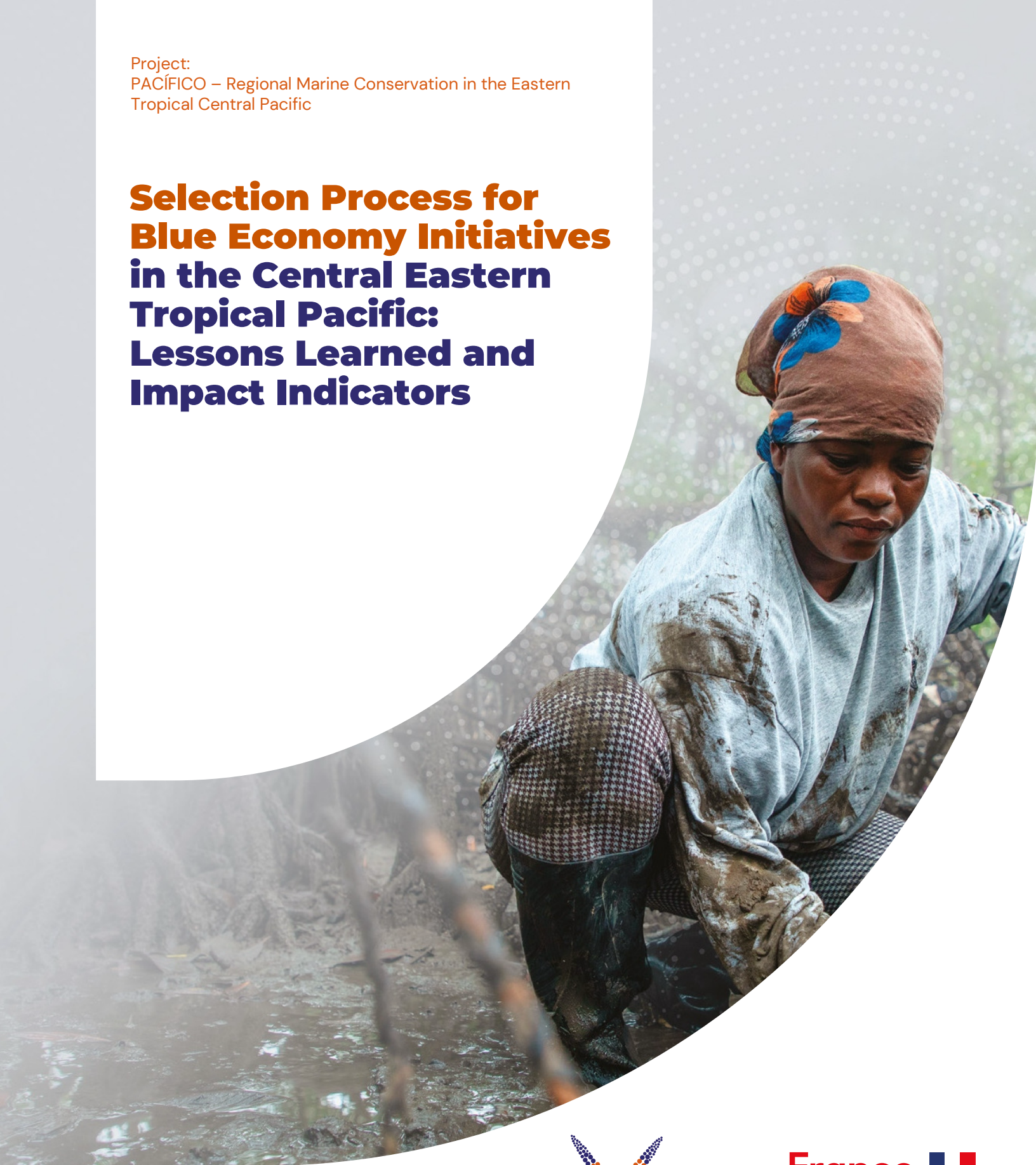


Project:
PACÍFICO – Regional Marine Conservation in the Eastern
Tropical Central Pacific

Selection Process for Blue Economy Initiatives in the Central Eastern Tropical Pacific: Lessons Learned and Impact Indicators



France 



FONDS
FRANÇAIS POUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT
MONDIAL

Fundación Pacífico, 2026

Project: PACÍFICO – Regional Marine Conservation in the Eastern Tropical Central Pacific

Institutional Authorship

Fundación Pacífico (PACÍFICO)

Editorial Review and Project Coordination

Andrea Montero-Cordero, M.Sc. – Fundación Pacífico

Consultant

Antonio Jaramillo-Amplo Kaya

Design Adaptation

El Domo Comunicación

English Translation and Layout

Yeimy Carolina Castillo C.

Cover Photograph

Asociación Raíces Piangueras, Colombia

Acknowledgments

Fundación Pacífico and the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) would like to thank:

→ Ad Hoc Selection Committee:

- Dr. Laura Canevari
- MBA Armando Laborde
- M.Sc. Jackeline Siles
- Dr. Pilar Herron

→ Founding Environmental Funds and Partners: Fondo Acción (Colombia), Fundación Patrimonio Natural (Colombia), Fundación Natura (Panama), Asociación Costa Rica por Siempre (Costa Rica), and, in Ecuador, FIAS, Instituto Nazca, and Fundación Krucial.

→ Grassroots organizations: ASOSALAN, FEPACOIBA, La Cumbancha, Raíces Piangueras, and Raising Coral.

Their knowledge, experience, and perspectives were essential in developing the selection criteria during the initial process and the impact monitoring tools for each selected Blue Economy initiative. Thank you for helping ensure transparency, impartiality, and a level playing field in the support provided to the grassroots organizations and environmental funds that took part in this process.

PACÍFICO authorizes the use of the information in this document, provided it is cited as follows:

Fundación Pacífico. (2026). Selection Process for Blue Economy Initiatives in the Central Eastern Tropical Pacific: Lessons Learned and Impact Indicators: Project PACÍFICO – Regional Marine Conservation in the Eastern Tropical Central Pacific. Fundación Pacífico.

Contents

Acronyms	4
Introduction	6
Stages of the Selection Process	7
Phase 1: Identification and Selection	9
I. Establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee	9
II. Integration of an Impact Investment Approach	9
III. Definition of the Evaluation Criteria	10
IV. Application Process	12
V. Evaluation of Applications	13
VI. Selection of Pilot Initiatives	16
Phase 2: Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation System	17
I. Definition of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Methodological Framework	17
II. Development of the Core Indicator Catalog	17
III. Preparation of a Reporting Template and Implementation Guide	18
Lessons Learned and Recommendations	18

Acronyms

ASOSALAN → Asociación de Buzos en Pesca Artesanal Puerto Salango

ETP → Eastern Tropical Pacific

FEFs → PACIFICO Founding Environmental Funds

FEPACOIBA → Federación de Pescadores del Parque Nacional Coiba

FFEM → French Facility for Global Environment

M&E → Monitoring and Evaluation

MPAs → Marine Protected Areas

RUT → Single Tax Registry

SDGs → Sustainable Development Goals

UNDP → United Nations Development Programme

UNEP → United Nations Environment Programme



Introduction

Transforming the Blue Economy in the Central Eastern Tropical Pacific (Central ETP) requires momentum driven by pilot initiatives capable of attracting capital, delivering demonstrable environmental and social returns, and maintaining financial discipline in complex settings.

The strategy for advancing the Blue Economy in the region begins with selecting suitable pilot initiatives through an orderly, well-structured process. To achieve this, the technical team implemented a set of instruments discussed and approved by the Ad Hoc Committee, including the terms of reference, technical selection criteria, and a comprehensive evaluation process.

To support biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the Central ETP, the French government, through the [French Facility for Global Environment \(FFEM\)](#), is providing Fundación Pacífico with a grant of up to €2.56 million to implement the project, [PACÍFICO – Regional Marine Conservation in the Eastern Tropical Central Pacific](#). The project's overall objective is to contribute to a more efficient and harmonized management of marine biodiversity in the region through national and regional coordination, the consolidation of Fundación Pacífico as a regional financial facility, and targeted support for sustainable Blue Economy initiatives.

The four PACÍFICO Founding Environmental Funds (FEFs) and PACÍFICO partners (e.g., in Ecuador) each nominated between one and three pilot initiatives for this process, aiming to evaluate and select them for funding and technical assistance through a cross-cutting impact lens.

This document presents the primary stages and tools utilized throughout the selection and decision-making process led by the Ad Hoc Committee, anchored in transparency, impartiality, and equal opportunity for all participating organizations.



Stages of the Selection Process

To select the Blue Economy pilot initiatives in the Central ETP, Fundación Pacífico carried out a process built around two core, complementary phases, designed to ensure that the selected initiatives were suitable for impact investment.

Phase 1:

Identification and Selection:

This phase covered setting up the Ad Hoc Committee, defining the evaluation criteria, and integrating an impact investment approach into the process. It ended with the selection of the pilots.

Phase 2:

Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

This phase established the framework for impact monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including a core catalog of triple-bottom-line impact indicators (social, environmental, and financial) and reporting tools.

Lessons learned, along with operational and strategic recommendations, emerged in both phases. The strategic recommendations look in more detail at the distinct roles of Fundación Pacífico, the FEFs, and partners.





Phase 1:

Identification and Selection



I. Establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee



II. Integration of an Impact Investment Approach



III. Definition of the Evaluation Criteria



VI. Selection of Pilot Initiatives



V. Evaluation of Applications



IV. Application Process



Phase 2:

Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation System



I. Definition of an M&E Methodological Framework



III. Preparation of a Reporting Template and Implementation Guide



II. Development of the Core Indicator Catalog

Phase 1: Identification and Selection



I. Establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee

The first step was to [set up the Ad Hoc Committee for the selection of Blue Economy pilot initiatives](#). The committee played a key role in the impact investment process of the PACÍFICO–FFEM project, ensuring transparency, objectivity, and technical consistency in selecting the proposals that would receive support.

Made up of four specialists from diverse backgrounds who served in a personal capacity and on a voluntary basis, the committee contributed expertise in marine conservation, sustainable development, social inclusion, climate adaptation, and impact finance.

Its work ensured that the selected initiatives were aligned with the project’s environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals, helping to strengthen innovative Blue Economy models in the Central ETP.



II. Integration of an Impact Investment Approach

During this first phase, between 2025 and 2026, the process was supported by an impact investment advisor.

This work helped ensure that the PACÍFICO–FFEM project’s impact investments integrated environmental, community, and financial criteria to strengthen regenerative economic models in coastal and marine areas. The advisory work included technical support, tailoring financial instruments to each initiative, and building a long-term vision that will allow the pilots to grow, generate local income, and contribute to marine conservation. The approach prioritizes fair value chains, community economic autonomy, women’s leadership, responsible practices, and coordination with MPAs.



III. Definition of the Evaluation Criteria

The selection process included defining the criteria for evaluating future applications. These criteria drew on two funding frameworks from leading organizations and international standards.

The Ocean Innovation Challenge, run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provides a framework for identifying and funding innovative solutions that help achieve ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mainly SDG 14. It promotes replicable pilot projects that can scale up technological, policy, economic, and social solutions for ocean conservation, and offers funding, mentoring, and international networks to selected initiatives.¹

Similarly, the Blue BioTrade approach promotes responsible trade in marine products and services through value chains that integrate conservation, social inclusion, traceability, and equitable benefit-sharing. To this end, it supports capacity building, coordination between public and private actors, and the creation of enabling conditions to scale up sustainable solutions in marine and coastal sectors. The approach seeks to shift traditional marine sectors toward value-added economic models and responsible trade aligned with the Blue Economy.² The criteria also reflect practices and recommendations from international and multilateral organizations, bringing them together in a concise evaluation framework and applying them individually or specifically to the relevant criteria.

World Bank:	UNEP:	CAF:
Provides the overall conceptual framework on trends in sustainable territorial development and the economic rationale. Applied to criteria II, III, and IV. ³	Provides the ecosystem approach and environmental safeguards for project implementation. Applied to criterion I. ⁴	Offers a regional perspective on Blue Economy challenges in Latin America. Applied to criterion IV. ⁵

1 United Nations Development Programme. (2023). [Ocean innovation challenge: Accelerating solutions for ocean health](#). UNDP.

2 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2022). [Blue BioTrade: Promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine biodiversity](#). UNCTAD.

3 World Bank. (2017). [The potential of the blue economy: Increasing long-term benefits of the sustainable use of marine resources for small island developing states and coastal least developed countries](#). World Bank Group.

4 United Nations Environment Programme. (2023). [Sustainable blue economy](#). UNEP.

5 Development Bank of Latin America. (2023). [Blue economy for ocean health and sustainable development](#). CAF.

Selection Process for Blue Economy Initiatives in the Central Eastern Tropical Pacific: Lessons Learned and Impact Indicators

Based on the type of investment prioritized by the project, the following minimum requirements were set for submitting an initiative:

- Years in operation: At least two, with 2025 counting as the second year.
- Geographic location: The initiative must be located and operate within the marine and coastal areas of the Central ETP (Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama).
- Link to ecosystem services: A direct or indirect connection to the ecosystem services of marine and coastal protected areas in the Central ETP.
- Marine and coastal impact: Evidence of a direct contribution to the conservation or sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Defined business model: Identified customers and, ideally, verifiable sales.
- Legal status: A legally constituted organization under the laws of its country.
- Accounting system: Formal accounting records that ensure financial traceability and transparency.

Proposals were evaluated against the following four criteria:

Operational Maturity and Scalability (25%):

Assessed the initiative's level of development and traction, excluding those still at a purely conceptual stage. It also considered the model's potential for growth and replication in the region, as well as its alignment with territorial and regional priorities.

Impact and Sustainable Livelihoods (25%):

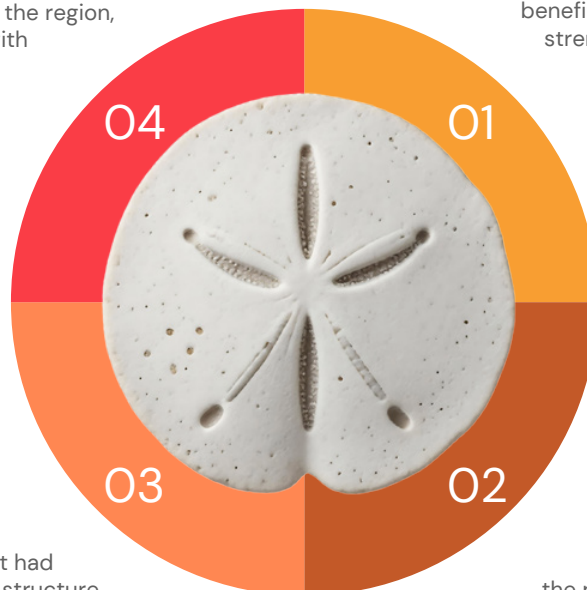
Assessed the initiative's contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems in the Central ETP, and its ability to generate social and economic benefits in coastal communities, strengthening sustainable and regenerative livelihoods equitably for women and men in those communities.

Investment Readiness and Corporate Governance (25%):

Verified that the applicant had the institutional and legal structure needed to receive investment, along with basic corporate governance and transparent management practices. Previous experience with development cooperation projects or managing external funds was also assessed.

Financial Performance and Sustainability (25%):

Analyzed the strength of the proposed business model, its economic viability and the clarity of the intended use of the requested funds. It also considered the initiative's ability to ensure medium-term financial sustainability.



Lessons learned at this stage

- Although the selection criteria consider the geographic and economic context, as well as the types of businesses and pilots submitted, they cannot be applied uniformly. This is due to the diverse nature of the projects: while some operate as nonprofit associations or serve research purposes, others are for-profit ventures.
- To standardize these elements, it is recommended to create **a specific section on each pilot's legal status** and to design **targeted questions** to explore aspects that would otherwise not be properly documented.
- Although the evaluation criteria are comprehensive, the primary challenge is gathering the information and verifying its accuracy. Therefore, in addition to requesting the required supporting documentation, conducting site visits or further verification is recommended as part of a **complementary due diligence process**. This can be done **once the pilots have been selected and before funding is awarded**.



IV. Application Process

The project designed a country-based application process for pilot initiatives using an online questionnaire. Its 44 questions combined multiple-choice formats, supporting document uploads, and open-ended answers structured around the four selection criteria described above. The objective was to gather all available information from the applications, ensuring that the FEFs and partners participated on an equal footing.

Lessons learned at this stage

- This type of tool is recommended as an efficient and rigorous way to collect information, since deadlines and responses can be tracked and evaluated using standardized methods.



V. Evaluation of Applications

A total of nine initiatives submitted for the four Central ETP countries were evaluated. The main gap during the evaluation was the quality of the information submitted, which reflects each pilot's individual economic and geographic context. However, it also became clear that both the FEFs and the PACÍFICO partners had limited access to the pilots' documentation at this stage.

The following eight recommendations jointly address the issues assessed under the four criteria:

Criterion I – Recommendations for enhancing impact and promoting sustainable livelihoods

1. Standardizing social and environmental baselines: Although most pilots demonstrated a clear understanding of their expected impacts, weaknesses were identified in the definition of robust and measurable baselines. Recommendations:

- Adopt uniform methodologies to characterize marine and coastal ecosystems and communities.
- Implement comparable instruments across countries to facilitate comparisons among pilots and the subsequent evaluation of the regional portfolio.
- Ensure the availability of technical teams or partners experienced in environmental and social monitoring, particularly in community settings.

The FEFs and PACÍFICO partners play an essential role. Phase 2 therefore focuses on identifying key indicators and recommends that all pilots develop a theory of change, which will help establish the baseline as the starting point for the intervention.



2. Mainstreaming gender, youth, and ethnic minority dimensions: The evidence gathered shows progress in identifying vulnerable groups, but limited capacity to turn this into concrete actions. Recommendations:

- Incorporate indicators disaggregated by gender, age, and ethnicity.
- Design community participation plans that ensure differentiated benefits and mechanisms for the equitable distribution of the value generated by the initiative.
- Develop practical guides for integrating a gender approach into Blue Economy value chains, particularly fisheries, tourism, and conservation.

Environmental impact was clearly defined, even though it is potentially the hardest to measure. However, the pilots placed less emphasis on social implications and on the inclusion of different population groups.

Criterion II – Recommendations on financial models and economic sustainability

3. Consolidating comprehensive, auditable financial models: A significant proportion of the pilots presented early-stage financial models or models with insufficiently supported assumptions. To improve their ability to attract financing, the pilots should strengthen the following areas.

- Develop standardized financial models with 3- to 5-year projections, including explicit assumptions, sensitivity analysis, and a path to break-even.
- Include an analysis of operational, market, and regulatory risks, quantifying their impact on revenue, costs, and cash flow.
- Encourage the FEFs to support the validation of assumptions using verifiable local data.

4. Clarifying the use and prioritization of requested funds: The proposals reviewed varied significantly in their ability to justify how the funds would be used. Recommendations:

- Establish a mandatory use-of-funds template, prioritized by impact on scalability, operational maturity, and the reduction of critical risks.
- Break down the required investment into working capital, institutional strengthening, infrastructure, applied research, and impact activities.
- Link the investment to verifiable milestones that trigger phased disbursements.

Criterion III – Recommendations on corporate governance and investment readiness

5. Formalizing legal status and ensuring documentation compliance: The review of applications revealed recurring gaps in the availability of legal documents, certifications, and permits. Recommendations:

- Establish a mandatory list of required documents for future calls for proposals, including bylaws, certificates of legal existence, RUT or equivalent, bank reference letter, sector permits, and corporate records.
- Implement a document check before the evaluation process, acting as an “eligibility filter.”

The FEFs and PACÍFICO partners should help the pilots bring their legal documentation up to date. Only those that have received previous funding show an acceptable level of compliance. Even so, not having a well-organized, regularly updated document repository puts pilots at risk of being disqualified from funding calls and grant opportunities.

6. Developing minimum corporate governance practices: To build the confidence of investors and donors, it is recommended to:

- Promote the adoption of basic governance structures, such as active boards of directors, conflict-of-interest policies, and regular financial reporting.
- Train the pilots in resource management and good practices in procurement, monitoring, and accountability.
- Require evidence of fund management capacity, especially for community-based or membership organizations, given their nonprofit status.

Criterion IV – Recommendations for operational maturity and scalability

7. Setting realistic operational roadmaps: Many pilots presented a clear growth concept but lacked a clear operational and logistical plan to achieve it. Recommendations:

- Develop operational plans with quarterly milestones, associated risks, and internal capacity requirements.
- Identify critical enablers such as permits, suppliers, scientific and technical partnerships, certifications, and government stakeholders.
- Integrate value maps and impact models that link activities to expected outcomes in a verifiable way.

8. Adopting a place-based approach aligned with local agendas: Integration with regional initiatives is key to scalability. Recommendations:

- Require concrete evidence of alignment with local conservation plans, national Blue Economy policies, and coastal management agendas.
- Encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together communities, local governments, the private sector, and academia.
- Prioritize pilots with a proven capacity to be replicated or expanded to other sites in the Central ETP.

Lessons learned at this stage

For each of the selected pilot initiatives, it will be essential to strengthen administrative processes, reporting practices, and accounting and financial controls.

→ Most of the pilots are nonprofit entities, which makes governance more complex. Corporate governance is considerably different from the governance of community and membership organizations. These structures may have limited capacity to manage resources and contracts and to provide strategic direction in the short and medium term.

→ With some exceptions, the pilots present business models that combine different activities, such as tourism and fishing, or ecosystem conservation and fishing. We recommend clearly defining the core activity, the value proposition, and the contribution of each component to the business model to avoid spreading resources and effort too thin, which could affect results.



VI. Selection of Pilot Initiatives

A total of five Blue Economy pilot initiatives were selected across the four countries, four of which are led by women. Details on each initiative are available here: [Blue Economy Pilot Initiatives](#).



Phase 2: Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation System



I. Definition of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Methodological Framework

This framework sets out the results chain (outputs, outcomes, and impact) and links it to the project's theory of change. It sets the system's guiding principles (regional coherence, verifiability, traceability, and comparability) and defines the critical assumptions and risks to be monitored. It also looks more closely at the role of the FEFs and partners in the flow of information and establishes minimum criteria for generating, validating, and reporting data.

In addition, the framework provides guidance on building baselines, reporting frequency, and the verification mechanisms needed to ensure methodological quality.



II. Development of the Core Indicator Catalog

A core catalog of impact indicators was developed based on the project's theory of change and each pilot's own theory of change. The catalog organizes the indicators into three dimensions (social, environmental, and financial) and clearly distinguishes between impact and management indicators. Each indicator is defined conceptually and operationally, including its measurement logic, possible data sources, units of analysis, suggested frequency, and minimum conditions for data collection.

The catalog includes regional indicators (common to all pilots) as well as specific indicators aligned with each initiative's business model and local practices. The purpose of this tool is to allow comparability without losing local relevance, ensuring that the system captures real changes attributable to the intervention.



III. Preparation of a Reporting Template and Implementation Guide

A simplified M&E reporting template was created in Excel. It is designed to make it easy for the FEFs, partners, and pilots (grassroots organizations) to enter information on a regular basis, standardizing how progress, evidence, risks, and deviations from plans are reported.

The template includes fields to record quantitative data, attach supporting documents, explain variations from the baseline, and report qualitative progress related to governance, institutional coordination, or organizational strengthening.

In this way, the template works both as a reporting tool and as a management tool for local teams. It comes with a technical guide that explains how to use it, the operational definition of each indicator, interpretation criteria, acceptable sources of evidence, and institutional responsibilities within the reporting flow.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to refine the selection process, raise the technical quality of applications, and strengthen regional stakeholders' institutional capacities. Their implementation will help future calls for proposals attract initiatives closely aligned with marine conservation, community development, and impact investment priorities across the Central ETP, tailored to the operational maturity level of each project. This will significantly enhance the prospects for capital deployment toward Blue Economy initiatives that deliver tangible benefits.



Lessons learned

- The information submitted at the application stage is not always sufficient to fully validate the technical, financial, legal, and operational viability of selected initiatives.
- Technical support provided by the FEFs during proposal preparation significantly influences the quality and consistency of submitted proposals.
- Digital application tools have enhanced transparency, traceability, and comparability across proposals, though opportunities remain to improve the quality and consistency of the information collected.

Recommendations

- Establish a formal post-selection due diligence process, including field visits, expanded documentation review, and thorough verification of technical, financial, and legal criteria prior to fund disbursement.
- Strengthen the FEFs' role as technical advisory bodies through shared guidelines, consistent criteria, and standardized proposal development tools.
- Optimize digital application platforms by incorporating automated validation, improved document management workflows, and step-by-step guidance to ensure information consistency across participating countries and entities.

Additionally, the following closing activities conducted after Phases 1 and 2 represent good practices:

- The process incorporated a final synthesis of operational and strategic recommendations examining the **respective roles and mandates** of Fundación Pacífico, the FEFs, and regional partners. It established practical guidelines to ensure information quality, field validation, and the program's overall regional coherence.
- Recommendations were developed on **system governance, inter-country coordination arrangements, quality controls, reporting protocols, institutional roles, and strategies for adaptive management and regional learning**. Prerequisites for implementation were also defined, including basic record-keeping capacity, the designation of staff responsible for M&E, and operational clarity within the pilots. A set of measures was proposed to prevent data distortion and strengthen the system's long-term reliability.

- The project designed an integrated M&E system that standardizes the reporting framework for pilots and establishes a shared framework for interpreting performance and extracting regional lessons:
 - a. The project's theory of change, aligned with those of the individual pilots, guides expectations and clarifies which results constitute evidence of progress.
 - b. The indicator catalog translates these pathways of change into verifiable metrics.
 - c. The standardized reporting template ensures consistency in data collection and presentation.
 - d. The strategic recommendations define the institutional conditions required for the system to operate with quality, consistency, and sustainability.

Together, the outputs associated with each step form an operational framework designed to strengthen the capacity of Fundación Pacífico, the PACIFICO Founding Environmental Funds (FEFs), and regional partners to evaluate the effectiveness of their investments, anticipate risks, adapt interventions, and consolidate comparable evidence across countries and pilots. This supports evidence-based decision-making and the development of replicable Blue Economy models that can be scaled across the Central ETP region.



Project:
PACÍFICO – Regional Marine Conservation in
the Eastern Tropical Central Pacific



France 



FONDS
FRANÇAIS POUR
L'ENVIRONNEMENT
MONDIAL

