

ADAPTATION FUND

Reducing Risk and Vulnerability to Climate Change in the Region of La Depresion Momposina – Colombia.
PHOTO CREDIT: UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME COLOMBIA

THEMATIC BRIEF | JUNE 2026

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Adaptation Fund has supported developing countries with their adaptation needs by funding over **USD 191 million** in **27 projects** where cultural heritage gains have been identified as expected outcomes, representing 12% of the total Fund portfolio. While cultural heritage is not the primary goal of these projects, the Fund has supported climate-exposed communities whose traditional knowledge, cultural practices, livelihoods and ways of life are increasingly at risk from climate change through these projects.

These projects are expected to benefit 4.7 million people, including **120,000 indigenous people** as direct beneficiaries, protect the livelihoods of around **400,000 households**, and support the protection of more than **650,000 hectares** of natural assets.

Overview and Strategic Relevance

Cultural heritage is closely linked to climate resilience, especially for communities whose identities, livelihoods, traditional knowledge, and living landscapes are shaped by long-standing relationships with land, water, ecosystems, and natural resources.

As climate change intensifies ecosystem degradation, water stress, food insecurity, displacement risks, and damage to culturally significant places and practices, safeguarding cultural heritage becomes an important part of adaptation.

Aligned with the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), the Adaptation Fund supports communities in safeguarding these assets, while strengthening resilience and preserving their social, cultural, and economic foundations. Even where cultural heritage is not the primary goal, Fund-supported projects can deliver important cultural heritage co-benefits by strengthening community stewardship, integrating traditional knowledge and governance practices into adaptation planning, and enhancing social cohesion through locally-led approaches.



Adaptation to Climate-Induced Water Stresses through Integrated Landscape Management – Bhutan.
PHOTO CREDIT: ADAPTATION FUND

The Adaptation Fund Portfolio in Cultural Heritage

The Adaptation Fund supports cultural heritage co-benefits through projects whose primary goals fall across five GGA thematic areas: ecosystems and biodiversity, water supply and sanitation, food and agriculture, infrastructure and human settlements, and poverty eradication and livelihoods. Of the **27 projects** where cultural heritage outcomes are expected as a co-benefit, the largest concentrations are in **ecosystems and biodiversity (41%)**, followed by **water and sanitation (22%)**, **food and agriculture (18%)**, and **infrastructure and human settlements (15%)**.

Figure 1.1: Share of Adaptation Fund portfolio with 'cultural heritage' co-benefits, by primary GGA theme and grant amount (**in % & USD million**).

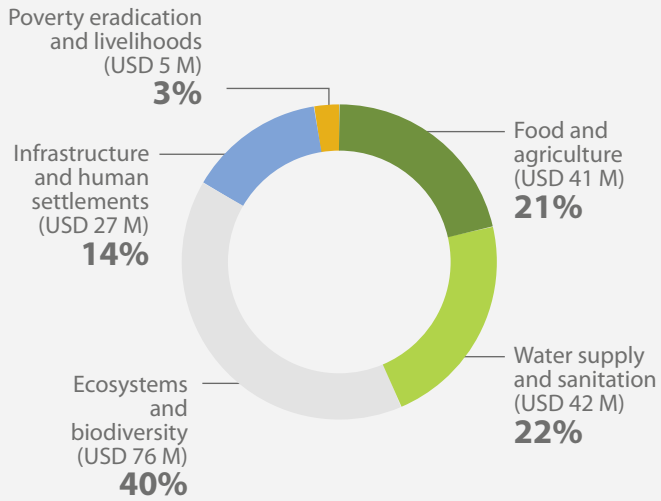
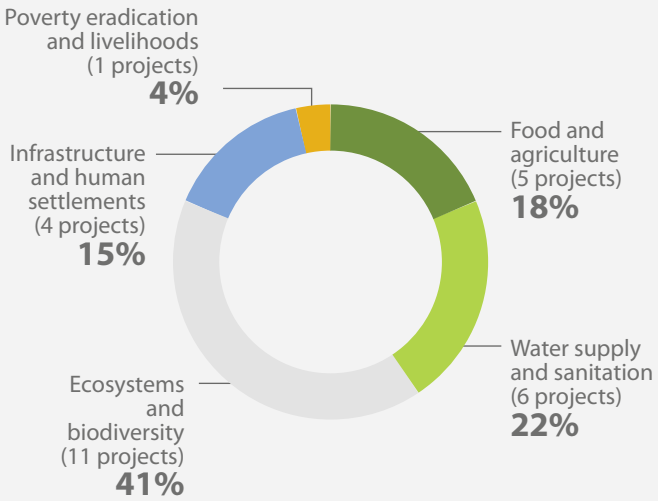


Figure 1.2: Share of Adaptation Fund portfolio with 'cultural heritage' co-benefits, by primary GGA theme and project numbers (**in % & number of projects**).



National and **Regional Implementing Entities** lead **17** of the **27** projects (61%), ensuring that adaptation is designed and delivered by entities with the closest ties to the communities and landscapes involved. Working with national entities is essential as cultural heritage adaptation requires community legitimacy and cultural proximity.

Geographically, **Latin America and the Caribbean** account for 12 of the 27 projects **(44%)**, followed by **Africa and Asia-Pacific with 6 each (22%)**. The portfolio is growing, with **USD 50 million** committed in the last five years.

Figure 2. Geographical distribution of projects with 'cultural heritage' co-benefits by type of implementing entity
Distribution of Adaptation Fund projects that have 'cultural heritage' co-benefits, by region, broken down by the type of implementing entity responsible for project delivery.

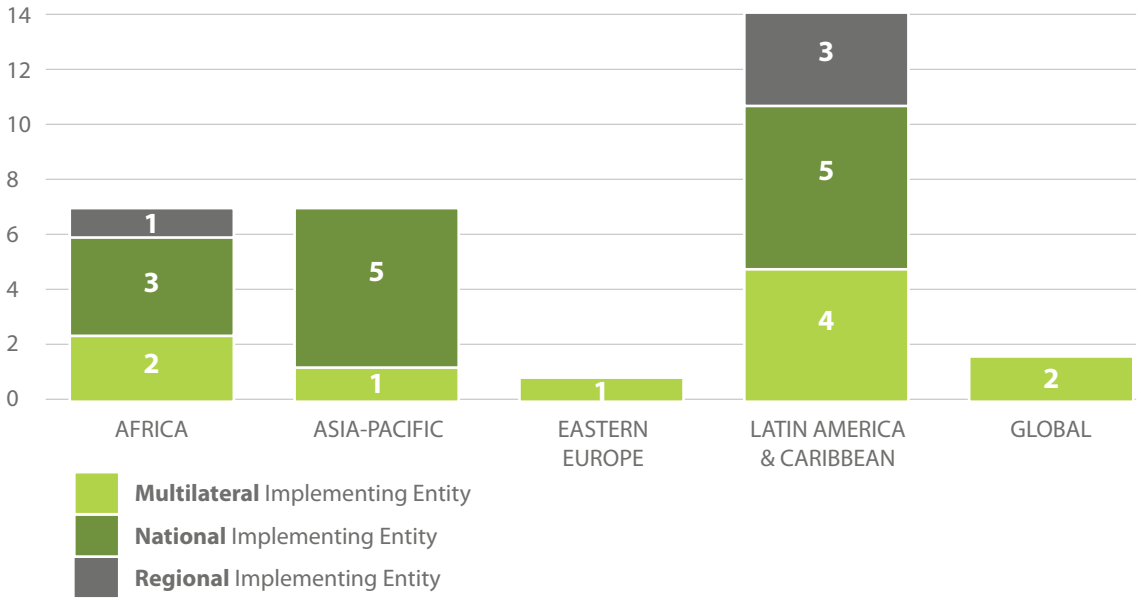


Figure 3.1: Share of Adaptation Fund portfolio with 'cultural heritage' co-benefits, by implementing entity type (**in % of total portfolio & USD million**).

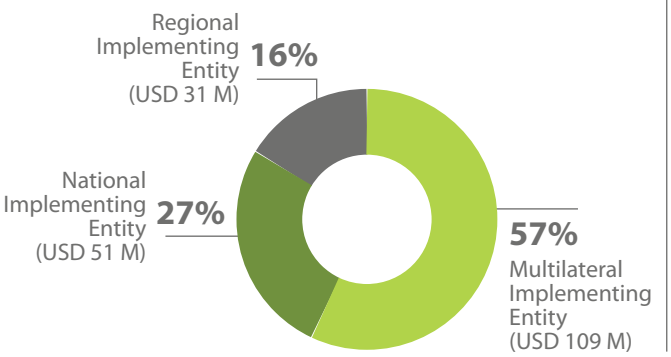
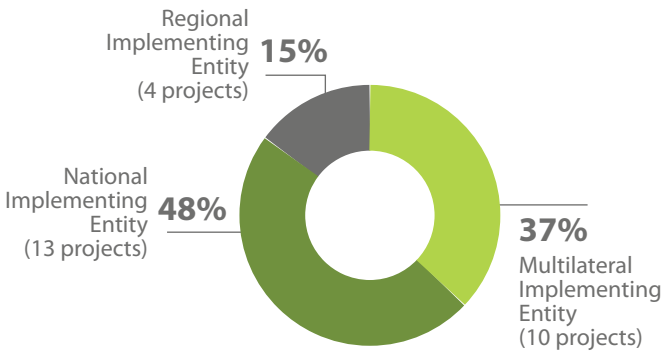


Figure 3.2: Share of Adaptation Fund portfolio with 'cultural heritage' co-benefits, by implementing entity type (**in % & number of projects**).



Note: *Adaptation Fund 'cultural heritage' portfolio: USD 191 M across 27 projects*

CASE STUDY:
COLOMBIA-ECUADOR


PHOTO CREDIT: WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

Building Adaptive Capacity through Food and Nutrition Security and Peacebuilding Actions in Vulnerable Afro and Indigenous Communities in the **Colombia-Ecuador Border Area**

Countries:	Colombia, Ecuador
Implementing entity:	UN-World Food Programme (MIE)
Amount:	USD 14,000,000
Project duration:	2018-2024
Status:	Project Implementation Completed

Afro-descendant and Awá communities living in the Colombia–Ecuador border region face acute climate vulnerability, food insecurity, and environmental degradation. The project focused on the Mira-Mataje and Guaitara-Carchi transboundary watersheds, where climate change is exacerbating droughts, floods, ecosystem degradation, and pressures on livelihoods. These impacts have been compounded by decades of marginalization and conflict, which have weakened traditional food systems and eroded ancestral knowledge.

This project strengthened adaptive capacity through food and nutrition security, ecosystem restoration, and peacebuilding. A central feature of the project was the integration of traditional and local knowledge into climate adaptation planning, recognizing that both Afro and Awá communities possess longstanding cultural practices, governance systems, and ecological knowledge that have enabled them to manage natural resources and maintain food security in harmony with their environment.

Funded activities included documenting ancestral practices, inventories of climate-resilient native species and traditional foods, intergenerational knowledge-sharing workshops, cultural events and community dialogues, alongside climate information services, early warning systems, water management measures and ecosystem restoration.

The project also supported the inclusion of adaptation priorities in Indigenous and Afro-descendant development plans, while promoting culturally sensitive and community-led adaptation approaches that combined scientific and traditional knowledge.

ACHIEVED OUTCOMES

The project strengthened the adaptive capacity of Afro-descendant and Awá communities by combining ancestral knowledge, food security, ecosystem restoration, and climate adaptation. Ten participatory methodologies were adopted to integrate scientific and traditional knowledge, while ethnobotanical studies identified 112 native and local species that support food security, resilience, and cultural heritage. The project also established two botanical gardens for the conservation of native seeds and promoted intergenerational knowledge exchange through cross-border learning activities.



Building Adaptive Capacity through Food and Nutrition Security and Peacebuilding Actions in Vulnerable Afro and Indigenous Communities – Project Completion Report.
PHOTO CREDIT: WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

Category	Achieved outcomes
Beneficiaries	25,987 direct beneficiaries reached, of which 52% women.
Early warning systems	Climate information and monitoring system established in Ecuador with 26 weather stations; community-based Early Warning System designed in Colombia.
Natural assets protected or rehabilitated	15,282 hectares of forests and mangroves protected, restored, or placed under conservation measures across Colombia and Ecuador.

Source: Final Evaluation of the Binational Adaptation Project in Colombia and Ecuador (April 2024).



Building Adaptive Capacity through Food and Nutrition Security and Peacebuilding Actions in Vulnerable Afro and Indigenous Communities – Project Completion Report.
PHOTO CREDIT: WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

CASE STUDY:

INDONESIA



PHOTO CREDIT: ADAPTATION FUND

Adapting to Climate Change through Sustainable Integrated Watershed Governance in Indigenous People of Ammatoa Kajang Customary Area in **Bulukumba Regency**

Country:	Indonesia
Implementing entity:	Partnership for Governance Reform of Indonesia (Kemitraan) (NIE)
Amount:	USD 1,125,015
Project duration:	2021-2024
Status:	Closed

The Ammatoa Kajang are an indigenous community of 48,411 people living across 36 villages in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, whose customary territory of approximately 22,592 hectares has been governed for generations under customary law. Their culture is deeply rooted in the traditional philosophy of Pasang ri Kajang, a system that regulates land use, forest management, and sustainability principles in forest and natural resource management. Central to this heritage is the 313.99-hectare Kajang customary forest, which serves as a vital ecological buffer and meeting point for three major watersheds. However, climate change is disrupting this balance with seasonal flooding destroying rice crops, prolonged droughts affecting water availability, and seawater intrusion degrading coastal ecosystems and livelihoods. Despite growing climate pressures, customary governance in the Ammatoa Kajang community had received limited recognition in formal planning, and no district-level climate adaptation plans were in place.

In this context, the Adaptation Fund provided over USD 1 million to strengthen climate resilience in the Ammatoa Kajang customary territory. The project focused on four main components, including sustainable integrated watershed management, climate-adaptive livelihoods, policy advocacy, and awareness-raising, while safeguarding and strengthening the cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge that underpin Ammatoa Kajang's relationship with the landscape. By enabling a low-cost, community-based conservation model, the project showcases the potential of small grants delivered through national entities to support locally led adaptation.

ACHIEVED OUTCOMES

The project strengthened climate resilience by combining indigenous knowledge with formal watershed governance and planning. It established the Bulukumba Regency Watershed Coordination Forum, bringing together government, academics, private-sector actors, women, indigenous groups, and traditional leaders to support inclusive decision-making and to recognize and document local ecological knowledge.

At the community level, the project promoted climate-resilient livelihoods through sustainable rice cultivation across 210 hectares, 150 hectares of agroforestry, 50 hectares of banana cultivation, home gardens, and soil conservation measures. These activities improved food security, diversified incomes, and restored degraded landscapes, while training more than 520 community members and engaging 250 local leaders and traditional authorities in climate-resilient adaptation strategies and watershed management.



Adapting to Climate Change through Sustainable Integrated Watershed Governance in Indigenous People of Ammatoa Kajang Customary Area in Bulukumba Regency – Indonesia.
PHOTO CREDIT: ADAPTATION FUND

Category	Achieved outcomes
Beneficiaries	2,045 direct and indirect beneficiaries.
Households	225 households are benefiting from the utilization of home yards as a source of additional income while supporting local food security.
Natural assets protected or rehabilitated	314 hectares of the Kajang Customary Forest are protected.

Source: Evaluation of the climate change adaptation program through sustainable integrated watershed governance for indigenous communities in the Ammatoa Kajang customary area, Bulukumba Regency. (2025)



Adapting to Climate Change through Sustainable Integrated Watershed Governance in Indigenous People of Ammatoa Kajang Customary Area in Bulukumba Regency – Indonesia.
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Methods

Data are drawn from the Adaptation Fund's portfolio database (226 projects as of June 2026), which is classified using the GGA thematic area typology based on project documentation. Core indicator values represent expected or achieved results as recorded in approved project documents or evaluation reports respectively, extracted through an AI-assisted protocol.



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Nature-based Climate Adaptation Programme for the Urban Areas of Penang Island.
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