design Learning and Accountability systems around local realities

The NLGF highlighted the limitations of conventional monitoring and evaluation approaches for capturing locally led change processes. Many important outcomes, including strengthened community leadership, local governance improvements, knowledge exchange, and shifts in power dynamics, were difficult to capture through standard indicators and reporting frameworks.

Future mechanisms should invest in learning systems that combine quantitative and qualitative evidence. Storytelling, community narratives, peer reflection, participatory monitoring, and locally defined indicators should complement more conventional reporting approaches. Communities should be involved in defining what meaningful success looks like and how it should be documented.

Particular attention should be given to creating stronger feedback loops between local learning and programme-level decision-making. Monitoring and learning should not function solely as accountability mechanisms for donors. They should also support reflection, adaptation, and continuous improvement by communities and intermediary organisations themselves.

This requires dedicated resourcing. Learning, documentation and knowledge management should be considered central programme functions rather than optional add-ons. Investments in learning systems can also generate evidence that informs broader advocacy efforts and contributes to growing debates around locally led adaptation and conservation finance.

5.5 Invest in funding architectures that support trust, flexibility and long-term change

Many challenges encountered during implementation resulted not from local capacities, but from the design of the funding system and process. Delayed contracting processes, short implementation windows, uncertain future funding, and fragmented disbursement schedules limited the ability of grantees and fund managers to plan effectively and invest in longer-term impact.

Future mechanisms should therefore prioritise more patient, predictable, and flexible financing approaches. Grant cycles should be long enough to allow adaptation, learning, and institutional strengthening. Funding signals should be provided early and clearly to enable planning and staff retention. Disbursement structures should facilitate implementation rather than create unnecessary administrative burdens.

At the same time, flexibility should not mean a lack of accountability. Rather, accountability and flexibility should be understood as complementary. Clear principles, safeguards, and reporting requirements can coexist with adaptive management and context-specific implementation approaches.

The experience of the NLGF suggests that trust-based funding models are both feasible and effective when accompanied by strong relationships, transparent processes, and capable intermediary organisations. Future mechanisms should therefore treat trust not as a risk, but as a strategic asset that enables locally led action, learning, and long-term impact.

5.6 Strengthen WWF's role as an enabler for localization

The NLGF experience suggests that WWF's greatest contribution to localisation may not lie in directly managing funding flows, but in creating the enabling conditions that allow local actors to access, govern, and influence resources on their own terms. As localisation progresses across the conservation sector, WWF's role ought to evolve from programme designer and implementer towards convener, resource mobiliser, broker, technical partner, and institutional supporter.

This shift is particularly relevant for WWF-NL. As a fundraising office within the WWF network, WWF-NL is well positioned to leverage donor relationships, mobilise resources, support innovation, and facilitate connections between local actors, local WWF offices, philanthropic foundations, Indigenous, and community-led funds and wider conservation finance ecosystems. Rather than viewing direct finance and localisation as a threat to WWF's role, it can be understood as an opportunity to reposition WWF as a trusted intermediary that helps unlock, de-risk, and scale locally led conservation.

Future efforts should therefore focus on strengthening WWF's ability to: (i) connect rights-holders and local organisations to funding opportunities, technical expertise, and policy spaces; (ii) support the development of, and/or fundraising for, Indigenous-led funds, community-owned financing mechanisms, and other locally governed funding models; (iii) strengthen the organisational capacities and financial sustainability of local actors; and (iv) generate evidence and learning that can help influence wider conservation and climate finance systems toward more equitable and locally led approaches.

The growing interest among donors in localisation, power shifting, and direct financing presents an opportunity for WWF to clarify its value proposition. The organization's comparative advantage increasingly lies not in retaining control over resources, but in helping ensure that resources, knowledge, and decision-making power move closer to the actors best positioned to steward landscapes and deliver long-term conservation outcomes. **In this sense, WWF's future role is not diminished by localisation; it is transformed by it.**

6. CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

The NLGF was implemented at a time when localisation, direct finance, and locally led adaptation are receiving growing attention from donors, foundations, and climate finance institutions. Yet despite increasing commitments, funding continues to struggle to reach local actors directly and equitably. The NLGF therefore provides WWF with an opportunity to contribute evidence and practical experience to a rapidly evolving field.

A review of comparable small-granting mechanisms suggests that there is currently strong momentum behind funding approaches that prioritise community leadership, participatory grantmaking, and direct support to local actors. At the same time, many existing mechanisms continue to rely on intermediary organisations to provide accompaniment, verification, learning, and capacity strengthening. The NLGF experience reinforces this finding: localisation is often most effective when local actors are supported through existing trusted networks and institutions rather than left to navigate complex funding systems alone.

Several gaps remain within the current funding landscape. Relatively few mechanisms successfully combine rapid response, long-term resilience building, and strong community ownership within a single ecosystem. Similarly, there remains limited funding available for the type of accompaniment, organisational development, and intermediary support that the NLGF demonstrated to be critical for success.

The NLGF also provides a compelling value proposition for WWF. The mechanism demonstrated the organization's ability to mobilise resources, work through credible local partners, support grassroots actors, experiment with new funding models, and generate lessons relevant to the wider conservation and climate finance sectors. Importantly, it showed that WWF can play a unique role in connecting local realities with broader policy debates, conservation strategies, and funding opportunities.

For future resource mobilization efforts, WWF should avoid presenting a single predefined mechanism. Instead, a more promising approach may be to develop a flexible concept note that articulates a clear vision, a set of tested design principles and a menu of possible implementation options. This would allow future mechanisms to be co-designed with donors while preserving the core principles that emerged from the NLGF experience: accessibility, participation, accompaniment, flexibility, and locally led action.

Importantly, future mechanisms should build on, and where appropriate invest through, existing local and rights-holder-led funds rather than automatically creating new intermediary structures. These funds are not simply channels for transferring resources to communities; they are part of the institutional infrastructure for locally led conservation. Because their governance, relationships, and decision-making are rooted closer to the territories and rights-holders they serve, they can enable local actors to exercise greater influence over which priorities are funded, how resources are allocated, and what forms of accountability are appropriate.

Strengthening these institutions can therefore create benefits beyond individual grants by building lasting local capacity to mobilise, govern, and redistribute conservation finance. For WWF, this implies engaging with this growing funding ecosystem not only as a donor or intermediary, but as a potential resource mobiliser, technical partner, and ally, helping locally governed funds access larger and more sustainable sources of finance while respecting their autonomy and decision-making authority.

Foundations may represent a particularly promising entry point given their increasing interest in power shifting, participatory grantmaking, and locally led approaches. At the same time, bilateral donors and climate finance institutions are increasingly adopting localisation and adaptation commitments that could create opportunities for larger-scale partnerships.

Relevant philanthropic funders include:

- **Ford Foundation:** Strong track record funding small granting initiatives (Fund for Global Human Rights, Mama Cash, Global Greengrants Fund, EDC, C-CAF), explicit focus on natural resources and climate justice for Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities, recent increase in indirect cost rate to 25% demonstrates commitment to grantee sustainability. Geographic presence aligns well with WWF priority countries.

- **Oak Foundation:** Funds both environmental programs (Nature and People, Regenerative Landscapes) and human rights defenders protection. Previous support for Mama Cash and C-CAF shows willingness to fund small granting mechanisms.

- **Porticus:** Explicit focus on "shifting power" and "overcoming top-down views" with work in regenerative agriculture and living forests in key geographies (Amazon, Congo, Indonesia, Brazil, DRC, Kenya). Participatory grantmaking emphasis aligns with LLA principles.

- **Packard Foundation:** Strong focus on mobilizing resources for Indigenous Peoples and forest community-led groups, explicitly supporting organizations "creating their own funding programs to get resources directly to the people and places that need them most." Already funds WWF and supports small granting initiatives (EDC, Global Greengrants Fund, Fund for Global Human Rights).

- **Quadrature Climate Foundation:** New "Respond" pillar focuses on supporting vulnerable communities to build resilience, with emphasis on climate adaptation. Invitation-only process but contributor to Adaptation and Resilience Fund for LLA. Science-led approach could value WWF's expertise and commitment to documenting evidence and learning.

Ultimately, the strongest message emerging from the NLGF is that locally led finance is not simply a funding modality. It is a different way of organising relationships, decision-making, and accountability. Future investment in this space should therefore focus not only on increasing financial flows, but also on strengthening the institutional ecosystems, knowledge systems, and partnerships that make locally led climate and conservation action possible.

7. CONCLUSION

The Next Level Grant Facility was deliberately created within the Voices for Just Climate Action programme to test a different way of financing climate action: one that could move resources closer to grassroots organisations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and environmental defenders, while strengthening the civil society actors and institutions that enable locally led action. Across five very different contexts, the NLGF showed that this is possible. It also showed that doing so requires much more than creating a small-grants window. Accessibility depended on trusted relationships, locally rooted fund managers and intermediaries, accompaniment, flexible processes, and a willingness to adapt conventional approaches to risk and accountability.

This is where the NLGF's most important legacy lies. Its ambition should not end with the individual initiatives it financed. The facility was an experiment in changing the way conservation and climate finance works, and its lessons point towards **a more fundamental transformation: from funding locally delivered activities towards enabling locally led systems of action; from consulting rights-holders towards institutionalizing their role in setting priorities and making decisions; and from strengthening organisations so that they can comply with existing funding systems towards changing those systems so that they recognize different forms of governance, knowledge, and accountability.** The five different country experiences also demonstrate that stronger local civil society, trusted intermediaries, and rights-holder institutions are not ancillary to conservation outcomes. They are part of the infrastructure through which durable and equitable conservation becomes possible.

This requires greater ambition from WWF and its partners. Future efforts should build on what the NLGF tested, but move beyond project-by-project experimentation towards institutionalizing locally led approaches within funding strategies, governance arrangements, partnerships, monitoring and learning systems, and organisational procedures. For WWF, this also means being prepared for its own role to change: using its resources, technical capabilities, networks, and influence not to retain control, but increasingly to strengthen the actors and institutions that can lead conservation in their own territories.

The NLGF should therefore be understood not as an endpoint, but as a proof of possibility and a call for further transformation. The next step is to turn these lessons into institutional practice and to use the evidence generated through the facility to influence the wider conservation and climate finance system. Only then can localisation move from a series of innovative projects to a durable shift in where resources flow, whose knowledge counts, who makes decisions, and, ultimately, who holds the power to shape conservation outcomes.

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9. COLOFON

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Prepared by
Pivot Inc. (Authors: Monica Trichart and Sophia J.V. Rensburg); NES Consultancy (Authors: Nina Swen and Ilaha Abasli); Diana Frances (WWF-NL)

Edited by
Diana Francês (WWF-NL) and Laura Lopéz (WWF-NL)

Contributors
WWF country offices and regional teams
VCA alliance partners
National fund managers including Samdhana Institute, Fundo Casa, Comuna, CODEHUPY, and AIHR.

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Contact
Diana Francês, dfrances@wwf.nl

Design
Adriana Lara Duarte

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

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THE NEXT LEVEL GRANT FACILITY

DIRECT FINANCE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

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