

Equator Initiative Evaluation  
Period: 2010 - 2019

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Evaluator: Michelle Libby Tewis

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## Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
BMU or BUMB	German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CI	Conservation International
COP	Conference of Parties
EI	Equator Initiative
FTE	Full-time employee
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IPLCs	Indigenous peoples and local communities
IUCN	International Union for Conservation
MFA	Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NFD	Global Program on Nature Development
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NICFI/MCE	Norwegian International Climate and Forests Initiative / Ministry of Climate and Environment
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NYDF	Global Platform on the New York Declaration on Forests
OE	One Earth
PCI	PCI Media Impact
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGP	Small Grants Programme (under UNDP)
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNF	United Nations Foundation
UNFIP	United Nations Office for Partnerships
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## Executive Summary

The Equator Initiative recognizes and advances local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities. The Initiative is a multi-sectorial partnership led by UNDP, with operational implementation by UNOPS, and since 2002 has supported 245 Equator Prize winners from 81 countries. The Initiative is currently housed in and managed by UNDP's Global Programme on Nature for Development (NFD).

This evaluation analyzes the work of the Equator Initiative between 2010 - 2019, and based on the findings, recommends actions to strengthen the Initiative and best align its efforts for the next decade. The information gathered and analyzed is structured around seven themes: impact, relevance, partnership structure, efficiency, gender equality, sustainability, and relevance to UNDP strategy. Specific questions were developed for each theme, and the answers provided are the basis for analysis, findings, and recommendations. Information for the analysis was gleaned from 1) secondary sources like project documents and annual reports, and 2) direct inputs by winning organizations and partner organizations collected via questionnaires and a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants and current staff.

In the period between 2010 and 2019, the Equator prize was awarded six times to 144 organizations in 65 different countries. Aside from the prize, the Equator Initiative supports its beneficiaries, the winning organizations, via community dialogues, which are spaces that allow for sharing best practices and training and networking with national and global policymakers. Additionally, through its knowledge management work, the Initiative offers its beneficiaries a variety of knowledge products like case studies, publications, videos, and online courses to catalyze ongoing peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.

Many of the Equator Prize winners are projects and organizations that specifically benefit women in a variety of ways. Moreover, the evaluation clearly showed that despite some of the cultural constraints inherent to places where the Equator Initiative works, the Initiative has always implemented gender-favorable best practices for project selection and event attendance. The Initiative is thus, consistently encouraging women to express their voice and supporting their professional growth.

The Evaluation established that the Equator Prize and knowledge products give recognition to the winner organizations and their projects. Recognition has opened the doors for increased funding, partnerships, expansion of projects, and influencing of policy. Any of these benefits can be a catalyst for another benefit. And that is how it has played out for a great majority of the surveyed organizations who have won the Equator Prize. Furthermore, the work the Initiative does and the services it provides are considered relevant by both winning organizations and partners. Equator Initiative work is effective and efficient. Most importantly, the Initiative has, in the last four years since 2016, proactively implemented measures to continue improving its services for beneficiaries.

Several factors make the Initiative a potentially sustainable project. First, the prize and knowledge products continue to produce myriad benefits after awarded. Second, the Initiative provides relevant services and products to its beneficiaries. And third, the Initiative responds adequately to and evolves with the changing needs of the IPCL policy landscape as well as to those of its beneficiaries. Thus, with

appropriate and continued financial support, the Equator Initiative can continue providing relevant benefits for an indefinite period.

Moving forward, the Initiative should continue awarding the prize, providing knowledge products, especially case-studies and videos; and they should increase and diversify the ways by which winning organizations can connect face to face. Collectively these activities are like the heart and soul of the Initiative, with the prize and prize ceremony being at the crux.

Also, moving forward, the Initiative should strengthen and focus efforts to help scale-up winning projects since this is what a majority of winning organizations and partner organizations consider to be a relevant and valuable action to potentiate the work recognized via the prize.

The current management team knows that helping projects scale-up makes sense as a central action of the Initiative. However, the Initiative is critically understaffed, and developing and implementing an appropriate strategy to support scaling-up requires dedicated personnel time. The Initiative can fulfill its current duties because it astutely and continuously moves its staff resources around to cover immediate needs. However, whenever one area is tended to, another is unattended, thus making it impossible to grow a stable program based on a long-term vision to impact the climate change and sustainable development agendas with nature-based solutions. Helping projects to scale up requires a longer-term vision with the appropriate staff and financial resources to implement.

Building a stable team requires stable, yearly core funding. Over ten years, the project never received a steady and consistent amount of funding. The funds received fluctuated every year. Every year after the initial amount of 2million US in 2010, the Initiative received smaller and varying sums of funds. Coincidentally, 2million US is a reasonable budget to staff some key positions and have a core team that can develop a strategic program; one that can continue to award the prize and properly assist winners with scaling-up of projects.

The evaluation also clearly showed that the partnership structure is not being used efficiently and needs to be revitalized. Doing this requires dedicated staff that at the moment is non-existent. A partnership scheme that is actively engaged in strategic activities of the Initiative can leverage core funding and also find additional funding that can be invested in capacity building, connecting partners face-to-face, knowledge management, and scaling-up. Further engaging UNDPs support into the partnership scheme is fundamental since the Equator Initiative by contributing to all six signature solutions proposed by UNDP in its 2018 - 2021 strategy is very relevant to UNDP's overall work.

# 1. Introduction

The Equator Initiative recognizes and advances local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities. The Initiative is a multi-sectorial partnership implemented by UNOPS, and since it began in 2002 has supported 245 Equator Prize winners from 81 countries. The Initiative is currently housed in and managed by UNDP's Global Programme on Nature for Development (NFD). In 2010, the first ten years of the Initiative were evaluated, now, as a new decade lies ahead the Initiative is poised to learn from its last ten years of work and best determine how to structure its current work to successfully service its stakeholders and achieve its goals in the years to come.

## 1.1 Purpose of Evaluation

Overall, the evaluation is looking to identify what has worked and what needs improving in order to best align the Initiative's efforts for the next decade. The findings of the evaluation will help provide strategic recommendations for the project structure and future development of its activities.

Specifically, the following aspects are being analyzed:

1. Impact and effectiveness of the Equator Initiative on its recipient communities.
2. Value added and response to demands in the international environmental policy arena in the area of indigenous peoples' and local communities (IPLCs).
3. Effectiveness of the Initiative's multi-sector partnership structure.
4. Cost-efficiency of project activities.
5. Promotion of positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including the participation of women in Initiative activities.
6. Capacity of producing and reproducing benefits over time, including after interventions or direct support have ended.
7. Relevance of the Equator Initiative to UNDP's Strategic Plan.

"Appendix 1: Evaluation Questions" lists the specific questions that the evaluation set out to answer.

## 1.2 Scope of Methodology

This evaluation covers the decade between 2010-2019 and used three specific methods to collect data. The Equator Initiative team provided diligent support with data provision and collating and processing of information.

A significant part of the information came from secondary data sources like project documents, annual reports, accounting statements, and knowledge products for the period in review. The documents analyzed for the desk review are listed in "Appendix 2: Key Secondary Data Sources Reviewed".

The reviewer developed specific questionnaires for prize-winning organizations and partner organizations

and clarified that the Equator Initiative was conducting an independent, third-party evaluation of its last ten years of work. An evaluation with the intention of fine-tuning work and best serve the beneficiaries in the years to come. Respondents' input is confidential but informed overall recommendations for the evolution and improvement of the Equator Initiative.

Although the evaluation focuses on the last ten years, questions were phrased so that a partner or winning organization could answer based on the overall experience they have had with and the knowledge they have of the Equator Initiative. The information gathered and analyzed from the questionnaires was an essential complement to the secondary data analysis.

Organizations were given three weeks and reminded once to submit their answers. Of the 23 current partners, 11 answered the survey. The survey was sent to 211 winning organizations, and 95 responded. The winner organization questionnaires received represented: 46 countries (40% from Latin America and Brazil, 26% from Sub-Saharan Africa, 25% from Asia Pacific, 3.1% each from Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, and 2.1% from the Global North); 32% of the 95 respondents were winners from between 2002 - 2009; 68% of respondents were winners between 2010 - 2019.

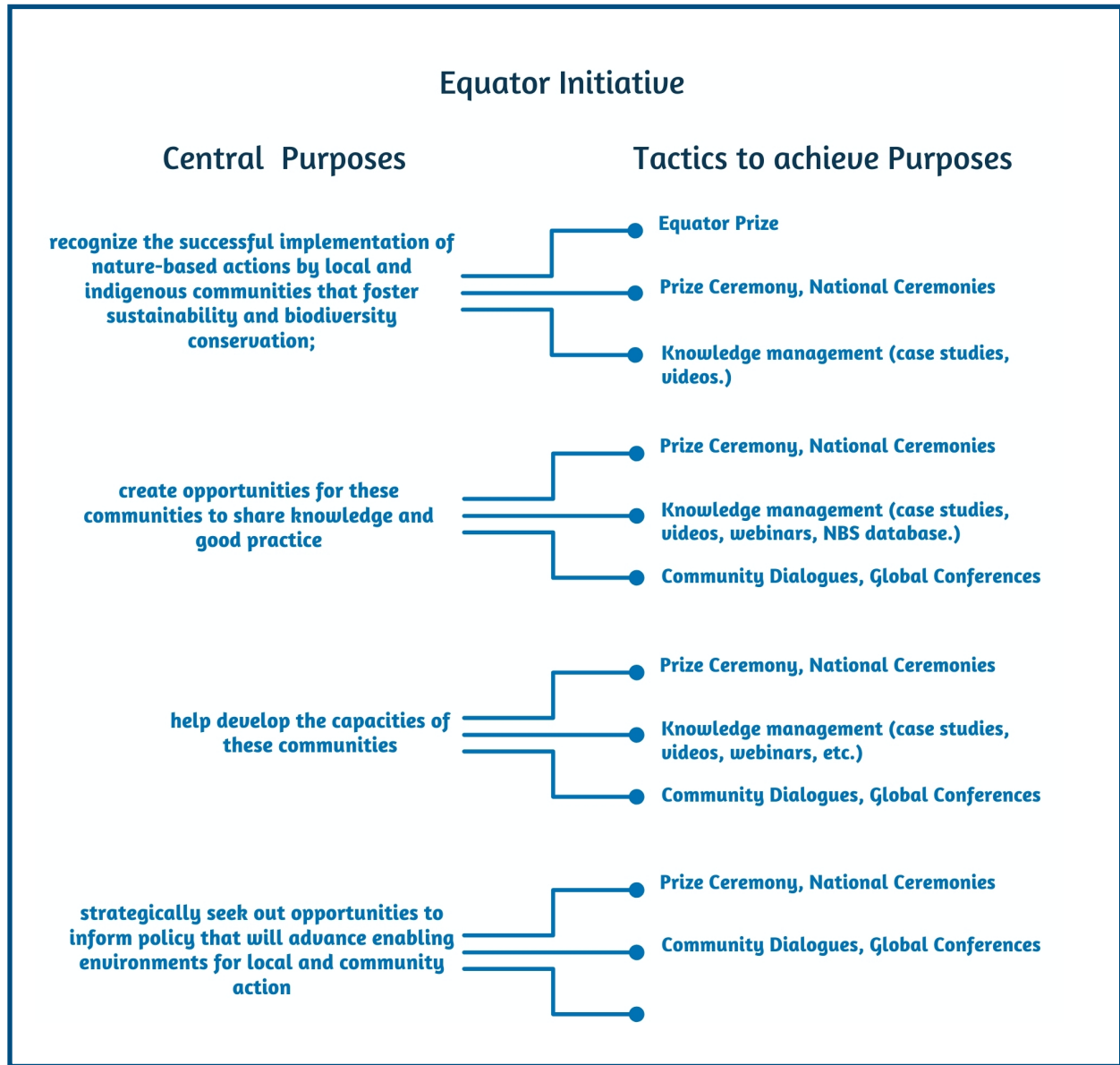
Lastly, the evaluation relied on a series of semi-structured interviews with key project staff, winners, and partners to triangulate some of the information gathered via questionnaires. These interviews were also a source for relevant background and historical information about the Initiative. In total, nine interviews were conducted via teleconferences. "Appendix 3: Key Informants", lists the names of the people interviewed.

## 2. Project Description

For eighteen years, the Equator Initiative has been shining a light on the innovative sustainable development efforts of local and indigenous communities around the world. The Initiative has four purposes. 1) It recognizes the successful implementation of nature-based actions by local and indigenous communities that foster sustainability and biodiversity conservation; 2) it creates opportunities for these communities to share knowledge and good practice; 3) it helps develop the capacities of these communities, and 4) it strategically seeks out opportunities to inform policy that will advance enabling environments for local and community action.

To fulfill its four purposes, the Initiative implements a series of tactical actions. The hallmark tactic of the Initiative is the Equator Prize. The prize is awarded biannually and honors nature-based efforts of local communities on the international stage. The prize ceremony usually consists of a ceremony on a global stage and a series of week-long activities to build capacity and network. Occasionally, smaller national level ceremonies are implemented to honor specific winners in-country. Another tactic, the community dialogues, brings together prize-winning communities, policymakers, and thought leaders to share knowledge, good practice, and develop capacities. Sometimes, community dialogues are organized in conjunction with the Initiative's and winner's participation in Global Conferences. Another tactic, Equator Knowledge, provides easy access to online tools and courses to facilitate learning among local and indigenous communities. Figure 1 illustrates how the different tactics of the Equator Initiative contribute to each one of its purposes.

Figure 1: Purposes and Tactics of Equator Initiative



## 2.1 The Prize

The Equator Prize has been awarded six times between 2010 and 2019 to 144 organizations in 65 different countries. The majority of the recipients are from Sub-saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia and the Pacific. See Figure 2 below. Table 1 highlights winners per year, per region in absolute numbers.



Figure 2: Winners by Geographic Region

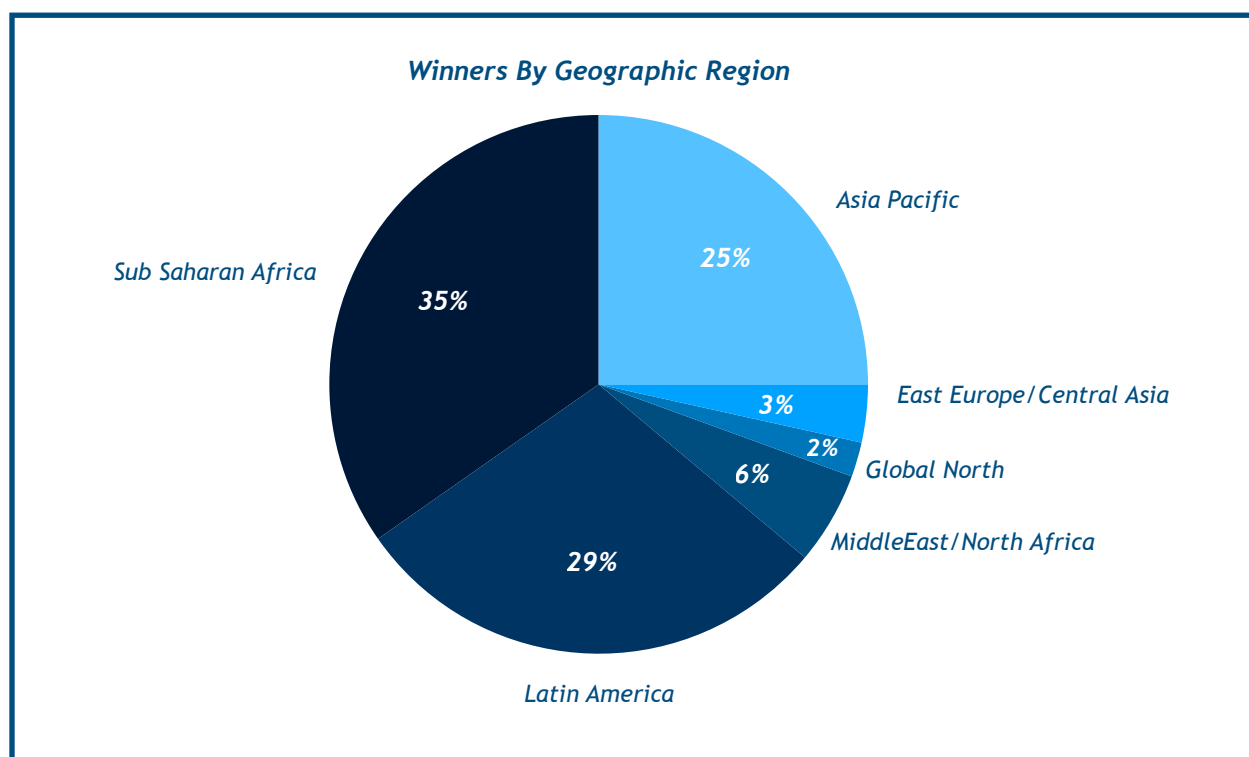


Table 1: Prize Winners by Year and Region in Absolute Numbers

Year of Prize	Global Conference Linked to Prize Ceremony	# of Winners	Winners by Region					
			AP	SS	LA	ME/NA	EE/CA	GN
2010	UN General Assembly	25	7	10	7	1	–	–
2012	Rio+20 (World Summit on Sustainable Development)	26	6	9	7	2	–	–
2014 (June)	World Day to Combat Desertification	12	–	12	–	–	–	–
2014 (Sept)	World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Issues and UN Secretary-General's Climate Conference	23	6	5	7	4	1	–
2015	UN Climate Change Conference (COP21)	21	6	5	8	1	1	–
2017	UN General Assembly	15	5	3	6	–	1	–
2019	UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit and UN General Assembly	22	6	6	7	–	–	3
<b>Totals</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>

The Equator Prize was designed for countries that “were located 23.5 degrees north or south of the Equator (i.e. the Tropics); countries with high biodiversity, and commonly high levels of poverty”, hence the predominance of winners from Latin America, Asia Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010, the focus of the prize expanded to all countries where UNDP worked. This expansion meant including the Middle East and North Africa, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In 2017, and in light of the global sustainable development goals and interest from indigenous groups in the Global North, the Initiative opened the prize to indigenous groups around the world.

Because of its original geographic focus, the Initiative has developed robust networks in Latin America, Asia Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa that allow for a much larger reach when receiving nominations. That network is not yet as expansive for the other parts of the world, hence fewer nominations received, and thus fewer prizes potentially awarded.

## **2.2 The Community Dialogues**

The Initiative helps develop the capacity of its winning communities through various modalities. One of the principal ways has been via the Community Dialogues. These spaces allow community representatives to share experiences and best practices; they offer the participants targeted trainings, and provide strategic opportunities for community leaders to link with national and global policy-makers. In the last ten years, the Initiative has hosted 21 such events, involving 402 winners from numerous countries. The events often coincide with international events such as conferences of the parties for biodiversity and climate change, the World Conservation Congress, World Parks Conference, Rio+20, the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, or at times with UN General Assemblies or UN Climate Action summits, amongst others. In this way, the Dialogues build capacity and allow participants to share best practices, and at the same time, participate in the various policy forums offered by the respective global conferences.

## **2.3 The Knowledge Products**

Equator Knowledge is described as a “research, documentation and learning program focused on local best practice in sustainable development.....working with partners to identify, document, and analyze the success factors of local best practice, and to catalyze ongoing peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange and replication of best practice”. The knowledge products include 223 case studies, 13 publications (all published in English and a majority in another relevant language), 75 videos, and numerous online courses; a plethora of products easily accessed and downloaded from the Equator Initiative website.

The nature-based solutions database has been a recent innovative product of Equator Knowledge, uploading 721 solutions in 2018 and 514 in 2019. The database highlights both winner projects and runner-up projects that did not make the final cut yet undoubtedly are doing innovative work concerning nature-based solutions and sustainable development for their communities. Before the nature-based solutions database, between the years 2009 - 2013, the Initiative had tried to develop the Community Knowledge Service (CKS) to enable local community representatives to share their knowledge and expertise with other local community representatives and with the broader range of stakeholders. This CKS had a few meetings over the years but never managed to take the form intended, so in 2013 it was discontinued.

## 2.4 The Management Team

The day to day work of the Equator Initiative is carried out by a lean team of professionals, housed within the Global Programme on Nature Development of UNDP. There is six staff with different roles and amounts of time allocated to the Initiative. However, altogether these different amounts of time only total about 3FTEs.

The program has a steady flow of interns, donated to the program through informal arrangements with Fordham, Brandeis, and Carnegie Mellon Universities. The interns collaborate with the program on a full-time or part-time basis for 3 to 6 months at a time. Often during prize years, a Junior consultant is hired to help with all the preparations of the Prize week. Both current and past program managers recognize that these interns are the motor of the Equator Initiative. The challenge is that this model of interns coming and going does not create stable capacity in the program, hence making it nearly impossible to develop new needed activities within a strategic, long-term approach to work.

At the moment, the Initiative has four areas of work. 1) the prize, which breaks up into the nominations process and the ceremony; 2) capacity building via community dialogues and participation in other global events; 3) knowledge management; and 4) impacting IPLC policy and supporting IPLCs to impact policy. Not one of those areas of work has a full-time staff member dedicated to it. Furthermore, overall management of the Initiative receives a third of an FTE, and procurement and administration are add-ons to an FTE with a full workload.

Specifically, out of the six staff with different amounts of time dedicated to the EI, three positions spend 50% or more of their time on the Initiative. The Program Coordinator (.75 FTE) manages the day to day, is the lead for the award ceremony, and handles contracts and procurement. The program analyst (1 FTE) is the lead for the Equator Prize process and the principal liaison with communities. An IPLC engagement specialist (.5 FTE) is the liaison to the IPLC global constituency and takes the lead on special projects that may arise. In the last ten years, these three positions have only co-existed for a year. Before this, the Equator Initiative had a manager and coordinator dedicated to it. The current manager of the NFD spends about 33% of their time on the Initiative.

## 2.5 The Partners

The Equator Initiative is a multi-sectorial partnership and currently has 23 organizations associated with it, most of which have been with the Initiative since its inception in 2002. These 23 organizations are divided into two distinct groups: major donors and operational partners.

As the name implies, major donors provide the vast majority of the funding for the Initiative's activities. Except for two recent donors, all have been bi-lateral agencies. The Government of Norway, represented by various institutions, and the Government of Germany have been major donors, almost since the beginning.

In the last ten years, operational partners have contributed to selecting winners, carrying out joint activities, participating in community dialogues, providing technical assistance, and sponsoring prize ceremonies. Out of the 18 operational partners, 7 are UN-affiliated, 9 are non-profits (1 cultural, 1 communication, 7 environmental), 1 is a university, and 1 is a bi-lateral agency. See Appendix 4 for a list

of current and past donors and current operational partners. Section 3.3 “Partnership Structure” will detail the Initiative’s interactions with the various partners, and section 3.4 “Efficiency” will discuss donor partner contributions more closely.

## 3. Project Analysis

Section 3 of this report presents the results of the questionnaires and interviews. It interprets those results in light of Equator Initiative information presented in annual reports, the website, and that provided by the Equator Initiative team. The analysis for each one of the seven aspects being evaluated below (Impact, Relevance, Partnership Structure, Efficiency, Gender Equality, Sustainability, and Relevance to UNDP Strategy) is the basis for the findings and recommendations presented in Section 4.

### 3.1 Impact

This section analyzes the impact of the Equator Initiative on prize recipient communities; specifically, how the prize, capacity building events, and knowledge products have benefitted, or not, the winning organizations.

#### 3.1.1 Impact of Winning the Prize

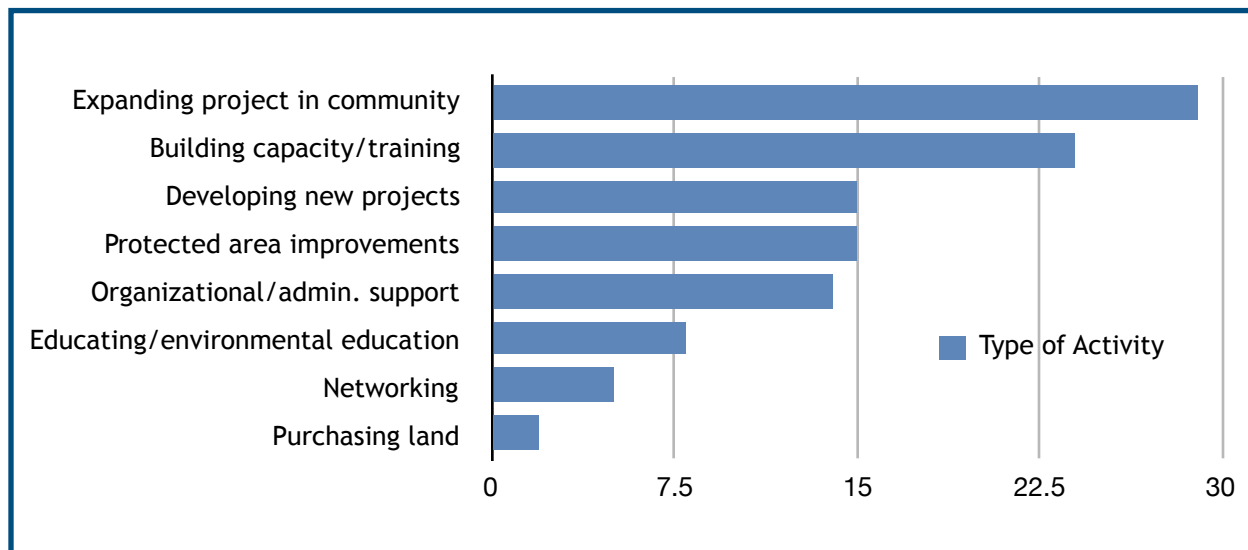
Respondents claim multiple benefits from winning the prize. Overall, 75% of the responding organizations (total 94) claim that winning the prize has improved their organizations ability to communicate/tell/share their story. This impact is closely followed by that of being able to establish a relationship with other local communities in their region or country and share knowledge with each other about best practices or join forces on different projects (73%). The third most relevant impact of winning the prize (64%) has been the ability to expand/enlarge the project in their current community. Table 2 below lists the impacts of winning the prize and the number of times in absolute numbers that a respondent considered it important.

**Table 2: Impact of Winning the Prize: Relationships, Replication, Learning**

What the prize has allowed the winning organization	# of times mentioned as important
Improve its ability to communicate/tell/share its story.	71
Establish a relationship with other local communities in their region or country and share knowledge with each other about best practices or join forces on different projects.	69
Expand/enlarge the project in the current community.	60
Improve nature-based solutions that it was already implementing.	54
Identify new nature- based solutions.	50
Replicate the project in another community.	43
Create beneficial alliances with local government entities that are not based on funding.	42
Create alliances with national government entities that are not based on funding.	33
Have rights acknowledged or strengthened (for example, land rights etc.).	32
Create beneficial alliances with subnational government entities that are not based on funding.	30

The prize money awarded to each winner has been mostly used for expanding the project in the community and for capacity building or training events. That said, prize money has supported everything from protected area improvements to environmental education to purchasing land. Figure 3 below, lists all the general types of activities in to which prize money has been invested.

**Figure 3: Investment of Prize Money**



In the words of the winners some of the ways in which winning the Equator Prize has benefitted them include:

*“Wining Equator award made Kayonza Growers Tea Factory popular nationwide. Most tea factories and government agencies have been coming to Kayonza to benchmark on the Kayonza climate mitigation model. Wining this prize helped management to do more sensitization to farmers on community-based Climate Change adaptation initiatives like energy saving cooking stoves, wetland conservation and tree planting.”*

*“Based on our experienced, our organization grew financially and in terms of recognition from all multi-stakeholders. Our mass based support increased, our networks increased, and our funding increased. This led us to do more fund sourcing that led to the generation of support which funded our different programs, projects and services for Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines.”*

*“Equator prize enhanced our feasibility at local, national and international level. At the local levels winning of the award increased community participation in the project.”*

*“We have opened relationship with new communities in Ipoti-Ekiti, Ekiti State Nigeria on the utilization of T.danielli leaves for commercial products such as bags, mats and ceiling materials. Our Project received widespread public education attention resulting from news of the Equator Award.”*

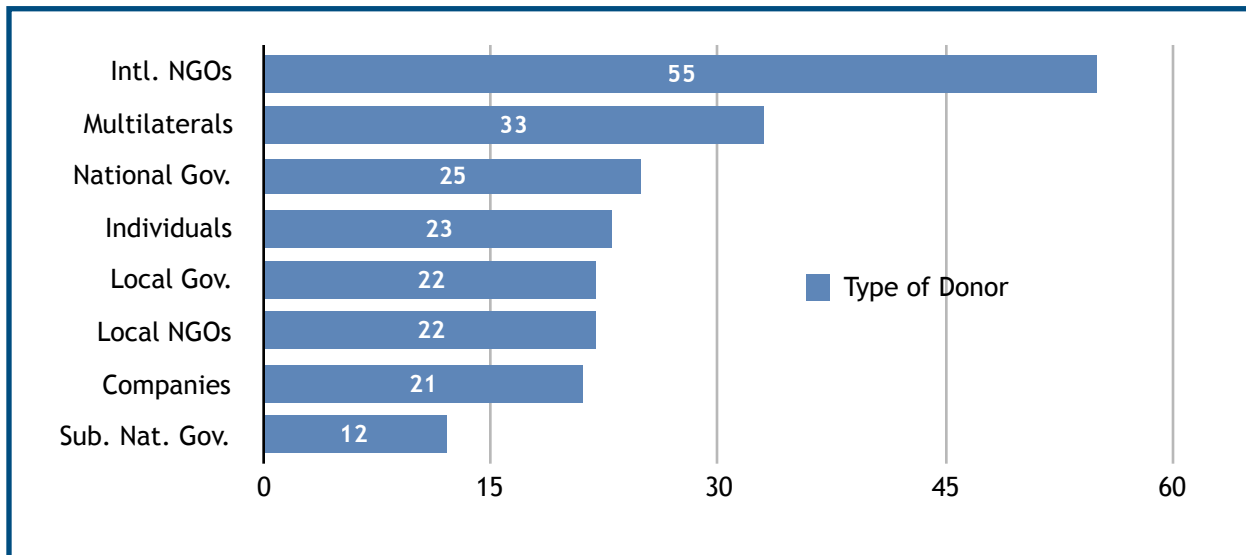
*“By winning the Equator Prize, we gained recognition and trust from other development NGOs including academe, locally and internationally. At the local level, some local government units in Northern Samar and Quezon Provinces asked us to replicate the technologies we developed on the tie-crab fattening and the bamboo potting techniques*

*for mangrove planting in their respective mangrove areas. The congressman in our district also learned our winning and invited Trowel to help in rehabilitating some denuded mangrove forests in the province of Northern Samar. Specifically for our fisherfolk partners, the municipal LGUs and the provincial office of the Department of Environment signed the protected area management agreement that gave the organizations and their members that exclusive right to manage and utilize the resources that are found in the mangrove forest that we have rehabilitated.”*

Another impact of winning the prize has been the additional funding organizations have been able to raise. Of the 95 organizations responding, 84 (88%) have received funding from other multiple sources because of winning the Prize. Most of the additional funding has come from international NGOs, yet multilateral, and national governments have also been common sources. Figure 4 below shows the funding sources from which organizations have received funds after winning the prize.

Also, the majority, 96% (total 91 respondents) have received positive media attention because of winning the prize. Most of that media attention has been through social media, newspaper, and TV. Radio and magazine have been less common vehicles through which to receive media attention. This finding correlates well with the fact that the greatest impact of receiving the prize has been being able to better share/tell their story.

**Figure 4: Sources of Additional Funding Received by Winning Organizations**



Additionally, a majority of respondents, 79%, claim that since winning the prize their organization has influenced policy making at the local, national, or regional level; 19% said they had not influenced policy since winning; and 2% did not answer. Some of the ways in which winners have influenced policy include.

*“The findings of the project has influenced the development of national mangrove management plan for Kenya as well as the regional guidelines for mangrove restoration in the Western Indian Ocean region.”*

*“We are spearheading development of Ci- Management plans for BMU within Kilifi County Coastline in Collaboration with County Director of Fisheries.”*

*“We got opportunity to be appointed in the National Task force for the revision of the 1998 Forest Policy which is still under review. We facilitated communities to air their views and opinions for the revised policy.”*

*“As the result of winning the award the Institution managed to draw the attention of Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture. This has seen an inclusion of sustainable agriculture, organic agriculture and agrobiodiversity in National Development Plan.”*

*“The Equator Prize has enabled us to advance our work in the fight for environmental justice for the benefit of indigenous Pygmies and the establishment of a legal framework in their favor in the DRC. Currently the National Assembly has deemed admissible the law promoting and protecting indigenous Pygmies. A first in the DRC on the fundamental and specific rights of indigenous Pygmies.”*

*“At the local level, all communities integrate the biodiversity and NRM dimension into the municipal development plans. At the national level, the State has revised the status of the Partial Reserve for Elephants and set it up as a Biosphere Reserve. At the sub-regional level, the experience of Community Natural Resource Management and anti-poaching has been duplicated in a neighboring countries Burkina”*

### **3.1.2 Impact of Capacity Building Events**

Building capacity of winning organizations is a tactic of the Initiative and is carried-out through various events described below.

- **Week of the Prize Ceremony:** Commonly, winners are gathered for a week before the prize ceremony and partake in a series of workshops and events designed around relevant themes like fundraising, grant writing, and communication strategies. The prize week allows winners to share knowledge and best practices and offers specific opportunities to network with possible donors and strategic media outlets.
- **Community Dialogues:** At least once a year, winners are invited to participate in a relevant international fora/event where meetings and exchanges are carefully planned around the event to share experiences, develop capacities, and influence policy.
- **‘Other’ Capacity Building Events:** The Initiative sponsors winners to attend other events, not implemented by the Initiative but pertinent to the issues of winner organizations.
- **National Prize ceremonies:** While these events are not standard practice with all winning organizations, every year when carried-out, the Initiative helps structure them to provide learning and networking opportunities.
- **Global Conferences:** The Initiative occasionally sponsors groups of winners at Global conferences, and these conferences, in and of themselves, along with the many side events are other venues for building capacity, networking, and influencing policy. Sometimes, upon request of organizers of thematically pertinent conferences, the Equator Initiative will recommend

speakers from winning communities. The Initiative will prepare the speakers, and the event organizers or a third-party will sponsor travel and participation.

Overall, winning organizations identify the prize week as the most useful event for building capacity, followed closely by capacity dialogues and global conferences. National ceremonies and other events are considered only slightly less useful.

The proximity in usefulness among the various events can be because of several reasons. One reason is that a community dialogue is often scheduled with a global conference or as part of the prize week. This type of scheduling can lend itself to confusion by participants. The proximity in usefulness could reflect the organizations' preference for these mixed events because of the opportunities to share knowledge, network, and build capacity. Lastly, the slight variations among usefulness can be because organizations do not participate in all events; aside from the prize week and community dialogues, not all winning organizations partake in a national ceremony, a global conference, or an 'other' type of capacity building event.

### **3.1.3 Impact of the Knowledge Products**

Over the last ten years the Initiative has invested in building a more robust knowledge management tactic. This effort has responded directly to a recommendation of the last evaluation in 2010. By 2011, 115 case studies highlighting the winning organizations and their projects had been produced. Every year since then has seen an average of 14 new case studies for a total of 223 case studies today; most published both in English and at least another language. After 2011 there was also a surge in the production of videos, which today total 75. Blogs, photo essays, or articles were few and far between, seven total, until 2017 at which point this production took off to 11, 12, and 14 yearly for 2017, 2018, and 2019 respectively.

The numerous cases studies are deemed as the most useful knowledge management product by winner organizations, followed very closely by publications, videos, and the nature based solutions database. Online courses and other courses and webinars are found to be less useful, and the blog is ranked, overall, as the less useful product for their organization.

Online courses and webinars could be considered less useful because there could be a general preference among winners for in person contact and communication; and because they have been offered systematically only for the last two years. The less usefulness of the blog is most likely a function of blogs commonly being reflection/opinion pieces that do not necessarily contain tangible tools that can benefit an organization's work.

Aside from ranking usefulness, winning organizations were specifically asked to identify how the knowledge products have helped their organization. Predominantly, knowledge products have allowed them to better communicate/tell/share their story. This makes sense, since having a case study and or video of your organizations' work is a tool to easily showcase the organization and its work. Building partnerships is a second most important result of using the knowledge products. This is also a logical benefit, since the majority of the knowledge products are designed so organizations can learn from each other and reach out to each other if appropriate. Table 3 below lists all the impacts brought forth via



knowledge products and the times in absolute numbers that an organization considered that benefit as important.

**Table 3: Impact of Knowledge Products**

What knowledge products have allowed a winning organization	# of times mentioned as important
Improve its ability to communicate/tell/share its story.	62
Build partnerships.	53
Expand/enlarge their projects in the current community.	49
Improve nature-based solutions that their organization is already implementing.	45
Identify new nature- based solutions.	43
Replicate the project in another community.	43
Fundraise and gain new donors or funding.	33

More specifically, about the use of knowledge products winning organizations say:

*“The products made it possible to document knowledge and helped to share experiences during training and awareness workshops at local and national level.”*

*“Initially, the tools allowed us to improve our capacities in terms of communication on our different actions through videos, etc. Also, they have allowed us to improve our knowledge and discover new climate-based solutions that can allow us to improve the solutions we offer and are already implementing in our communities.”*

*“The publications and study of the case have reached the hands of other communities that are interested in generating development projects for their families; This type of material informs them that there are cases that can serve as a guide. The Communities contact us and links and exchanges of experiences are generated that allow us to generate mutual learning that helps us to grow on both sides.”*

*“The case study and the Equatorial Prize certificate have been the organization’s letter of introduction. It has opened opportunities for alliances and fundraising. The General Coordinator of the organization came to obtain the position of National Coordinator of SGP Venezuela.”*

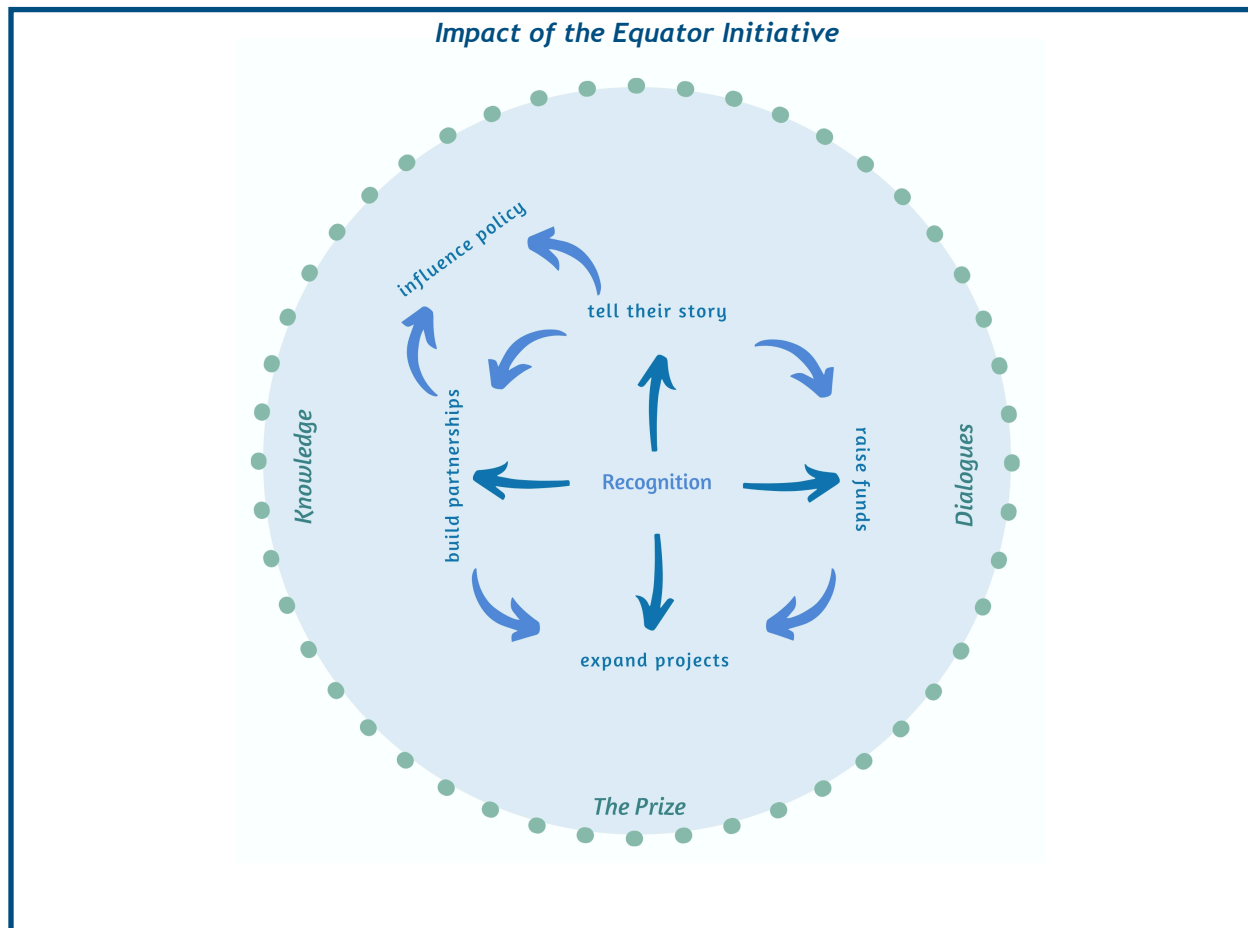
### 3.1.4 Overall Impact

The prize and knowledge products have brought recognition to the winner organizations and their projects. Recognition has opened the doors for increased funding, partnerships, expansion of projects, and policy influence. At any moment, any of these benefits can be a catalyst for another benefit, and that is indeed how it has played out for many of the surveyed organizations who have won the Equator Prize. See Figure 5 for the interplay of benefits and impacts of the Equator Initiative tactics.

Interestingly, while both capacity building events and knowledge products are considered useful and have brought forth beneficial impacts, there were more responses for evaluating the usefulness of the capacity building events than for the usefulness of the knowledge products. This could indicate a preference for in-

person capacity building and sharing of knowledge, vs reading text, or receiving online courses. While this evaluation is not looking to specify what kind of capacity building works best, it could be useful to determine what issues/aspects can best be offered and be of most value to winners online, vs what issues/aspects should best be addressed in person. This could help target funding towards the development of specific in-person events vis a vie investment in online materials.

**Figure 5: Impact of the Equator Initiative**



## 3.2 Relevance

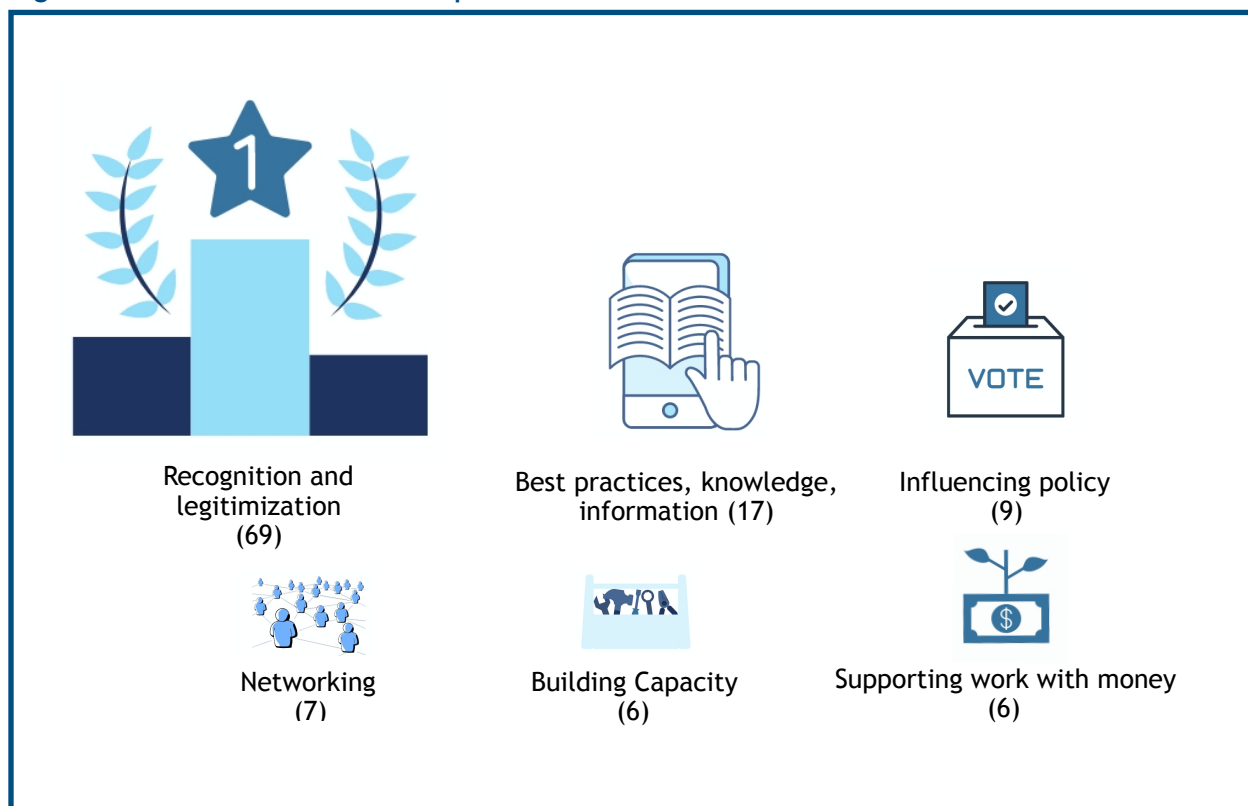
This section assesses the relevance of the Equator Initiative, specifically the degree to which the Equator Initiative adds value and responds to demands of the international environmental policy arena in the area of IPLCs.

### 3.2.1 General Relevance and Value

Prize winners and partner organizations were asked to describe the current relevance of the Equator Initiative and to explain how the Initiative adds value to the IPLC scene. Overwhelmingly, the most prevalent response was about providing recognition and legitimization to the work being done by the organizations. Thus, “shining the light”, according to both winners and partners, is the aspect of most relevance and value of the Equator Initiative. Nonetheless, other aspects were also considered relevant

and of value. These are expressed in Figure 6 below with the absolute number of times a particular value/ relevance was mentioned in parenthesis.

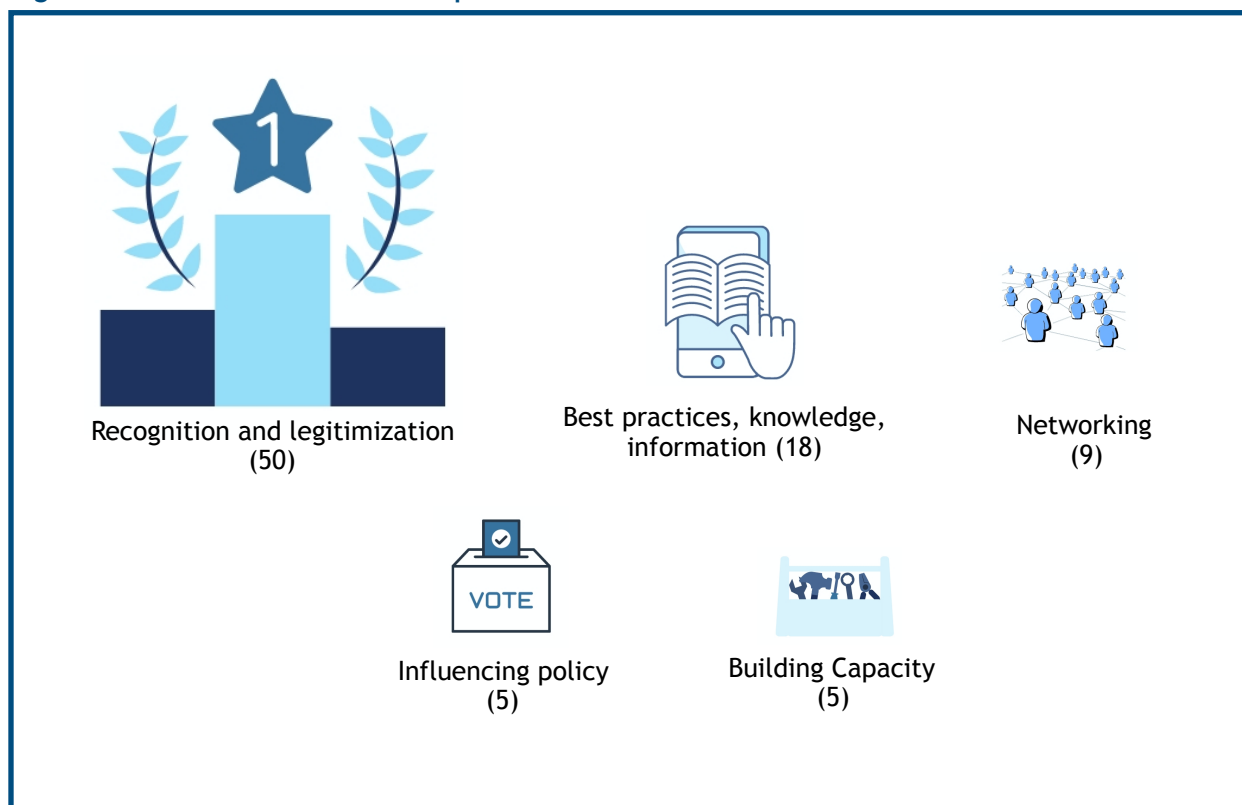
**Figure 6: Relevance and Value of Equator Initiative**



Partners and winners were also asked to describe how the Initiative has contributed, or not, to the global and national discourse on the role of indigenous peoples and local communities regarding nature-based solutions for biodiversity conservation, climate change, and local development. This question makes the Equator Initiative directly relevant to one of UNDPs strategic signature solutions “promote nature based solutions for a sustainable planet”. Once again, the predominant answers are about providing recognition and legitimization of myriad and successful nature-based solutions that are being carried out by indigenous peoples and local communities. The other aspects considered as relevant and of value are expressed in Figure 7 below, with the absolute number of times a particular value/relevance was mentioned in parenthesis.

In sum, an overwhelming majority of partner and winner organization believe that the Equator Initiative is relevant and adds value to the current IPLC scene and to the global discourse of local communities and nature based solutions by providing recognition and legitimization of the work being done by these organizations.

**Figure 7: Relevance and Value of Equator Initiative for IPLCs and Nature-Based Solutions**



### 3.2.2 Specific Points of Relevance and Value

As a first point, both winners and partners were asked if the Initiative provides a platform for IPLCs to voice policy recommendations in relevant international fora. Seventy-five (75%) of partners and winners feel the Initiative does provide a platform for IPLCS to voice policy recommendations in relevant fora; 22% feel it does not, and 3% did not answer.

**Table 4: Equator Initiative is a Platform for Voicing Policy Recommendations**

Criteria / Yes,No	Yes	No	No Answer
The Initiative provides a platform for IPLCs to voice policy recommendations in relevant international fora	75%	22%	3%

Some examples of how winning organizations have used the Equator Initiative’s platform and of how that platform could be fine-tuned are provided below.

*Yes, firstly because of the self-esteem generated in the winners; second, because achieving such high recognition allows it to be a benchmark to follow at the local, sub-national, national and international levels, and that generates political advocacy capacity. Third, because achieving such high recognition, attests to each practice that its path is good and projects a promising future. And finally, because it is a golden opportunity to establish alliances at the local, national and international levels to potentiate your projects at the technical, financial, research, systematization and dissemination levels.*

*The platform exists and is useful, but advice and support is required from organizations in each winning country. Develop capacities to influence public policies. It is not a simple process, it requires support.*

*Considering the fact that our Fund had won the Equator Prize, I was selected as a member of the International Scientific Technical Counsel (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan) for the green technology development in 2018 and 2020, also as a member of Scientific Technical Counsel of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.*

*This platform reaches national and international levels, and helps communities who are members of the indigenous peoples movement. Unfortunately, it has not been able to reach the maximum extent of local government and indigenous communities that are not part of the indigenous peoples' movement.*

*Yes, in some cases prize ceremonies have led to immediate connections to high-level government delegations and decision-makers (outside the home countries) leading to increased interest by governments in IPLC community solutions. Where UNDP COs have organised national EI events, additional policy linkages have also been made.*

*Yes - the challenge is that companies/countries/stakeholders need to commit to action - at the moment this amazing work is lost - due to the above not having a long term action plan.*

*Yes, but it could be more strategic in terms of negotiations at the CBD and UNFCCC and engagement with the relevant IP caucuses.*

As a second point, partners and winners were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the Equator Initiative, a) for recognizing the success of local and indigenous initiatives; b) in creating opportunities and platforms to share knowledge and good practice; c) in developing the capacity of local and indigenous initiatives to scale-up their impact; d) for informing policy to foster an enabling environment for local and indigenous community action.

As seen in Table 5 below, in these four aspects, both partners and winners coincide that overall the Equator Initiative is very effective. That said, while still very effective, “developing the capacity of local and indigenous activities to scale up their impact” and “informing policy to foster and enabling environment for local and indigenous community action” rank lower, are the two aspects where the second highest is effective vs extremely effective, they both have higher percentages of mildly effective, and are the only aspects with a tiny percentage of not effective.

**Table 5: Effectiveness of Equator Initiative in Key Areas**

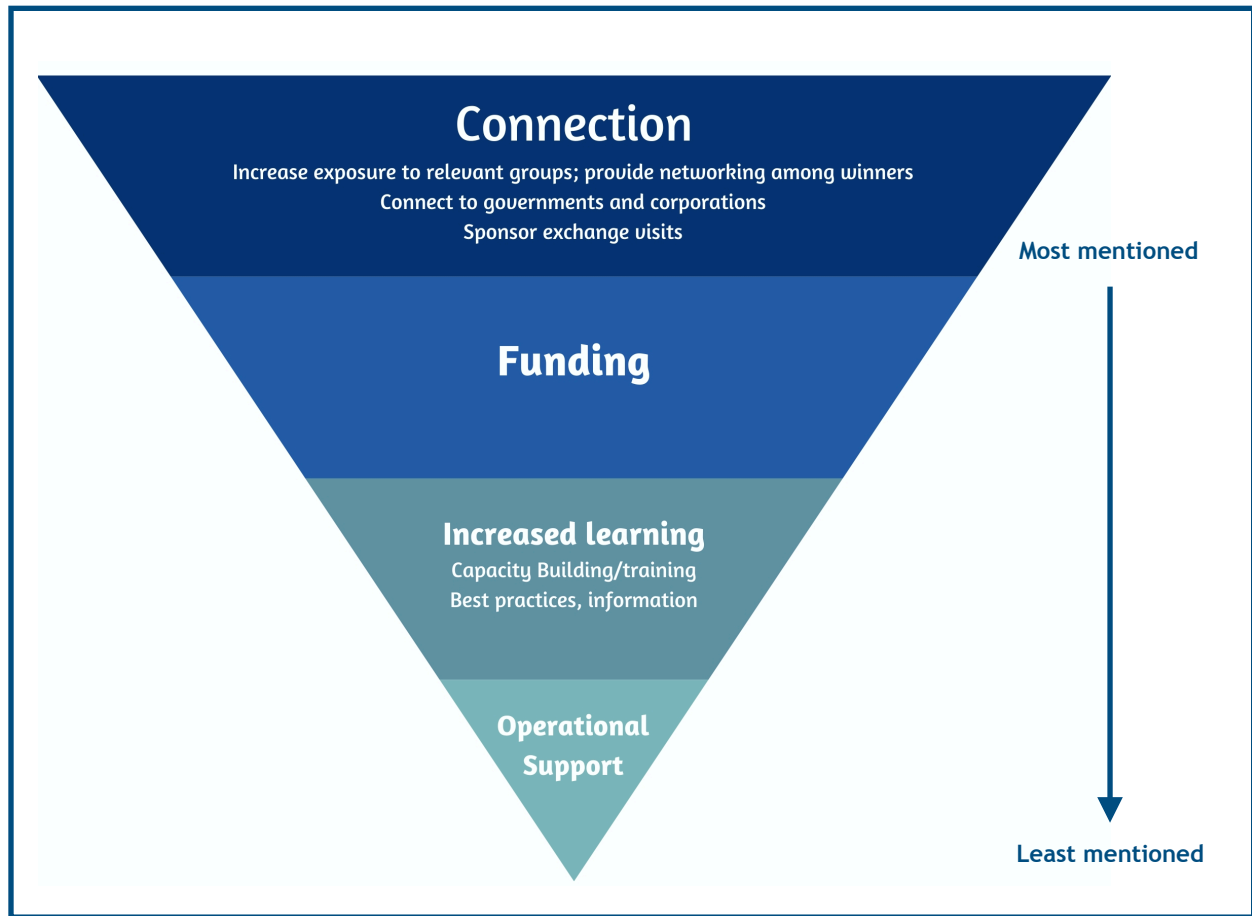
Aspect/Effectiveness	Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Effective	Mildly Effective	Not Effective	No answer or Don't Know
a). for recognizing the success of local and indigenous initiatives	30%	<b>45%</b>	17%	1%		7%
b). in creating opportunities and platforms to share knowledge and good practice	24.5%	<b>40.5%</b>	23%	6.5%		5.5%
c). in developing the capacity of local and indigenous initiatives to scale-up their impact	13.2%	<b>33%</b>	28.3%	14.2%	2%	9.3%
d). for informing policy to foster an enabling environment for local and indigenous community action	15%	<b>36%</b>	29%	12%	1%	7%

These numbers suggest that the Equator Initiative has not been as effective “for informing policy to foster an enabling environment for local and indigenous community action”, and in “developing the capacity of local and indigenous initiatives to scale-up their impact”, as it has been with “shining a light” on the winners, and creating opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge.

### 3.2.2 Relevance moving forward

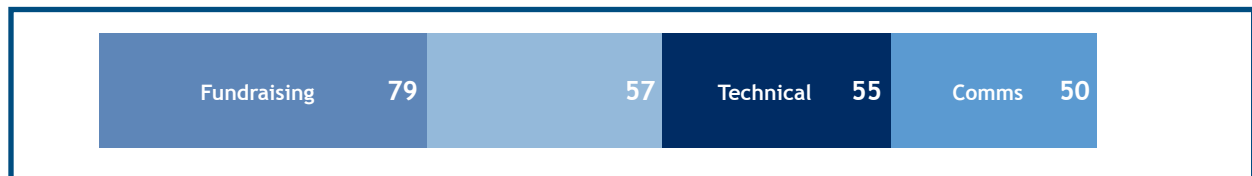
As shown above the Equator Initiative is considered relevant and effective at what it does. Yet, moving forward how can it ensure that it stays relevant? One of the aspects that is essential for anything to remain relevant is that it continue to be of service or use to its beneficiaries/clients. So, while the winning organizations feel strongly about the relevance and value of receiving the prize, making use of case studies and videos, and of participating in the opportunities provided to network, build capacity, and influence policy they feel that moving forward they could best be served by the Initiative in four major ways: 1). with increased opportunities for connection/networking; 2). with direct funding; 3). with increased opportunities for learning, and 4). With specific types of operational support. See figure 8 below.

**Figure 8: What Winners want more of from the Equator Initiative**



Collectively, the responses associated to increased connection are the most prevalent, followed closely by direct funding and increased learning. Varying types of operational support was mentioned the least number of times. When it comes to increased learning, the majority of organizations are most interested in learning fundraising skills (marketing, campaigning, donor management, events); social media skills (developing content, interacting with followers, photographs); and technical skills (grant writing, budgeting, basic accounting). Communication skills (elevator pitch, presentations, storytelling, public speaking, written communication, media relations) are a bit less in demand but by no means unwanted. See figure 9 below.

**Figure 9: Areas of Desired Increased Learning**  
(in absolute numbers)



As seen previously, helping winning organizations scale-up their impact has not been as effective an action for the Initiative as their work with and around the Prize and the opportunities to share knowledge

and good practice. The Equator Initiative team has unequivocally expressed the desire and need to scale-up project impact. However, helping project scale-up requires staff and funding resources that are currently not available to the team. Section 4, “Findings and Recommendations” goes into further detail on this matter. That said, if staff and funding resources are adequate, the information on what winners want more of, including the kind of training desired, can help guide the Initiative’s efforts to develop a more robust strategy to help winners scale-up their impact.

### **3.2.3 Relevance Overall**

Both winners and partners see the relevance and value of what the Initiative does. Additionally, the program management team, in the last ten years, has been taking actions to strategically remain relevant and continue being of value to their beneficiaries. For instance, the team has worked diligently to implement the recommendations of the last evaluation. The team has implemented nine of the ten recommendations provided in 2010. The one that remains pertains to maximizing the partnerships; more on this in the upcoming section, “Partnership Structure”. The team has also implemented the recommendations emerging from Fordham University [Equator Prize Evaluation: A Survey of Winners](#). Out of seven recommendations, the team has implemented six. The one that is still pending further fleshing-out is the recommendation to help winners scale -up or replicate their projects; more on this issue in “Section 4 Findings and Recommendations”.

In the last four years (2016-present), the team has strategically reworded the goal of the Equator Initiative to reflect the evolution of the social-environmental world since the Initiative was created, and thus proactively and align its mission and work. Up until 2016, the basic definition of the Equator Initiative was “to recognize outstanding community efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation of biodiversity”. By 2016, the team refined the purpose to reflect the shift in their work, “to recognize and advance local, sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities”. The purpose today reads: “foster resilient communities by recognizing and advancing local nature-based solutions for sustainable development”. The same kind of evolution and preciseness is evident in the themes for prize nominations, and the reporting of Equator Initiative activities, with reports since 2016 being thorough and coherent. Further, since its integration under the NFD program, the Initiative actively cross-fertilizes knowledge and leverages resources with the National Biodiversity Initiative and the Global Platform on the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF). Almost two decades after its genesis and, in the last ten years, the Equator Initiative 1) has demonstrated intelligible steps and actions to evolve with the global environmental agenda, 2) has fine-tuned its services, and 3) has, given its resources, remained relevant and useful to its beneficiaries.

## **3.3 Partnership Structure**

Throughout its existence the Equator Initiative has highlighted that it is a multi-sectorial partnership. The webpage currently states: “The Equator Initiative brings together the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses, and grassroots organizations to recognize and advance local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities.” This section of the evaluation gauges the effectiveness of the Initiative’s multi-sector partnership structure.



Effectiveness of the partnership was assessed through a series of questions to determine 1) partner involvement and support of the Initiative; 2) partner involvement and support of the winning organizations; and 3) partner perspective on the effectiveness of the Equator Initiative’s purposes and work. This section analyzes the responses for one and two. The responses provided for the third point were analyzed in section “3.2 Relevance”.

The Equator Initiative has 23 current partner organizations. For a full list of partners see Appendix 4. Out of the 23 partners that received the questionnaire 11 responded. Table 6 below provides basic information on the partners that responded.

**Table 6: Partners Responding to Questionnaire**

Number of Partners	Year Joined	Donor / Operational	Organizational Type
6	2002 / 2003	1 donor / 5 operational	3 environmental non-profits 1 bilateral 2 UN
1	2005	Operational	academic non profit
1	2007	Operational	environmental non-profit
1	2010	Operational	cultural social non-profit
1	2017	Operational	environmental non-profit
1	2019	Donor	for profit

### 3.3.1 Why Partner with the Equator Initiative?

Organizations are partners of the Initiative for various reasons. Most predominantly because there is mission alignment, complementarity of work, and/or IPCLS are critical to the work done by the partner organization. Partners also want to support the Initiative’s work because of a firm belief in its importance. However, despite overall alignment of mission and belief in the work being done, there was admission that tangible significant support of, or involvement in the Initiative has been limited in the recent years. This statement of low involvement coincides with observations by current and past management teams about low participation and support from partner organizations.

Being a partner of the Initiative is also beneficial for partner organizations in several ways. Most importantly, it has been useful for accessing UN networks and acquiring relevant information and materials about innovative projects worldwide. It has also been important for: branding of their organization; helping their partners access the Equator Prize, (all partners except the donor partners have used it at some point to nominate their partners, many of which have been winners); and, establishing direct connections with IPCLs. To a lesser degree, it has also been important for demonstrating relevance to donors and for navigating UN processes more efficiently.

### 3.3.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Partners

The majority of partner organizations state that they know and understand their roles and responsibilities, and have, at different times during their years as partners, supported the Initiative’s work by: participating in prize winner selections, facilitating dialogues, facilitating outreach for nominations, sponsoring award

ceremonies, and providing funding for Initiative activities. The funding provided by partner organizations was at the very beginning of the Equator Initiative. In the last 15 years, direct funding has not been a way for the partners to support the Initiative, unless of course, the partner is an official donor partner like the government of Norway. Table 7 below shows the number of partners that have supported a particular Equator Initiative activity a specific number of times.

**Table 7: Partners Supporting EI Activities, # of times Supported**

Type of Support for a Winning Organization	Yes	No	No Answer
Provided <i>past</i> technical assistance	7	3	1
Providing <i>current</i> technical assistance	6	4	1
Provided <i>past</i> financial support	6	3	2
Providing <i>current</i> financial support	5	5	1
Sponsored a National Ceremony	4	6	1

As seen in the Table 7 above, participating in the outreach process for nominations and providing visibility for the prize ceremony are the activities that get the most consistent support. Participating on the technical advisory committee (TAC) for the selection process of winners also gets good support. However, sponsoring the prize ceremony which entails a financial contribution has occurred with less consistency, and support for facilitating dialogues is also less consistent.

Partners have also supported the production of knowledge products, specifically, videos, case studies, and other publications. Of the eleven partner respondents, six partners have at some point contributed financially to the production of a knowledge product, and all but two, at some point, have contributed in kind, either by providing interns or other staff time, to help write or edit a knowledge product.

**3.3.2 Direct Support of Winner Organizations**

Through the years partner organizations have supported and still support some of the winning organizations. At some point in the past, or currently, some of the eleven partners have sponsored a National Prize Ceremony, and/or have provided funding or technical assistance to a winning organization. The majority of partners, eight, have also helped winning organizations by consistently giving them visibility via social media, formal communications to targeted audiences, and by inviting them to speak at conferences or events. Table 8 below lists the number of partner organizations supporting a winning organization with funding or technical assistance.

**Table 8: Support Provided to Winners by Partners**

Activity /Times Supported	7-10	4-6	1-3	None
Outreach process	8	3	—	—
Providing visibility to prize ceremony	7	2	—	2
TAC - winner selection	4	5	—	2
Sponsoring prize ceremony (financial or in-kind)	4	1	4	2
Facilitating dialogues	3	2	3	3

### 3.3.3 Collaboration Moving Forward

Partners were asked to consider their organization’s continued involvement with the Equator Initiative in four distinct areas: a) fomenting capacity building, b) supporting winners, c) enhancing operations, and d) supporting the prize. Fomenting capacity and supporting the prize are the areas where partners are potentially most interested in continuing collaboration. Specifically, the results of what partners are interested in supporting are displayed in Table 9, below.

**Table 9: Partner Possible Continued Collaboration with Equator Initiative**

<p><b>FOMENTING CAPACITY BUILDING</b> (10 respondents)</p> <p><i>Facilitating dialogues 8</i> <i>Speaking at dialogues 7</i> <i>Editing publications 4</i> <i>Funding videos or publications 4</i></p>	<p><b>ENHANCING OPERATIONS</b> (9 respondents)</p> <p><i>Carrying-out joint activities 5</i> <i>Carrying out joint fundraising 4</i> <i>Donating funds 3</i> <i>Proving interns/consultants 3</i></p>
<p><b>SUPPORTING WINNERS</b> (8 respondents)</p> <p><i>Providing technical support 6</i> <i>Providing funding 5</i> <i>Providing interns 2</i> <i>Sponsoring national ceremonies 1</i></p>	<p><b>SUPPORTING THE PRIZE</b> (10 respondents)</p> <p><i>Selecting winners 8</i> <i>Advertising prize 6</i> <i>Sponsoring ceremony 5</i> <i>Accessing VIPs 3</i> <i>Sponsoring travel/board of winners 3</i></p>

Based on these results, it seems like partner organizations are interested in continuing to do what they have done most in the past, supporting the prize by advertising it, and selecting winners. There is a bit more interest moving forward than in the past, with capacity building by facilitating or speaking at community dialogues. There is somewhat less overall interest for supporting winners, but the support would continue to be with technical assistance or funding. Supporting the Equator Initiative operation, although not as “popular” as the other three categories still leaves opportunity for fomenting joint fundraising and implementing of activities.

### **3.3.4 Partnership in Sum**

Positive aspects of the partnership structure include: a) mission alignment or complementarity between the partner organization and the Initiative’s work; b) some support of Equator Initiative activities, c) partner support of winning organizations, and d) a potential interest in continuing to collaborate with the Initiative.

Additionally, as seen earlier in "Section 3.2 Relevance", partner organizations feel that what the Equator Initiative does is relevant and adds value to the IPLC and nature-based solutions scenes. And, partner organizations derive useful benefits from being in the alliance, namely accessing UN networks and acquiring relevant information and materials about innovative projects worldwide

On the flip-side, the activities supported by partners are for the most part activities that require minimal levels of involvement, be it minimal time commitments, or limited, if any, financial contributions. Partners do admit that overall involvement has been low in recent years, a fact the management team also recognizes. The relatively low response rate, 11 of 23, is a potential indicator of overall low partner organization involvement with the Equator Initiative.

It is important to note, that while partners do enact certain roles, and seem interested in continuing to do so, there has never been an official Equator Initiative document that details partnership roles and responsibilities. There is no document that spells out any aspect of the collaboration between the various organizations and the Initiative. How partners engage or not with the Initiative is a sui-generis process based on the personal interactions of the EI team members and the representatives of the various organizations.

While all support from a partner organization is valued and appreciated by the Equator Initiative, there is a sense among the current management team and all key informants interviewed that more can be done to harness the expertise, connections, and funding resources of the various partner organizations. Ten years ago, during the last evaluation, one of the major recommendations suggested that more could be done to develop “the potential of the partners’ skills, contacts, and interests, as well as their funding”. The current management team recognizes that this has not been done and in 2017 began an effort to re-structure the partnership scheme. This effort was put on hold since it was evident after initial analysis that restructuring the partnership would require dedicated and consistent time and effort that was not, and is still not, available on the team.

### 3.4 Efficiency

This section of the evaluation determines the cost-efficiency of Equator Initiative project activities. It also gauges the degree to which the Equator Initiative is capable of leveraging funds and opportunities for mission-aligned purposes from other funding sources.

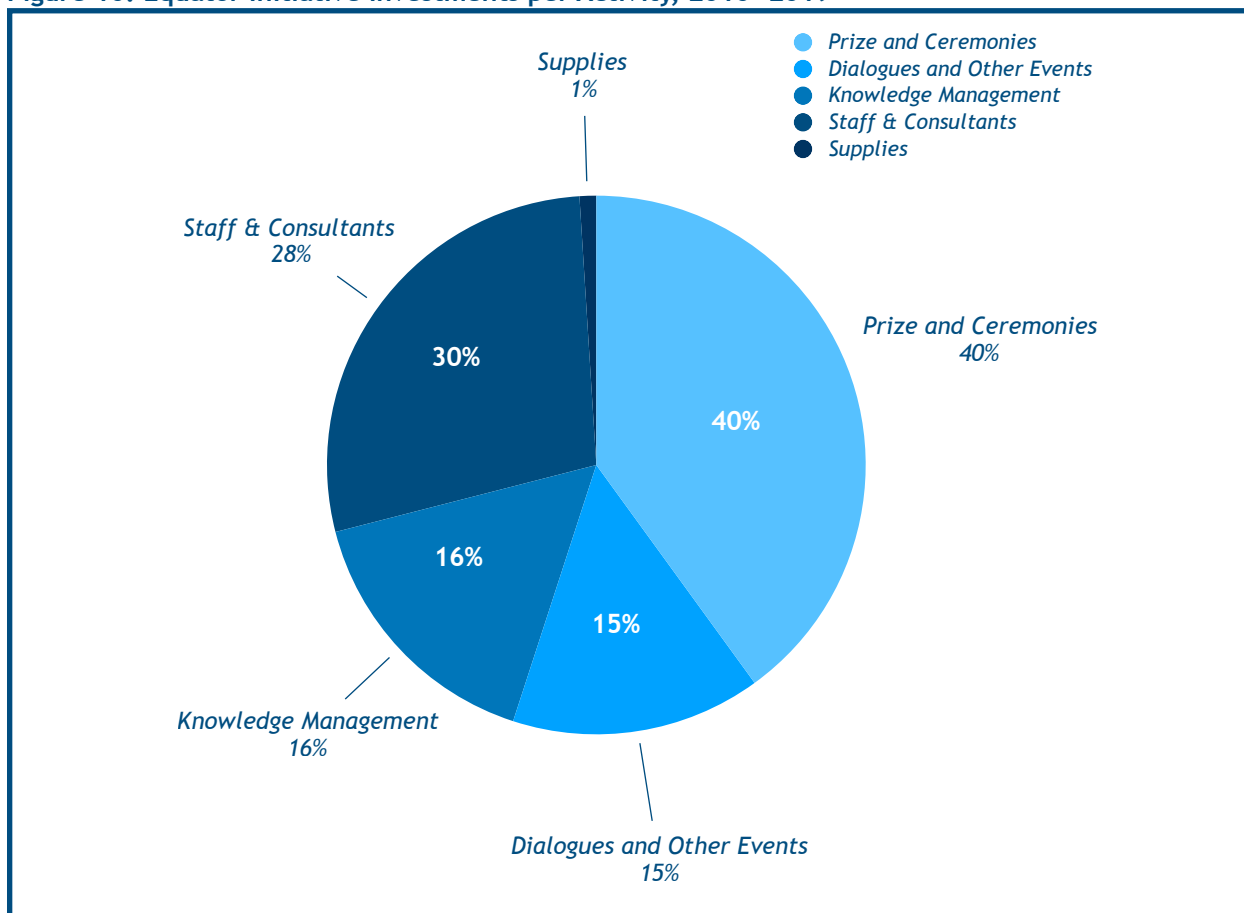
Program income and expenses are recorded by UNOPS using their particular accounting system. However, the Equator Initiative does not have an activity-based budget, meaning that it does not have yearly documents that layout budgets for the activities it plans to implement that year. Rather, budgets are differentiated by donor and budget planning is done across donors but is not recorded by activity in UNOPS systems. Thus, to analyze efficiency for this evaluation, the management team compiled expenses for each of its significant activities based on the information in UNOPS ledgers. See Appendix 7 for Equator Initiative 10 years of Expenses.

Over the last ten years, beginning in 2010, the Initiative has functioned primarily with the financial contributions, a total of approximately \$US10,400,343, from the Norwegian, German, and Australian governments. A total of US\$10,044,757 was spent by the end of 2019. This amount translates to nearly ~US\$70,000 invested per winning organization (144 winners) over the last ten years. Seventy thousand invested per organization gives the winners the following: prize money, participation in the prize ceremony and activities of the prize week, participation in a community dialogue or other global event, a case study and video about their organization; and unlimited access to hundreds of cases studies and videos, the nature-based solutions database, and many online learning courses. Most importantly, as seen in "Section 3.1 Impact" this investment also allows for multiple other benefits that arise from winning the prize, receiving the prize money, and having case studies and videos to share with others. Without further analysis, it seems that the Equator Initiative's modest investment of ~US\$70,000 per winning organization has tremendous returns.

#### **Investment of Income**

As seen in Figure 10 below, 40% of the Initiative's resources, over the past ten years, were invested in the Prize (the prize money, the resources required for the outreach and selection of the winners, the official awards ceremony, and the occasional national ceremonies). 15% of the Initiative's resources were invested in Community Dialogues and other events like global conferences, and 16% in Knowledge Management. 28% of resources have gone towards staffing needs and 1% towards program supplies, materials, and equipment. Table 10 below shows the dollars spent per each one of these categories.

**Figure 10: Equator Initiative Investments per Activity, 2010 -2019**



**Table 10: Equator Initiative Investments 2010 - 2019**

EI Activity	US\$ Invested	Comment
<b>Prize and Ceremonies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prize \$ awarded</li> <li>Outreach and selection process</li> <li>Ceremonies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$1,055,000</li> <li>\$435,536</li> <li>\$2,501,696</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not included in prize money: 200,000 for 2010 (co-funded); 65,000 in 2017 (co-funded); 10,000 of 2019 (transferred in 2020).</li> <li>Ceremonies include: main award ceremonies, national ceremonies, travel, food, and lodging of winners.</li> </ul>
Community Dialogues/other events	\$1,479,291	
Knowledge Management	\$1,619, 191	
Staff and consultants	\$2,954,043	
Supplies, materials, equipment	\$94,593	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,044,757</b>	Total investment over ten years = \$US10,400,343; remainder of US\$355,586 for 2020.

## Flow of Income and Expenses

Income and expenses per year varied considerably during the ten years (Table 11 below). In several years, expenditures were higher than income and the team relied on funds left over from previous years to make up the shortfall. 2017 was the year that received the least amount of income from any other year in the ten years. A couple of factors helped shaped this scenario. First, there is occasionally a large gap of time between the time donor agreements are signed (at which point the funds are considered income in the ledgers) and the actual time when the money arrives. Second, it is evident that expenditures fluctuate considerably between the years. Years in which an Equator Prize is held will come with much higher expenses than years in which there is no Equator Prize.

**Table 11: Equator Initiative Income and Expenses 2010 - 2019**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Year Start	2,131,089	1,130,955	1,646,003	971,875	1,069,893	1,093,719	537,250	318,042	-145,137	515,426
Income		943,296	879,030	799,080	1,281,520	982,770	1,149,236	398,407	1,081,461	754,454
Expenses	1,000,134	428,248	1,553,158	701,062	1,257,694	1,539,239	1,368,444	861,586	420,898	914,295
Year End	1,130,955	1,646,003	971,875	1,069,893	1,093,719	537,250	318,042	-145,137	515,426	355,585

**Note:** Figures above represent project disbursements/delivery. Figures are exclusive of indirect and direct costs, management fees, and other flat charges on contributions (where applicable), both at expense and income level. Negative amounts in this table should be interpreted as funding shortfall; not as actual deficit in bank accounts.

Inconsistent sums of income make it very difficult to plan effectively, not to mention almost impossible to grow a stable team and program. This evaluation has shown that what the Equator Initiative does, it does well and is considered relevant and of value among its beneficiaries. However, of note is that the results of the Equator Initiative are at the expense of years of contracting ad hoc labor. Consultants and interns coming and going are administratively time-consuming and hence costly. They do not allow for economies of scale to develop over time and result in know-how walking out the door when the consultant is gone. Thus, things have to be re-invented the next time around. These are all factors that result in an expensive process that prevents the growth of a stable program. In part, this ad-hoc staffing method was the result of the inconsistent and possibly insufficient amounts of income streams that did not permit the hiring of permanent staff.

## Determining Adequate Income

The Initiative could benefit from a consistent income amount to ensure a stable and sustainable program. The evaluation calculated four reasonable annual incomes for program functioning based on straightforward analyses of income and expenses.

### Approach 1:

- This approach is the difference between the highest and the lowest incomes received. 2010 was the year with the highest income of US\$2,131,089; no other year came close. The year with the least income was 2017, with US\$398,407. The difference between the highest and lowest incomes is US\$1,732,682.

### **Approach 2:**

- This second approach averages expenses of prize years and non-prize years and sums the two to give an annual budget. The average expenses of a prize year (2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019) are ~US\$1,190,000; average expenses in a non-prize year (2011, 2013, 2016, 2018) are ~US\$730,00. Based on key informant and staff information, a prize year leaves little money for any follow-up activities with the winners. The years in between prizes allow for some follow-up work. The logical and effective yearly budget would allow for both prize and follow-up to occur in a prize year, and non-prize years would focus on further follow-up investment to scale projects and build capacity. Summing the two amounts (prize year expenses plus non-prize year expenses) provides an option for thinking about optimal budget, in this case, an approximate of ~US\$1,920,000.

### **Approach 3:**

- Another approach to arrive at an optimal budget: to each line item (Prize and Ceremonies, Dialogues and other events, Knowledge Management, Staff and consultants, and Supplies and Equipment) assign the amount of the difference between the highest amount spent on that line item and the lowest amount spent on that line item over ten years; sum the line items. This approach gives a total budget of US\$2,018,000.

### **Approach 4:**

- The last approach averages the results of each mentioned approach (1-3) and yields approximately ~US\$1,890,000 as a figure for a yearly budget. Any of the suggested budget amounts are lower than the income received in 2010 but higher than any of the income amounts received sub-sequentially. Any of these budgets, if provided consistently, can help the Equator Initiative stabilize staff resources and program functions, thus allowing it to fully and effectively focus energy on scaling up nature-based solutions.

### **Leveraged Resources**

Although tracking leveraged money and resources is not a simple task given UNOPS administrative systems, it is clear from conversations with key informants and management staff that resources are leveraged consistently. For instance, just the two interns that Fordham University puts forth every year are valued at approximately US\$10,000 a year. Video donations during prize years have been in the range of US\$35,000 - US\$40,000. Donations of space to host Equator Initiative events during global conferences (i.e. World Conservation Congress, CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD COPs,) run between \$US10,000 - US\$50,000. Partners and other organizations have sponsored the travel, food, and lodging of winners for many awards ceremonies. Despite ample leveraging of resources, the Initiative does not have a formal strategy for leveraging funds and in-kind donations because such a strategy demands time and skill currently not available on the team.

While the Initiative's ability to leverage support for its activities is commendable and should continue, the leveraging is mostly done to make ends meet. A unique awards program like the Equator Initiative, 20 years after its continued relevant performance, should have its basic operations well covered. Limited staff time and energy should not be used for securing activity and program survival. Instead, it should be spent on bringing more players to the table to effectively enable the scaling of nature based-solutions around the planet, which is the laudable goal in the contribution of climate change action and



sustainability. With the proper staff and time dedicated to expanding and leveraging the partnership resources, it is more than probable that the Initiative could successfully leverage substantial funding and in-kind support for growing the program, not surviving, consistently.

The Initiative has recently explored working more closely with the corporate sector to support Equator Initiative work. The team has succeeded at establishing rapport with certain corporations, but they recognize that such work, if expected to yield results, demands much time and requires a specific skill set. The corporate sector would likely welcome the opportunity to invest in organizations and projects, that as prize winners, have been vetted. Additionally, the variety of themes and geographies available for support is a plus for many corporations since it allows them to tailor their interventions to places and things that are meaningful to their corporate social responsibility agendas.

In sum, the Equator Initiative is doing what it can with the resources that it has, and what it is providing to its beneficiaries is effective and brings myriad benefits to those beneficiaries. That does not mean, however, that it is working at its full potential. On the contrary, it is most likely operating under significant constrain. The Initiative could solidify and grow its work strategically with an increased and steady yearly income; it could benefit from tracking leveraged funds and in-kind donations. Additionally, it has the full potential, given the right staff resources, to expand its donor base and strategically increase both financial and in-kind support.

### **3.5 Gender Equality**

This section assesses the extent to which the Equator Initiative promotes positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including the participation of women in project activities.

The Equator Initiative implements several best practices that promote the empowerment of women. As a first step, all nominated project contenders are judged by “the extent to which the project promotes the equality and empowerment of women and girls”. Once winning projects are chosen the Initiative insists that one of the two organizational representatives sent to the prize ceremony must be a women. Also, the Initiative always seeks for capacity dialogues and other events to be attended equally by men and women. That said, in many countries where the prize has been awarded there are cultural norms and traditional roles that do not always favor the Initiative’s practices for including women. The Initiative will always insist on involving women, and have succeeded in including women from places where that is not the norm; however, despite insistence, sometimes the Initiative has to respectfully defer to cultural norms and traditions.

The average attendance of women winners at the prize ceremony in the last ten years has been 39%, with four of those years being over 40% and in 2017 reaching up to 55% female winner participation. The average attendance of women for community dialogues and other capacity building events is also 39%. There have been 19 community dialogues or other events in the last 10 years, 11 of those have had female attendance between 40% and 60%.

Of the 144 winning organizations of the last 10 years, 36 (25%) of them are led by women. While the majority of the winning organizations, 77, focus their work on all sectors of the community, meaning men,

women, youth, and children, 45 focus only on men and women. Four organizations focus exclusively on women and children; 8 have women as their priority; and 9 have a women only focus. Only one focusses solely on men. 103 of the winning organizations, 71.5%, have some kind of program that furthers women's empowerment. Of the 95 organizations that answered the survey, 45% have programs solely focussed on women. Examples of the kind of projects empowering and benefitting women are quoted below.

*"The organization has 5 networks of rural women and they develop a gender-based agroecology project with the support of the Tierra del Futuro Network. (Sweden / Latin America)."*

*"Projects to strengthen and recognize women's knowledge for the proper management of the territory in relation to traditional agricultural systems."*

*"We have 2 projects: One to equip and train women's groups for the transformation of local products, the second consists in equipping women with charcoal ovens or improved stoves with compensatory reforestation of wood-energy species to fight against global warming."*

*"Creation of a literacy center for women; establishment of funding lines for income-generating activities for women; training in leadership."*

*"Swayam Shikshan Prayog's mission is to promote inclusive, sustainable community development by empowering women in low income climate threatened regions. SSP repositions women's collectives by training them as farmers and entrepreneurs and thereby increasing their economic and social resilience. Over the years, SSP has evolved an ecosystem of federations and social enterprises to enhance access to finance, skills & entrepreneurship and rural marketing platforms. SSP has empowered over 180,000 women entrepreneurs, farmers & community leaders positively impacted 5.5 million people across seven states in India. By way of impact, SSP's efforts have tripled women's earnings through agriculture & enterprise, resulted in better health, nutrition and enhanced women's status as decision makers in households and as leaders in their communities and in local governance."*

*"DDS primarily works with about 5000 women, who are all very small holders practising high biodiversity and ecological agriculture on their bucket sized farms. The primary units of the DDS are called Sanghams, which are entirely made up of women from the villages who make all the decisions regarding the functioning of the society, its programmes and the implementation. DDS is also the national convenor for All India Millet Sisters Organisation, which is a 100% women's network. DDS has won the highest price accorded by the Government Of India for work with women called Nari Shakti Puraskar (Award for women's power)"*

*"We have established a very new programme on women, primarily focusing on empowering them with basic knowledge to participate in higher portfolios in community structures, which are currently dominated by men. As well as looking on best land usage methods, with more concentration on farming. Our intention is to give them a platform to have their voice heard and taken into account when formulating policies which will govern our community."*

The Equator Initiative, by mission, is not in a position to directly push the issue of gender equality. However, in the past ten years it has done so consistently and appropriately by implementing gender favorable best practices for project selection and event attendance. As the numbers and examples above show, and despite cultural constraints, the Equator Initiative is shining the light on women, it is shining the light on projects that benefit women, and it is actively bringing women to its events to help build their capacity and encourage them to express their voice.

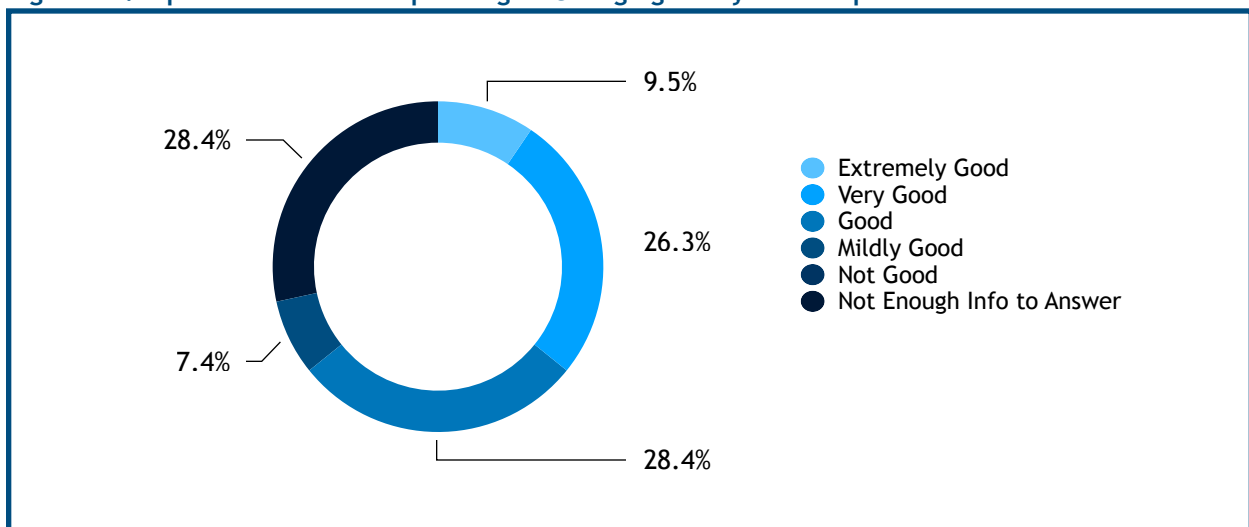
### 3.6 Sustainability

This section discusses the extent to which the Equator Initiative is capable of producing and reproducing benefits over time, including after interventions or direct support have ended. Sustainability of a program such as the Equator Initiative is dependent on at least three key aspects: 1) the relevance of its services/products to the beneficiaries; 2) the capacity to respond and evolve to changing needs; and 3) funding for continued provision of the appropriate services and products, and for the effective function of a management team to deliver those services and products.

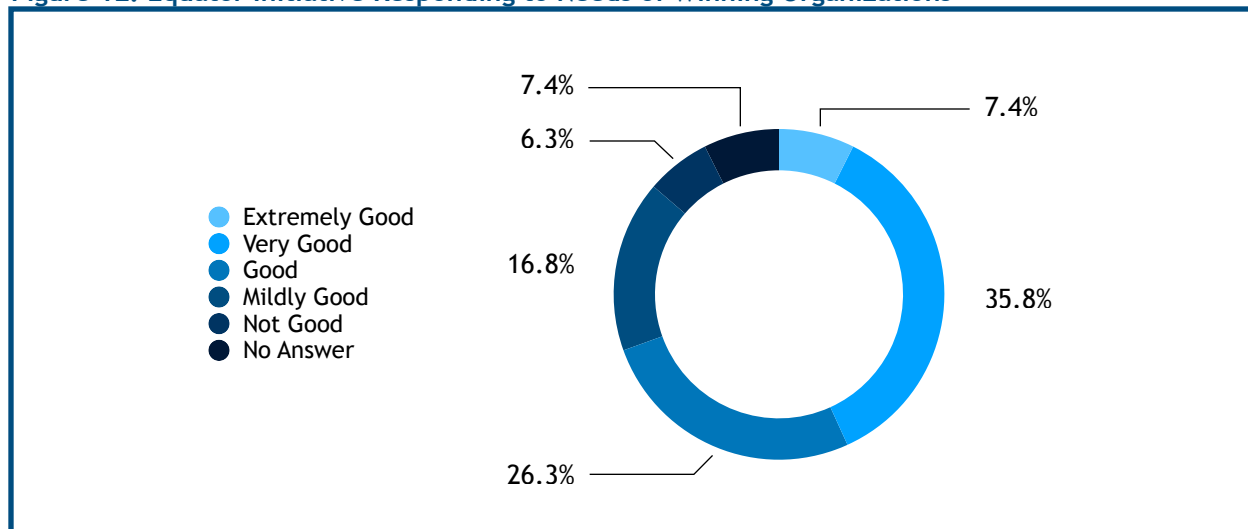
This evaluation has shown that the impacts/benefits of the Equator Initiative go beyond the interventions and direct support of the Initiative (Section 2.1 Impact). The evaluation has also confirmed that the Initiative is effective and what it does, and it has demonstrated that after almost 20 years the Initiative is still seen as relevant and of value to the IPLC scene and to climate change action and sustainability via nature-based solutions.(Section 2.2 Relevance).

Furthermore, according to winning organizations the Initiative is good to very good at adjusting to the changing policy landscape, and it is also good at responding to the new demands from its key stakeholders, the prize winners. See Figures 11 and 12 below.

**Figure 11: Equator Initiative Responding to Changing Policy Landscape**



**Figure 12: Equator Initiative Responding to Needs of Winning Organizations**



In order to continue being relevant to its beneficiaries and in order to best respond to the changing global environmental trends, the Initiative has recently refined its purposes. The tweaked purposes are listed below and the previous purposes are outlined in Figure 1 under Section 2, Project Description. The refined purposes are to:

- a. Reposition indigenous peoples and local communities as a solution and as one of the most important stakeholders in the rush to address ecosystem degradation, decline of nature and biodiversity, and climate change.
- b. Impact IPLC policy and supporting IPLCs to impact policy.
- c. Help Equator Prize winning projects to scale up and replicate.

Winners and partners (106 respondents total) were asked if these three purposes should be the focus of the Initiative henceforward. Respondents felt that “repositioning of indigenous people and local communities.....” and “helping to scale-up and replicate” are the most relevant purposes to pursue. “Impacting IPLC policy....” while considered less relevant is still considered an appropriate purpose by over 70% of the respondents. See Table 12 below.

**Table 12: Support for Refined Equator Initiative Purposes Moving Forward**

Purposes/Approval	Yes	No	Not enough Info.
Reposition indigenous peoples and local communities as a solution and as one of the most important stakeholders in the rush to address ecosystem degradation, decline of nature and biodiversity, and climate change.	91%	1%	8%
Impact IPLC policy and supporting IPLCs to impact policy.	72%	4%	24%
Help Equator Prize winning projects to scale up and replicate.	89%	3%	8%

In sum, the Initiative is relevant, has demonstrated the capacity to adjust to the changing policy landscape, has responded well to the changing needs of its stakeholders, and has proactively refined its purposes to best serve its beneficiaries. Given continued and sufficient funding to maintain current valued activities, improve efforts to help winner projects scale up, and assure an appropriately staffed management team, the Equator Initiative could very well continue to produce these impacts/benefits for organizations for an indefinite amount of time. Sustainability is possible.

### 3.7 Strategic Relevance to UNDP

This section gauges the relevance of the Equator Initiative to UNDP's 2018 -2021 Strategic Plan. UNDP designed the Global NFD Programme with the overarching goal of identifying and showcasing local and national success stories that demonstrate that investing in nature-based solutions can accelerate sustainable development (Project Document: Global Programme on Nature for Development, 2018). The Equator Initiative is one of three projects in the NFD Programme that help meet this overarching goal.

In its strategic plan, UNDP outlines six signature solutions as the key strategies to help: effectively eradicate poverty in all its forms, accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development, and build resilience to shocks and crises. The Equator Initiative is aligned with and contributes directly to all six signature solutions making the Equator Initiative entirely relevant to UNDP's current strategy.

The Equator Initiative contributes directly and significantly to signature solution 4 *to promote nature-based solutions for a sustainable planet* since the prize is for "outstanding community efforts that are advancing local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities". As mentioned earlier, the Initiative has a nature-based solutions database that details over 1,200 community-based, nature-based solutions for a more sustainable planet.

Equator Initiative winning projects are selected, in part, for "the extent to which the nominated initiative demonstrates adaptability to environmental, social, and economic change, resilience in the face of external pressures, and improved capacity for local self-sufficiency. As such, winning projects contribute to signature solution 3: *enhance national prevention and recovery capacities for resilient societies*.

The Equator Prize is for communities in areas that are both hotspots for poverty and biodiversity. The majority of winning projects are also providing sources of income for communities. This is because winning projects are, in part, selected for the "extent to which the project reduces inequalities in income as well as those based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic status, particular for the poor". Thus, winner projects are contributing to signature solution 1: *keeping people out of poverty*.

The themes for each prize cycle are varied and have included: sustainable energy, climate change, a low-carbon economy, and sustainable development. All of these themes potentially and commonly include projects that promote renewable energy or energy efficiency. Around 50 of the winning projects have directly supported signature solution 5, *close the energy gap*.

As demonstrated in "Section 3.5 Gender Equality", the Equator Initiative is: shining the light on women, it is shining the light on projects that benefit women, and it is actively encouraging women to express their

voice. The Equator Initiative is a project that effectively realizes its mission by being inclusive and supportive of women. Therefore, the Equator Initiative aligns with and contributes positively to signature solution 6: *strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*.

One of the purposes behind launching the Equator Initiative in 2002 was to give local and indigenous communities a voice. Awarding the prize and providing opportunities for these communities to influence policy gives these communities a voice. As evidenced in “Sections 2.1 Impact and 2.2 Relevance”, the Initiative's work is considered relevant and useful, as well as beneficial to winners. The prize gives winning organizations recognition and a voice. And as seen in this evaluation, organizations have used the recognition and voice to influence policy at local, national, or international levels; and they have used that voice and recognition to share their work and influence government schemes. Every time this happens, these communities contribute actively to signature solution 2: *strengthen effective, inclusive, accountable, governance*.

## 4. Findings and Recommendations

This section summarizes the findings that have emerged through the analysis of the seven specific areas on which this evaluation has focussed, and provides specific recommendations for those findings

**Finding 1:** The Equator Prize is much valued among winners. The award gives winners recognition and opens the doors to multiple types of opportunities like media attention, work partnerships, and additional funding for furthering their projects and missions. The awards ceremony and the activities surrounding the prize week are highly valued as excellent opportunities for networking and learning.

**Recommendation 1:** Continue awarding the prize and performing the awards ceremony and the activities associated to the prize week. For the most efficient results, the Equator Initiative needs to secure consistent funding for the awards ceremony and the prize week. This does not preclude the team from continuing to engage ceremony sponsors and leverage funds wherever possible to increase support and visibility for the event. Secure funding for the ceremony and prize week removes the time-intensive burden of piecing together the event to make ends meet, and instead, allows the management team to focus on providing the best and most useful learning and networking experience for the winners. Moving forward, major program donors can commit to fully funding the prize, ceremony, and week's activities. The Initiative can continue to leverage additional funds, not necessary to pull the event off, but desirable to maximize contributions of the major donor and ensure support and visibility. Eventually, the Initiative could find additional donors for the prize-money, or raise a capital fund that would yield yearly interest to cover the prize.

**Finding 2:** Case studies and videos are much valued by the winning organizations. The evaluation showed that all the opportunities provided by the Initiative to learn, share knowledge, and build capacity are appreciated by the winning organizations. However, of the various knowledge products available, the case studies and videos are most appreciated; very likely, because they are tools that help organizations tell their story. They also provide an easy to use tool for others to learn about the project and possibly replicate it. In a way, these case studies and videos are both calling cards and teaching tools.

**Recommendation 2:** Maintain the production of case studies and videos. More specifically: a) continue producing case studies and videos, making them as user friendly as possible so they remain effective calling cards and easy to use learning tools for winning organizations; and b) expand the use of the case studies to leverage support from other organizations (nonprofits, corporations, universities, etc.) to strengthen the Equator Initiative operation. An example of the expanded use of case studies could be with universities. Currently, the University of Hawaii uses EI case studies regularly in appropriate classes. Brandeis University and College of the Atlantic have also used them on occasion. Yale used the case studies for a capstone project and produced a white paper on “Assessing the scalability of community-based sustainable development projects: Lessons from 15 years of the Equator Prize”. With some effort, the Initiative can identify a strategic group of University programs that can benefit from the case studies while allowing the Initiative to develop more formal relationships/partnerships with these universities. These relationships would strategically support the Equator Initiative in other ways — interns, research, media, communications, and more.

**Finding 3:** Helping to scale-up projects is much desired by winning organizations but is somewhat underserved by the Initiative. According to this evaluation, the Initiative does what it does effectively. However, helping winners to scale-up, and informing policy to foster an enabling environment for local and indigenous community action are deemed as activities that are not performed as effectively as others. That said, 89% of responding organizations favor the Initiative’s refined purpose for more efforts to help scale-up winner organization work. This would indicate helping winners scale-up is a tactic of the Initiative that needs bolstering. The Equator Initiative already engages in ad-hoc activities contributing significantly to scaling up or making a policy impact for select winner communities. For instance, in the case of Equator Prize 2015 winner Kayonza Growers Tea Factory in Uganda, the Initiative responded to a community request to facilitate a private sector investment into a satellite factory. In this pilot, the EI team found an NGO working on investment readiness and enabled a 3.15 million USD loan by an impact investor for the tea factory. The tea factory was thereby able to scale-up, an achievement that is a product of Equator Initiative support.

There is third-party, independent evidence that the Equator Prize helped catalyze the granting of land rights by the local and later national governments to the indigenous community of the Sungai Utik Longhouse in Indonesia. After 40 years of advocacy by this Equator Prize winner, these land rights ensure the protection of the territory for future generations. In this narrative, the Equator Prize and EI communications efforts helped shape policy and confirm impact. (see article here: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/the-fight-for-indonesia-s-forests/>)

**Recommendation 3:** Strengthen and focus efforts to help scale-up winning projects. This recommendation does not imply that the Initiative become an on the ground implementer, instead it suggests that it develop ways to provide winners with select tools and services that can effectively help them to scale-up. The management team has begun exploring ways to do this, however further work is needed to identify those specific needs that if met would help projects scale-up, and subsequently, identify the tools and services that could meet those needs. The identification of the best method to provide those tools and services is also needed.

**Finding 4:** Connecting and networking is important to and desired by the winning organizations. The prize week, the community dialogues, and the various other capacity building events are all highly valued

for the opportunities they provide for sharing knowledge and networking. Also, more respondents evaluated the usefulness of face to face capacity building events than the usefulness of digital materials or online methods for learning. This very possibly indicates a preference for face to face training over digital or online training. Further, when asked what they would like to receive the most from the Equator Initiative in the future, the predominant answers were about connection. Specifically, they mentioned: increasing the networking among winners, connecting with other relevant groups, participating in sponsored exchange visits among winners, and having facilitated connections with governments and corporations.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase opportunities for winners to connect. One option mentioned by key informants as well as by winning organizations is to have periodic regional meetings that bring together winners from those areas. Another option is to create a competitive “sponsor grant fund” and provide 10 or 15 yearly grants of US\$ 5,000 for organizations that want to learn from each other. Another idea is to create a “meet and greet funding fair” whereby 10-20 possible investors/funders can meet a group of select organizations with the specific intent of supporting their projects. These suggestions and many possible more require strategic thought, planning, and funding to be implemented successfully.

**Finding 5:** Limited and fluctuating yearly income constrain the full potential of the Initiative despite effective performance. Over ten years, income dropped six times, it picked up three times from a previous year drop, but it never returned to the initial, highest income amount, ~US\$2,000,000 of 2010. Such fluctuations make it near impossible to maintain or grow program staff or develop new activities. Income fluctuations of this sort weaken longer-term planning and make for an unstable work environment. It is akin to expecting a star athlete to perform consistently without being able to ensure sustained training with good coaches, the right equipment, and proper rest and nutrition.

**Recommendation 5:** Increase the project income based on a sound yearly budget and workplan. This recommendation does not espouse an unlimited, outrageous budget; it merely suggests providing consistent funding to ensure a core team and the basic set of activities that could allow the Equator Initiative to support scaling up of nature-based solutions around the world. For instance, the current long-term donors can consider funding steadily at 2010 levels for the next five years, with the yearly commitment from the Initiative of matching at least 10% of that income with other leveraged funds or in-kind support. Expanding the donor base every year could further secure consistent and sufficient funding for the Initiative. Expanding the donor base, very likely, could be done with the partner organizations, especially since there is a willingness on their behalf to pursue joint fundraising. That said, the partnership needs to be revitalized first, see finding and recommendation 6.

**Finding 6:** The current partnership model is not being used efficiently. Out of 23 partner organizations, only 11 answered the survey. Although all 11 support and believe in the Initiative’s purpose and see its value and relevance, actual contribution to the Initiative, financial or in-kind, is limited. Theoretically, the partnership model looks impressive, however day-to-day performance is almost dormant, underutilized, and thus needs to be revitalized. The management team acknowledges this limited involvement and also recognizes that, in part, it is because they have been unable to dedicate the appropriate resources to evolving and re-igniting the partnership. The observation in the last evaluation, and still relevant today, is that the partners can genuinely provide many useful things to the Initiative. However, constrained Initiative resources have prevented the appropriate identification and delivery of those things.



**Recommendation 6:** Revitalize the partnership model. An Initiative founded in partnership needs someone to lead that partnership. Thus, a necessary first step to revitalize the Equator Initiative partnership structure is to have permanent staff dedicated to shepherding it. The restructuring will require determining aspects that include: what is desired and needed from the partnership? What kinds of organizations can meet those needs? What are the current partner organizations looking for, and what are they capable and willing to bring to the table? This information and more needs to be communicated, negotiated, and digested into something that works for all parties. Most of the current partners have been with the Initiative since its inception, and while there is a willingness to continue being involved, revamping entrenched models of work cannot be done haphazardly.

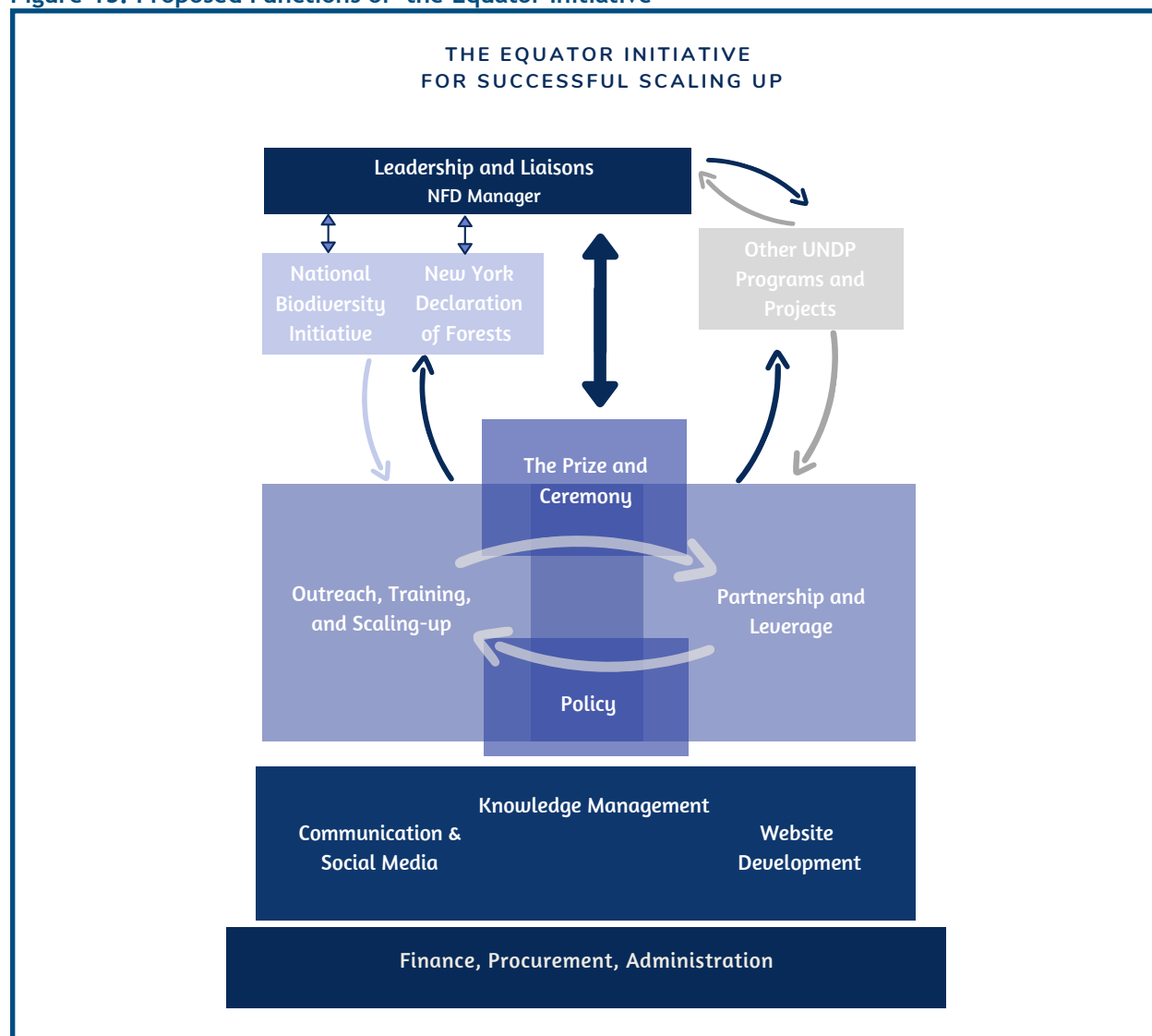
**Finding 7:** The project management team is understaffed. This finding is likely evident and has probably been so for many years, yet it merits correction. The Initiative needs sufficient staff if there is a genuine interest in maximizing the potential of the Equator Initiative to increase the use of nature-based solutions for climate action and sustainability around the world. Two hundred-forty-five organizations have received the prize, and there are hundreds more as runners-up with successful nature-based solutions. Yet, the Initiative has 1fte to shepherd 245+ organizations, and this 1fte also plans and oversees the prize nomination and selection process. One of the essential pillars of the Initiative is knowledge management, yet the Initiative can only afford .20fte knowledge management support. Impacting IPLC policy and supporting IPLC's to impact policy is one of the re-defined purposes of the Initiative, but it can only afford .50fte to oversee this function. The lead for the awards ceremony and the coordination of contracts, procurement, travel, and other essential administrative duties is handled by a .75fte. Capacity building is attended to by .25FTE, and perhaps most importantly, the Equator Initiative is a partnership based project that does not have a dedicated person to lead and potentiate this partnership. Not only are necessary functions unstaffed, but not a single one of the vital activities of the Initiative has a dedicated full-time staff member assigned to it.

**Recommendation 7:** Insure an adequate number of staff to allow for the true potential of the Equator Initiative to emerge. Determining essential functions could help decide the right amount of staff. The Initiative, ostensibly, carries out two types of activities: those that are in service of the beneficiaries (winners) and those that are necessary to provide those services to the beneficiaries. Table 13 below lists these various activities and estimates the amount of staff time required for each. The program manager for the Initiative is not listed below as that staff could effectively remain at .33FTE by assembling an adequately staffed team that stabilizes the program for long term impact. Figure 13 illustrates how the different recommended functions work together.

**Table 13: Proposed Adequate Staffing for Equator Initiative**

Service Actions for Winners	FTE	Support Actions for Service Actions	FTE
Coordinate prize process and ceremony ( <i>and support partnership</i> )	1	<b>Supporting all Service Actions</b> • Finance, procurement, and administration  • Communications and social media  • Website development	0.5
Impact policy ( <i>and support scale-up, partnership, and capacity building</i> )	1		1
Train and build capacity ( <i>and support scale-up</i> )	1		0.5
Outreach to winner organizations and help projects to scale-up	1	<b>Supporting capacity building/scale-up</b> • Knowledge management  • Partnership development and leveraging	1
			1
<b>Total FTEs</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>4</b>

**Figure 13: Proposed Functions of the Equator Initiative**



**Finding 8:** The Equator Initiative is very relevant to UNDPs overall 2018 - 20251 Strategy. As evidenced in “Section 3.7”, the Initiative contributes to all six signature solutions proposed by UNDP. It contributes directly and very significantly to signature solution 4; it contributes directly and significantly to signature solutions 1, 3, and 5; and is entirely aligned with and contributes substantially to signature solutions 2 and 6.

**Recommendation 8:** Engage UNDP’s support to truly reflect the value of what the Equator Initiative represents for UNDP. For instance, UNDP could ensure a core, permanent staff for the Initiative, hence truly endorsing the importance of such an Initiative towards the overall 2018 - 2021 strategy. Also, UNDP country offices of winning projects could commit to always sponsoring national ceremonies, or they could host networking meetings of in-country winners. There are likely many options for UNDP to embrace the significance of the Equator Initiative to its overall work while simultaneously supporting the Initiative so that it can achieve its full potential.

#### **In Sum:**

The Equator Initiative has demonstrated its sustainability through time by remaining relevant and being vigilant about aligning its work with the global environmental agenda and UNDP’s goals and strategies. This evaluation has clearly shown that after 20 years of functioning, the Equator Initiative is still relevant to and valued by its beneficiaries, the Equator Prize winners. The dollar investment, including the prize, per winning organization, has brought recognition and legitimacy to these organizations; it has opened multiple doors, including new partners and funding, to help strengthen and continue the work of these groups. The impacts go beyond just winning the prize and the ceremony, and both beneficiaries and partner organizations of the Initiative feel that what the Initiative does should continue albeit, with increased emphasis on supporting the winning organizations to scale-up their nature-based solutions.

The Initiative’s true potential to contribute nature-based solutions to climate change and sustainable development is latent. This potential hinges, primarily, on securing sufficient and consistent yearly funding to grow a strategic and steady program. Maximizing the Initiative’s potential will require several key positions that, at the moment, because of insufficient funding, are not available on the team. For instance, a pivotal function of the program moving forward has to be the revitalizing of the Initiative’s partnership structure. An active partnership structure can increase funding for the Initiative and anchor scaling-up efforts for the winning organizations. Twenty years, and the last ten years, as seen in this evaluation, have proven this Initiative to be of much value. It seems fitting that the next ten years, given proper funding, staffing, and continued efficient alignment of action with vision, be of maximum potential; maximum potential to have nature-based solutions burgeon across the globe.

# Appendix 1: Evaluation Questions

## Evaluation Key Points and Questions

**1. Impact and Effectiveness:** Analyze the impact and effectiveness of the Equator Initiative on the recipient communities.

1a. How has winning the Equator Prize impacted communities’/organization’s efforts for replication, scaling, relevance with government counterparts, protection from outside interference etc.?

1b. After receiving the prize what kind of impacts has media attention had on the project and the communities?

1c. What has been the impact of the capacity building activities on the recipient communities?

1d. How effective has the Equator Initiative been in the building of capacities among Equator Prize winners to tell their stories?

1e. What has been the impact of the knowledge management services offered on the recipient communities?

1f. How effective are Equator Initiative knowledge products and capacity-building activities in helping to identify nature-based solutions?

**2. Relevance:** Assess the degree to which the Equator Initiative adds value and responds to demands in the international environmental policy arena in the area of indigenous peoples’ and local communities (IPLCs).

2a. To what extent is the Equator Initiative’s work equipped to support IPLCs in gaining access to policy spaces that would otherwise not be available?

2b. To what degree does the Equator Initiative provide a platform for IPLCs to voice policy recommendations in relevant international fora?

2c. How has the Equator Initiative contributed to the global and national discourse on the role of indigenous peoples and local communities regarding nature-based solutions for biodiversity conservation, climate change, and local development?

**3. Partnership:** Examine the effectiveness of the Initiatives multi-sector partnership structure.

3a. How effective is the multi-sectoral partnership modality the Equator Initiative is using?

3b. To what extent are roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and what improvements could be suggested?

**4. Efficiency:** Determine the cost-efficiency of Equator Initiative project activities.

4a. Given a broad overview of annual turnover figures and costs for events and similar interventions by the Equator Initiative, how cost-efficient are project activities?

4b. To what degree is the Equator Initiative capable of leveraging funding and other opportunities for mission-aligned purposes from other funding sources?

## Evaluation Key Points and Questions

**5. Gender Equality:** Assess the extent to which the project promotes positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including the participation of women in project activities.

6a. Through what means does the Equator Initiative empower women and girls, and how effective are these measures?

**6. Sustainability:** Discuss the extent to which the project is capable of producing and reproducing benefits over time, including after interventions or direct support have ended.

5a. How does the Equator Initiative sustain the momentum generated by the Equator Prize?

5b. To what extent do stakeholders support the long-term vision the Equator Initiative work communicates?

5c. How does the Equator Initiative respond to new demands from its core constituency, and/or a changing policy landscape?

**7. Strategic Institutional Relevance:** Gauge the relevance of the Equator Initiative to UNDP's Strategic Plan.

## Appendix 2: Key Secondary Data Sources Reviewed

1. Project Document, 2018 - 2023, Global Programme on Nature for Development; UNDP; 2018.
2. Equator Initiative Annual Reports, 2010 - 2018; UNDP.
3. Evaluation of the Equator Initiative 2002 - 2009, Executive Summary; International Institute for Environment and Development; 2010.
4. Equator Prize Evaluation: A Survey of Finalists; Fordham University; 2009.
5. Reflection on Equator Initiative Partnerships (draft internal document); UNDP; 2017.
6. Memo on the Equator Prize 2019; Jamison Ervin, Director Global Programme on Nature for Development; 2019
7. Global Biodiversity Program Planning and Visioning Report; UNDP; 206
8. Project Document, Environment and Energy Biodiversity Global Programme 2008-2010: Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Economic Sector Governance Systems and Product Supply Chains; UNDP; Amendment 2, 2010; Amendment 4, 2011, Amendment 5, 2012;
9. UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018 -2021; UNDP, 2018.
10. Excel documents assembled by Equator Initiative Team
  - Equator Prize Summary Profile
  - Partner Profiles
  - Winning Organization Profiles
  - Capacity Dialogue Profiles
  - Knowledge Products Stocktaking
  - Prize Nomination Themes
  - Staffing Positions and Functions
  - Summary of Income and Expenditures 2010 - 2019

## Appendix 3: Key Informants

1. Jill Blockhus, Director of International Partnerships - International Climate Policy and International Government Relations; The Nature Conservancy, USA
2. Cristina Coc, Maya Leaders Alliance of Southern Belize, Belize.
3. Jamison Ervin, Director Global Programme on Nature for Development, UNDP; New York, USA.
4. Mugabe Gregory, former chairman of the board of [Kayonza Growers Tea Factory](#), Uganda.
5. Nina Kantcheva, Equator Initiative Policy Specialist; UNDP; New York, USA.
6. Will Kennedy, Senior Programme Officer, UN Office for Partnerships, New York, USA.
7. Jane Carter Ingram, Senior Manager, Climate Change and Sustainability at Ernst and Young, USA.
8. José Inés Loria Palma, President at Fundación San Crisanto, Mexico
9. Gerald Miles, former Vice President at Rare, USA.
10. Budi Setiawan, chairman of [Kelompok Peduli Lingkungan Belitung](#), Indonesia.
11. Martin Sommerschuh, Equator Initiative Program Coordinator, UNDP; New York, USA.
12. Sarah Timpson, member Board of Directors, Synergos Institute, USA
13. Eileen de Ravin, former Manager of the Equator Initiative, USA.

## Appendix 4: Current and Past Donors/Operational Partners

Current Donors	Start Date	End Date
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	2003	Current
Sweedish International Development Cooperation Agency	2011	Current
Govt. of Norway: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation	2017	Current
OneEarth	2017	Current
Estee Lauder Companies	2019	Current
Past Donors	Start Date	End Date
Govt. of Norway: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2006	2016
Government of Australia	2012	2014
Govt. of Norway: Norwegian International Climate and Forests Initiative / Ministry of Climate and Environment	2015	2017

Current Operational Partners and Start Date							
2002	2003	2005	2007	2010	2012	2017	2018
UNDP UNDP (Small Grants) UNFIP UNOPS UNEP UNF CBD IUCN TNC Rare	CI	Fordham University	Ecoagricul-tural Partners	Tribal Link Foundation	PCI Media Impact USAID	WCS	WWF