

ENDURING EARTH: ACCELERATING SUSTAINABLE FINANCE SOLUTIONS TO ACHIEVE DURABLE CONSERVATION YEAR 1 LESSONS LEARNT BRIEF

About this Brief

The Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded Enduring Earth (EE) Project completed its first year in December 2024, laying essential groundwork for advancing Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiatives across multiple countries¹. Insights derived from the project's annual Adaptive Management Workshops and ongoing learning processes have identified two priorities: 1) navigating complex political changes and external factors; and 2) developing robust project management frameworks suitable for intricate, multi-stakeholder engagements. This brief aims to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, enhance current implementation practices, and inform strategic planning for future PFP initiatives. Moreover, this brief underscores the project's dedication to systematic learning and proactive dissemination of knowledge.

LESSONS ON NAVIGATING POLITICAL CHANGES

A key strength of the PFP model lies in its robust collaboration with duty bearers and rights holders, underpinned by a shared commitment to achieving long-term ecological and biodiversity outcomes. In response to risks associated with evolving political landscapes, such as governmental transitions, staffing changes, and strikes, project executing agencies utilised various strategies to strengthen resilience and adaptability. Below are the key lessons drawn from the first year:

Lesson 1. Monitor, Assess, Act – utilizing the risk management framework: The Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP) project operates across four distinct governmental contexts and political environments, resulting in varied uncertainties. To proactively address this, The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) ETP team actively monitors the news, engages with government counterparts and tracks political changes focusing on government directions and policy shifts to understand the implications to the potential durable finance mechanism. Following Panama's 2024 General Elections and before the new administration took office, the Pew ETP team met with the incoming Environment Minister before his official appointment, enabling proactive engagement. The Pew team also built strong relationships with technical staff in government agencies and departments to ensure continuity of project implementation despite changes in key posts.

Recommendation: Dedicate regular standing time in Project Steering Committee or the CTF Board meetings for risk assessments, analysing the 3 Ws: Where we are now, Where we are headed and What to do about it. Utilize GEF's [Risk Log template](#), which organizes risks into probability and impact levels. Develop actionable mitigation or countermeasures.

Lesson 2. Institutionalize for project continuity: Building on trust-based relationships, embedding the PFP work into formal structures is key to ensuring continuity beyond political cycles and leadership changes. In Gabon, The Nature Conservancy Gabon secured an official decree by the Prime Minister's Office, formalizing the technical working groups mandated to complete the

¹ Under a PFP approach, the parties define and agree on a unique set of commitments in a single closing to ensure that, over the long term, large-scale systems of conservation areas are well-managed, sustainably financed, and benefit the communities who depend on them. This entails institutional capacity building, leadership and commitment, and, often, changes in policy. (EE Project Document, pg.7)

PFP planning work. The technical group, representing fifteen government administrations and NGOs each, has been meeting regularly since October 2024. Meanwhile, the Enduring Earth Hub, which implements the knowledge management efforts within the global EE partnership as part of the GEF project, formalized relationships with key CTF organisations through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with RedLAC, strengthening the collaboration framework and knowledge exchange. While MoUs do not create legal mandates, they provide structured yet flexible institutional partnerships.

Recommendation: Prioritize legally embedding the PFP work into national policy through official directives, decrees or formal committees. When legal mandates are not an option, formal mechanisms can be developed through MoUs. Combining both strategies tailored to the specific context can provide the strongest foundation for long-term sustainability of PFPs.

LESSONS ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A PFP initiative is built on collaboration among all stewards of the environment, including governments, Indigenous peoples, communities, and other partners. Therefore, building robust project management mechanisms is a foundation for a successful operation. Here are some lessons learnt by the GEF project executing agencies.

Lesson 3. Align from the Start with Inception Meetings: Feedback from PFP teams identified the importance of the Inception Meeting to set-up a project up for success. Executing Agencies reported that establishing a shared understanding of project goals, timelines, roles, and expectations from the outset helps unify stakeholders and lays a strong foundation for collaboration. Agencies can maximize this opportunity by ensuring inception meetings bring together internal implementation teams, supporting units, and external partners. Investing time early in such alignment can proactively prevent confusion, enhance partnership clarity, and accelerate project momentum.

Recommendation: Schedule a comprehensive inception meeting that includes all relevant stakeholders. Create and distribute an inception report documenting key decisions, agreements, and regular check-in mechanisms. Develop and iteratively utilize a RACI table to enhance clarity in roles and efficiency.

Lesson 4. Avoid delays with Streamlined Contracting: The foundation-setting period requires contracts and agreements with partners. Executing agencies learned that a mutual and clear understanding of both stakeholder and internal contracting processes is critical to avoid unnecessary delays. Experiences from ETP underscore the importance of understanding stakeholders' contracting processes, including their preferred languages and signature protocols, particularly when coordinating with multiple governments. Gabon's experience shows that for a newly established team, building team-wide understanding of the organisation's internal contracting procedures is critical.

Recommendation: In the foundation-setting year, establish a clear understanding of the contracting process for efficiency. Outline and agree with stakeholders on the contracting process and time required in advance. If multiple team members will be involved in handling contracts, ensure team-wide understanding of procedures. Consider enhancing your organization's checklist or roles division chart with the stakeholder's protocols and workflows.

Looking Forward: The first year of the GEF EE Project has provided invaluable insights into managing external risks and multi-stakeholder project management. Moving forward, the project will continue to collect, document, and share these learnings, ensuring adaptive management and enriching the project partnership's knowledge base on the PFP approach.

For more information on the GEF EE Project, please visit our [website](#) or contact julie.byun@tnc.org, MEL specialist for the EE Project.