



EVALUATION SUMMARY

COUNTRIES: Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, Myanmar, Laos, Uganda



THE CONSERVATION, MITIGATION AND BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS PROGRAM (COMBO+)

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Evaluation date: September 2025 – February 2026

KEY DATA OF FFEM SUPPORT

Amount of FFEM funding : €2,000,000
Project grant date : 2020
Duration : 4 years
Project name: COMBO+
Project number: CZZ2876

Context

Globalization and accelerating economic growth are increasing pressure on natural resources, exacerbating the climate, health, and biodiversity crisis. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework underscores this urgency by setting ambitious targets, particularly for biodiversity-rich COMBO+ countries facing intense development pressures. The mitigation hierarchy — avoid, reduce, restore, and then compensate — is a central lever in this initiative to achieve zero net loss or a net gain in biodiversity. Following COMBO I (2016–2020), which laid the strategic foundations, COMBO+ aims to strengthen institutional anchoring, private sector engagement, and capacity development at all levels.

Participants and operating procedures

The project was managed by WCS, with the support of Biotope and BIOFUND. Implementation relied on national teams (Laos, Uganda, Mozambique, and Madagascar). Technical partners (Biotope, Guinea Ecology, and BIOFUND), along with an

OBJECTIVES

Reconcile economic development and conservation objectives by contributing, by 2025, to the development and implementation of policies that ensure no net loss — or even a net gain — in biodiversity, and to the achievement of national biodiversity targets.

Specific objectives:

- (1) Support countries in establishing governance frameworks to apply the mitigation hierarchy;
- (2) Develop decision-making tools;
- (3) Strengthen the capacities of public and private stakeholders;
- (4) Pilot innovative operational models, including biodiversity offsetting, in partnership with all stakeholders.

TESTED INNOVATION

COMBO+ introduced institutional, financial, and technological innovations to implement the mitigation hierarchy. The program has been innovative in developing tailored tools, pioneering financial models (BIOFUND and the Guinean Trust Fund), and establishing cross-sectoral governance mechanisms. Its multi-country approach has been a key driver of innovation.



EVALUATION RESULTS

Relevance

The COMBO+ project appears highly relevant in light of the international and national contexts, marked by an intensification of development projects (mining, hydropower, infrastructure, tourism, etc.) and increasing pressure on biodiversity. Its logical framework and work plans, which were generally well aligned with national needs and adapted over the course of the project, responded coherently to these challenges, despite a particularly ambitious overall objective. The multi-country approach, led by the NGO WCS and its partners, strengthened its relevance through cross-learning, the standardization of tools, and the mobilization of complementary technical expertise.

Coherence

COMBO+ has integrated the recommendations from Phase I by strengthening public sector involvement, piloting operational models, and enhancing private sector engagement, while expanding capacity building to civil society and financial institutions. Institutional ownership has increased through targeted support and a cross-sectoral approach, despite limited progress to date and the continued need for sustained support.

Effectiveness

The program has contributed to improving policy and regulatory frameworks, with varying levels of progress across countries. It has introduced innovative mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the mitigation hierarchy. Capacity-building efforts have been relevant, despite ambitious objectives. The pilot models, which are more complex to implement, have produced mixed results.

ADDED VALUE OF THE FFEM

The added value of FFEM has remained largely imperceptible to local stakeholders, as it is difficult to distinguish from AFD. Nevertheless, its support has been decisive in mobilizing and strengthening AFD's co-financing and engagement, justified by the highly innovative nature of the program and its potential for replication in many contexts.

States must view the mitigation hierarchy as a development opportunity rather than a constraint.

Thierry Clément – Project manager

Efficiency

Despite ownership challenges, the institutional arrangements and multi-donor coordination supported adaptive implementation, characterized by rigorous monitoring and efficient execution.

Impact

The project has had a significant impact by mobilizing public, private, and civil society actors around a common vision. It has strengthened capacities through targeted training, promoted inter-institutional coordination, and widely disseminated knowledge and good practices. It has also influenced public policies by strengthening the integration of the mitigation hierarchy into national regulatory and institutional frameworks.

Viability/Sustainability

Sustainability was integrated into the program design at both the cross-cutting and national levels. Knowledge-sharing mechanisms, standardized tools, and training-of-trainers approaches have promoted the replication of good practices across countries. Activity planning explicitly aimed to ensure the long-term legacy of results, with strong involvement of multisectoral stakeholders and the development of partnerships. Several tools and resources continue to support the monitoring of actions. However, the lack of dedicated post-program funding and uncertainty regarding future funding are likely to limit sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the multi-country approach, the application of the mitigation hierarchy remains a long and complex process. Policies must be operational and supported by data, adequate resources, and strong political will. Technical assistance, financial innovation, and private sector engagement remain crucial.

- Encourage cooperation between countries.
- Strengthen the commitment of states and the role of CSOs,
- Continue providing technical assistance to the authorities, if necessary, through dedicated funding,
- Adopt a phased implementation approach, adapted to the available tools and data,
- Place capacity building at the heart of the action,
- Ensure sustainable public financing,
- Develop innovative financing mechanisms,
- Consolidate private sector partnerships,
- Promote the mitigation hierarchy as a development opportunity.

Find details of the project sheet by scanning the QR Code

