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Evaluation of Norwegian International Climate and Forest Initiative Support to Civil Society

Department for Evaluation





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Disclaimer

This report is the product of its authors, and responsibility for the accuracy of data included in this report rests with the authors alone.

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Foreword

Through multiple reports, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹ has firmly established that saving tropical forests is key to reducing emissions, but also to achieve the sustainable development goals related to water, health, energy, human safety, and biological diversity. Being the homeland for millions of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent populations, the rain forest is also historically, culturally, and spiritually significant providing security, status, income, social identity, and a basis for political relations.

Norway's contribution to the international framework for Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) is channeled through Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI). This initiative has been in operation since 2008 and has pledged up to 3 billion NOK a year to enable a stable climate, preserved biodiversity and sustainable development.

The Department for Evaluation has regularly evaluated NICFI. This report focuses on Norad's management of NICFI civil society support. The intention is to contribute new knowledge and learning to further strengthen the coherence of the NICFI support to civil society.

The main conclusion is that Norad has taken important steps towards a more strategic management of the support to civil society organizations. However, there is still room for improvement in some areas, including strengthening the collecting of, learning from, and use of different types of knowledge to inform decisions, enhancing alignments with other projects, and further developing the human rights-based approach.

We believe this evaluation will provide useful inputs for the government's support to civil society.

The evaluation was carried out and authored by a team from the Evaluation Department in Norad, CMI and Vista Analysis with contributions from external advisors at CICERO, Solveig Aamodt and Erlend Hermansen. I thank the team for a job well done.



Siv Janne Lillestøl.

Oslo, Februar 2024,

Acting Director, Department for Evaluation





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Abbreviations

FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
MFA:	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change
MoCE	Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment
NICFI:	Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative
Norad:	Norwegian agency for development cooperation
RBM:	Results-based management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC:	Theory of Change
ToR:	Terms of Reference
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework for Climate Change Convention





Executive Summary

Background

The Norwegian government is a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and supports the REDD+ framework through the Norwegian International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI). In operation since 2008, NICFI aims to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in the global south. NICFI is a central initiative in Norwegian development aid. Since it began, around NOK 5.9 billion has been allocated to, or through, civil society organizations (CSOs). Around NOK 4 billion of this funding has been managed by Norad through four rounds of competitive tendering, covering the periods: 2009-12, 2013-15, 2016-20 and 2021-25.

Purpose and scope of this evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the Section for Forests in Norad with information that can be used to adapt the management of the NICFI support that is provided to civil society organisations. The intention is to contribute new knowledge and learning to further strengthen the management of the NICFI civil society support.

The evaluation object is the NICFI funded civil society support, managed by Norad, from 2016 through two project cycles (2016-2020, 2021-2025.)

Methods

The evaluation design is grounded in a formative and utilization-focused approach with a primary emphasis on qualitative methods, complemented by relevant descriptive statistics. It is designed to surface lessons from the calls for proposals in 2019 and the management of the grants in the last project cycle (2021-2025). Semi-structured interviews are the main source of primary data used. Interviewees were purposively chosen to represent different aspects of the evaluation object. Narratives and statements from interviews and workshops were checked against secondary data to identify inconsistencies and/or similarities or reinforcements. Secondary data was collected in two forms: (i) documentary analysis (including quantitative analysis) of Norad guidelines, strategic policies, evaluations, embassy letters and reports, budgetary propositions to parliament and programme/project documents; and (ii) a review of published scientific and policy literature.

Evaluation questions

This evaluation explores **to what extent Norad has ensured the coherence of NICFI's support to civil society to reach its stated goals**. Coherence is important in the NICFI context since attaining the overall goals of the strategic initiative is dependent on improvements within several areas of intervention. Furthermore, the interrelations between the areas of intervention are multiple.

To answer this question the focus in this evaluation has been on the Norad Section for Forest's management of the NICFI support to civil society. It is, however, important to note that ensuring coherence is a joint endeavour, where all actors in the NICFI initiative, including the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the embassies, and civil society organizations play a role.

The evaluation criteria "coherence" is used as the starting point for this evaluation. We refer to the concept of coherence when we talk about the overall logical and consistent connections of different practices, ideas/standards/tools, and support to civil society organizations. The evaluation focused on three dimensions of coherence: 1) learning as a precondition for coherence; 2) vertical and horizontal alignment in





general among the projects; and 3) a specific focus on the integration of a rights-based approach in Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations.

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

The main evaluation question will be explored through the following sub-questions, which explore coherence from different perspectives:

Evaluation question 1: *To what extent is Norad collecting, analysing and using evidence to inform calls for proposals and make adaptations in the project cycle?*

The evaluation found that the development of the objectives and priorities in the call for proposals in 2019 were not based on a systematic compilation and analysis of results data from the previous project cycle. In preparation for the call for proposals, Norad initiated the development of two types of analysis: Analysis of the four prioritised themes in the call for proposals and eight country analyses. However, these analyses did not contain a systematic assessment of the results achieved, although a selection of results is included in the analyses. The main sources of knowledge used is the partners themselves. Limited attempts at triangulating this experience-based knowledge with other forms of knowledge, particularly scientific peer reviewed knowledge and Indigenous forms of knowledge were found in the analyses.

The evaluation also found that the work on developing common indicators to track the achievement of the overall project cycle is still a work-in-progress. However, Norad's Section for Forests has taken important steps towards a more strategic management of the support to civil society organizations. These steps include establishment of thematic working groups, country focal points, and initiatives to operationalize the NICFI strategic framework via more detailed sub theories of change, as well as the development of knowledge plans. Time and resource constraints, plus a lack of aggregated results data are barriers towards establishing an efficient system for organizational learning where explicit (including scientific and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge), implicit, and tacit knowledge are combined and used to understand the complex problem of, and sustainable solutions to, deforestation and forest degradation globally, nationally and locally.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to use the thematic working groups as arenas for collective learning and knowledge creation/synthesising;
2. Regularly update internal analyses (such as the thematic and country analyses), including links and citations to new information, evidence, and analysis. Balancing or triangulating experience-based knowledge with other forms of knowledge, particularly scientific peer reviewed knowledge and Indigenous forms of knowledge is needed;

3. Strengthen systems for aggregating and collectively assessing results data to learn and to inform decisions about what and who to fund and how to adjust the management of the funding.

Evaluation question 2: *How well does the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon complement the support to other thematic areas in the call for proposals (horizontal alignment), other NICFI interventions in the Amazon, and relevant policies (vertical alignment)?*

The evaluation found that attempts were made by Norad to ensure that the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon complemented support to other thematic areas in the same region. All projects were to vertically align with the aim to reverse and reduce loss of tropical forests, contribute to a stable climate, protect biodiversity and enhance sustainable development in developing countries. All projects were also to horizontally align with other NICFI activities to meet the overall goal of preserving tropical forests both by uncovering and monitoring activities that lead to illegal deforestation and by providing incentives for governments, businesses, and the financial sector to pursue policies and conduct activities that have no negative impact on the rainforest.





However, the evaluation also found gaps and missed opportunities. In terms of developing the call for proposals and assessing applications, vertical alignment was hampered by the incomplete development of nested theories of change for the five intervention categories at the time of project assessment. Horizontal alignment in developing the call for proposals and assessing applications was also hampered by the limited use of scientific evidence in an explicit assessment of the complementarity of civil society projects with the wider NICFI portfolio (including those in the Amazon). It was also difficult for embassies to gain a full overview of all partners and projects supported by Norway, and although various means were used to overcome this challenge, information sharing gaps remained. In terms of the management of the project cycle, vertical alignment with Norad's own policies appears to have been hampered through limited use of knowledge directly emanating from Indigenous Peoples. Horizontal alignment, too, was hampered by the limited overview available to Norad and embassy staff of all relevant NICFI activities in each context.

If a new call for proposals is decided upon, we recommend to:

1. Consider improvements to horizontal alignment of NICFI activities in each country. For example, ensure strong use of scientific evidence in addition to experience-based knowledge when assessing all initiatives focused on one geographic area to explore whether and how coherence among projects and partners can be enhanced. Consideration should also be given to the implications of Norwegian support in shaping power dynamics among partners;
2. Ensure that NICFI goals and objectives in the strategic framework, and how they interrelate, are understood by all those managing NICFI's budget (including Norad, embassies and partners).
3. Integrate systematized learning and the use of different forms of knowledge at an early stage of planning the call for proposals. Match staff capacities and workloads for both project selection and follow-up;
4. Ensure explicit and systematic documentation of activities/agreements, and results across the NICFI portfolio, is available to all actors involved in creating and recreating the NICFI portfolio;
5. Establish and maintain clear roles and responsibilities between the different NICFI actors in developing the call for proposals and selecting projects.

Evaluation question 3: *To what extent has Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations been rights-based?*

The evaluation found that, Norad, in accordance with the applicable guidance and rules, worked to ensure participation of and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent populations, and ensure women's participation and respect for women's rights.

BOX 1

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which aligns with their universal right to self-determination. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to provide or withhold/withdraw consent, at any point, regarding projects impacting their territories. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to engage in negotiations to shape the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects.

Source

(<https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/our-pillars/fpic/en/>)





Civil society projects supported were assessed by Norad against their use of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) or related processes at the programme level. Given the varying legal status and practice of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) across partner country jurisdictions as well as reported instances of malpractice linked to Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, the evaluation identifies scope for further consideration by Norad of how NICFI activities fit with Norway's international treaty obligations under International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169.

The evaluation also found that in the 2021-2025 round, only one of the seven domestic civil society groups supported is run by Indigenous Peoples themselves. Given that Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent populations are acknowledged to have the best and most up-to-date knowledge of the rights issues and threats they face, the omission of support to more IP-run organizations across all partner countries in the 2021-2025 round can be viewed as a weakness in NICFI's ambitions to further support Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Recommendations:

1. If a new call is decided upon, consider whether to introduce a specific small grants element for Indigenous Peoples and grassroots community organizations. Alternatively, create several funding channels based on the type of organization, their role, and their capacities;
2. Ensure that the guidance followed by NICFI is consistent with Norway's international treaty obligations under Article 6 of the ILO Convention given the varied legal status and practice of FPIC in partner countries, including reported instances of malpractice connected to FPIC processes;
3. Further strengthen the rights-based approach, through:
 - a. Systematise the inclusion of scientific, Indigenous and embassy knowledge in country and thematic analyses informing calls for proposals and project selection. For example, Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. (2021) provide lessons on pursuing access to justice and improved rights for forest-dependent populations in authoritarian REDD+ countries;
 - b. Consider introducing country-level theories of change, developed in tandem with more systematic use of the knowledge base, to better ground programme theories and assumptions in the dynamic rights situations of each context;
 - c. Review the completeness of the qualitative and quantitative indicator set for measuring progress on rights issues, given that the current indicators may only partially reflect the reality of the rights situations of target groups;





1

Introduction





The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Ometto et al., 2022) has established that conserving tropical forests is vital not only for reducing carbon emissions, but also for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to water, health, energy, human safety and biological diversity. Home to millions of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities, tropical forests are recognized by the IPCC as historically, culturally and spiritually significant, providing security, status, income, social identity, and a basis for political relations (IPCC, 2023; Ometto et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has developed a framework called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+). The aim of this framework is for governments to implement activities to reduce human pressures on tropical forests, which involve reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stock, and sustainable management.



Photo: **Espen Røst** | Panorama





The Norwegian Climate and Forest Initiative

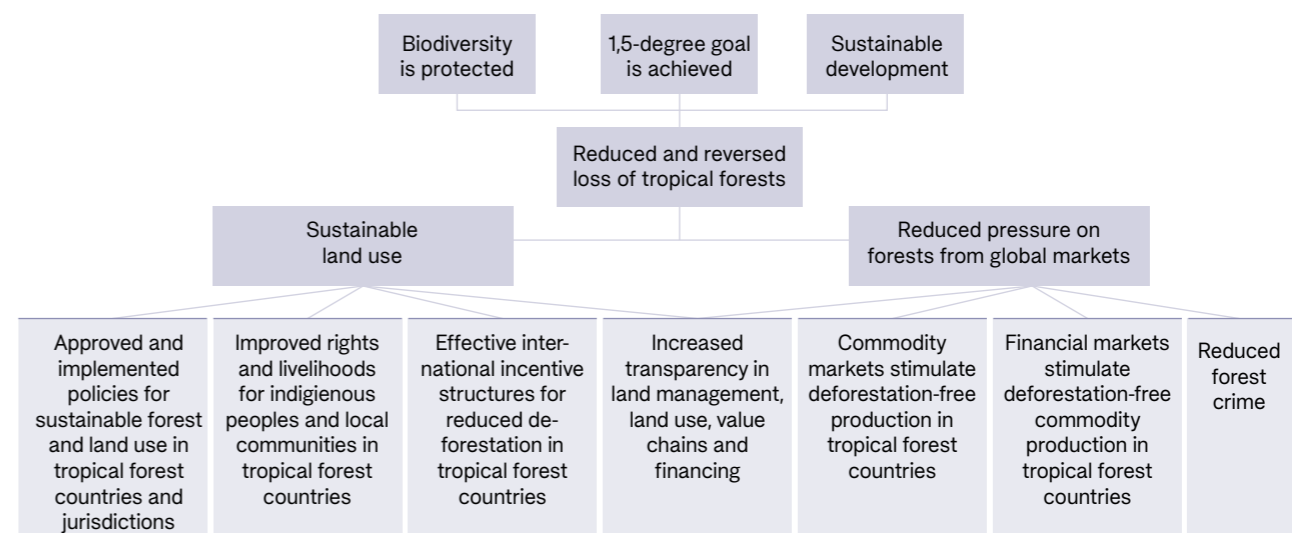
The Norwegian government is a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and supports the REDD+ framework through the Norwegian International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI). The Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment receives about NOK 3.1 billion each year over a separate line item in the national budget for this initiative. This funding finances a portfolio of activities managed directly by the NICFI section in the Ministry of Climate and Environment or through annual allocations to the Section for Forests at Norad and Norwegian embassies in the bilateral partner countries of Colombia, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Indonesia. Peru, which is also a partner country, hosts a Climate and Forest Envoy from Norway. However, Norway does not maintain a physical embassy in Peru, as the embassy in Chile oversees Peru.

The Ministry of Climate and Environment is responsible for the political direction of NICFI, setting the goals, diplomacy, building alliances, bilateral relationships, and governing Norad's work. The Ministry of Climate and Environment is responsible for the direction of the strategic framework (see figure 1) and hence for ensuring that all the pieces of the puzzle are aligned

in the best way possible. They are also responsible for the results-based payment programme. In addition, they also manage funding for selected initiatives. Norad, as a subordinate of the Ministry of Climate and Environment (and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on other sectors), receives instructions and allocation letters from the Ministries. Climate and Environment Envoys are responsible for the bilateral relations between Norway and the partner countries. Most of the envoys also have funding to directly support initiatives in the country.

This model should facilitate an elevated level of coordination compared to other Norwegian development aid portfolios where separate ministries are responsible for different components (Norad, 2020b). The three parties in this model: the NICFI section in the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Section for Forests in Norad, and the relevant embassies, meet regularly to discuss NICFI initiatives. The management of this funding is guided by a strategic framework revised by the Ministry of Climate and Environment in 2019, as seen in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
NICFI Strategic Framework 2019





This strategic framework identifies seven areas of intervention at its lowest level¹. These relate to host country institutions and politics, Indigenous rights, international interventions, transparency, product value chains, financial markets, and forest crimes. Interventions in these seven areas are expected to contribute to the impact of reduced and reversed loss of tropical forests through two intermediary outcomes. These intermediary outcomes are sustainable land use (i.e., that there is a reduction in the de facto supply of deforestation because unsustainable land use practices are diminished) and reduced pressure on forests from global markets (i.e., that there is a reduction of de facto demand for products derived from deforestation). In this framework NICFI assumes that reduced and reversed loss of tropical forests will take place in a way that contributes to three higher-level goals: biodiversity protection, limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and the creation of sustainable development.

Previous evaluations by the Department for Evaluations at Norad show that NICFI has delivered mixed results. For example, a 2017 synthesis (Norad, 2017a) of the main findings of Norad evaluations of NICFI since 2009, shows that there is a broad consensus that NICFI has been instrumental in pushing the REDD+

¹ In the most recent strategic framework, dated in 2022, an eight area of intervention has been added at the bottom of the framework, feeding into the seven others: global support. We use the 2019 framework since this version was relevant to the call for proposals we focus on in this evaluation.



Photo: **Marte Lid** | Norad

agenda forward and that it played a considerable role in building momentum towards agreement on a REDD+ framework under the UNFCCC, including its anchoring in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2015). At the same time, the same synthesis notes that NICFI has been largely based on a one-size-fits-all approach coupled with fragmented funding through multilateral and bilateral channels, which reduces NICFI's ability to adapt its approaches to the needs and capacity of each REDD+ country. The Norwegian Office of the Auditor General's investigation of NICFI found, *inter alia*, that the results

of REDD+ thus far were delayed and uncertain, and that the monitoring of the implementation and results of REDD+ were unsatisfactory (Riksrevisjonen, 2018, p.3). This mixed assessment matches recent evidence in scholarly literature on REDD+ and NICFI. While much of this literature is focused on the practical tasks of marshalling evidence and outlining policies to mobilize government decision-making, it also contains criticisms, for instance, of the gaps between how REDD+ shall in theory be implemented, and how it has been implemented in practice (Williams, 2023).





Overview of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the Section for Forests in Norad with information that can be used to adapt the management of the NICFI support that is provided to civil society organisations. The intention is to contribute new knowledge and learning to further strengthen the coherence of the NICFI civil society support².

The evaluation has two objectives: (i) To examine whether Norad's management of the support provided to civil society organisations facilitates internal coherence; (ii) Provide recommendations on Norad's management of the support provided to civil society organisations.

This evaluation focuses on 'internal coherence', which the OECD-DAC explain as follows: "*Internal coherence addresses **the synergies and interlinkages** between the intervention and other interventions carried out*

² The original Terms of Reference (TOR) for this evaluation covered a wider scope than what is included in this report. The TOR is therefore not included in this report.

by the same institution/government, as well as the consistency of the intervention with the relevant international norms and standards to which that institution/government adheres" (OECD DAC, 2021). The OECD DAC also highlights the importance of exploring both **horizontal and vertical** perspectives of internal coherence. In this evaluation *Vertical* alignment is about ensuring that both Norad and the project owners share the same overall goal and have the same understanding of this. *Horizontal* alignment is about ensuring that the projects harmonise with and reinforce one another.

The evaluation object is the NICFI funded civil society support, managed by Norad, from 2016 to the present date through two project cycles (2016-2020, 2021-2025). In this document, we use the term project cycle to refer to the evaluation object. The focus of the evaluation is on the 2021-2025 project cycle.

The evaluation answers one main evaluation question and three sub-questions. The main evaluation question is: **to what extent Norad has ensured the coherence of NICFI's support to civil society to reach its stated goals.**

This main evaluation question is explored through the following sub- questions:

i) Learning: To what extent is Norad collecting, analysing and using evidence to inform calls for proposals and make adaptations in the project cycle? The scope is the management of the two project cycles (2016-2020 and 2021-2025). The evaluation covers two project cycles to explore how learning from one project cycle is fed into the design of the next call for proposals.

ii) Alignment, trade-offs, and interlinkages: How well does the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon fit with a) the support to other thematic areas in the call for proposals, b) other NICFI interventions in the Amazon, and c) relevant policies? Here the primary emphasis is on how well projects included in the current project cycle scheme (2021-2025) are aligned with: a) projects targeting Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent populations in the Amazon (defined as Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Guyana). This region was selected because it has the world's highest biodiversity, but also some of the highest deforestation rates, and it





is impossible to attain global climate and biodiversity targets with continued deforestation and unsustainable development in this part of the world; b) other NICFI interventions in the Amazon; and c) relevant policies. The management of the current grant scheme is also included.

iii) Rights-based approach: To what extent has Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations been rights-based? For this dimension the emphasis is on the alignment of Norad's management of the current project cycle (2021-2025) targeting Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent populations in the Amazon with human rights-based policies (rights-based approach).



Photo: **Stock**





Concepts used in the evaluation

In this evaluation we use the following key concepts:

Coherence

We refer to the concept of coherence when we talk about the overall logical and consistent connections of different practices, ideas/standards/tools, and support to civil society organizations. The evaluation focuses on three dimensions of coherence: learning as a precondition for coherence, vertical and horizontal alignment in general among the projects, and a specific focus on the integration of a rights-based approach in Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations.

Synergies, alignment, trade-offs and interlinkages

We define 'synergy' in this context as a situation in which the projects collectively produce a greater effect than the sum of the projects' separate outcomes. We do not assess the effects of individual projects in this evaluation, and it is difficult to detect and measure synergies directly. Therefore, we aim to identify management aspects that are positively correlated with

synergies, namely positive and reciprocally reinforcing interlinkages between projects, and project alignment.

One way of ensuring synergies is enabling positive interlinkages. Interlinkages (positive or negative) in this context can be understood as the connections and causal relationships between projects and programmes and their goals. Interlinkages are often interpreted to be a necessary, albeit insufficient precondition for synergies to occur. For interlinkages to lead to synergies, the interlinkages should be 'positive', or reinforcing, where the parts that are interlinked have a positive effect on one another.

Trade-offs occur when pursuing one project or objective within a project cycle comes at the expense of another project or objective.

Interlinkages can, in turn, be identified through alignment, a concept that is closely linked to internal coherence. The OECD DAC (2021) notes how internal coherence can be understood from both a horizontal and a vertical perspective: *Vertical* alignment is about ensuring that both Norad and the project owners share the same overall goal and have the same understanding of this. *Horizontal* alignment is

about ensuring that the projects harmonise with and reinforce one another.

Results-based management

Results-based management is an essential tool for promoting coherence and can ensure that coherence is secured within and between project cycles. In this evaluation we define results-based management of the support to civil society organisations as "The management practices and procedures used to design, plan, organize and coordinate a collection of interventions, grants and initiatives towards the effective and efficient delivery of specific development assistance objectives. It involves setting overall (...) objectives and strategy, aligning resources towards these, and then using evidence to oversee and coordinate grants and initiatives, monitor overall progress, learn and adapt, and report" (Department for Evaluation, 2020:14). This definition is in line with how the Norwegian Directorate for Financial Management defines results-based management. Norad has developed a digital tool for grant managers. This tool details how results-based management should be understood and implemented in grant management (Grant Management Assistant compiled version 2023)





When done effectively, results-based management can help ensure both accountability and learning. The results-based management approach is that before moving to developing overall grant scheme objectives, analysis of results data is necessary to learn what works. These results data could come from annual project reports, project evaluations, or from other monitoring activities such as field visits, annual meetings etc. However, in the context of NICFI, additional types of knowledge should be considered to enhance coherence. Information about the political economy of the context in which projects have been operating, for example, is relevant to ensure tailoring to local conditions. Changes at the global level that might impact a particular grant scheme may also be collected to set new objectives and priorities.

However, the evaluation of the Norwegian aid administration's practice of results-based management (2018), found that in the case of NICFI, results stories were used for reporting, but not for allocating resources at the grant scheme level, 'apart from in the informal process where the grant managers had knowledge about the results and used it informally in the decision making' (2017: 30). The evaluation also found that the results report from the partners in previous grant schemes was finalized after the meeting in which the decision was made to allocate resources to a new round of support to the civil society organizations.

Portfolio

The totality of NICFI activities is a portfolio. This was stated in the budgetary propositions under the Ministry of Climate and Environment and MFA that gave the initial description of NICFI (Proposition No. 1 to the Storting (Norwegian Parliament (2008-2009)³. The reason given was the need for coordination of the different interventions in order to reach the overall objectives. This evaluation uses Norad's own definition of portfolio: A collection of measures which are designed to contribute to achieving specific high-level objectives in Norwegian foreign and development policy and are based on a common underlying logic (Norad 2021). This evaluation understands portfolio management as being the management practices and procedures used to design, plan, organise and coordinate a collection of interventions, grants and initiatives towards the effective and efficient delivery of specific development assistance objectives. This involves setting overall portfolio objectives and strategy, aligning resources towards these, and then using evidence to oversee and coordinate grants and initiatives, monitor overall progress, learn and adapt, and report (Norad, 2020). We will use the term 'project cycle' for the projects provided support through the call for proposals.

³ The precise quote is: "A portfolio of projects must be established, with variations in difficulty level, risk, geographical conditions, forest type, and partners."

Knowledge and learning

Organizational learning is a central feature of results-based management and is a foundation for enhancing coherence. In research about learning in policymaking, it is emphasized that the need for learning is particularly important for tackling problems described as 'super wicked', 'being highly urgent, uncertain, non-linear, untested, symptomatic of other problems, novel, ever evolving and lacking a central authority' (Levin et al., 2012). Research on learning in political institutions highlights that institutional capabilities and structures affect the flow of information, what kind of knowledge that is appreciated and appropriate, and how results are interpreted (for example: March & Olsen, 1996; Lægneid, 2020).

Organizational learning can be understood as a process of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within an organization (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Such learning processes could be based on several modes of learning: 1. Experience (learning by doing and learning by using), 2. Observation by others (learning by observing), 3. Systematic study (learning by studying), 4. Interaction (learning by interaction) (Kemp & Weehuizen, 2005). These processes should be understood as relational and reflective practices, where the individual and collective experiences interact (Filstad, 2022). Important to note are the power dimensions shaping these practices.





This includes how learning takes place, the type of knowledge appreciated, the kinds of competencies that are accepted and rewarded, and the kinds of questions and hypotheses that are put forward (March & Olsen, 1996; Lægneid, 2020; Filstad, 2022).

In this evaluation we understand knowledge as both individual and collective, and we distinguish between explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge. **Explicit knowledge** is easily articulated, recorded, communicated and stored. The Grant Management Assistance is an example of explicit knowledge about the rules, regulations and guidelines related to grant management. On the other hand, **implicit knowledge**, also called procedural knowledge, is the practical application of explicit knowledge. This could be procedures for how to operationalize the GMA to make it applicable for solving specific tasks for example how to follow up a grant agreement. The final category of knowledge is **tacit knowledge**, which is the silent knowledge garnered over time. It is experience-based and grounded in an understanding of connections. This is knowledge that is difficult to write down, articulate or present in a structured manner. These three main categories can be held individually, but also on an organizational level. Organisational knowledge is the combination of explicit knowledge, the application of implicit knowledge and the historically evolved collective understandings that represent tacit knowledge (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Understanding these different categories of

knowledge and interrelations between individual and organizational knowledge is essential when exploring knowledge management and organizational learning. Filstad (2022) argues that it is important to note that knowledge is not the same as data, information or statistics. Knowledge should rather be understood as analysis of new data within an existing cognitive system of subjective perceptions.

Rights-based approach

Our understanding of 'rights-based approach' leans on the UN's 2003 Common Understanding of Human-Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in Development Cooperation.⁴ According to the UN, rights-based projects: i) aim to further the realisation of the human rights of the target groups; ii) adhere to human rights instruments in programming; and iii) contribute to the capacities of rights holders to claim their rights and to duty bearers to meet their obligations. In 2019, the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) re-affirmed the UN's commitment to HRBA, identifying it as a key principle in its Sustainable Development Co-Operation Framework. The UNSDG added to the 2003 definition by affirming that the HRBA was a conceptual framework for "the process of sustainable development" and further identified equality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability as the key human rights principles which should guide

development cooperation. The rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are recognised by Norad, NICFI and the UN-REDD Programme as integral to REDD+. This approach has been interpreted by the UN-REDD Programme to imply the participation of the target groups in design and programme implementation, consideration of local communities' and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and rights, and obtaining their free, prior and informed consent (UN-REDD, 2022). A rights-based approach is highly relevant to this evaluation because strengthening the rights of Indigenous and forest-dependent communities is necessary to achieve NICFI's goals.

⁴ UNSDG | Human Rights-Based Approach





2

Methods





Data collection and data analysis

In this section, the methods of data collection and the process used for the analysis are presented.

Data collection and data analysis

The evaluation design is grounded in a formative and utilization-focused approach with a primary emphasis on qualitative methods, complemented by relevant descriptive statistics. It is designed to derive lessons from the calls for proposals and the management of the grants in the last project cycle. Based on this analysis, the evaluation provides recommendations on Norad's management of the support provided to civil society organisations.

For all three evaluation sub-questions, primary and secondary data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Primary data

Semi-structured interviews are the main source of primary data used in the evaluation. There were two main aims of these interviews. The first aim was to understand the processes and actors involved

in developing the call for proposals and assessing the applications, the dilemmas, considerations and consequences of the decisions made. The second aim was to understand how the practices of management of the funding facilitates coherence. The evaluation team conducted 20 interviews with former and current staff from Norad, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, embassies and civil society organisations from June 2023- September 2023. The interviews were conducted in three different modes: physical, hybrid (a combination of physical and digital participation), and fully digital.

Interviewees were purposively chosen to represent different aspects of the evaluation object and comprised: people with different responsibilities over different time periods between 2016 and the present day. The interviewees were also purposively chosen to represent different gender, seniority, nationality, and technical backgrounds. Interviews were directed by thematic interview guides on the three dimensions for coherence, with questions adapted to each interviewees' role in the call for proposal/ management of current agreements. The interview guides consisted of open questions with the aim of encouraging informants to answer freely. A minority of interviews were conducted in groups when this

aided data collection. In the case of group interviews, prior consideration was given to power dynamics (for example related to seniority, age, gender, background) that could influence data collection, with such interviews proceeding only when the evaluation team deemed this was not a risk.

The interviews were recorded upon approval of evaluation participants, and the recordings then transcribed with the assistance of an automatic transcription service, with a subsequent process of manual quality assurance by the evaluation team. To explore patterns across the interview data the team opted for a systematic coding process of the material. Based on the data from the three first interviews a coding structure of thematic codes was developed by the team and later implemented in Nvivo, a software programme for organising and analysing qualitative data. In the first round of coding, all interviews were coded in accordance with the agreed coding structure, although a few additional codes were subsequently added as new themes were discovered in the data. In the second round of coding, more detailed thematic codes were implemented for parts of the data. The team held an internal workshop to discuss preliminary findings and read and commented on each other's drafts.





Secondary data

Narratives and statements from the interviews and workshops were checked by the evaluation team against secondary data to identify inconsistencies and/or similarities or reinforcements.

Secondary data was collected in two forms: (i) documentary analysis (including quantitative analysis) of Norad documents, guidelines, strategic policies, evaluations, embassy letters and reports, budgetary propositions to Parliament, and programme/project documents; and (ii) a review of published scientific and policy literature. A first literature review (Norad, 2022) formed the initial starting point, and this literature was added-to by using a keyword and country-focused approach during the period of primary data collection.

The document analysis was based on an excerpt of documents from Norad's internal database. This entire excerpt was sorted into a color-coded and hyperlinked spreadsheet, which the whole evaluation team had access to. This spreadsheet was an important working document in the evaluation. We first went through all the documents from the excerpt to obtain an overview of the extent and type of documents available. Then we assessed which ones of these were relevant for the evaluation. These were then analysed in more detail. Among other things, the documents were used in the preparation of interview guides, for triangulation

against primary data, to obtain an overview of the processes related to the call for proposals and management process, and to analyse NICFI strategies. We used a total of 60 internal documents, in addition to applications, decision documents, and grant agreements for each of the projects, and application documentation and annexes for a selected number of projects. This amounts to around 200 documents in total. See [Annex 2](#) for a list of the documents.

In addition, we have reviewed documents regarding communication between the Ministry of Climate and Environment and some embassies over the years 2015–2022, sorted using a similar method as above. These documents mainly consisted of allocation letters (“belastningsfullmakter”) from the Ministry of Climate and Environment, semi-annual embassy reports on climate and forest-related conditions locally, annual reports on the allocation letters, progress reports, and budgets. The documents were used to understand the form and extent of embassy reporting on NICFI-related measures. In total, 310 such documents were (spot) reviewed, with a focus on the reports in the period the call for proposals was developed. Finally, we also reviewed annual budgetary propositions from the Ministry of Climate and Environment to Parliament, in the period of the development of the call for proposals.

The purpose of the quantitative analysis was to provide background information for the evaluation. Among other things, it was necessary to gain an overview of the scope of the agreements in total and in individual countries. This was important in the preparations for the interviews and for assessing Norad's work in creating synergies. A spreadsheet was created with an overview of each individual project. This included partner names, originally applied-for amount, final amount, category, NICFI outcome, start month, contract date, type of organisation, and geography. The main sources used were the application texts, decision documents, and the grant agreements. We also used statistics provided by the Norad Department of Statistics to inform the quantitative analysis.

Addressing the evaluation sub-questions

Somewhat different data were used to address the three evaluation sub-questions:

Evaluation sub-question 1 (Learning for coherence):

To what extent is Norad collecting, analysing and using evidence to inform calls for proposals and make adaptations in the project cycle? In addition to interviews, the team collected and analysed a range of strategic documents related to the call for proposals, in addition to documents on project management, knowledge plans, and theories of change.





Evaluation sub-question 2 (Alignment, trade-offs, and interlinkages): How well does the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon fit with a) the support to other thematic areas in the call for proposals, b) other NICFI interventions in the Amazon, and c) relevant policies?

In addition to interviews, the team assessed project information to explore alignments, interlinkages and trade-offs. This included project descriptions, annual reports, and project reviews or evaluations. These documents were grouped by theme and geographic location, target groups, and goals. The team also organised a workshop on nested theories of change with the Section for Forests in Norad. Theories of change represent how and why an intervention is expected to contribute to an intended result. The theory of change typically depicts a package of activities, support factors and assumptions that together are sufficient to contribute to the intended results. Support factors may include events and conditions needed to reach the stated goals (Mayne, 2015).

NICFI's strategic framework is considered by Norad to be the overall theory of change for NICFI's interventions. However, to explore the interlinkages and alignment within the different themes covered in the call for proposal (2021-2025), the overall theory of change is too broad. To understand how these themes

were intended to interact, but also the support factors needed to reach the goals (such as governments, private sector etc.) nested theories of change were developed by the evaluation team. This meant developing sub-theories of change for each of the themes covered by the project cycle to explore how they may interact with each other in bringing about the desired results. The evaluation team developed these sub-theories of change by reconstructing existing NICFI project documents and by holding a workshop with the Section for Forests. The aim of this workshop was to explore interlinkages and alignments of the four themes in the call for proposals. The reconstructed sub-theories of change were shared with the Section for Forests in advance. Some written comments were received before the workshop, others were discussed and collected at the workshop itself.

Evaluation sub-question 3 (Rights-based approach): To what extent has Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations been rights-based? In addition to interviews, the team assessed project information to explore the rights-based approach. These documents were grouped by theme and geographic location, target groups, and goals. The evaluation team also reviewed relevant policies and guidelines, including the MFA guidelines from 2013 describing Indigenous Peoples' rights (MFA, 2013), the white paper from 2014 describing Norway's Human Rights Policy (MFA, 2014), and the UN's 2003 Common Understanding of Human-Rights Based Approach

(HRBA) in Development Cooperation. The team invited the Section for Forests, the Ministry of Climate and Environment as well as a human rights specialist for a validation workshop to discuss preliminary findings on the rights-based approach dimension and possible recommendations. Comments and suggestions received during the validation workshop were further integrated into the evaluation's analysis.

Triangulation

The evaluation team adopted multi-pronged triangulation, which refers to the use of multiple approaches in research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Flick, 2004). Three forms of triangulation were performed: (i) method triangulation – through blending different qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the same phenomenon; (ii) investigator triangulation – through combining the observations of several evaluation team members on the same phenomenon; and (iii) data source triangulation – through collecting data from people with different backgrounds to gain multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon. Evaluation team members met regularly during and after data collection to jointly discuss the collected data, team members' respective analysis of this data, and any discrepancies or confirmations in the data and/or in team members' interpretations of the data.





Limitations and ethics

The evaluation team recognises several limitations in the methods used and data collected. The evaluation did not collect original primary data from the ultimate intended beneficiaries of the civil society projects supported by NICFI (for example Indigenous Peoples or forest-dependent communities receiving support from civil society organizations funded by NICFI). There were also no field visits to NICFI-supported project implementation sites in tropical forested countries. Original primary data from government actors in NICFI partner countries was not collected by this evaluation. These limitations mean that the evaluation team faced restrictions in developing a fully comprehensive understanding of the evaluation object, with these restrictions limiting, for instance, the team's ability to achieve triangulation. This evaluation report should be read with these important limitations in mind.

The evaluation did not review internal reports to the state secretary in the Ministry of Climate and Environment.

The evaluation complied with the National Ethical Committees for the Social Sciences and Humanities' (NESH) ethical guidelines and regulations concerning collection and treatment of data. The collection,

storage, and use of qualitative interview material has followed the Data Management Plan developed by Sikt- Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. Each interview began with an explanation of how data would be used, participants' rights to anonymity and to access, change or delete data and information stored about them. Approvals for the use of anonymized quotes were provided before publication of the evaluation report.

To account for individual biases in the evaluation team, we implemented several measures. The first measure was joint discussions in the team throughout the evaluation process. Second, interview guides were designed to ensure open questions. Third, we used a systematic approach to data analysis to avoid selective interpretations of findings. The fourth measure was to involve stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, from the inception phase, through participation in interviews, participation in two workshops, and an invitation to provide comments to the draft report.





3

Support to civil society





The NICFI support to civil society is an integrated, strategic, component of NICFI and should contribute to achieving the initiatives' three overarching goals: (i) Biodiversity is protected, (ii) Global warming is limited to 1,5 degrees Centigrade, (iii) Sustainable development is achieved. The support to civil society consists, however, of grants for specific projects and, as such, is distinct from the bilateral, state-to-state partnerships that are a central component of NICFI, and which reward governments ex-post for achievements in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest-degradation based on the principle of results-based payments.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have received a total of NOK 5.9 billion from NICFI since 2013. Most of this, around NOK 4 billion, has been managed by Norad through four rounds of competitive tendering, covering the periods: 2009-12, 2013-15, 2016-20 and 2021-25. The remaining funds are projects managed by the Ministry of Climate and Environment and embassies.



Photo: **Espen Røst** | Panorama





Description of the development of the call for proposals

This section contains a chronological summary of the main milestones in the process of developing the call for proposals and the assessment of applications. The summary is based on document reviews and interviews (a full description of the process is attached in Annex 1). Our assessment of this process is integrated into the assessment of the three aspects of coherence, presented in chapter 4.

In November 2019, the Ministry of Climate and Environment instructed Norad to **announce a call for proposals for support to civil society organisations** under NICFI, for the period from 2021 to 2025. Norad was asked to prioritize four categories for funding, plus an open category:

1. Indigenous Peoples, local communities and environmental defenders (IPLC)
2. Deforestation-free supply chains and financial markets (Supply chains)
3. Reduced forest crime and improved forest monitoring (Crime)
4. Mobilizing ambition and support for forest friendly policies (Policies)
5. Groundbreaking ideas to reduce deforestation

These priorities would be aligned with the strategic framework for NICFI, and the civil society support was to contribute to the overall goals of NICFI, as well as provide added value compared to other NICFI efforts through country partnerships, multilateral

organisations, and other strategic agreements. When the call for proposals was developed in 2019, funding from the Ministry of Climate and Environment was administered in two separate sections: 'Grønn (Green)' and 'Sivilt samfunn (SIVNAT)'. These sections were administered under different departments in Norad. It was SIVNAT, the section for civil society, that was tasked with developing and managing the call for proposals.

Before writing the call for proposals, Norad wrote **thematic and country analyses**, to inform the priorities in the call for proposals.

The **call for proposals was launched** on 17 January 2020. Applicants were to submit 'full' applications 13 weeks later, by 20 April 2020. The deadline was moved to 19 May 2020 due to Covid 19.





The assessment period had six phases:

1. Application reception (358 applications) and formal requirement check (May 2020)
2. Preliminary assessment of 328 applications (Norad), using a standardized scorecard with 7 criteria (May–June 2020)
3. Ranking and discussions (Norad, Ministry of Climate and Environment + embassies recommendation for the “shortlist” of 84 applications. (June–July 2020)
4. Shortlist of applications assessment reduced to 46 by the Ministry of Climate and Environment (July–September 2020)
5. Full assessment of 47 applications- was carried out using Norad’s resource allocation model (RAM) which includes 7 standards as well as discussions between Norad, the Ministry of Climate and Environment and embassies (September 2020–February 2021)
6. Finally, 38 applications were selected to be awarded grants (see below for an overview).

The process of developing the call for proposals and evaluating the applications took almost two years and involved approximately 30-50 persons.

Photo: **Richard Whitcombe**





Overview of current civil society agreements

Overview of CSO agreements 2021-2025

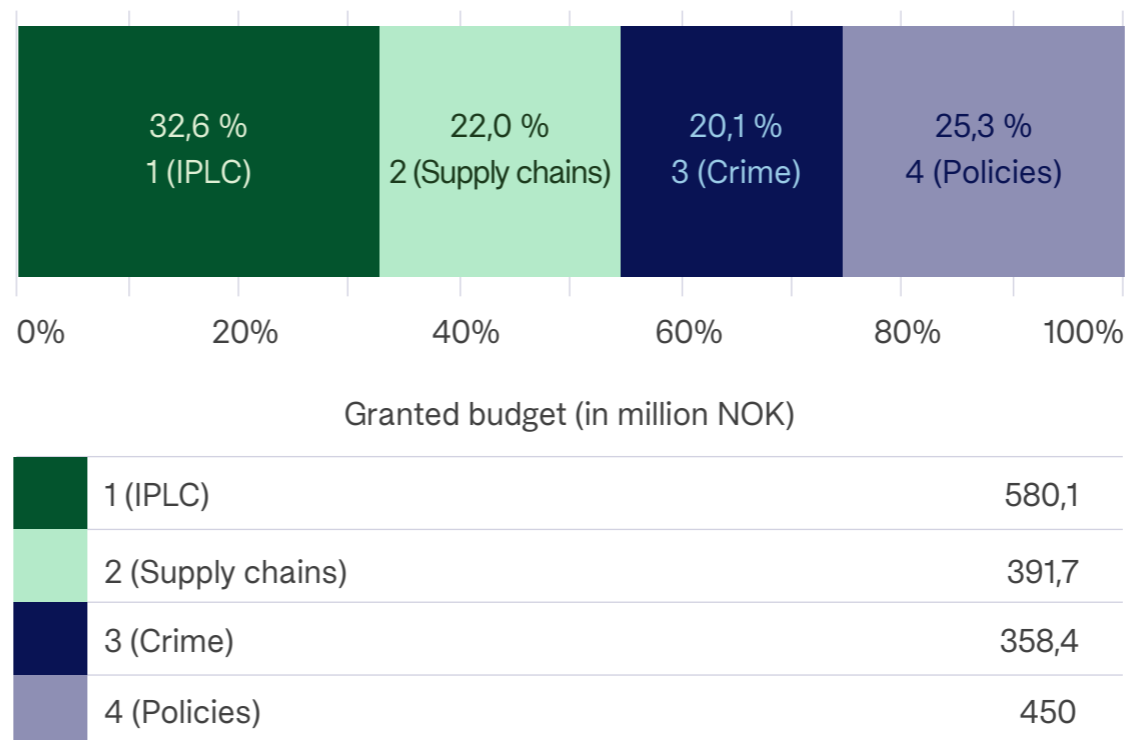
The 2021-2025 project cycle comprises thirty-eight agreements, totaling NOK 1 780,2 million over the full five-year period (compared to the originally applied-for NOK 4, 346 million). The four prioritized thematic categories are (with short form in parentheses):

1. Indigenous Peoples, local communities and environmental defenders (IPLC)
2. Deforestation-free supply chains and financial markets (Supply chains)
3. Reduced forest crime and improved forest monitoring (Crime)
4. Mobilizing ambition and support for forest friendly policies (Policies)

There were no projects in the fifth category (groundbreaking ideas). The IPLC category has the largest number of agreements, with 11. Next comes Policies, with 10 agreements. The Supply chains category has 9 agreements, while Crime has the fewest number of agreements, with 8.

As shown in Figure 2, the budget sizes per thematic category follow the same ranking as the number of agreements, with IPLC again being the largest category.

FIGURE 2
Granted budget per thematic category





Around 26% of the the support in the 2021–2025 round went to Norwegian CSOs, as evident from Table 1. Note that Rainforest Foundation Norway is included in this category, and that they also hold the largest agreement in this round at NOK 237.1 million. Most agreements are with national NGOs in the partner countries.

Agreements in Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Peru

Nineteen agreements (exactly half of the total) target one of the four Amazon countries directly, with six of these agreements also having a global component. Two agreements target Latin America as a region, although these are not focused on specific Amazon countries. The nineteen agreements focusing on one or more of the Amazon countries are granted in total

NOK 1 023,8 million. When adding the two regional agreements, this puts the total at NOK 1 076,8 million, with an average of NOK 51,3 million per grant in the Amazon region (the median grant in the region is NOK 40 million). Just over 60% of the total granted budget targets these four countries or the region.

At country level, Brazil has the highest number of partner agreements, with fourteen in total. shows a map with the total number of agreements in each of the Amazon countries covered by this evaluation. Colombia has five agreements, Peru has four, while Guyana has the fewest, with two agreements.

FIGURE 3

Number of agreements in Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, and Peru

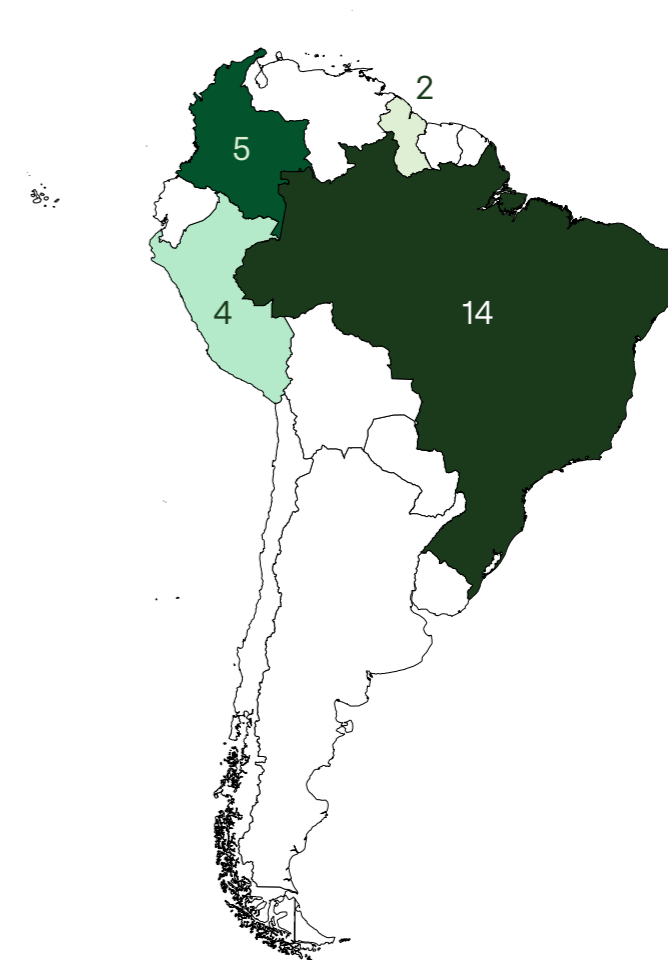


TABLE 1

Support per organisation type

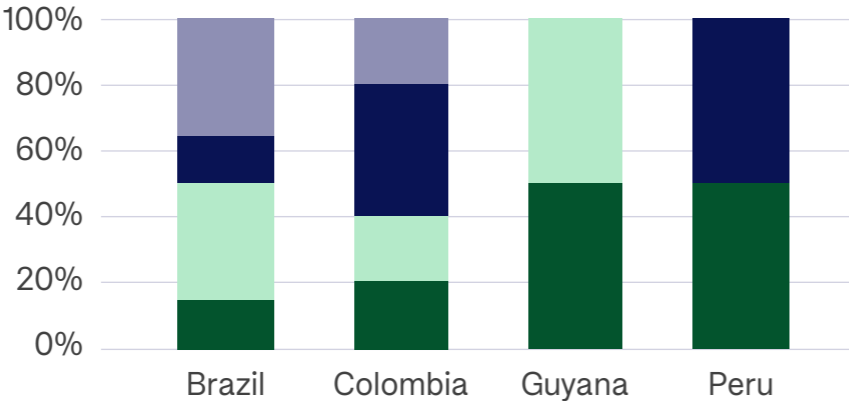
Organisation type	Granted budget (in million NOK)	Number of agreements
International (Norway)	471,6	5
National	431,9	12
International (USA)	421,7	11
International (UK)	270	6
International (EU)	75	2
Total:	1780,2	38





Although Amazon countries covered by this evaluation are represented with partner agreements, not all countries have agreements in all categories. Figure 4 shows the distribution of categories in each country. Most agreements in Brazil focus on categories 2 and 4. Colombia has a more balanced distribution across categories. Guyana and Peru do not have agreements in all categories, including only categories 1 and 2, and 1 and 3, respectively.

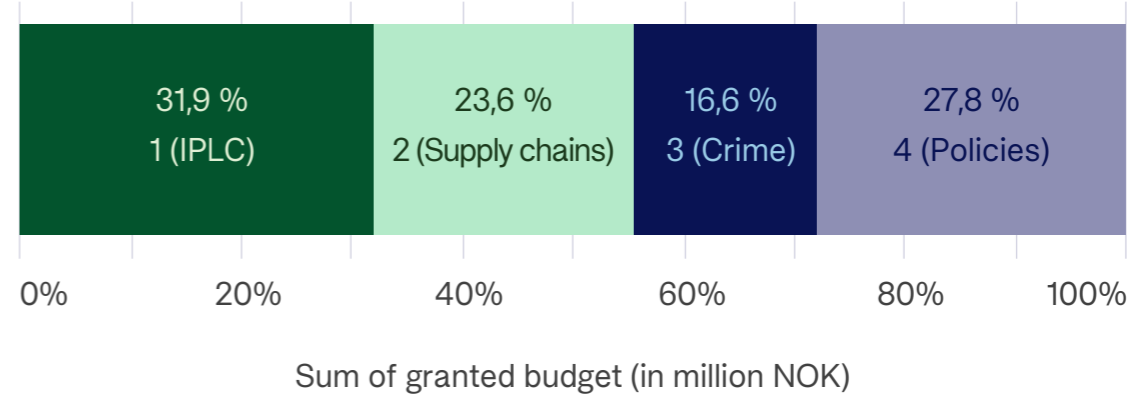
FIGURE 4
Distribution of categories per country



4 (Policies)	5	1	0	0
3 (Crime)	2	2	0	2
2 (Supply chains)	5	1	1	0
1 (IPLC)	2	1	1	2

Within this group of countries, IPLC is the largest category, also in terms of funding. Next comes Policies, Supply Chains and then Crime. See Figure 5. This is the same order when looking at all projects, not just those in the Amazon.

FIGURE 5
Total granted budget per application category in countries BRA, COL, GUY, PER (as share of total and in million NOK)



1 (IPLC)	327,1
2 (Supply chains)	241,7
3 (Crime)	170
4 (Policies)	285





4

Findings





This evaluation aims at exploring **to what extent Norad has ensured the coherence of NICFI's support to civil society to reach its stated goals**

This question is important in the NICFI context since attaining the overall goals of the strategic initiative is dependent on improvements within several areas of intervention. Furthermore, the interrelations between the areas of intervention are multiple.

To be able to assess the main evaluation question we will consider three dimensions of coherence: (i) learning for coherence, (ii) alignment, trade-offs and interlinkages, and (iii) the rights-based approach.



Photo: **Marte Lid** | Norad





Learning for coherence

In this evaluation we assessed learning for coherence, by looking into organizational learning and the use of knowledge in two processes. The first process relates to developing the call for proposals⁵, including the evaluation of applications. The second process is the management of agreements included in the project cycle of 2021-2025. Details about the key concepts used in this chapter (results based- management, knowledge and learning) can be found in [chapter 1](#).

Call for proposals

In preparation for the call for proposals, Norad initiated the development of two types of analysis: Analysis of the four prioritised themes in the call for proposals and eight country analyses. These analyses are examples of the use of explicit knowledge used to form the call for proposals and were also used in assessing the applications.

Sources of knowledge and results data

Not all evaluation informants remembered details about the process of developing these two types of analysis. The overall picture from the interviews,

⁵ For a brief description about this process see chapter 3.1, for details about the process see annex 2 Call for proposals-timeline

however, is that the format for analysis was set by the section, but no further direction on how (sources, involvement, etc.) these should be developed was provided. Our assessment of these analyses indicates that the sources of knowledge were mostly Norad partners and their experience-based knowledge of the problems to be solved, and roles for civil society. We found limited attempts at triangulating this experience-based knowledge with other forms of knowledge, particularly scientific peer reviewed knowledge and Indigenous forms of knowledge.

This assessment was confirmed by interviewees who consistently highlighted that partners are the most important source of information for the Section for Forests. This knowledge could be based on regular partner dialogue or through civil society seminars in the partner countries (see [chapter 4](#) for more details about this analysis).

A limitation in creating these analyses, but also for ensuring that the objectives and priorities in the new call for proposals was evidence-based, was that the results of the previous project cycle were not available to inform decisions. Most of the mid-term evaluations would have been available, as well as annual reports

from the partners. We also found that the thematic and country analyses contained a selection of results, however, evaluation interviewees consistently noted that there was no attempt at a systematic assessment of existing findings from the evaluations and results from the annual reports.

This is a missed opportunity for ensuring effective results-based management.

Although there was a lack of systematic and formal learning loops from the previous call, experiences contributing to building implicit knowledge from the previous call were used to develop the call for proposals. This finding is in line with previous evaluations (for example Norad, 2017).

There are several reporting requirements within NICFI. In addition to the partners reporting requirements to Norad, the embassies and Norad report semi-annually to the ministries. There are also the annual budgetary propositions from the Ministry of Climate and Environment to parliament which contain results data.

We have considered the regular reports from the embassies and Norad to the Ministry as well as the





budgetary propositions and found that they contain results information across intervention areas. However, they (particularly annual budgetary propositions) present results information on an overarching level. The embassy reports are more detailed, but do not include projects managed by Norad. The reporting from Norad to the ministry also contains results information on ongoing activities and projects. All these reports contribute to a general knowledge base for NICFI.

However, the evaluation interviews did not mention these reports as useful in developing the call for proposals or managing the agreements directly. Evaluation interviews confirmed, however, that the goals objectives and plans presented in the annual propositions and the annual allocation letters are used to guide their work. This finding corresponds with previous evaluations articulating that results-based management in Norad is associated with demonstrating and reporting on results rather than using this data explicitly to learn and inform decisions about what and who to fund (Norad, 2018).

Collaboration

In interviews it was mentioned that the thematic and country analyses were drafted and finalized by individual staff in the section for civil society. However, it was highlighted that both thematic and country analyses were developed in close interaction with thematic and geographic counterparts in the Ministry of Climate and Environment. The interviews were also

consistent on the fact that the embassies were invited to comment on the country analyses but not on the thematic analyses. This was raised by some of the previous and existing Climate and Forest Envoys as a missed opportunity for ensuring relevance with local priorities and needs. The informants also highlighted that there were limited attempts at using the processes of developing these analyses to engage a broader audience in the two sections involved in managing NICFI funding for strategic discussion on the selected themes. Although this was an important opportunity to develop a more systematic presentation of explicit knowledge, we believe that a broader process could enhance the opportunity to tap into the implicit and tacit knowledge among the staff. A more systematic discussion involving staff working on different themes and geographic locations could have provided an opportunity to identify synergies and interlinkages and thus enhance coherence. Using these, and other, knowledge products to create arenas for organizational learning is essential to harvest different types of knowledge that exists across individuals, across themes, and across country contexts to solve the 'wicked' problem of deforestation.

Assessing proposals

Both the interviews, and an internal note summarizing experiences with assessing the applications, revealed discrepancies between conclusions drawn from the case workers from Norad, the embassies and the Ministry of Climate and Environment. Norad's

assessment was based on a structured analysis of different dimensions of the quality of the application (see Annex for details). However, the interviews indicate that the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the embassies drew on more experienced-based and tacit knowledge leading to different conclusions. AMAN, an Indonesian organisation of Indigenous Peoples, illustrates this contrast, where Norad deemed the organization to be lacking institutional strength, while the Ministry and embassies underscored its strategic importance. This assessment was rooted in a political economy analysis of the Indonesian context.

Learning from the previous call for proposals

Two aspects were highlighted by the Norad informants when asked about what they had learned from the call for proposals in 2015 that they wanted to do differently in the 2019 call for proposals. The informants highlighted that they wanted to be more systematic by developing clear assessment criteria to ensure an equal treatment of the proposals. This was considered particularly important as many case workers were involved in assessing the proposals. The informants also highlighted that they wanted to be more efficient in the assessment phase. One tool for achieving this was to develop a flow chart, describing the process including the division of labour between the actors. They also wanted to increase their cooperation with domestic civil society organizations. This ambition was included in the instruction letter, where Norad was also encouraged to take risks. As expressed in some of the





interviews, to achieve NICFI's goals it was considered essential to partner with different types of actors operating at different levels. In the early phase of NICFI, global partners were considered the most effective in improving international support structures and establishing deforestation-free commodity markets. In the most recent period, more attention has been paid to national and local organisations. This evolution can be explained as a learning process based on experiences with partners and projects in the previous rounds of funding.

Management of agreements

Organizational changes in Norad and implications for management of agreements

After the agreements were signed, Norad was reorganized following a major reform in the aid administration: 'reform 2019'. The reorganization was completed in 2021, in conjunction with the development of Norad's new strategy 'Norad's strategy towards 2030'. One of the five strategic priorities was to 'strengthen and systematise the development, sharing and use of knowledge within Norad'. This priority set in motion several initiatives, including a reinforced focus on portfolio management with associated tools such as theory of change, knowledge plans and the newly-published dashboard (an online presentation of key data for each portfolio).

As part of this reorganization, the two sections administering NICFI funding were now merged into the new 'Section for Forests', administered under the new department for Climate and Environment. Most of the staff involved in the call for proposals left the section for other sections in Norad or found other jobs outside Norad. The agreements were then distributed across the remaining staff from the two sections, but also newly externally recruited staff. The aim of merging the sections, as expressed in interviews, was to better integrate the different grants and initiatives funded by NICFI within Norad and allow for better strategic management of the funding. Another goal of the restructuring was to agree on a common approach to grant management, and where possible reduce the time spent on grant management to free up time for more strategic management. This includes more time for learning.

Challenges and solutions for organizational learning

A challenge with the reorganization was that even though the two sections managed NICFI funding, and there was thus a common thematic frame for the initiatives, they had different tasks and types of agreements to manage. The size of the agreements varied between the sections. Grønn focused on large strategic initiatives, such as the Central African Forest Initiative (a regional initiative supported by a donor group). SIVNAT on the other hand, had many smaller agreements with multiple civil society organisations.

The staff have diverse sets of competences: some are thematic experts, others country experts, while some are experts on one type of channel, and some are more devoted to grant management practices. Differences in understanding how to best follow up agreements (for example which aspects, and the level of detail, of the agreements to focus on) were pointed out in the evaluation interviews as an unresolved issue in the section.

Another challenge with the current organization of Norad is the tension between thematic and context orientation. Norad is currently organized in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. According to some evaluation interviewees, this thematic organization of Norad, including the NICFI funding, comes at the expense of geographic orientation. This means that less emphasis is placed on in-depth geographic competence. This was identified as a challenge in some interviews because management of the agreements would benefit from country-specific expertise.

To address both challenges described above, the evaluation interviewees pointed out that the Section for Forests tries to integrate both thematic and geographic competences by establishing country focal points and three thematic working groups: a) Indigenous Peoples b) Forest crimes and transparency c) Private sector. This means that each staff member of the Section for Forests is required to stay informed both on one or more countries as well as one of three





topics. The aim of the thematic working groups is to create arenas for collective learning and development and use of knowledge. These groups have been tasked with the development of knowledge plans, and to respond to requests from the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the embassies. Since the focus is on solving tasks, these have the potential to become the arena where different forms of knowledge, including explicit but also implicit and tacit knowledge, are used to respond to different types of requests.

Staff are also assigned as contact points for different countries. From the evaluation interviews it seemed that a commonly agreed understanding of the expectations related to this role is less defined, leaving room for individual interpretation. One informant expressed an expectation that the country contact point should stay on top of the changes in the country and be able to build a bridge between the thematic focus of the section and country-specific developments.

Another potential arena for learning is the creation of Norad's annual report to the ministry where results from the different activities and projects are included. Norad is also actively contributing to the Proposition number 1 to the Storting, as well as the annual allocation letter to the embassies. Although not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, it is likely that the production of these reports represents an arena where different types of knowledge and experiences are shared and discussed.

Several of the evaluation interviewees pointed out that following-up the caseload of agreements is a time-consuming task, which does not necessarily leave time for sufficient collaboration with colleagues. Limited time is available to keep abreast of the changing political economy of 'their countries'. As a result of limited capacity to engage with colleagues working on other themes or countries, the informants claimed that individual caseworkers have an insufficient overview of the totality of the sections' agreement, or of the NICFI initiative in total, and how other agreements may align with their own areas of responsibility.

Civil society seminars

In the annual allocation letter, Norad is tasked with organising civil society seminars (approximately 3 per year) at the country level. The purpose of these seminars is not specified in the allocation letters, however, in the interviews the overall aim was described as the creation of arenas where Norad, the embassy and grant-receiving organisations discuss common challenges and learn from each other. Evaluation interviewees consistently highlighted the importance of these seminars. Obtaining an overview of other organisations working on the same topic was highlighted as valuable in the interviews (see more on alignment in chapter 4.2). The opportunity to learn from each other, and encourage each other, was also highlighted by all interviewees as important. Some of these seminars delved into a particular topic where participants were tasked to suggest solutions to a

specific challenge. The literature on organisational learning (for example: Filstad, 2022), highlights the importance of these kinds of learning arenas, where participants can move beyond explicit knowledge-sharing, and use implicit and tacit knowledge to create joint solutions.

It was, however, pointed-out in the evaluation interviews that the potential for learning and creating synergies could be increased. It was suggested, for example, to ensure that conversations from seminars could continue after official meetings ended. One "low-hanging fruit" would be to share (with consent) the contact details of participants and encourage them to continue the dialogue. Another more time-consuming task would be to arrange shorter digital seminars on a regular basis to enhance further collaboration, or to dive deeper into specific topics. Some interviewees suggested that it would be interesting to delve deeper into Norad's work on knowledge and on human rights.

Sources of knowledge

Evaluation interviewees consistently indicated that interactions with partners and observations are the most common source of knowledge. Reports from partners and embassies, field visits and regular conversations are considered valuable for gaining knowledge, including explicit but also implicit knowledge about developments in the different thematic areas and contexts.





Knowledge management

The Section for Forests is currently working on two processes related to knowledge management. The first is based on a specific request in the annual allocation letter for 2023 where Norad is tasked to assess NICFI's knowledge base and whether there are knowledge gaps (Annual allocation letter to Norad from Ministry of Climate and Environment 2023). Norad is also tasked to identify efforts to ensure that existing knowledge is actively used in the further development of the Climate and Forest Initiative's efforts.

The second process is an internal initiative related to Norad's general work on portfolio management. Here, all the portfolios are tasked to develop a knowledge plan. The aim of this plan is to serve as a planning, learning and monitoring tool in the portfolio management process (Guidance and template, Norad's internal). This is an attempt to systematize existing knowledge and identify the knowledge gaps at the NICFI portfolio level. In the interviews, it was mentioned that the different types of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, should be the basis for testing several hypotheses developed by the section.

Another promising initiative mentioned in the interviews is to use the mid-term reviews more strategically by compiling and systematizing results data across the projects.

Indicators

Literature on results-based management and portfolio management emphasises the need for aggregated results data (Norad, 2021). A common set of indicators is one possible tool to compile and analyse results data. Developing and using common indicators that are relevant for all the contexts and themes has been challenging for NICFI over previous years (see for example Norad, 2017; Norad 2021; Riksrevisjonen 2018). The evaluation interviewees confirmed that this is still a work-in-progress.





Alignment, trade-offs and interlinkages

The evaluation aimed to identify management aspects that are positively correlated with synergies, namely positive and reciprocally reinforcing interlinkages between projects, and project alignment. The evaluation team considered two main types of alignment: vertical and horizontal. Under vertical alignment the evaluation considered: (i) how Norad managed the approval and follow-up of the projects to make sure they align with and contribute to the desired NICFI outcomes; (ii) the degree to which the management of the project cycle is aligned with relevant policies, such as the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Guidelines from 2013 on Indigenous Peoples Rights; (iii) whether Norad and the project owners shared the same overall goal and had a similar understanding of the goal; and (iv) whether Norad prioritized projects based on their strategic importance in reaching the overall desired outcomes. Under horizontal alignment, the evaluation considered: (i) the extent to which the projects reinforced each other; (ii) how gaps and overlaps were managed by Norad; and (iii) the extent to which the projects are aligned with other NICFI interventions in the Amazon region to reach the same outcomes and impacts.

NICFI has attempted to rationally organize the totality of its civil society interventions. Norad was tasked to manage the collection of grants as a portfolio and to ensure that grants were aligned with the other NICFI interventions (Allocation letter 2019). Conversations with the Section for Forests clarified that the civil society grants have not been managed as a separate portfolio but are seen as an integrated part of the overall NICFI portfolio.

The various intervention categories of the civil society support were outlined in NICFI's overarching strategic framework (see Figure 1). Following the 2019 folding of the seven intervention categories into five categories of intervention, sub theories of change (i.e., theories of change at a lower level of results that fit (or nested) within the overarching NICFI strategic framework) for each category began to be developed. These sub theories of change were not complete before the 2020 call for proposals for the latest civil society funding round was made public. As part of this evaluation, the evaluation team therefore reconstructed these nested sub theories of change and workshopped them with Norad staff to ensure their accuracy and validity.

Guidance for the Mid-Term Review of NICFI's 2021-2025 civil society grant period (issued in January 2023) notes that assessing coherence helps map the extent to which project activities are complementary to other interventions in the given context. To enable meaningful interventions, the note explains that Norad seeks to avoid the duplication of efforts by civil society organisations, donors, governmental agencies, or other international partners. Instead, it seeks to promote projects that work in tandem with other projects, whether in the same or in other development sectors. Two forms of coherence are noted in the same 2023 guidance document: (i) Internal coherence, i.e., the synergies and interlinkages between the intervention and other interventions carried out by the same institution/government, as well as the consistency of the intervention with the relevant international norms and standards to which that institution/government adheres; and (ii) external coherence, i.e., the consistency of the intervention with other actors' interventions in the same context. This includes complementarity, harmonisation, and co-ordination with others, and the extent to which the intervention is adding value while avoiding duplication of efforts.





Calls for proposals and nested theories of change

The 2020 call for proposals envisaged that all civil society projects would vertically align with the aim to reverse and reduce loss of tropical forests, contribute to a stable climate, protect biodiversity and enhance sustainable development in developing countries. The call for proposals also notes that civil society projects shall horizontally align with other NICFI activities to meet the overall goal of preserving tropical forests both by uncovering and monitoring activities that lead to illegal deforestation and by providing incentives for governments, businesses, and the financial sector to pursue policies and conduct activities that have no negative impact on the rainforest.

Two interlinked challenges were identified in Norad's operationalization of NICFI's strategic framework as important to address: market failure and governance failure. For market failure to be addressed, NICFI envisaged that the costs of deforestation should be priced into global raw materials, so that countries will be motivated or forced to facilitate more rational deforestation-free sustainable food production and sustainable extraction of other types of non-renewable resources. For governance failure to be addressed, NICFI envisaged that forested countries must realize that forest conservation is important for the country's economic development, growth and welfare in the

long term, so that these countries then have a vested interest in carrying out the necessary reforms to contribute to more rational land use and sustainable land management. If forested countries have the capacity to carry out these reforms, the country can then produce agricultural goods and extract raw materials without affecting the forest cover to any great extent, so that, in a sustainable way, tropical forest and forest cover is maintained. Indigenous Peoples, local communities and environmental defenders were envisaged by NICFI to protect forests better than others because forests provide these peoples and communities with food, shelter, medicine, and spiritual and cultural meaning. So, if various government efforts to protect the rights of these groups were supported, and if NICFI helped raise these groups' voices in the international community, in global climate negotiations, and at national and local levels, then their role in forest protection could be strengthened.

The nested theories of change also recognised that companies' global supply chains produce and distribute goods such as soy, palm oil, beef, timber and coffee, all over the world. If NICFI supported the implementation of no-deforestation commitments for companies, facilitated deforestation-free landscapes, investments in deforestation-free business models, and if NICFI supported civil society in holding companies accountable, it was envisaged that deforestation in global commodity supply chains could therefore be reduced.

In terms of forest crime, the nested theories of change recognized that illegal activities are an important factor behind some deforestation in forested countries. It was envisaged, therefore, that if NICFI supported measures that contribute to forestland monitoring and law enforcement, that counteract harmful, profitable incentive structures that drive and maintain the actions of criminal actors, if it supported international cross-cutting cooperation between law enforcement agency authorities and international actors, and if it supported civil society to provide transparency and accountability, as well as new technology developments to track the legality of forest products, then it could help reduce illegal forest destruction.

Finally, the nested theories of change envisaged that carbon markets and international structures were needed to reward forest land and reduce deforestation. If NICFI increased corporate and government support for functioning carbon markets and international REDD+ architecture, it was envisaged that it may become easier for forest lands to access benefits to reduce deforestation.

The evaluation team's workshop with Norad staff on the reconstructed sub theories of change underlined that civil society projects supported under these five categories were all expected to vertically align with NICFI's overarching goals. Interlinkages and examples of horizontal alignment across the five intervention categories were also highlighted. For instance,





since forest crimes and illegality disproportionately impact Indigenous Peoples, forest-dependent local communities and environmental defenders, then projects that tackle forest crimes and illegality could also help improve the rights situations of these populations. Another example is that projects that help reduce deforestation in global commodity supply chains could also help tackle forest crimes and illegality, or vice versa. Overall, consideration of vertical and horizontal alignments, as well as potential interlinkages, are evident both in the 2020 call for proposals and in the reconstructed nested theories of change.

Developing the call for proposals and assessing the applications

Choosing the format for the call for proposals

The task of securing coherence through administrating such a large and complex call for proposals process was noted in evaluation interviews to be challenging for several reasons. In contrast to the 2016-2020 funding cycle, the Ministry of Climate and Environment and Norad decided to avoid a first stage of Concept Notes before full applications were developed and rather to invite applicants to submit full proposals during the first stage. The decision to use only full applications instead of an initial round of Concept Notes was motivated by an ambition both to avoid a two-step assessment process and to raise the

threshold for applying, hoping to increase the relevance of applications and reduce the overall workload in assessing them. However, after receiving 358 applications, the workload was still deemed to be excessive, leading to extra administrative work for both applicants and reviewers. Staff rotation compounded this challenge. Interviewees discussed with the evaluation team that one option for the future could be to limit the number of words or pages for full applications. The largest applications in this round were above 100 pages, not including mandatory attachments.

Interviews with some of civil society organizations indicated that the decision not to use Concept Notes generated expectations that funding was likely to be forthcoming. The process of applying with full proposals placed a heavy burden on organizations applying given the documentation workload and strict criteria to be followed, although some organizations reportedly appreciated being able to skip the concept note stage included in earlier calls. Domestic civil society organizations in the Amazon region reportedly found the full applications process particularly burdensome. Several projects proposed as multi-country initiatives were asked to be rewritten as single-country projects. This was noted by some evaluation interview respondents as undermining interlinkages with countering forest crimes, given that illicit and criminal networks operating in the Amazon are a cross-border and transboundary challenge, going beyond

single countries. This can be considered to have weakened the potential for internal coherence among the civil society projects supported in the Amazon.

Collaboration

Another challenge was how to balance sufficient involvement of the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the embassies to enhance alignment with other NICFI initiatives, while also maintaining defined lines of responsibility for selecting funded projects. In a letter from the Ministry of Climate and Environment to Norad, from 28.11.2019, Norad was instructed to launch a call for proposals for funding civil society organizations. Norad is therefore the responsible agency for executing this task, in accordance with the letter of instructions process and the selection of the grantees, and is accountable for the result. This responsibility has been confirmed through the evaluation interviews. However, most of the Norad staff involved in the call for proposals questioned whether this balance was maintained, pointing to several occasions where Norad's assessment of the applicant's ability to deliver results was in practice overruled by the ministry, who placed a different emphasis on applicants' strategic and political importance. This was reflected in concerns expressed by some Norad staff as to the broad understanding of civil society held by the ministry, which included consultancy-like organizations based in the United States.





This balance was, on the other hand, also criticised by some of the Climate and Forest Envoys. They expressed dissatisfaction with the previous round in 2016, particularly some projects' abilities to achieve intended results. For some envoys, this dissatisfaction was at a level that the term "mistrust" was used to explain their view of Norad's role in the call. Embassies therefore invested considerable time to make sure that their voices were heard when selecting partners in the last round of proposals. To enhance the local relevance and the possibility to increase coherence at the national level, some envoys expressed a desire to be more involved in the preparatory process of developing the text for the call for proposals. It should also be noted, however, that some projects that Norad considered "high-risk" were continued from one round to the next given their strategic importance to the ministry.

Assessing the proposals

Evaluation interviews revealed a relatively well-defined management process for both vertical and horizontal alignment in terms of proposal selection. Relevance to the thematic call, to the NICFI strategic framework, as well as relevance to the geographic context, were all assessed. The proposal selection process was organized into thematic categories to avoid overlaps and country discussions and meetings provided additional means of ensuring alignment. Management discussions, for example, considered how to avoid overlaps, use complementarities, and find synergies

with other projects, which would be included in proposals for revisions. At the same time, synergies were not explicitly mentioned in the selection criteria, and some evaluation respondents suggested that complementarity with the rest of the NICFI portfolio could be included as a separate criterium in future.

Overall, it is somewhat difficult to assess the extent to which Norad prioritized projects based on their strategic importance in reaching the overall desired outcomes. In the Amazon region studied for this part of the evaluation, all countries had partner agreements, but not all countries had agreements in all the priority categories. This might be because not all categories were equally important in all the countries. For example, the country analysis for Guyana suggests that issues of Indigenous Peoples' rights may be less vital to address there than in either Brazil, Colombia, or Peru. At the same time, although an overarching theory of change for NICFI was available, addressing the various priority categories and how they should, in theory, work together towards the same overarching goal, more detailed sub theories of change for each of the priority categories were not available at the announcement of the call for proposals or as decisions on funding were made. Neither were country level theories of change available at either an overarching or more detailed level. The omission of country level theories of change likely made it more challenging to regularly discuss and revisit core programmatic assumptions and their realism over time in a particular

context, such as whether civil society organizations can act as watchdogs towards the state. A workshop with Norad staff suggests, however, that much of the thinking subsequently placed into the nested theories of change for priority categories was already in circulation within Norad and NICFI at the time of the second call for proposals. It is likely, therefore, that Norad did prioritize projects based on their assumed strategic importance in reaching the overall desired outcomes, but that this process could have been further aided by more detailed work on the theories of change at an earlier stage, including more systematic use of evidence and experience.

Management of the project cycle

A general implementation challenge relating to coherence, alignment, the identification of trade-offs and interlinkages noted by evaluation interviewees, was that it was difficult for embassies to gain a full overview of all partners and projects supported by Norway. Embassy staff attempted to overcome this through inviting partners to discuss matters of strategy and tactics. Updated information on all projects managed by Norad (objectives, budget, sub-grantees, case handler) relevant to specific countries is included in yearly allocation letters to embassies since 2022, whereas before this only information on cross-cutting issues was provided. However, it appeared from our interviews that this project information is not always used or is in some ways still insufficient.





Several Forest and Climate Envoys noted that the annual civil society seminars, where all partners were invited, were a good initiative that helped improve coordination and information-sharing, although not necessarily alignment. Another positive example provided by interviewees was the use of regular monthly meeting with Norad's country focal point for information exchange, to keep abreast of country and project updates. A good example of interlinkages between the global civil society focus on financial institutions and country projects was from Brazil, where banks announced they would no longer provide loans to applicants with illegal land claims. This was argued by some interviewees to improve the framework conditions that country projects were operating within by reducing funding for illegal land grabs.

Although consideration was given (e.g., in Colombia) to balancing the range of supported activities with the overall outcomes intended, and to tailoring the support provided in countries to the perceived needs as, for example, stated in the various country analyses, the extent to which projects reinforced one another was also affected by countervailing forces. For example, several evaluation respondents recounted a certain degree of siloing and limited exchange of information across project managers, reinforced by heavy workloads, which appears to have limited coordination opportunities. Gaps in information-exchange were managed differently by different actors

in the system, with some actively pursuing the filling of gaps and others leaving them unattended. Gaps generated by civil society organizations re-focusing their work on one country rather than running projects across several countries were not necessarily filled by Norad, although may have been picked up by other donors. Discrepancies were also noted by evaluation respondents from civil society organizations in terms of the ready availability of, and follow-up from, their Norad counterparts.

Elements of the management of the project cycle appear to have taken the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs guidelines on Indigenous Peoples rights from 2013 into account. These guidelines state that consultation and engagement of Indigenous Peoples is a requirement in Norway's agreements under the International Climate and Forest Initiative and a condition for Norwegian support. Regarding forest conservation, the guidelines also place emphasis on the fact that in many cases, local communities are often the best source of knowledge about responsible natural resource management, and that this knowledge is crucial for ensuring that initiatives are sustainable. The fact that forests are often the basis for Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods must also be considered by initiatives taken by Norway. Evaluation interviews revealed several examples of consultations and engagement with Indigenous Peoples' organizations, for example, direct discussions with an Indigenous Peoples' run organization on how to implement funded

activities, as well as via the series of civil society seminars run by embassies in tropical forested countries. Consultations and engagement with Indigenous Peoples were also conducted by the civil society partner organizations supported in the second phase of funding support, particularly but not limited to those engaged on the question of Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent communities' rights. At the same time, the extent to which these consultations and engagements always met the standard of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples is questionable. The extent to which management depended on information from Indigenous Peoples on questions of natural resource management and environmental crimes is also questionable, with internal experience within the Norwegian aid system highly prized. A greater use of direct knowledge and information from Indigenous Peoples could have ensured a further alignment with the 2013 guidelines.

Attempts were made by Norad, in accordance with the applicable guidance and rules, to ensure both vertical and horizontal alignment, to actively manage trade-offs, and to ensure interlinkages between various goals and projects, both in terms of developing the call for proposals/assessing projects, and in terms of managing the project cycle. Gaps and missed opportunities are also evident, however, from the evaluation data. In terms of developing the call for proposals and assessing applications, vertical alignment was somewhat hampered by the incomplete





development of nested sub theories of change for the five intervention categories at the time of project assessment. Horizontal alignment in developing the call for proposals and assessing applications was also hampered to a degree by limited use of scientific evidence in assessments of the complementarity of civil society projects with the wider NICFI portfolio. It was also difficult for embassies to gain a full overview of all partners and projects supported by Norway, and although various means were used to overcome

this challenge, information sharing gaps remained. In terms of the management of the project cycle, vertical alignment with Norad's own policies appears to have been hampered through the rather limited use of knowledge directly emanating from Indigenous Peoples. Horizontal alignment, too, was hampered by some Norad and embassy staff experiencing insufficient overviews of all relevant NICFI activities in each context.

Further improvements in promoting alignment, managing trade-offs and ensuring interlinkages are possible in any future funding round to civil society. Further consideration of the sequencing of activities, enhancement of internal communication mechanisms, the balancing of staff capacities and workloads, and the early integration in planning processes of systematized forms of learning and knowledge are likely to be beneficial (as discussed also on [page 34](#) on Learning for Coherence).



Photo: Bjørnulf Remme





The rights-based approach

Given the cross-cutting importance of respect for, and promotion of, human rights in Norwegian development cooperation, as well as the focus areas of the NICFI portfolio, our evaluation considered the extent to which Norad's management of the support to civil society organizations has been rights-based. The evaluation team particularly looked at how Norad ensured real, (i.e., genuine, and as opposed to formulaic or performative), consultation, participation and engagement of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent populations via the approved projects in accordance with Norad/MFA/UN guidance and Norway's international obligations. The evaluation also considered how Norad ensured empowerment of these same groups, how it ensured capacity building of relevant rights duty-bearers (i.e., states), as well as how it ensured women's participation and respect for women's rights. Finally, the evaluation team focused on the extent to which there is room for strengthening the rights-based approach, and on how this might be approached.

Guiding principles for the rights-based approach

Norway is a signatory of Article 6 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention, in which states

have an obligation to consult Indigenous Peoples with the objective of achieving agreement or consent. Moreover, under Article 19 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Norway has long been a party, states are to consult and cooperate with Indigenous Peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them. Whether the ILO Convention or the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is used as the basis, the main points are the same. Achieving consent or agreement is not an absolute requirement, but authorities are to enter the process in good faith and with the goal of achieving consent or agreement.

Improvement of economic, social, and political conditions in developing countries is also a major goal of Norwegian development cooperation, with the promotion of human rights highlighted by the Norwegian Parliament as one among several target areas within this field of activity. Stated priorities are enhancing the rights of women, children, persons with disability. It is stated that "peace, democracy and respect for human rights are fundamental conditions for sustainable development. Consequently, these

components must be built into development co-operation both globally and with each partner country". Norad's 2000-2005 strategy further outlined that: "human rights are essential components of the development co-operation effort and that human rights treaties shall serve as a common denominator for the dialogues between Norway and its partner countries". These two documents together introduced a rights-based approach to development at Norad, with further implementation to be addressed in policy dialogue with partner countries.⁶

Emphasis has been placed by Norad on the need to consolidate legal frameworks by means of reform of domestic legislation and adherence to international human rights treaties. Further Norad support is provided to initiatives whose main aim is to enhance and promote human rights, such as ombudsman institutions, independent judiciaries, free media, and democratic elections, among others. Finally, human rights are to be mainstreamed into other programme areas, an approach elaborated upon in Norad's Handbook on Human Rights Assessment, published

⁶ All Norwegian aid also has a responsibility to ensure sustainable development and this is specified in the overarching goal of NICFI. See also: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-24-20162017/id2547573/?ch=1>





in 2001. In this context, mainstreaming implies that the way development cooperation is carried out pays due regard to respecting (i.e., does no harm) and promoting (i.e., does good) human rights. A cornerstone of this approach is the active, free, and meaningful participation of the beneficiaries as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986, which states that: “The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized”.

The Norwegian government committed to four cross-cutting issues (human rights, women’s rights and gender equality, anti-corruption, and environment and climate issues) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ White Paper (2016-2017) titled “Common Responsibility for Common Future”. Before 2016, there were three cross-cutting issues, and the objective was to promote these. In 2016, human rights became an additional issue. At the same time, the ambition was lowered to one of “do no harm”. Norway’s approach to cross-cutting issues is viewed by the OECD as lower in ambition than other donor countries and was criticized in the OECD-DAC 2019 Development Cooperation Review of Norway.

The NICFI civil society funding was subject to rules adopted by the Ministry of Climate and Environment, which came into force on 1 October 2018, and were

revised on 1 January 2020. These rules identified the final target groups for the grant scheme as population groups in developing countries that depend on tropical forests for subsistence, as well as all other population groups in these countries that will benefit from reduced greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The rules also specified a non-human target group of tropical forests and their carbon stores. The rules noted that the objectives of the civil society grant scheme must be weighed against NICFI’s main objective, which is: reduced and reversed loss of tropical forests contributes to a stable climate, protects biodiversity, and enhances sustainable development. Two further subgoals to this main objective were identified as: (i) contribute to sustainable land use and (ii) contribute to reduced pressure on forests from global markets.

Seven objectives for projects to be funded via the civil society grant scheme were outlined in the 2018 grant scheme rules, with these seven further reflected in NICFI’s Strategic Framework. Of these, one explicitly mentions rights: improved rights and livelihoods for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in tropical forest countries. Several evaluation respondents highlighted that activities under other objectives that did not explicitly mention rights could still contribute to rights improvements and empowerment of the target groups. For example, if projects led to approved and implemented policies for sustainable forest and land use in tropical forest countries and jurisdictions, or

to a reduction in forest crime, then this could, in turn, improve the rights situations of population groups that depend on tropical forests for subsistence. Moreover, a further overarching objective of the civil society grant scheme was that projects should show how they contribute to poverty reduction for affected groups. This implies an overall focus on the social, economic and cultural rights of the targeted populations.

It should be noted that through Norad’s Resource Allocation Model (shortened to RAM in 2017) framework, processing of all project applications must focus on the overall aims of strengthening civil society, promoting human rights, and eliminating poverty in developing countries.

Formal notification on rights-based approach to potential grant recipients

Norad alerted potential grant recipients under the civil society scheme that they were required to have relevant rights policies in place, and that they must identify any risk factors that could have a negative impact on rights as a cross-cutting priority in Norwegian development cooperation. Specifically, the 2018 rules for the civil society grant scheme noted that recipients must have policies in place for combating and counteracting sexual harassment and discrimination and ensure that these policies were implemented in practice. Applicants were also to have safeguards in place against corruption and negative impacts on women’s rights and gender equality, and





on human rights. Applications were to identify any risks that could negatively impact rights, with grant recipients expected by Norad to analyse and mitigate these risks throughout the project cycle, in accordance with the significance of the project, its scope and duration. Risks were particularly to be defined in relation to the cross-cutting issues of (i) human rights, with a particular focus on participation, accountability, and non-discrimination, and (ii) women's rights and gender equity.

In addition to the grant scheme rules, the civil society funding was also informed by Norad's guiding principles on support to civil society, published in June 2018, which state that "human rights for all" is the backbone of all Norad civil society support. These guidelines note that human rights is one of four main objectives for Norwegian development cooperation's support to civil society (the others being democratization, poverty eradication, and sustainable development), and that Norad does not support civil society groups that do not further these objectives. Issues of human rights are woven into several of the 2018 civil society guidelines, including social sustainability, inclusion, legitimacy, accountability, and context-sensitivity. Social sustainability in this context encompasses human rights, labour rights and good governance, while inclusion refers to equality and non-discrimination.

The guidelines make it explicit that, in the context of Norad's support to civil society, states are the primary duty-bearers with obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights for all. However, the guidelines recognize that civil society and their partners play an important role in rights given their long-term development and humanitarian work, as well as their role in holding governments to account. Examples of civil society activities relevant to the principle of inclusion laid out in the guidelines are work that opens spaces for voices typically not heard, or work advocating free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and other affected populations in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects.

Call for proposals and thematic and country analyses

The 2020 call for proposals highlighted the importance of rights-based approaches as a core component of support, indicating that civil society organizations play a crucial role in the protection and promotion of Indigenous Peoples' rights, mobilizing the private sector and holding authorities accountable.

Several thematic (including Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Interests) and country analyses were produced by Norad as internal documents, covering various aspects of the context and status of rights in target countries. These documents were used to inform the call for

proposals text between 2019 and 2020. Not all these internal documents are clearly dated, but they were noted by several evaluation respondents to reflect current or emerging thinking in Norad that was used to inform the call for proposals text. These thematic and country analyses were also used in the selection process for projects. The analyses contain only a limited number of citations, with most citations being to policy-practice analysis (e.g., Economist Intelligence Unit, CIVICUS etc.) or experience-based documents (e.g., Norad, embassy or other reports), rather than to scientific or academic studies, or to direct knowledge or experience from Indigenous Peoples.

Overview of country and thematic analyses

The country analysis for Colombia dated September 2019 (updated in 2020) mentions rights issues, priorities, and risks around 20 times, with the topic of rights a common thread throughout the document. The complexity of the tenure rights situation for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombian communities is recognized, and updated details of the grave human rights situation for human rights defenders, Indigenous and Afro-descendent leaders, plus others in civil society, are provided. Specialist Colombian state bodies responsible for human rights protections are noted, and various risks for work on human rights via civil society identified. Protection of environmental leaders and support to more traditional human rights organizations and networks are suggested for future consideration. It is put forward that security for local





communities and their leaders and defenders should become a crosscutting issue, i.e., every project working in the country should detail how it plans to deal with socio-environmental conflicts in project areas. Another highlighted risk is the degree of coordination among organizations working in the Indigenous/local community category, and the uneven balance between Norad support to International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and more 'local' organizations in Colombia.

The Brazil country analysis dated May 2020 covers rights less extensively than the Colombia analysis, mentioning rights around nine times in the document. An overarching threat to human rights work on the part of civil society groups involved in the forest and climate space is highlighted i.e., that the political climate had been increasingly hostile towards Indigenous Peoples' rights and to environmental protection efforts. Although noting actual and potential collaboration opportunities with certain state authorities on issues of rights, both on the part of Norway and its civil society partners, racism towards Indigenous Peoples among high-ranking officials is noted, implying that work to protect rights of Indigenous Peoples will continue to be both important and difficult. Only two projects working on Indigenous Peoples' rights and rights to land are noted to have been supported by Norad/NICFI at the time (2020). However, this low number (despite the high relevance of rights issues) is partly explained by other interventions with this

focus being supported directly through the Norwegian embassy's Indigenous Peoples' programme. As with Colombia, a concern noted in the analysis is the relatively high number of INGOs supported during the first round of funding, with only two national NGOs supported.

The undated Guyana country analysis mentions rights less extensively than either the Colombia or Brazil analyses, with two entries on rights in the document. The analysis identifies that Guyana has a favourable legal environment for civil society in general, and that human rights defenders can operate without hindrance. It further notes that people frequently join protests and gatherings that are predominantly peaceful, although there are examples of the use of excessive force by the authorities, and media outlets can face harassment and intimidation through the courts. Although this is not necessarily identified as a risk, the preponderance of INGOs supported via the NICFI grant scheme is noted in the document, with controversy within domestic civil society noted around Conservation International's acceptance of additional funds from Exxon Mobil Foundation, given the links between oil infrastructure development and Amerindian land titling.

The country analysis for Peru, dated 2020, notes the country's relatively recent experience of authoritarianism and human rights abuses connected to this, but suggests that human rights defenders generally

operate freely and are less exposed to direct violence than in Brazil or Colombia. At the same time, it is noted that activists addressing the human rights impacts of extractive industries risk intimidation, smear campaigns, death threats, surveillance, and judicial harassment. The analysis recognizes that Peru holds one of the largest Indigenous Populations in Latin America, with the Peruvian Indigenous Peoples' movement thus representing a significant force in national politics. This translates into large networks of Indigenous community organizations, such as AIDSESEP, and related initiatives, such as the creation of an Indigenous Amazonian REDD (RIA), aimed at strengthening property rights for Indigenous Peoples. The importance of continued support for Indigenous organizations and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is clearly flagged in the document, and it is suggested a way of doing this would be to expand support to include not only national organizations (e.g., AIDSESEP and CONAP) but also regionally based organizations in areas highly vulnerable to logging, extractive industries, and deforestation.

Finally, the Indigenous Peoples analysis (2022) provides the most in-depth consideration of matters of rights of relevance to the civil society funding of the analyses considered by the evaluation, mentioning rights around 31 times in the document. Various topics highlighted in the country analyses are treated in this document at depth, with more attention provided, for example, to the issue of women's rights and the relationship with





Indigenous rights, an issue not particularly touched upon in the country analyses. The document also provides a useful reflective analysis, considering both the balance of support in rights provided towards global and domestic organizations, and the various roles and strengths of Norad versus the Norwegian Foreign Ministry when it comes to Indigenous Peoples rights (e.g., the Foreign Ministry's role with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights). The analysis considers, at several points, protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in an instrumental manner, i.e., to achieve forest carbon sequestration rather than as a priority goal, in and of itself, for Norwegian development cooperation. It was noted by several evaluation respondents during a workshop on the evaluation's initial findings that this framing was deliberate and due to the source and purpose of the state funding for NICFI whose top three goals do not explicitly mention Indigenous Peoples or forest communities' rights.

The indicator set used by Norad to measure progress on its goals and sub-goals relevant to rights issues (version of March 2021) includes a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. For example, the sub-goal of protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights to land and forests is measured through their participation in relevant processes, and via reporting on safeguards (such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent, FPIC) established as part of international conventions and instruments, as well as civil society equivalents.

Implementation experiences

Overall, the 2021-2025 funding round awarded support to a total of 38 agreements, with 11 agreements supported under the category of Indigenous and Forest Dependent Peoples Rights. Indeed, this was the largest category in funding terms to receive support. This allocation underlines the prioritization of this category of work as part of the civil society funding. More than half (seven of eleven) of the organizations supported in this category are based in tropical forested countries. Several evaluation respondents indicated that this was part of a shift to increased support to domestic civil society as opposed to international NGOs (INGOs). It should be noted that one INGO supported in the first NICFI civil society funding round (2016-2020) was the subject of concerns from other state authorities and scholars surrounding their approach to human rights protections in projects they ran with funds from other donors. These concerns have been investigated by the House Committee on Natural Resources in the United States leading to proposed new federal US legislation to address human rights abuses in international conservation support.⁷

In the 2021-2025 round, only one (AMAN in Indonesia) of the seven domestic civil society groups supported under the same category is run by Indigenous Peoples

⁷ See: <https://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/media/press-releases/chair-grijalva-and-ranking-member-westerman-introduce-bill-to-address-human-rights-abuses-in-international-conservation>

themselves. Given that Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent populations are acknowledged by Norad guidance to have the best and most up-to-date knowledge of the rights issues and threats they face, the omission of support to more IP-run organizations across all partner countries in the 2021-2025 round can be viewed as a weakness in NICFI's ambitions to further support Indigenous Peoples' rights. Several evaluation respondents noted, however, other avenues for support of IP-run organizations, such as the Norwegian Indigenous Peoples' Programme managed by the Norwegian Embassy in Brasilia, the Norwegian Human Rights Fund managed by the Embassy in Bogota, and seed funding to a new fund managed by Wildlife Conservation Society and Rainforest Foundation Norway in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The lack of direct support to organizations run by Indigenous Peoples in the 2021-2025 round was also noted by respondents to arise from the need to balance different types of risk faced by Norad in managing the funding. This includes the need to fulfil formal requirements for fiduciary and corruption risk management.

Some evaluation interviewees argued that a shift to greater support to Indigenous Peoples' run organizations has begun to occur and that it is a longstanding feature of Norwegian support in some countries. Evaluation respondents also noted that the 2021 UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow included a joint donor pledge, including Norway, to spend USD 1.7 billion





to secure land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities by 2025. The evaluation interviews also surfaced the issue that, in balancing support on rights to domestic organizations, further consideration by Norad of power relations among various civil society groups is needed at the country level. This is important because by supporting one or two groups over others, Norad may contribute to changing the political economy of civil society in a country, which could, in turn, affect the rights situations of Indigenous Peoples.

In accordance with the applicable Norad/MFA guidance and rules, Norad made attempts to ensure participation of and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent populations, to empower them, and ensure women's participation and respect for women's rights. However, the extent to which Norad ensured its NICFI activities conformed to Norway's international treaty obligations to work towards the standard of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities in *all* activities that affect them is questionable. While the civil society projects supported were assessed by Norad against their use of FPIC or related processes at the programmatic level, FPIC has varied legal status and is practiced differently across national jurisdictions in partner countries, with instances of malpractice linked to FPIC processes reported (Lasheras et al, 2023; Williams, 2023; Gahman et al, 2020). Even if an FPIC process is applied in a particular context, rights violations may

still occur in that specific context (Williams, 2023). Indeed, the rights situation remains challenging in all the Amazon countries included in the evaluation's review (with recent killings of environmental defenders in Peru, for instance) and the evaluation team notes that many of Norad's consultations and engagements with Indigenous Peoples were indirect and/or relatively informal.

The rights-based approach could be further strengthened through: (i) more systematic inclusion of scientific, Indigenous and embassy knowledge in country and thematic analyses informing calls for proposals and project selection (for example triangulated use of deforestation data from various sources, including sources outside the partner country), (ii) more detailed (possibly at country level) theories of change developed in tandem with more systematic use of the knowledge base, (iii) reinforcing support to Indigenous Peoples' run organizations based on systematic knowledge use. Given that the mid-term review of the 2021-2025 funding round focused on matters of coherence it would be beneficial to place a focus on rights issues in a new mid-term review of a future civil society funding round. Further consideration is needed as to the completeness of the qualitative and quantitative indicator set for measuring progress on rights issues, given that the current indicators may only partially reflect the reality of the rights situations of target groups.





5

Conclusions and recommendations





This evaluation set out to answer one main evaluation question: **to what extent Norad has ensured the coherence of NICFI's support to civil society to reach its stated goals**

To answer this question the focus in this evaluation has been on the Norad Section for Forest's management of the NICFI support to civil society. It is, however, important to note that ensuring coherence is a joint endeavour, where all actors in the NICFI initiative, including the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the embassies and civil society organizations play a role. Norad cannot ensure coherence alone and is dependent on the overall resources it receives.

The evaluation criteria "coherence" is used as the starting point. We refer to the concept of coherence when we talk about the overall logical and consistent connections of different practices, ideas/standards/tools, and support to civil society organizations. The evaluation focused on three dimensions of coherence: learning as a precondition for coherence; vertical and horizontal alignment in general among the projects; and a specific focus on the integration of a rights-based approach in Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations.

Below are the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations on the three dimensions of internal coherence assessed.



Photo: **Espen Røst** | Panorama





Learning for coherence

To what extent is Norad collecting, analysing and using evidence to inform calls for proposals and make adaptations in the project cycle?

The evaluation has found that the development of the objectives and priorities in the call for proposals in 2019 were not based on a systematic compilation and analysis of results data from the previous project cycle. In preparation for the call for proposals, Norad initiated the development of two types of analysis: Analysis of the four prioritised themes in the call for proposals and eight country analyses. However, these analyses did not contain a systematic assessment of the results achieved, although a selection of results is included in the analyses. The main sources of knowledge used are the partners themselves. Limited attempts at triangulating this experience-based knowledge with other forms of knowledge, particularly scientific peer reviewed knowledge and Indigenous forms of knowledge was found in the analyses.

The evaluation has also found that the work on developing common indicators to track the achievement of the overall project cycle is still a work-in-progress. However, the evaluation has found that the Section for Forests has taken important

steps towards a more strategic management of the support to civil society organizations. These steps include establishment of thematic working groups, the continuation of country focal points, although this role is not properly defined, the initiative to operationalize the NICFI strategic framework via more detailed sub theories of change, as well as the development of knowledge plans and the initiative to use the mid-term reviews more strategic. These steps have the potential to strengthen internal coherence of the funding to civil society.

However, time and resource constraints, plus a lack of aggregated results data are barriers towards establishing an efficient system for organizational learning where implicit, explicit, and tacit knowledge are combined and used to understand the complex problem of, and sustainable solutions to, deforestation and forest degradation globally, nationally and locally.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to use of the thematic working groups as arenas for collective learning and knowledge creation/synthesising;
2. Regularly update internal analyses (such as the thematic and country analyses), including links and citations to new information, evidence, and analysis. Balancing or triangulating experience-based knowledge with other forms of knowledge, particularly scientific peer reviewed knowledge and Indigenous forms of knowledge is needed;
3. Clarify the roles of country focal points;
4. Strengthen systems for aggregating and collectively assessing results data to adjust the management of the funding.





Alignment, trade-offs, and interlinkages

How well does the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon complement the support to other thematic areas in the call for proposals, other NICFI interventions in the Amazon, and relevant policies?

The evaluation found that attempts were made by Norad to ensure that the support to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and environmental defenders in the Amazon complemented support to other thematic areas in the same region. All projects were to vertically align with the aim to reverse and reduce loss of tropical forests, contribute to a stable climate, protect biodiversity and enhance sustainable development in developing countries. All projects were also to horizontally align with other NICFI activities to meet the overall goal of preserving tropical forests both by uncovering and monitoring activities that lead to illegal deforestation and by providing incentives for governments, businesses, and the financial sector to pursue policies and conduct activities that have no negative impact on the rainforest.

However, the evaluation also found gaps and missed opportunities. In terms of developing the call for proposals and assessing applications,

vertical alignment was hampered by the incomplete development of nested theories of change for the five intervention categories at the time of project assessment. Horizontal alignment in developing the call for proposals and assessing applications was also hampered by the limited use of scientific evidence in an explicit assessment of the complementarity of civil society projects with the wider NICFI portfolio (including those in the Amazon). It was also difficult for embassies to gain a full overview of all partners and projects supported by Norway, and although various means were used to overcome this challenge, information gaps were still experienced. In terms of the management of the project cycle, vertical alignment with Norad's own policies appears to have been hampered through limited use of knowledge directly emanating from Indigenous Peoples. Horizontal alignment, too, was hampered by the limited overview available to Norad and embassy staff of all relevant NICFI activities in each context.

Photo: **Marte Lid** | Norad





Photo: **Marte Lid** | Norad

If a new call for proposals is decided upon, we recommend to:

5. Consider improvements to horizontal alignment of NICFI activities in each country. For example, ensure strong use of scientific evidence in addition to experience-based knowledge when assessing all initiatives focused on one geographic area to explore whether and how coherence among projects and partners can be enhanced. Consideration should also be given to the implications of Norwegian support in shaping power dynamics among partners;
6. Ensure that NICFI goals and objectives in the strategic framework, and how they interrelate, are understood by all those managing NICFI's budget (including Norad, embassies and partners).
7. Integrate systematized learning and the use of different forms of knowledge at an early stage of planning the call for proposals. Match staff capacities and workloads for both project selection and follow-up;
8. Ensure explicit and systematic documentation of activities/agreements, and results across the NICFI portfolio, is available to all actors involved in creating and recreating the NICFI portfolio;
9. Establish and maintain clear roles and responsibilities between the different NICFI actors in developing the call for proposals and selecting projects.





The rights-based approach

To what extent has Norad's management of the support to civil society organisations been rights-based?

The evaluation found that, Norad, in accordance with the applicable guidance and rules, worked to ensure participation of and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent populations, and ensure women's participation and respect for women's rights.

Civil society projects supported were assessed by Norad against their use of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) or related processes at the programme level. Given the varying legal status and practice of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) across partner country jurisdictions, as well as reported instances of malpractice linked to Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, the evaluation identifies scope for further consideration by Norad of how NICFI activities fit with Norway's international treaty obligations under International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169.

The evaluation also found that in the 2021-2025 round, only one of the seven domestic civil society groups supported is run by Indigenous Peoples themselves. Given that Indigenous Peoples and forest dependent populations are acknowledged to have the best and

most up-to-date knowledge of the rights issues and threats they face, the omission of support to more IP-run organizations across all partner countries in the 2021-2025 round can be viewed as a weakness in NICFI's ambitions to further support Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Recommendations:

10. If a new call is decided upon, consider whether to introduce a specific small grants element for Indigenous Peoples and grassroots community organizations. Alternatively, create several funding channels based on the type of organization, their role, and their capacities;
11. Ensure that the guidance followed by NICFI is consistent with Norway's international treaty obligations under Article 6 of the ILO Convention given the varied legal status and practice of FPIC in partner countries, including reported instances of malpractice connected to FPIC processes;
12. Further strengthen the rights-based approach:
 - a. Systematise the inclusion of scientific, Indigenous and embassy knowledge in country and thematic analyses informing calls for

proposals and project selection. For example, Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. (2021) provide lessons on pursuing access to justice and improved rights for forest-dependent populations in authoritarian REDD+ countries;

- b. Consider introducing country-level theories of change, developed in tandem with more systematic use of the knowledge base, to better ground programme theories and assumptions in the dynamic rights situations of each context;
- c. Review the completeness of the qualitative and quantitative indicator set for measuring progress on rights issues, given that the current indicators may only partially reflect the reality of the rights situations of target groups;





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Annex 1

Call for proposal - timeline

In November 2019, Ministry of Climate and Environment instructed Norad to **announce a call for proposal for support for civil society organisations** under NICFI, for the period 2021 to 2025. Norad was asked to prioritize four categories for funding, plus an open category. These priorities would be aligned with the strategic framework for NICFI, and the civil society support were to contribute to the overall goal of NICFI as well as provide value added compared to other NICFI efforts through country partnerships, multilateral organisations, and other strategic agreements. The Ministry of Climate and Environment advised NORAD to view the support as a portfolio, where the achievement of objectives is assessed at the portfolio level, allowing for some high-risk projects if they have the potential for breakthroughs in achieving the objectives of the Norwegian International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI).

The Ministry of Climate and Environment letter came during the same period in which the **call for proposals** for the support to civil society organizations under NICFI was being developed. Ministry of Climate and Environment received the first draft of the call for proposals from Norad in September 2019. The call for proposals was finalized in January 2020, after a close cooperation between Norad and Ministry of Climate and Environment. Before writing the call for proposals, Norad wrote **thematic and country analyses**, to inform the priorities in the call. The thematic analyses, which were written with input from Ministry of Climate

and Environment, are the basis for the bullet points under each prioritized category in the call; the bullet points are meant to summarize the analyses.

The general grant scheme rules for support relating to the national budget ch 1482, item 73 Norway's international Climate and Forest Initiative, regulated this particular call. This meant that some of the successful applicants were later transferred to the MoEC or the embassies for monitoring and control. This was done from a cost effectiveness viewpoint.

The **call for proposals was launched** on 17 January 2020. Applicants were to submit 'full' applications 13 weeks later, by 20 April 2020. The deadline was moved to 19 May 2020 due to Covid 19.

The assessment period had six phases:

1. Application reception and formal requirement check (May 2020)
2. Preliminary assessment, using a scorecard (May–June 2020)
3. Ranking and recommendation for the "shortlist". (June–July 2020)
4. Shortlist assessment (July–September 2020)
5. Full assessment (September 2020–February 2021)
6. Contract signing (April–October 2021)





The full applications had to include, *inter alia*, a description of the organisations' routines and systems, results and risk management, budget, project description, problem analysis, baseline description, theory of change, objectives and results framework, and relevance. This contrasted with the previous round in 2016–2020, where applicants initially submitted a briefer concept note, outlining their project proposal, before later submitting a full application if selected for further assessment. The decision to use full applications was motivated by an ambition both to avoid a two-step assessment process and to raise the threshold for applying, hoping to increase the relevancy of applications and reduce the overall workload in assessing applications. However, after receiving 358 applications, the workload was still deemed to be excessive, and leading to extra work for both applicants and reviewers. It has been proposed to limit the page numbers or number of words in future rounds if full applications are used, in order to reduce the workload – as the largest applications this round were above 100 pages, not included mandatory attachments.

The applicants uploaded their applications in an **online portal** ("Tilskuddsportalen", TP), which was then used by Norad for the very first time. The expectation was that using TP would also reduce the number of applications and thus the assessment workload. There were some technical issues in using TP that complicated the formal requirement check, created some additional workload for the assessment team,

and led to several applicants requesting clarifications¹. Overall, however, the assessment by Norad is that TP was a time saving tool.

Norad was tasked with performing an **initial screening** of the 358 applications received, checking whether formal requirements were met, for example if the application was complete, or if the applicant was a civil society organisation per Norad's definition, and not, e.g., a public university. There were some discussions of how to define CSOs. It was important to Norad to ensure that the support wouldn't be used to generate profits, and that it was given to non-governmental organisations. Evaluation respondents reported that it is difficult to strike a perfect balance in the definition. Private universities were in contrast to public universities considered CSOs, which seemed somewhat arbitrary to several respondents. The eligibility check was performed by an internal Norad team, using about one week plus quality assurance. 30 applicants did not pass the screening and were notified along with other refused applications in September.

During the initial assessment phase, Norad's whistleblowing-team received information on potential misconduct within two applicants' ongoing agreements². The team launched a special audit, which

ultimately led to the rejection of the applications in question. As a result of this process, the evaluation phase of category 2 applications was prolonged by approximately one month – finishing with a meeting on 19th February 2021, instead of together with categories 1, 3 and 4 on 15th January 2021. Also, some funds were withheld to be granted to "substitute" applicants in case of rejections. These funds were later granted to applicants considered to cover similar outcomes as the rejected applicants.

After the formal eligibility check, 328 applications were through to the **preliminary assessment phase**. The purpose of this phase was to give a rough indication of preliminary ranking per theme and country. To achieve this, the assessment team used a **standardized scorecard** with seven criteria, each graded on a scale from 1 to 4:

1. Thematic and geographic competence
2. Financial management and governance
3. Selection and follow up of sub-grantees
4. Theory of change
5. Partnership model
6. Relevance to the thematic call and NICFI strategic framework
7. Relevance to geographic context

¹ Some formal requirements in the call for proposals were not included as separate fields in the application form.

² One of which was an agreement with Climate Advisors Trust, as reported by Panorama Nyheter (Bolle & Leer-Salvesen, 2023).





To assess each criterion, the team used several guiding questions. For example:

- “Is the ToC supported by existing knowledge, such as research, evaluations, previous experience or other documentation?” (criterion 4)
- “Does the proposal fit well with the bullet points under the relevant category of the call?” (criterion 6)
- “Is the proposal relevant for NICFI’s strategic framework?” (criterion 6)
- “Is the intervention relevant and suitable in the country context(s)?” (criterion 7)

The scorecard was completed using staff resources from several sections within Norad (SIVNAT, GRØNN, ASP), Ministry of Climate and Environment, and relevant embassies. Each of the four main thematic categories had a SIVNAT lead coordinator and a Ministry of Climate and Environment team member. The embassies contributed with country-specific feedback, across thematic categories, while Norad and Ministry of Climate and Environment mainly worked within thematic categories, across countries (but each country also had a responsible case handler in SIVNAT).

Based on the preliminary scorecard assessments, Norad, the Ministry of Climate and Environment and selected embassies held **discussions leading to a shortlist** of the best 80 best applications. This was

done to ensure a thorough assessment of relevance, quality, and the organizations’ capacity to manage funds. There were held country group discussions for each country and thematic discussions for each category. The team, still lead by SIVNAT staff for each thematic category, discussed individual applications and compared applications within and across themes and countries, considering balance in the overall spread of themes and geography. Comments from these discussions were added to the scorecard along with a written assessment summary to produce a colour code to indicate recommendation status.

Norad concluded the shortlist on July 3rd with 84 applications that provided a preliminary recommendation and ranking based on scorecard, thematic coverage, and geography. The shortlist was then **sent to Ministry of Climate and Environment for further assessment**. Ministry of Climate and Environment returned a revised list of 46 applications recommended for full assessments, including proposed budget revisions for each application. The list was increased to 47 applications after a meeting with Norad. All applicants through to full assessments were to reduce their budgets, and many were requested to narrow their geographical scope or make other changes to . Discussions considered how to avoid overlap, use complementarities, and find synergies with other projects, which would be included in the revision proposals. Some projects that Norad considered “high-risk” would also continue to the next round, given

their strategic importance to Ministry of Climate and Environment. Informants and internal post-assessment evaluations has pointed out that even though Ministry of Climate and Environment has formally had an advisory role in the application assessment process, the advice has been perceived in a way which makes it unclear whether the advice is an instruction or a recommendation.

The **final decision on which applications would proceed to full evaluations** was made by Norad after a verbal review with Ministry of Climate and Environment on 17 September 2020. The primary purpose of the verbal review was to ensure that Norad had enough information to assess borderline cases and the potential added value of the projects in relation to other Norwegian support from Ministry of Climate and Environment and other NICFI efforts at the country and global levels.





The **full assessment of the top 47 applications** was done using the RAM-framework³ and decision documents and would rank the best 35–40 application for award of grant. The decision documents are structured after the RAM standards, that assess:

1. the applicant and partners,
2. the achieved results,
3. relevance,
4. the result management in the initiative,
5. and cross-cutting issues in the initiative,
6. the sustainability, local ownership and exit strategy of the initiative, and
7. the budget of the initiative.

³ RAM is Norad's "Resource Allocation Model" consisting of seven standards that are ranked from 1 to 6 and added to give a total score. The main questions sought answered by using this model are what the organisation's strengths and weaknesses are, how solid the results that the organisation has achieved earlier are, and how good and credible the programme and project plans in the application are. The RAM model documentation including a detailed descriptions of the seven standards can be found [here](#).

The connection between project outcomes and the seven NICFI outcomes is assessed specifically in the **decision documents**, as well as the project's connection to the SDGs. Furthermore, embassy feedback is included to ensure relevance to local contextual factors. The project theory of change is expected to be knowledge-based and realistic, clearly stating assumptions and showing causal relations. Projects are also expected to obtain sufficient results information, based on development of indicators, baselines, targets, data sources, and data collection methods.

The full assessment was performed by the same team as the previous phases, but with additional help to appraise the result framework, risk, and cross-cutting issues. Furthermore, consultants were commissioned to assess partner capacity, competence, background information and budgets (RAM standards 1, 2 and 7).

The thematic team leaders conducted discussion groups with participation from the Ministry of Climate and Environment and embassies, organized by country and theme, which led to the preliminary final recommendation per theme and further discussions. The case handlers then completed decision document drafts before the final recommendation was approved by SIVNAT and sent to Ministry of Climate and Environment for final review using embassy input. The final grant recommendations were completed 17 January 2021 for categories 1, 3 and 4, and 19 February

2021 for category 2. It has been suggested that complementarity with the rest of the NICFI portfolio should be included as a separate assessment criteria in future rounds.

Finally, **38 applications were selected to be awarded grants** (see chapter for an overview). The selected applicants received a Letter of Intent. Norad performed partner reviews of new partners without previous agreements and followed up on final adjustments and documentations. After all additional documentation is submitted and Norad's department for quality assurance (AMOR) conducted their review, the decision documents were finalized, and agreements were signed. After the selection was made, some funds remained unallocated in category 2. These were given to an organization in category 1, that was considered the most likely to improve the overall set of projects. It was also considered giving the unallocated funds to the project with the highest RAM-score, but this was not done since the RAM scores were not sufficiently calibrated.

The process of developing the call for proposal and evaluating the applications, took almost two years, and involved approximately 30-50 persons.





Annex 2

Documents reviewed

TABLE 2

Overview of project documents reviewed

Type	For whom?
Original applications	All granted projects
Decision documents	All granted projects
Grant agreements	All granted projects
Invitations to submit revision	Selected projects
Result frameworks	Selected projects
Progress reports	Selected projects
Project ToCs	Selected projects
Grant notification letters	Selected projects
Decision document drafts	Selected projects
Organisational reviews	Selected projects
Revised project ToCs	Selected projects





TABLE 3

List of internal documents reviewe

#	Title of document	Description	Type
1	Bestilling Utlysning av tilskudd til sivile samfunnsaktører 2021-2025	Ministry of Climate and Environment official request to launch call for proposals	Document
2	KOS innstilling for avtale Desember 2020	Recommended projects, with budget (cat. 1,3,4)	Sheet
3	Application processing teams_NICFI_Norad_ plan_30.04.20	Team organization for application processing	Document
4	Applications rejected on formal criteria_03.07.20	Overview of rejected applications, initial screening	Sheet
5	Bestilling til STRATEG fra SIVNAT	Request for indicators to inform CfP process	Email
6	CIVIL SOCIETY - CALL FOR PROPOSALS	Final call for proposals text	Document
7	Datsett_indikatorer_mars2021	Comprehensive set of indicators for NICFI	Sheet
8	DRAFT Climate and Forest Strategy, Brazil 2023-2026	DRAFT Climate and Forest Strategy, Brazil 2023-2026	Document
9	Endringsteori for skogporteføljen i Norad	Two-page ToC on Norad forest-portfolio	Document
10	Erfaringsnotat (statusrapport per 17.9)	Experience note, CfP process	Document
11	Erfaringsnotat fra KOS-søknadsrunde 2021-2025	Experience note, CfP process	Document
12	Erfaringsnotat KOS sivilt samfunnsportefølje - 2021-25	Experience note summary	Email
13	ERFARINGSOPPSUMMERING SIVNAT KOS-UTLYSNING	Experience note, CfP process	Document
14	FW: Landrapporter	Country-wise statistics	Email
15	FW: NICFI civil society grant scheme: Comments on applications	Embassy valuation of applications in Peru	Email
16	GRANT SCHEME RULES NORWAY'S INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE AND FOREST INITIATIVE (NICFI)	Grant scheme rules from 2018, revised 2020.	Document
17	Innstilling KOS-utlysning - kategori 2	Briefing to ASP on category 2 recommendations	Document
18	KOS endelig innstilling for avtale - kategori 2	Recommended projects, with budget (cat. 2)	Sheet
19	KOS endelig innstilling for full søknad	Final recommended selection	Sheet
20	Kunnskapsplan for skog	Norad "Knowledge plan" for forests	Sheet
21	LAND Brasil Mai 2020	Country analysis, Brazil	Document





TABLE 3

List of internal documents reviewe

#	Title of document	Description	Type
22	LAND Colombia - landanalyse oppdatert	Country analysis, Colombia	Document
23	LAND Guyana	Country analysis, Guyana	Document
24	LAND Peru 2020	Country analysis, Peru	Document
25	Literature Table - Knowledge Base per Sub Outcome in the Forest Portfolio	Norad knowledge base, IPLC	Sheet
26	NICFI civil society grant scheme: Comments on applications	Request for comments to Embassy in Brasilia	Email
27	NICFI civil society grant scheme: Comments on applications	Request for comments to Embassy in Bogotá	Email
28	NICFI civil society grant scheme: Comments on applications	Request for comments to Embassy in Santiago	Email
29	NICFI CSSS 2016-20 call concept note form	Template for concept notes, 2016	Document
30	NORAD'S SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY: GUIDING PRINCIPLES	Guidelines for Norad's CS support	Document
31	Notat til direktøren – Innstilling sivilsamfunnsutlysning Klima og skoginitiativet 2021-2025. Kategori 1, 3 og 4	Norad briefing to Director general on recommendations, cat. 1,3,4	Document
32	Notater porteføljestyrmøte kategori 2	Portfolio meeting minutes, category 2	Document
33	NY TEMA International Consensus on REDD	Thematic note, category 4	Document
34	Omforent referat porteføljestyrmøte	Portfolio meeting minutes, categories 1, 3 and 4	Document
35	Orientering om pågående varslingsaker – frys i utbetalinger og konsekvenser for søknadsrunden på Klima og skog	Briefing on whistleblower cases	Document
36	Orientering om pågående varslingsaker – frys i utbetalinger og konsekvenser for søknadsrunden på Klima og skog	Further detailed briefing on whistleblower-cases	Document
37	Oversendelse av klagesaker, Klima- og skoginitiativet, sivilsamfunnsutlysning	Briefing on complaints from organisations not rewarded	Document
38	Oversendelse: Forslag til innstilling KoS sivil samfunn - Kategori 1, 3 og 4	Briefing to Ministry of Climate and Environment on portfolio, proposed recommendation	Email
39	Oversikt land og tema til kick-off med kontaktinfo	Country and theme overview of projects rewarded	Sheet
40	Porteføljeprofil kategori 2	Portfolio profile, category 2	Document
41	Portfolio assessment of the four thematic kategorier	Early portfolio assessment, scorecards phase	Document





TABLE 3

List of internal documents reviewe

#	Title of document	Description	Type
42	Priority list - all applications	Scorecard assessment, all applications	Sheet
43	RAM model v.6	Norad Resource Allocation Model documentation	Document
44	RE: Oversendelse: Forslag til innstilling KoS sivilt samfunn - Kategori 1, 3 og 4	Norad reply to Ministry of Climate and Environment's reply regarding proposed recommendation	Email
45	RE: Oversendelse: Forslag til innstilling KoS sivilt samfunn - Kategori 1, 3 og 4	Communication regarding unallocated funds, w.b.-case	Email
46	RE: Vurderinger av søknader Colombia	Colombia application score from embassy	Email
47	RE_ Sivilsamfunnsutlysning KoS 2021-2025_ Økning av tildeling Utviklingsfondet	Grant increase communication	Email
48	Sivilsamfunnsutlysning KoS 2021-2025, Fordeling av reservert beløp 60mill NOK	Briefing on unallocated funds after w.b.-cases	Document
49	Svar på bestilling 03.07.2020 - Utlysning av tilskudd til sivilsamfunnsaktører	Norad briefing to Ministry of Climate and Environment of proposed shortlist	Email
50	TEMA Indigenous peoples and local communities	Thematic note, category 1	Document
51	TEMA Legality, Transparency and Governance	Thematic note, category 3	Document
52	TEMA Supply Chains	Thematic note, category 2	Document
53	Terms of references: The knowledge base of the theory of change	ToR for ToC development	Document
54	Thematic overview - category 1	Distribution of screened applications, per NICFI outcome	Sheet
55	Thematic overview - category 2	Distribution of screened applications, per NICFI outcome	Sheet
56	Thematic overview - category 3	Distribution of screened applications, per NICFI outcome	Sheet
57	Thematic overview - category 4	Distribution of screened applications, per NICFI outcome	Sheet
58	Veileder for forvaltning av Norads tilskuddsordninger til ASP	Management guide / handbook, Norad	Document
59	Visualisering av søknadsprosess_KOS 18.09.20	Application process flow chart, internal use	Document
60	VS: Oversendelse: Forslag til innstilling KoS sivilt samfunn - Kategori 1, 3 og 4	Ministry of Climate and Environment reply to proposed recommendation	Email





TABLE 4

Overview of embassy documents and budgetary propositions reviewed

Type	For whom, and which years?
Annual allocation letters to embassies ("belastningsfullmakter")	Selected countries, 2015–2022
Semi-annual embassy reports on climate and forest-related issued	Selected countries, 2015–2022
Annual budgetary propositions from the Ministry of Climate and Environment to Parliament	Selected years from 2008





Annex 3

Overview of informants participating in interviews

TABLE 5

Overview of interview participants

Category	Number of interviews	Number of informants
Previous employees in SIVNAT	4	5
Current employees in Section for Forests	5	5
Previous and current climate and forest envoys, embassy employees	4 (5) ⁴	5 (6)
Previous and current employees in Ministry of Climate and Environment	2	3
NGO	4	6
Total	20(21)	24(25)

⁴ One informant was asked about several roles



Department for Evaluation