FINAL REPORT

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE "ACCELERATING THE GLOBAL TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE" PROJECT

Prepared by Altai Consulting for IUCN | December 2025

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFD	Agence française de développement
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
AGSTA	Accelerating the Global Transition to Sustainable Agriculture
APEFA	Action pour la Protection de l'Environnement et la Promotion des Filières Agricoles
ARO	Asia Regional Office
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CECON	Centre of Conservationist Studies of Guatemala
CGD	Common Ground Dialogues
CIFOR - ICRAF	Center for International Forestry Research
CPF	Confédération Paysanne du Faso
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EAFF	East Africa Farmers Federation
ESARO	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
EURO	IUCN European Regional Office
EWMR	Embedding Integrated Water Resource Management
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FAS	Food and Agricultural Systems
FAST	Food and Agricultural Systems Team
FFEM	Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial
FFF	Forest and Farm Facility
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environnement Facility
IA	Internal agreement
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
LH	Land health
LHMF	Land Health Monitoring Framework
LOGMe	Land of Opportunity Global Mechanism
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MERIT	Mekong Delta Climate Resilience and Integrated Transfromation
MINAGRI	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NbS	Nature-based Solution
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECM	Other effective area-based conservation measures
ORMACC	Regional Office for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean
PACO	Central and West Africa Regional Programme
PSTA	Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation
RAB	Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Board
RCF	Regional Conservation Fora

SAT	Sustainable Agriculture in Tanzania
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSC	Species Survival Commission
STAR	Species Threat Abatement and Restoration
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFSS	UN Food Systems Summit
WCC	World Conservation Congress
LAHMP	Land Health Monitoring Platform
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
SE-CAC	Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council
GAHP	Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Accelerating the Global Transition to Sustainable Agriculture (AGSTA) project is a four-year initiative funded by the IKEA Foundation and implemented in six countries (India, Vietnam, Tanzania, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Burkina Faso), aimed to accelerate the integration of land health into sustainable agriculture as a nature-based solution to food and water insecurity and climate change. Conceived as a catalytic and exploratory initiative, the project successfully strengthened IUCN's institutional capacity and strategic positioning in the Food and Agricultural Systems (FAS) space, laying the foundations for long-term engagement in sustainable agriculture.

Key evaluation findings

Relevance. AGSTA was highly relevant to IUCN's strategic priorities and to global agendas on sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. The project played a catalytic role in shaping IUCN's vision for FAS and aligning institutional strategies with key international frameworks. Its outputs broadly reflected global and national priorities and addressed internal staff needs, particularly at headquarters. At the country level, the focus on Nature-based Solutions (NbS), land health, and biodiversity addressed pressing national priorities and was widely recognized by stakeholders as timely and contextually appropriate. However, country-level ownership was mixed, with engagement and influence strongest among institutional stakeholders and less pronounced for end users such as farmers and extension services. Moreover, the strategic framework lacked clarity on uptake, scaling, and systematic mechanisms to engage end users, limiting the translation of technical outputs into practical, on-the-ground impact.

Coherence. AGSTA demonstrated strong internal and external coherence, aligning closely with IUCN's strategic priorities and selected initiatives within the FAS Team's sphere, reinforcing IUCN's integrated approach to sustainable agriculture. These connections reinforced thematic consistency, facilitated knowledge sharing, and complemented ongoing country-level programmes. However, broader institutional integration was limited by structural barriers, fragmented planning, and reliance on bilateral agreements, which constrained cross-unit collaboration, joint ownership, and systematic uptake of outputs. Externally, AGSTA aligned well with global agendas and engaged actors such as FAO, CGIAR, and national ministries, but most partnerships have remained either informal to date or superficial with limited opportunities for co-designed tools, joint programming and workplans, and sustained impact.

Effectiveness. AGSTA performed strongly at the output level, delivering key technical and knowledge products such as the Land Health Monitoring Framework (LHMF), the sectoral adaptation of the NbS Standard, and biodiversity metrics, while successfully convening multi-stakeholder dialogues and allowing the preparation of investment proposals. However, outcome-level achievements were more modest, with limited evidence of systemic change or sustained uptake of tools and approaches. Effectiveness was shaped by a combination of strong institutional consolidation, strategic credibility, and trusted relationships, but constrained by short implementation windows, modest country-level budgets, limited piloting, and the absence of structured uptake or localisation strategies. Overall, AGSTA created foundational conditions for deeper impact in subsequent phases, with early indications that careful sequencing, local engagement, and capacity building can enhance the adoption of tools and integration into policy processes.

Efficiency. AGSTA was implemented efficiently and within budget, demonstrating adaptive financial management through strategic resource reallocation over its four-year cycle. Efficiency was further enhanced by alignment and cost-sharing with complementary IUCN initiatives and donor-funded projects, which promoted coherence and resource optimization. However, country-level budgets were modest relative to the project's scope, limiting localisation, piloting, and sustained uptake, while the breadth of activities diluted depth of delivery. Short timelines, limited staffing, and a HQ-centred coordination model constrained structured technical support, follow-up, and scaling

Sustainability. AGSTA catalysed significant institutional shifts, most notably the establishment of the FAST, but the long-term sustainability of these achievements depends on continued funding and deeper structural integration. Its tools and approaches demonstrated potential for ongoing use, particularly when connected to financing mechanisms. Sustainability was strongest where proactive staff actively linked outputs to existing systems, yet the project lacked systematic strategies for broader institutionalization.

Adaptation and learning. AGSTA demonstrated strong adaptive capacity at headquarters level, notably through iterative revisions to the Theory of Change (ToC) and refinement of technical tools. However, country-level adaptation was limited, constrained by insufficient co-design processes, operational guidance, and tailored Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems. MEL were introduced reactively and remained underdeveloped, limiting the project's ability to track outcomes, capture learning, or inform strategic decisions. Experience highlighted that field-level experimentation, structured uptake pathways, localised tools, continuity of dialogues, political traction, and durable partnerships are essential for translating outputs into sustainable influence, institutional learning, and long-term impact.

Recommendations

Category	Recommendations
Strategic recommendation	Prioritise depth over breadth by focusing on a limited number of countries with high political traction and delivery capacity
	Redraft the ToC to include assumptions (on political alignment, institutional readiness, etc.), reflect FAS' phased delivery model and define explicit external adoption pathways
	Rethink the purpose of CGD to ensure concrete impact
	Develop an outcome-oriented partnership and engagement strategy to amplify reach and scale impact
	Formalise a co-design process with country teams at inception to align expectations and capitalise on local opportunities
	Treat country-level adaptation, uptake, and internal integration as core design features
Operational recommendation	Consolidate deliverables into sequenced country packages to enhance depth and efficiency
	Align CGDs with mapped policy or financing windows and establish structured follow-up mechanisms
	Develop a standard localisation and uptake plan for each tool to ensure outputs are actionable at field level
	Integrate MEL from inception to track influence and guide adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

Globally, transforming food systems is increasingly recognised as essential to tackling critical environmental and development challenges, including biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, and water insecurity. Agriculture is both a major driver of these crises and a key part of the solution. Sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agricultural practices are essential to restore Land Health (LH), conserve biodiversity, support climate resilience, and ensure food security. Despite growing global commitments, including the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), efforts to integrate biodiversity, climate, and agriculture remain limited, and coordination between conservation and agricultural actors is often fragmented.

Within this context, IUCN has progressively integrated sustainable agriculture into its agenda, notably through the launch of the Sustainable Agriculture and Land Health Initiative in January 2021 and the Accelerating the Global Transition to Sustainable Agriculture (AGSTA) project (2021–2025), supported by the IKEA Foundation. AGSTA has strengthened IUCN's capacity, established the Food and Agricultural Systems Team (FAST), fostered cross-sector collaboration, and embedded food systems into strategic frameworks, positioning agriculture as a core theme in upcoming programmes such as the Intersessional Programme 2026–2029[i].

This final evaluation takes place at a pivotal moment, offering an opportunity to consolidate learning, assess the project's relevance and adaptability, and inform decisions on how best to scale IUCN's engagement in sustainable agriculture in a way that is evidence-based, partner-responsive, and aligned with organisational priorities.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The overall objective of this final evaluation is to provide an independent and evidence-based assessment of the AGSTA project, in order to inform strategic decision-making on the future of IUCN's engagement in sustainable agriculture. The evaluation serves both accountability and learning purposes, reviewing the project's performance, extracting lessons learned, and supporting IUCN in assessing the potential for a new project building on AGSTA.

The evaluation is structured around six core the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria:

1. **Relevance** – to assess the project's alignment with institutional strategies, stakeholder needs, and global priorities.
2. **Coherence** – to examine the degree of internal coordination within IUCN and complementarity with external initiatives.
3. **Effectiveness** – to evaluate the extent to which the project achieved its intended results and contributed to broader change.
4. **Efficiency** – to analyse how well the project's resources, structures, and processes supported timely and cost-effective delivery.
5. **Sustainability** – to consider the likelihood that project results and institutional gains will endure beyond the project period.
6. **Learning and adaptation** – to capture lessons, adaptations, and innovations that can inform future programming and strategic direction.

The evaluation places particular emphasis on strategic and operational learning, including:

- Identifying good practices and areas for improvement in AGSTA's design and implementation, including tool development, country-level adaptation, and coordination between HQ, regional, and country teams, as well as how these experiences inform the broader work of the FAST.
- Assessing AGSTA's internal and external impact, including its contribution to strengthening IUCN's institutional capacity, positioning agriculture as a core programmatic theme, and clarifying IUCN's comparative advantage in promoting sustainable and biodiverse agricultural systems.
- Drawing lessons on partnerships, dialogue approaches, and scaling strategies to inform future engagement, including how to integrate technical tools, field delivery, and policy influence in a coherent, country-driven approach.

The evaluation also examined how gender and youth considerations were addressed as cross-cutting issues within AGSTA, including the extent and limitations of their integration.

Ultimately, the evaluation supports IUCN in understanding what AGSTA has achieved, where operational and strategic adaptations were effective, and how these insights can guide future initiatives in sustainable agriculture to maximise relevance, impact, and institutional learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. SCOPE

The AGSTA project is a four-year initiative (1 October 2021–31 December 2025) jointly developed by IUCN with a total budget of EUR 3,091,775 funded primarily by the IKEA Foundation with co-financing from IUCN and other partners.[1] The project aims to advance and expand IUCN's efforts to promote nature-positive food and agricultural systems (FAS) to drive the transition towards sustainable and multifunctional agricultural landscapes and contribute to resilient value chains. AGSTA is structured around three interconnected outcomes to be achieved by the end of 2025:

i) An IUCN vision and strategy for FAS transformation and sustainable agriculture are established and supported by key stakeholders.

ii) Increased awareness and evidence of sustainable agriculture's benefits through publishing frameworks, tools, and organising international events.

iii) Facilitated the transition toward sustainable agriculture by supporting internal and external stakeholders in identifying opportunities and developing strategic projects by 2025.

The project operates through a combination of policy advocacy, member engagement and dialogues, knowledge products development, and capacity building (both internally within IUCN and externally with partners). While AGSTA does not involve large-scale field implementation, it leverages targeted partnerships to influence policy and practices.

The project is implemented across six pilot countries (Rwanda, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Guatemala, India, Vietnam) through three main levels:

i) The FAST at the IUCN Secretariat leads the technical and programmatic coordination and facilitates collaboration with a broad network of international organisations, civil society organisations, research institutions, and government agencies.

ii) IUCN's regional offices – the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) in Nairobi and the Asia Regional Office (ARO) in Bangkok – provide regional oversight and technical backstopping.

iii) IUCN's country offices manage operational implementation, stakeholder engagement, and on-the-ground delivery of project activities.

2.2. OVERALL APPROACH AND TIMELINE

Altai applied a phased approach to this evaluation to ensure strategic focus, iterative refinement, and meaningful stakeholder engagement across IUCN levels. The assignment, conducted between May and December 2025, follows the sequence below:

1. **Inception (May–June 2025):** Altai refined the evaluation scope and methodology, identified stakeholders, and finalised the evaluation matrix and data collection tools.

2. **Data collection (June–July 2025):** The evaluation team conducted in-depth document review, two field visits to Rwanda and Vietnam, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and an online survey; Interviews were carried out in parallel across project levels, starting with IUCN teams at the secretariat, regional, and country levels to build a strong foundational understanding.

[1] Other funding source includes from the IUCN – France partnership.

3. **Analysis and reporting (July–December 2025):** Initial analysis and drafting were carried out in August 2025, resulting in the submission of a first draft report to IUCN FAST. This draft was reviewed by IUCN FAST at HQ and country levels as well by the Ikea Foundation, whose comments and inputs have been incorporated into the present version. This final version is therefore an updated and consolidated version of the August draft and includes key developments that took place between August and December 2025, as well as an executive summary. This final report is delivered in December 2025.

2.3. Analytical Framework

2.3.1. Evaluation matrix

The evaluation matrix in Annex 5.1 drew on the evaluation questions from the ToR, the updated AGSTA results framework, key findings from the Mid-Term Review (MTR) and its management response to define twelve focused evaluation questions. It also integrated insights from the inception interviews with IUCN FAST members, which clarified how the project has evolved, its strategic priorities, and how it operates in practice.

Evaluation questions and sub-questions are structured around adapted OECD-DAC criteria: **relevance** (alignment with institutional strategies, stakeholder needs, and global priorities); **coherence** (synergies within IUCN, national priorities, and complementarity with external initiatives); **effectiveness** (achievement of intended results and contributions to broader change); **efficiency** (use of resources, structures, and processes to enable timely, cost-effective delivery, and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)); **sustainability** (likelihood that results and institutional gains will endure beyond the project period); and **learning** (adaptations, innovations, and lessons for future programming). Together, these criteria guided the assessment of AGSTA's performance to date and helped identify forward-looking lessons for a potential next phase. In the final review phase, the evaluation team has added a few questions on gender and youth integration.

2.3.2. In-depth document review

Altai conducted an in-depth review of project-related and institutional documentation to inform the evaluation design and ensure alignment with the project's scope and objectives. The review drew on several categories of material:

- **Core project documentation** (original project proposal, annual progress and financial reports, the 2023 MTR and management response, examples of Internal Agreements (IA) with regional and country teams, and the updated 2024 Results Framework and Theory of Change (ToC)).
- **Country- and region-specific documentation** (national and regional Common Ground Dialogue (CDG) reports from the pilot countries, Nature-based Solution (NbS) guidance feedback reports, Land Health Monitoring Framework (LHMF) assessment reports, Regional Conservation Forum outputs, and country policy assessments).
- **MEL tools** (MEL indicators and tracking sheets, country-level reporting templates, and internal notes on evaluation design and progress measurement).
- **IUCN frameworks and knowledge products** (Nature 2030 Programme, The Land health monitoring framework[ii] and the associated guidance note, Operational Framework on Agriculture, IUCN Global Standard and Guidance for Nature-based Solutions, the flagship report on Agriculture and conservation, the *Policy and legal enabling conditions for sustainable agriculture*, the *Introduction to conservation and agriculture*[iii] online course, *Sustainable Agriculture and Nature-based Solutions*[iv], *Assessing the Biodiversity–Agriculture Nexus*[v], *Money Well Spent?*[vi], the 2023 IUCN Evaluation Policy[vii]).

- **Relevant external materials and policy references** (national strategies related to agroecology and biodiversity, key policy instruments supporting sustainable agriculture in pilot countries, and outputs from related platforms such as the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) or the Agroecology Coalition).

The full list of documents consulted throughout the evaluation is in Annex 4.3.

2.3.3. FIELD MISSIONS

Altai conducted two field missions: one in Rwanda (14–21 June 2025) and one in Vietnam (3–11 July 2025) to deepen understanding of the project's implementation at country level, in two continents where AGSTA operates. These countries were selected in agreement with IUCN during the inception phase based on criteria such as i) accessibility for the evaluation team, ii) potential for generating transferable insights, and iii) to explore areas where continued engagement may support learning and influence beyond the current project phase.

The data collection approach included semi-structured interviews and site observations. The evaluation team:

- Held individual interviews with IUCN country teams involved in project implementation, including country resident representatives, AGSTA project managers, communication specialists, MEL specialists, and admin and finance officers.
- Conducted consultations with key stakeholders and beneficiaries, including representatives from the ministries of agriculture and environment, universities and research institute experts engaged in tool assessments, partner conservation and agriculture Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and representatives from farmers organisations.
- Visited key sites of IUCN interventions. In Rwanda, the team visited Sebeya and Arusha (in the western province) and in Vietnam two Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) sites, the Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve and the lotus farm pilot project site in the Dong Thap province.
- Participated in the 3rd CGD in Rwanda (Rubavu, 19-20 June 2025) observing the activity's implementation approach of the activity and the exchanges between stakeholders.

Figure 1: 3rd CGD in Rubavu, Rwanda

Figure 2: Lotus farm in Dong Thap, Vietnam

2.3.4. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Altai conducted online KIIs in parallel with the country missions. The initial interviews were held with representatives from IUCN teams involved in the project (project management, regional and country staff, tools development, MEL, communication), followed by representatives from IKEA Foundation and key partners such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The full list of **41 informants** is provided in Annex 4.2.

The interviews provided a comprehensive overview of AGSTA's achievements across global, regional, and institutional levels. The KIIs focused on priority areas of inquiry identified through the document review and field visits, namely:

- Project implementation and outcomes across all AGSTA countries.
- Stakeholder engagement and complementarity between AGSTA's different levels of intervention.
- Perceived relevance and added value of the AGSTA approach in various contexts.
- Sustainability and potential for replication or scaling initiatives.
- Coordination and collaboration between IUCN teams (Secretariat, regional and country offices) and with external partners.

Interview guides were tailored to each stakeholder group and refined throughout the process, based on emerging themes from the early phases of data collection and the evaluation matrix.

2.3.5. ONLINE SURVEY

To complement the interviews and ensure broader participation, Altai designed and administered a short online survey. The survey targeted partners who were not consulted through interviews, including regional and country office staff, project collaborators, and members of relevant internal or external networks.

The online survey was structured around the key questions from the evaluation matrix, combining a mix of open- and close-ended questions. It was available in three languages (French, English, and Spanish) and was disseminated via Google Forms.

Its objectives were to:

- Broaden the evidence base and test the salience of emerging findings.
- Capture perceptions on the relevance and perceived value of selected project outputs and engagement approaches.
- Gather insight into awareness and visibility of the project across IUCN and partner networks.
- Contribute to identifying learning priorities or potential areas of focus for future programming.

The survey was also shared with IUCN teams who disseminated directly to relevant partners. In total, **10 responses** were collected out of 21 people directly contacted, representing a response rate of approximately 48%. The list of 21 recipients included country project managers, who were encouraged to share the survey further with downstream partners and stakeholders. Results were disaggregated and analysed thematically alongside other data sources.

2.4. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The evaluation was designed to ensure broad coverage and meaningful engagement across IUCN levels. Nevertheless, a number of challenges constrained data collection and analysis:

- **Availability of key informants:** particularly at the regional and country levels, scheduling constraints limited access to some interviewees, such as representatives from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the private sector (both during and after the field missions). This affected the overall depth of data collection. Altai relied on the support of country office staff and the project team at the Secretariat level to facilitate scheduling where possible. The field mission to Rwanda coincided with the organisation of the national CGD, which limited stakeholders' availability for in-depth interviews.

- **Low response rate to the online survey:** Despite repeated follow-ups and efforts to disseminate the survey widely, only 10 responses were received mainly from IUCN Tanzania, IUCN European Regional Office (EURO), representatives from Biovision Foundation and the IKEA Foundation. No responses were received from partners at the country level, which further limited the representativeness and utility of the survey findings.
- **Ongoing implementation**: This evaluation captures progress up to December 2025. *It should also be noted that the project benefited from a no-cost extension covering the first quarter of 2026. Field activities were completed in December 2025, while a limited number of headquarters-based activities and final closure processes may continue into the first quarter of 2026.* While most planned outputs had been completed by this stage, some key institutional and partnership-related elements such as the formal signing of MoUs with CGIAR and FAO were still pending, despite the agreements being technically finalised. In parallel, a few countries are still in the process of developing project proposals building on AGSTA's foundations. Some knowledge products such as the sectoral adaptation of the global NbS standards and the Land Health Monitoring Platform, the work on STAR metrics adaptation are being revised or finalised to reflect recent developments or partners' needs before their official launch. As a result, certain longer-term outcomes, including the operationalisation of joint workplans, the establishment of co-funding mechanisms, and the mobilisation of new funding, are likely to continue evolving beyond the timeframe of this evaluation.
- **Limited evidence on gender integration:** Although gender was identified as a cross-cutting issue, the documentation reviewed and interviews with IUCN staff at HQ and country levels yielded limited evidence on how gender considerations were operationalised beyond participation in events, or on the outcomes achieved. Consequently, gender integration is reflected mainly in the evaluation's learning-oriented analysis (section 3.6.3) rather than as a results-based assessment.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. RELEVANCE

3.1.1. CATALYTIC IN SHAPING IUCN'S STRATEGIC VISION ON FAS

AGSTA was not only aligned with IUCN's strategic direction on food and agriculture, but it was instrumental in shaping it. Rather than being guided by existing institutional priorities, the project anticipated them and provided the foundations for IUCN's new FAS vision and ToC. Its adaptive design allowed it to evolve in step with institutional shifts, and its revised results framework now mirrors the core pillars of IUCN's FAS strategy[2].This catalytic role was rooted in the project's origins. Launched in October 2021 under the "production landscapes" priority area of the *Nature 2030 Programme*[viii], AGSTA built on the 2020 Common Ground: restoring LH for sustainable agriculture[ix] report and was closely tied to the Director General's Initiative on Agriculture and Land Health[3x]. AGSTA's trajectory mirrored IUCN's evolving priorities, reflecting and reinforcing the institution's growing emphasis on sustainable agriculture. Initially centred on mainstreaming LH and promoting NbS to address food security and climate resilience, AGSTA progressively expanded its thematic scope to integrate agroecology, biodiversity metrics, and regenerative practices; areas that would later become central to IUCN's FAS vision. This strategic positioning and flexible design enabled AGSTA to influence IUCN's emerging priorities, demonstrating a proactive approach to aligning project activities with institutional goals for food and agricultural systems transformation.

AGSTA shaped institutional tools and approaches, such as the LHMF, the associated guidance note[xi] and the Land Health Monitoring Platform (LAHMP) to inform biodiversity indicators in agroecosystems, and the sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard[4], which established minimum criteria for applying the Global Standard in agricultural contexts. Its work on biodiversity metrics included adapting the Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) metric for agriculture, supported by technical contributions like papers on integrating sustainable practices into STAR[5]. AGSTA also advanced IUCN's work on understanding the conservation status of soil biodiversity by tracking the conservation status of soil-dependent species through the Red List of Threatened Species[xii], finalizing the definition of "soil species" in 2024 and publishing over 500 species. In addition, the project contributed to work on the Red List of Ecosystems, with a focus on agroecosystems. In parallel, AGSTA demonstrated IUCN's convening power by launching the CGDs, which brought together stakeholders from conservation, agriculture, civil society, and the private sector.

AGSTA played a pivotal role in institutionalising sustainable agriculture within IUCN, by helping establish the FAST and filling a long-standing structural gap. Prior to AGSTA, the majority of agriculture-related initiatives were implemented at the national and regional levels, some were led by the Water and Land team (such as the SUSTAIN initiative) or under the Forest and Grassland team (such as the Forest and Farm Facility or the Forest Landscape Restoration initiative[6]), others embedded within NbS and ecosystem management work. However, these efforts were fragmented and lacked a global-level team to provide technical guidance and ensure strategic coherence across IUCN's work.

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[2] (i) Promote dialogue and more enabling policy and legal frameworks; (ii) Produce and disseminate knowledge, metrics and frameworks, and strengthen capacity; (iii) Support landscape and value chain action.
[3] IUCN Director General's statement for World Food Day, October 2021
[4] The IUCN agriculture guidance for the IUCN Global Standard for NbS will be released and launched in October 2025 at the WCC.
[5] Antonin Vergez's work in 2024.
[6] The Forest Landscape Restoration is a global framework for restoring ecological functionality in degraded forest areas. It aims to restore 200,000 ha of degraded land, leverage EUR 20 million of funds, contribute to the sequestration of 500,000 tonnes of CO2e, and improve the biodiversity and livelihoods of local communities in Brazil, Colombia, Madagascar, Peru, Tanzania, and Uganda.

AGSTA's contribution to establishing the first dedicated Food and Agriculture Systems Team (FAST) in 2023 consolidated these strands and elevated food and agriculture from a peripheral concern to a recognised organisational mandate. The new team now provides technical and strategic leadership across the Secretariat, ensuring that food and agricultural systems is systematically integrated into IUCN's broader portfolio, including work on NbS, ecosystem restoration, and related thematic areas. This shift not only brought coherence and visibility internally but also positioned IUCN as a credible actor in global food system debates – an area where the Union had previously struggled to gain traction.

AGSTA's catalytic role is most clearly reflected in IUCN's adoption of FAS transformation as one of eight institutional priorities in the 2025-2029 Programme[7]. AGSTA's early work on LH, NbS, and biodiversity metrics helped IUCN establish credibility in this space and directly informed the decision to recognise FAS transformation as one of IUCN's eight institutional priorities. In doing so, AGSTA not only aligned with strategy but expanded IUCN's scope, opened new arenas of influence, and laid the groundwork for agriculture to feature in IUCN's 20-year vision, *Unite for Nature: on the path to 2045*[xiii].This positioning was subsequently consolidated through the official approval of FAS as a core mandate at the World Conservation Congress (WCC), including through the voting and adoption of several motions closely aligned with FAS objectives. These included, for instance, Motion 002[xiv] on accelerating action for nature-positive, sustainable agriculture and food systems, which calls on IUCN to expand partnerships with the agri-food sector to reduce environmental impacts; mobilise funding and co-develop research and on-the-ground projects; establish a cross-commission working group on agriculture and food systems to develop tools, guidance, and recommendations; and create an Expert Group on Soil Biodiversity to advance the science and practice of soil health. The resolution also requests IUCN State Members to strengthen policy coherence between agri-food systems and conservation agendas, support ecosystem services, agroecology, and other sustainable approaches, and pursue ambitious commitments on climate action. Together, these developments mark a shift from project-based engagement to an institutional mandate, with FAS now firmly embedded as a core area of IUCN's work.

3.1.2. Positioned IUCN as a credible actor in sustainable agriculture through dialogue and knowledge tools

AGSTA positioned IUCN as a trusted convener at the intersection of agriculture and conservation. Through CGDs in the six pilot countries, the project created structured and neutral platforms that brought together ministries, farmer organisations, academia, private sector, civil society, and conservation stakeholders. These dialogues gave IUCN visibility in spaces where it had not previously been active. In Rwanda, for instance, the first national dialogue in April 2023 proved particularly impactful, catalysing collaboration between the Ministries of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) and the Ministry of Environment (MoE)[8][xv]. It also paved the way for IUCN to join the Rwandan Regenerative and Conservation in Agriculture coalition, alongside the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and to contribute to the design of the country's fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (SPAT 5)[xvi]. Building on this momentum, IUCN Rwanda signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the MoE to further advance sustainable agriculture. In Vietnam, the CGD in Can Tho (October 2023) brought together the newly merged Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, research institutes, and development partners, demonstrating IUCN's neutrality and convening power[xvii]. In India, the dialogue in New Delhi (December 2023) allowed the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, state agencies, and community actors (civil society, academia, international organisations, private sector) to define shared priorities and build consensus on sustainable agriculture in India, marking IUCN's first substantive engagement in the sector[xviii]. The event culminated in a 'Common Ground Declaration' signed by participants, outlining seven areas of convergence and demonstrating a shared commitment to sustainable agriculture. Building on this momentum, a second national CGD in New Delhi in August 2025 focused specifically

[7] The official IUCN 2026-2029 programme is being finalised for approval at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October 2025.
[8] Source: Alexandre Rutika, technical advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources of the Republic of Rwanda

on agriculture in high-biodiversity areas. A background study conducted in September analysed trends in cropland expansion around protected areas and buffer zones, and the study results were presented during the dialogue. Additional technical sessions complemented the discussions, providing evidence-based insights and fostering exchanges between stakeholders from agriculture and conservation sectors.

Beyond the national-level engagements, AGSTA also supported regional convening efforts that extended IUCN's convening role across borders. Notably, in October 2023, IUCN, together with the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and under the leadership of Uganda's Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, co-convened a regional CGD on mainstreaming sustainable agriculture in Eastern and Southern Africa. Building on national dialogues held in Tanzania and Rwanda, the event brought together public and private sector actors, farmer organisations, civil society, academia, and regional institutions from more than ten countries. The dialogue provided a neutral platform to share experiences, align priorities, and promote climate-resilient and biodiversity-positive farming approaches at regional scale, further reinforcing IUCN's credibility as a trusted convener. In June 2025, as well, IUCN, together with the Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (SE-CAC) and with support from KfW, co-organised the regional dialogue *"Hacia paisajes productivos, sostenibles y biodiversos en México y la región del SICA"* in San José, Costa Rica[xix]. The event brought together representatives from governments, producers (from small, medium, and large-scale farms, including indigenous and family farming), civil society, research institutions, and international cooperation partners. Over three days, participants exchanged experiences and best practices on integrating sustainable agriculture, climate-resilient practices, and NbS into productive landscapes.

The WCC served as a major global convening platform where the FAST demonstrated IUCN's convening power at the intersection of agriculture, biodiversity, and climate. The FAST organized around 12 side events that attracted diverse stakeholders, including ministries of agriculture from pilot countries, IUCN member NGOs, stakeholders in the conservation field, and farmer organizations. For instance, a high-level session highlighted the nexus of water, food, climate, and biodiversity, providing a space for strategic dialogue and reinforcing IUCN's role as a neutral and trusted convener on global sustainable agriculture and biodiversity issues.

Across contexts, these dialogues established IUCN's reputation as a systems-level convener able to bridge sectors, which represented a clear break from the past.

AGSTA strengthened IUCN's reputation as a credible technical and knowledge actor in sustainable agriculture. Stakeholders in the sustainable agriculture community interviewed during the data collection phase such as representatives from the ministry of agriculture, sectoral experts involved in tool applicability assessments, mainly recognise IUCN's technical expertise in integrating biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into agricultural systems through evidence-based metrics and guidance notes. The project generated a suite of tools and knowledge products that were valued both internally and externally. Flagship outputs such as the 'Agriculture and Conservation'[xx] report, along with the LHMF, and the sectoral adaptation of the NbS standard, were widely recognised by governments, donors, and research institutions as credible, evidence-based contributions. The flagship report explored the complex relationship between agriculture and biodiversity, calling for integrated policies that promote both food security and environmental conservation. It was used, for instance, by the World Bank to inform its latest report, to which IUCN's team contributed.

The LHMF provided a holistic, multi-scale, systematic, evidence-based approach to assessing and managing land ecosystem health within agricultural landscapes. Its components namely (i) the conceptual framework, (ii) the step-by-step guidance note, and (iii) the forthcoming web-based Platform enable users to design monitoring protocols, integrate field and GIS data, visualize progress, and align interventions with national and international climate and biodiversity conservation commitments. IUCN's work on the LHMF has generated significant external interest, leading to emerging partnerships across the private sector, development institutions, and research organizations. Companies such as Nestlé, Nespresso, and Inditex have engaged with IUCN to explore adaptations of the framework to their value

chains. Development actors, including the World Bank, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), FAO, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), have expressed interest in applying the LHMF in project design and monitoring, while research institutions, including the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centres, Cornell University, the Smithsonian Institution, and universities in China have sought collaborations for data sharing, tool co-development, and methodological refinement. Foundations focused on biodiversity have also indicated support for applying the framework to advance conservation and sustainable agriculture objectives.

Meanwhile the NbS Standard adaptation made the concept practically applicable in the agriculture sector. In several geographies including Vietnam, Rwanda, and ORMAC region, IUCN is already providing technical guidance to decision-makers to identify, assess, and promote agricultural NbS interventions. In Vietnam, for example, Can Tho University and the Dragon Institute integrated the sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard into their research and teaching, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment included it in the development of a Green Climate Fund (GCF) proposal.

Other knowledge products, such as the disaggregation of STAR metrics for agricultural threat abatement and work on soil species developed in collaboration with Species Survival Commission (SSC)[xxi], strengthened IUCN's internal capacity while also engaging specialised technical audiences.

Collectively, these tools and knowledge products reinforced IUCN's authority in sustainable agriculture, positioning the organisation as a credible solutions provider and a hub for evidence-based approaches to integrating biodiversity and ecosystem health into agricultural systems. They also created new entry points with governments, donors, and academic institutions.

3.1.3. CONSISTENT ALIGNMENT WITH GLOBAL AND NATIONAL POLICY PRIORITIES ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

AGSTA demonstrated strong relevance by aligning with global and national agendas on agriculture, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Its thematic focus resonated with international frameworks such as the SDGs, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). Strategic tools such as the LHMF, the sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard, and the flagship report on agroecological transitions respond to global calls for integrated, evidence-based solutions to food and biodiversity challenges. These knowledge products were showcased at major policy platforms: CBD COP16 (October 2024), UNCCD COP16 (December 2024), UNFCCC COPs 2022-2023-2024, and the FAO Committee on World Food Security (October 2023). Their visibility strengthened IUCN's credibility and influence in international debates on sustainable agriculture and food systems[xxii]. The FAST also contributed to high-profile dialogues, such as the *Nurturing the Seeds of Regenerative Agriculture* event at the IUCN Leaders Forum and a biodiversity credits session at the 2024 Agrobiodiversity Conference[xxiii]. In 2025, IUCN further reinforced its engagement in global food systems debates through active participation in the UN Food Systems Summit process, including UNFSS+4, where it championed soil health as a foundational element of sustainable and resilient food systems. IUCN also participated in the Copenhagen Organic Summit 2025, contributing to discussions on organic and agroecological transitions and their role in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Additionally, the FAST contributed to several regional conservation forums and events. In 2024, IUCN ARO participated in several sessions of the Asia Regional Conservation Forum in Bangkok (Thailand), covering topics such as transforming agri-food systems, applying the NbS standard, and LHM[xxiv]. Similarly, the Africa Regional Conservation Forum held in Nairobi (Kenya) featured several sessions on sustainable agriculture and ecosystem restoration through NbS, as well as discussions on scaling up NbS financing. The forum fostered stronger linkages between the food, agriculture, and conservation communities, paving the way for a shared vision and joint action in Africa. It also resulted in the identification of concrete areas of collaboration with key partners in the continent such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

Beyond formal policy and technical fora, IUCN also engaged with emerging constituencies, including through its participation in the Africa Food Systems Forum held in Dakar in 2025, highlighting the role of youth leadership and innovation in driving sustainable and inclusive food systems transformation. The Europe, North and Central Asia forum held in Bruges (Belgium) also included members and commissions consultation on the draft 20 years vision and on collaboration opportunities within the FAS ecosystem. It resulted in the identification of areas of collaboration with the French National Committee and Dialogue Matters. This visibility increased IUCN's recognition among donors and partners, consolidating its role as a key player in shaping global food system transformation.

At the country level, AGSTA's relevance was consistently recognised by all country project managers and local stakeholders interviewed. They all widely recognized the pertinence of the project's core themes, especially NbS, biodiversity conservation, and LH, in addressing the specific challenges faced by the agriculture sector in their contexts. For instance, in Rwanda, where soil erosion and land degradation are among the most pressing issues, AGSTA's focus on land health and sustainable land management directly responded to national priorities. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, where the overuse of chemical fertilisers and inputs poses a major threat to soil fertility and ecosystem health, the project's promotion of agroecology and NbS approaches was particularly relevant. In Vietnam, the project supported the implementation of NbS and regenerative agriculture in line with Resolution 120 (2017)[xxv] on sustainable development in the Mekong Delta and the Mekong Delta Master Plan (2021–2030)[xxvi], piloting flood-based agriculture (lotus fish model) and contributing to a GFC proposal. In Rwanda, it informed SPAT 4 (2018-2024) and 5 (2024-2029), facilitated collaboration between MINAGRI and MoE, and tested tools such as the NbS standard and LHMF within the dialogue platforms. In Burkina Faso, it complemented the Second National Rural Sector Programme (PNSR II)[xxvii] and the Climate-Smart Agriculture Investment Plan[xxviii], promoting agroecology and sustainable land management. In India, it echoed national goals under the *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana* (PKVY)[xxix] and the Mahatma Ghandi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)[xxx] schemes, supporting soil health and livelihoods through dialogues in Bihar and Jharkhand. In Guatemala, the project's emphasis on species-level biodiversity in agricultural landscapes supported national programmes such as the Program to Promote the Establishment, Recovery, Restoration, Management, Production, and Protection of Forests (PROBOSQUE)[9] and *Programa de Incentivos Forestales para Propietarios de Pequeñas Extensiones* (PINPEP)[10]. In Tanzania, AGSTA's work aligned with the National Ecological and Organic Agriculture Strategy (NEOAS)[11][xxxi], the Agriculture Sector Development Programme (ASDP) phase II[12], and SUSTAIN projects[13], contributing to discussions on biodiversity, soil health, and climate resilience and initiating engagement with national banks on integrating NbS into investment frameworks.

3.1.4. STRENGTHENED TECHNICAL CAPACITIES ACROSS IUCN BUT LIMITED COUNTRY-LEVEL OWNERSHIP

AGSTA strengthened the technical capacities of IUCN staff, particularly within the FAST at HQ and among AGSTA teams at the country level. The project's outputs and tools (such as the LHMF,

[9] Incentive mechanism established in Guatemala to stimulate forest restoration, increase climate resilience, and spur economic growth.
[10] Guatemalan forestry incentive program, established in 2010, that provides economic support and technical assistance to smallholder farmers and communities aiming to enhance biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and improve livelihoods
[11] Tanzania's National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (NEOAS) officially launched in November 2023 during the 3rd National Ecological Organic Agriculture Conference in Dodoma. It lays out a transformative vision for agricultural development from 2023 to 2030, aiming to mainstream ecological and organic farming into national policy and practice
[12]The ASDP II aims at transforming the agricultural sector (crops, livestock & fisheries) towards higher productivity, commercialization level and smallholder farmer income for improved livelihood, food and nutrition security and contribution to the GDP.
[13] SUSTAIN projects in Tanzania include SUSTAIN Pro (2022-2025) and SUSTAIN Eco (2023-2025) which both built on the foundation of SUSTAIN Phase 1 (2013-2018). SUSTAIN Pro focuses on sustainable agriculture, food systems, and productive growth, while SUSTAIN Eco focuses on ecosystem stewardship, biodiversity, and economic resilience.

NbS standard, CGDs, STAR metrics adaptation, legal reviews) filled longstanding gaps in knowledge and provided a shared technical language across levels. This gave staff a more confident basis for engagement with different stakeholders. The LHMF, supported by targeted training, equipped staff to assess LH and present evidence-based arguments to local authorities and investors. The sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard translated the Global Standard into practical criteria, helping teams design and adapt agricultural projects. In Rwanda, these tools informed policy discussions between the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, while in India they supported Conservation and Growth Dialogues in Bihar and Jharkhand. The CGDs further developed staff capacity to convene diverse actors and align national plans with international commitments.

However, while the project aligned closely with the thematic priorities of IUCN pilot country offices, most of national teams reported mixed levels of ownership. Country project managers across all geographies widely acknowledged the relevance of AGSTA's core themes and valued the flexibility they had in implementing activities such as the CGDs. Yet, some of them stated that their role often remained largely operational, with limited space to shape tool design or project framing. This limited sense of ownership appears to stem primarily from staffing dynamics and the insufficient integration of country-level implementation realities into project design and decision making. In most pilot countries, project managers joined AGSTA midway through implementation, after the main design decisions had already been taken. Combined with a high turnover rate within several country offices, this hindered continuity and constrained opportunities for teams to influence strategic direction. In contrast, this perception was not shared in Burkina Faso, where the head of programmes had been involved since the design phase and reported feeling fully included in decision-making and design processes. Short implementation windows and modest budgets further reinforced an operational rather than strategic role for national teams. In India and Tanzania, country teams found the CGDs to be effective entry points for dialogue but pointed out the absence of operational or financial linkages to wider IUCN country programming. Similarly, staff in Latin America emphasised the need for stronger mechanisms to integrate AGSTA with existing projects and regional strategies. These examples suggest that these country teams were often insufficiently involved in project design, limiting their ability to influence strategic decisions and ensure contextual relevance. In retrospect, earlier engagement of country and regional head of programmes during project design, coupled with mechanisms to ensure feedback from country programme managers inform project decision and operational approaches, could have strengthened internal ownership and better embedded AGSTA within country realities.

This contrast reflects a nuanced dynamic between project design and implementation. Headquarters staff emphasised that AGSTA intentionally allowed country teams flexibility to determine dialogue formats and approaches, with minimal prescriptive guidance. Yet, for some national staff, this autonomy did not translate into a meaningful sense of influence over project design, contributing to perceptions of limited ownership. There perceptions were also shaped by short implementation windows and modest country budgets. The project deliberately adopted a light structure to test approaches and entry points before scaling. As a result, opportunities to fully leverage AGSTA's potential, whether to align with country pipelines, strengthen internal ownership, or expand engagement with national partners were not always realised.

3.1.5. A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK THAT LACKED CLARITY ON UPTAKE, SCALING, AND END-USER RELEVANCE

Despite AGSTA's progress in strengthening IUCN's positioning and generating credible tools, its strategic framework shows limitations in uptake, scaling, and end-user relevance. The 2024 revision of the ToC following the MTR, represented a meaningful step forward by clarifying three core outcomes: building institutional capacity, generating evidence, and facilitating change at field and policy levels. Despite these improvements, the ToC remains largely inward-looking, emphasising internal positioning and upstream influence, with limited clarity on how outputs are expected to drive downstream impact. The project's broad scope, while appropriate during its exploratory phase, has reduced focus on key leverage points such as LH and NbS, constraining its potential to achieve targeted

and transformative outcomes. This limitation largely reflects the design choices made to prioritize experimentation over immediate downstream impact, rather than a shortcoming in implementation. However, with hindsight, greater emphasis on linking outputs explicitly to field-level or policy-level uptake, namely through pilot activities (ex: training sessions) or clearer pathways could have strengthened the potential for direct and measurable impact. For example, selected groups of farmers or agricultural extension services could have been involved in training sessions on NbS concepts and tools, with practical guidance on how to implement best practices across all countries. Beyond the training, these actors could have also participated in reflective discussions to help tailor the tools to their specific local contexts. This would have allowed the project to demonstrate tangible benefits on the ground, generate localized evidence of impact, and create pathways for scaling these approaches more broadly. That said, some efforts were made in this direction. In Burkina Faso and Vietnam for instance, capacity-building workshops were organized involving technical services responsible for agriculture at communal level as well as groups of farmers along with actors in the agriculture and conservation fields. However, these workshops were conducted as one-off events. There was no structured follow-up to support the adaptation of tools to local contexts or to gather feedback from participants. This limited the potential for deeper engagement, contextualization, and sustained use of the tools at the local level. In terms of policy uptake, CGDs could have engaged sectoral actors and policymakers in co-designing official guidelines, extension programs, or incentive schemes related to the LHMF or NbS, thereby directly inform policy decisions and scaling pathways.

The AGSTA logframe also provides limited guidance on end-user relevance, with the concept of "beneficiaries" remaining ambiguous in the project's original design. This reflects a deliberate design choice: AGSTA's primary objective was to strengthen IUCN's internal capacities, tools, and positioning in the agriculture-conservation interface, with external beneficiaries expected to be reached indirectly through institutional engagement and policy influence. While this internal focus was appropriate for a pilot and exploratory phase, the project could have articulated more clearly in its ToC how internal capacity-building and knowledge generation were expected to translate into downstream effects. In practice, AGSTA's added value was strongest among institutional stakeholders, less so for end users. Farmers and value-chain actors were not defined as direct beneficiaries, and their priorities were not systematically assessed. Engagement with producer organisations has been largely indirect, mediated through policy stakeholders, regional networks, or side events, rather than embedded within core planning or tool validation. As a result, the project's influence on agricultural practices and field-level decision-making is largely assumed rather than evidenced. Similarly, the ToC does not clearly distinguish between internal users, such as IUCN teams and Commissions, and external actors, such as government agencies, CSOs, or producers. While outputs like the LHMF and NbS standard have been applied in specific contexts, for example by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment in Vietnam, these applications remain largely ad hoc, lacking systematic strategies for institutionalisation or follow-up.

The project's catalytic role is acknowledged in the ToC, but pathways for translating tools, partnerships, and convening power into broader change remain underdeveloped. For example, the CGDs are widely valued across contexts for their ability to convene diverse stakeholders. Despite their strong perceived value, the lack of a replication or sustainability plan limits their potential to drive systemic change. Similarly, while AGSTA's tools and knowledge products are technically robust and well-received, they require explicit strategies to ensure uptake by institutional end-users (like extension services) and field-level actors, integration into national systems, and alignment with funding mechanisms. Without well-articulated pathways for scaling and embedding these resources, the project risks generating momentum that cannot be sustained or translated into meaningful policy or practice. For instance, the project could have strengthened impact by clearly defining, for each tool or approach, how it could be adapted to different contexts, what resources would be required, and which partnerships would be necessary. Engagement of national extension services, technical experts from ministries, and other relevant actors on the LH and NbS could have ensured that tools and methodologies addressed operational needs and were more likely to be integrated into routine planning and decision-making.

Complementary measures, such as training or technical support, combined with follow-up mechanisms would have reinforced uptake and helped translate outputs into sustained institutional and field-level change.

AGSTA's partnerships and financing strategies similarly reveal progress and continuing limitations in planning for scaling and sustainability. Initial engagement with external actors, including FAO and CGIAR remained largely informal and focused on knowledge exchange rather than co-ownership or co-investment. However, 2025 marked a significant institutional milestone in that IUCN is in the process of formalising partnerships through MoUs with both FAO and CGIAR. Although these MoUs have not yet been signed as of December 2025, largely due to high-level agenda constraints, they reflect the culmination of a lengthy negotiation process and signal a strategic shift toward more institutionalised collaboration. Accompanying these prospective agreements, detailed joint workplans are under development for 2026 onwards, outlining concrete areas of collaboration, shared ownership, and joint project development, including coordinated resource mobilisation. These emerging arrangements point to a transition from ad hoc engagement toward more structured and mutually accountable partnerships with the potential to support scaling and sustainability over the medium term. However, given their recent and largely prospective nature, it remains too early to assess their effectiveness in driving uptake or leveraging political and financial support at scale. Co-financing mechanisms remain largely untested, and their integration into a coherent, long-term resource mobilisation strategy is still evolving. Complementing these efforts, IUCN has formalised additional institutional linkages, including the signing of a MoU with the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (GAHP) at the Congress, as well as securing memberships in the Agroecology Coalition and the Coalition for Soil Health (CA4SH) Coalition. While some of these engagements, such as the GAHP MoU, do not yet include dedicated workplans, they strengthen IUCN's positioning within influential global platforms and open potential pathways for future collaboration and co-financed initiatives.

3.2. COHERENCE

3.2.1. STRONG COHERENCE WITH SELECT IUCN INITIATIVES BUT LIMITED BROADER INTEGRATION

AGSTA demonstrated strong internal coherence with IUCN's strategic priorities, particularly within the FAST's sphere of influence and on FAS-related topics. The project aligned closely with initiatives under the Land Health Initiative, such as the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF)[14], the Regen10 initiative, including collaboration with '1000 Landscape for 1 billion people' on food systems transition and the Regen10 Outcomes-Based Framework[15], and the CA4SH[16]. Additional synergies were built with relevant teams and Commissions for the sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard, and the development of the LHMF namely, which also linked to outputs under the IUCN-France Partnership 2021-2025[17]and Pernod Ricard-funded NbS portfolio[18].

Strong synergies were also built with thematic teams involved in the development of key AGSTA knowledge products. Collaboration with the Biodiversity Policy and European Regional Office teams supported the NbS and agriculture publication, while engagement with the Economics and Science teams underpinned flagship analytical work, including economic framing and contributions linked to STAR metrics and the contribution for nature platform. Additional collaboration with the Biodiversity Assessment and Knowledge teams strengthened work on soil biodiversity, including the development of a Red List of soil species.

[14] FAO, Forest and Farm Facility Management team, link
[15] IUCN, AGSTA KPI progress report, 2024
[16] IUCN, AGSTA KPI progress report, 2024
[17] The France-IUCN partnership also supported the establishment of the FAST team within IUCN. This support began in 2019 with the arrival of a technical assistant seconded from the French Ministry of Agriculture to IUCN and is being implemented in the fifth phase of the agreement.
[18] IUCN, AGSTA KPI progress report, 2024

AGSTA also benefitted from substantive contributions from the Environmental Law Centre, where the World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL) played a central role in the legal review of sustainable agriculture policies. The Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) supported initial exploratory work on the recognition of agricultural ecosystems, including early considerations related to the Red List of Ecosystems. Engagement with the Species Survival Commission (SSC) and the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) further reinforced links to species, ecosystem, and conserved-area frameworks, including emerging discussions on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in agricultural landscapes. These collaborations enhanced the technical robustness of AGSTA outputs and helped position them within IUCN's policy and standards-setting processes. However, Commission and thematic teams' engagement remained largely ad hoc, with limited ownership and weak integration into country-level delivery, testing, and uptake pathways.

Beyond technical content, collaboration with the IUCN Academy and Knowledge Management, Learning and Library Services enabled the development of online training content and supported dissemination through digital platforms. These efforts contributed to knowledge sharing and visibility but were primarily focused on output delivery rather than longer-term institutional embedding.

These internal linkages also spilled over into related FAST and FAS-linked programmes such as SUSTAIN[19], where country teams like in Tanzania, were encouraged and able to build synergies within their pipelines. These efforts reinforced internal coherence and contributed to building a more consolidated body of work on food and land use across the portfolio.

Collaboration beyond FAST was more limited and often transactional. Engagements with other IUCN units such as the economics and business teams, were typically managed through IAs financed from AGSTA's budget. While these arrangements enabled delivery of targeted outputs, including the economic study, they also introduced delays and generated limited joint ownership. Efforts to connect with initiatives such as BIODEV2030 in Mozambique or SUSTAIN, especially SUSTAIN-Pro in Tanzania did not fully materialise, constrained by mandates, funding models, and team capacity. These constraints are not unique to AGSTA but reflect broader structural challenges within IUCN's project-based operating model, which makes sustained cross-unit collaboration difficult without dedicated resources and explicit alignment from the outset. Ultimately, AGSTA's ability to build coherence was shaped less by its own design than by wider institutional barriers that make cross-unit collaboration difficult within IUCN.

Integration with other IUCN regional/country initiatives tended to emerge opportunistically rather than through systematic planning, reflecting a design-level limitation rather than an implementation gap. AGSTA forged meaningful connections where contextual fit and pre-existing relationships allowed, such as with the 'Embedding Integrated Water Resource Management'[20] (EWMR) (Sebeya) project in Rwanda, the 'Land of Opportunity Global Mechanism' (LOGMe)[21] project in Burkina Faso, or climate-related planning in Vietnam. In these instances, AGSTA's activities complemented ongoing workstreams and provided an added value by convening dialogue or testing the applicability of NbS and LHM indicators. In some cases, AGSTA aligned with initiatives supported by IUCN but implemented by its partners or union members. That was the case in Rwanda, where the third national dialogue aligned with the 'Five Fruit Trees per Household'[22] programme implemented by MINAGRI and Action pour la *Protection de l'Environnement et la Promotion des Filières Agricoles* (APEFA) (a member

[19] The SUSTAIN projects in Tanzania include SUSTAIN Pro (2022-2025) which focuses on sustainable agriculture, food systems, and productive growth and SUSTAIN Eco (2023-2025) which focuses on ecosystem stewardship, biodiversity, and economic resilience.
[20] The EWMR was a project implemented by IUCN Rwanda Office in the Western Province of Rwanda between 2019 and 2023. It aimed at improving water catchment management contributing to increased resilience of communities & landscapes to the impacts of climate change.
[21] LOGMe is an IUCN led initiative implemented in Burkina Faso between 2020 and 2024 and aiming at restoring degraded landscapes and improve lives in the Sahel
[22] Programme led by Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) in collaboration with organisations such as APEFA and supported by development partners like IUCN. It was launched in mid-2024. Its core aim is to combat malnutrition, improve household nutrition, boost climate resilience, and generate income for rural and urban communities

of the Union) and was funded by AGSTA. These synergies, however, were largely organic and context-driven rather than embedded within a broader programmatic strategy. At project inception level, no structured process was established to map synergies or align pipelines, limiting opportunities for cross-country learning or consolidated presence. Earlier and structured mapping of existing country and regional initiatives during project design could have helped identify priority entry points for collaboration, align activities with ongoing pipelines, and create a more coherent strategy for cross-country knowledge sharing and replication. Embedding such alignment mechanisms in the ToC and logframe from the outset would have enhanced both strategic coherence and the potential for scaling AGSTA's impact across contexts

3.2.2. INTERNAL STRUCTURAL BARRIERS LIMITED BROADER INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION

Although AGSTA succeeded in generating targeted collaborations within IUCN, these remained largely output-focused and limited in fostering broader institutional integration. IAs and co-financing arrangements enabled partnerships with Knowledge Management, Legal, Science, and Economics teams, contributing to the delivery of important outputs. Several of these collaborations proved to be effective. For instance, the IA with the Knowledge Management team on communications and the development of the online Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on sustainable agriculture[23] was successfully completed within the planned timeframe and budget, with negotiated adjustments incorporated efficiently. Similarly, the IA with the team on Red List of Ecosystems team resulted in the successful production of a publication[24] and an associated event.

However, other IAs proved more challenging, leading to significant delays and difficulties in coordination. Most agreements were negotiated bilaterally, with limited planning frameworks, and little connection to broader institutional priorities. As a result, these collaborations tended to focus on producing stand-alone deliverables (e.g. the MOOC, flagship report, legal review) rather than working toward broader, shared objectives like joint policy influence or sustained institutional learning, constraining their potential to serve as vehicles for systemic collaboration. This reflects both design and implementation factors. At the design level, the project lacked programme-level framework agreements or joint workplans that could have clarified shared objectives, synergies, and coordination mechanisms across IAs. At the implementation level, structured and regular cross-team coordination meetings, regular milestone tracking, and joint review processes could have strengthened alignment and facilitated the translation of outputs into institutional impact.

Even where strategic alignment with other IUCN initiatives was clear, capacity and planning constraints frequently limited engagement. Many teams were already bound by donor-driven commitments and fragmented workplans, leaving little bandwidth to collaborate meaningfully with AGSTA. These coordination challenges partly reflect broader structural factors within IUCN, where workplans and resource allocation make cross-unit collaboration inherently complex. However, some of these constraints could have been mitigated through stronger project-level mechanisms. For instance, identifying collaboration opportunities and establishing structured frameworks early on could have helped align priorities and timelines across teams. Similarly, dedicating specific resources or staff time for cross-unit coordination and maintaining consistent focal points might have reduced some delays in the delivering of outputs. AGSTA's wide-ranging deliverables also increased the coordination burden, making it harder to align with other units' timelines.

AGSTA highlighted both the possibilities and limits of collaboration within IUCN's complex institutional structure. Broader disincentives constrained integration, including organisational silos and limited platforms for joint planning. These challenges were echoed in interviews with the FAS team at Headquarters and representatives of teams involved in delivering knowledge products, who pointed

[23] The online MOOC on Sustainable agriculture will be launched in October 2025 at the WCC.
[24] Red list assessments for 400 beneficial soil species, plus 100 additional species.

to such institutional barriers as key factors limiting collaboration and the uptake of certain outputs (for example, the paper on the STAR metric adaptation drafted by staff from the Centre for Science and Knowledge, Economic and Finance Team x). Collaboration often relied on individual initiative rather than systemic structures. In the absence of shared accountability mechanisms or effective collaboration, it was difficult to leverage these efforts effectively and ensure outputs were used and disseminated efficiently. Within this context, AGSTA achieved targeted collaboration but could have adapted its level of ambition more closely to the operational bandwidth of other teams. Reducing fragmentation, securing formal collaboration commitments earlier, and tailoring task design to existing planning cycles might have eased coordination.

3.2.3. EXTERNAL COHERENCE AT AGENDA LEVEL WITH EMERGING BUT STILL LIMITED TRANSLATION INTO PARTNERSHIPS

AGSTA was not conceived as a delivery mechanism, and this shaped the nature of its external engagement. At global level, the project achieved visibility and thematic alignment with key institutions such as IFAD, the Nature Conservancy (TNC), FAO, CGIAR, and WWF, and engagement through joint events, dialogues, and aligned communications helped position IUCN as a credible voice in food system debates. At the regional level, AGSTA engaged a wide range of actors through Regional Conservation Forums and regional CGDs. In Africa, for example, the project facilitated discussions on collaboration with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR-ICRAF) and the East Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF), while also engaging major actors such as AGRA. At the country level, AGSTA collaborated with national partners including ministries of agriculture, private sector actors, the academia. In Guatemala for instance, discussions were held with the Centre of Conservationist Studies of Guatemala (CECON) and the National Soil Alliance of Guatemala. In Rwanda, IUCN signed a MoU with the MoE to further advance sustainable agriculture. In Vietnam, AGSTA collaborated with the World Bank, especially in the framework of the Mekong Delta Climate Resilience and Integrated Transformation Project (MERIT). However, collaboration remained largely informal during most of the project duration, with few examples of co-designed tools, joint workplans, or co-funded initiatives. Tools such as the LHMF, biodiversity metrics, and NbS guidance were widely recognised but seldom embedded in partner programmes, constraining their use as shared platforms. Formal MoUs with FAO and CGIAR signal interest in future cooperation, but in this phase, they did not yet lead to operational collaboration. At the same time, encouraging signals have emerged toward the end of the period under review. As of December 2025, IUCN is undertaking reviews of the LAHMP to better reflect the needs and interests of the growing and increasingly diverse set of external stakeholders engaged. Overall, AGSTA demonstrated strong external coherence at the level of agendas and dialogue, with nascent but still prospective pathways toward more durable partnerships and joint programming. It remains too early to assess the extent to which they will translate into embedded use, co-financed initiatives, or sustained institutional partnerships at scale.

3.3. EFFECTIVENESS

3.3.1. STRONG OUTPUT DELIVERY BUT MODEST OUTCOME- LEVEL ACHIEVEMENTS

AGSTA has delivered strongly against its intended outputs, but most achievements are closer to milestones than to systemic results, with progress more visible at the output rather than outcome level. The project largely achieved its intended outputs (see Annex 4.3). Key achievements include the revision of the ToC, the development of new tools and knowledge products, and the preparation of investment proposals. These are significant achievements for a first phase, and they create the conditions for deeper impact in subsequent cycles. However, many results are better understood as milestones than transformative change, reflecting both the project's foundational character and the output-driven nature of its results framework, with limited ability to capture behavioural or institutional change. In some cases, the outcome logic remains underdeveloped, making

it difficult to assess progress beyond delivery. For example, while CGDs are widely valued, there is no strategy for institutionalisation or policy follow-up.

Outcome 1 is largely on track, with notable progress in internal positioning and institutional change. These include the integration of agriculture into IUCN's 20-year strategic vision, the creation and institutionalisation of the FAST, the voting of Motion 002 at the WCC, and improved framing and shared language across internal teams and partners. Early efforts focused on legitimacy and trust-building within IUCN, followed by greater external engagement through dialogues and policy fora. Yet the outcome statement itself did not reflect this adaptive trajectory. It framed progress as a fixed milestone: "establishing a strategy and securing support" without defining what "support" meant in practice. In doing so, it missed the opportunity to capture the real achievements of AGSTA as an institutional change initiative: fostering internal uptake, positioning agriculture within IUCN's strategic priorities, and enabling learning and legitimacy.

Outcome 2 outputs were delivered as planned. However, they were heavily product-oriented and not clearly tied to stakeholder awareness or evidence uptake. The project produced a wide range of tools (cf Annex 4.3) and participated in international fora (cf. 3.1.3). These outputs represent solid delivery, but their contribution to awareness-raising, knowledge uptake, or policy influence is harder to assess. Most products were developed with limited co-design or feedback. Stakeholder targeting and feedback mechanisms only began to emerge in late 2024, and country teams often lacked time and resources to localise tools or capture user perspectives. This was partly a function of sequencing: Phase 1 prioritised developing and testing tools, with localisation and scaling envisaged for later phases. Nonetheless, some indicative progress has been reported from interview with HQ, regional and country teams. For instance, tools such as the LHMF and NbS sectoral guidance were used by all country teams to inform dialogues, pilot activities, and discussions with national authorities, suggesting early steps toward evidence uptake. For instance, in Rwanda, the third national dialogue held in June 2025 provided a platform to explore the practical application of LHMF within the context of the "Five Fruit Trees per Household" initiative, illustrating early efforts to link AGSTA tools with CGD and national priorities. Similarly, in India, the national CGD held in December 2023 featured a panel discussion focused on mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in agriculture. This dialogue highlighted the relevance of NbS and land health improvement approaches, demonstrating initial steps toward integrating AGSTA outputs into policy discourse.

Outcome 3 progress was modest, with ambitions exceeding what could reasonably be achieved in a first phase. The project supported six investment proposal ideas, of which three have been approved and were ready for implementation and two are still under development as of December 2025. All the proposal developed in the framework of AGSTA drew explicitly on tools and dialogues, demonstrating that early integration is possible. Yet the outcome statement "facilitating transition to sustainable agriculture" set an unrealistic level of ambition for a project of this scope and timeframe. Systemic transitions are not achievable in a single project cycle, especially with limited investment targets and an underdeveloped ToC of how individual proposals can lead to broader shifts. The absence of a baseline, limited engagement with decision-makers, and vague indicators made it difficult to assess progress toward systemic-level change. The project piloted tools, trained teams, and began engaging with investment processes, but the logic and pathways for achieving transition remain at an early stage.

Beyond these directly supported proposals, AGSTA's more significant contribution under Outcome 3 lies in its role as an enabler of downstream business development and investment mobilisation. While few investments had reached approval stage by the end of the evaluation period, the project laid essential technical and conceptual groundwork that is already being translated into follow-on investments and project pipelines, with effects likely to materialise beyond the project's lifetime. By producing credible tools, analytical frameworks, and dialogue outputs, AGSTA generated concrete discussion material that have been leveraged by IUCN FAST to engage donors and develop investment-oriented projects in the same countries and beyond. This catalytic effect is illustrated by the Solnaterre project proposal developed with FFEM and submitted for funding. The proposal involves two

AGSTA pilot countries namely Rwanda (districts of Rubavu and Nyadibu) and India (two landscapes in Bihar: Munger Sadar block and Kharagpur block) and explicitly aims to upscale initial work conducted under AGSTA. The project seeks to demonstrate the relevance of NbS and agroecological practices for restoring land health and strengthening ecosystem resilience. Similarly, other projects currently under implementation, such as NATAE project (Agroecological Transitions in North Africa), involving Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, are testing and refining the LHMF in North African agro-ecosystems, directly building on methodological foundations developed under AGSTA. While these initiatives fall outside the formal scope of AGSTA, they align strongly with Outcome 3 objectives and provide evidence that the project has contributed to shaping investment pipelines and influencing project design beyond its immediate boundaries.

The table below presents the project's achievement ratings per outcome and output using the Global Environment Facility (GEF) scale. Detailed justifications are provided in Annex 4.3.

Table 1: AGSTA GEF outcome/output achievement rating

Outcome	Rating
Outcome 1	Satisfactory
Output 1.1	Satisfactory
Output 1.2	Satisfactory
Output 1.3	Satisfactory
Output 1.4	Moderately satisfactory
Output 1.5	Moderately satisfactory
Outcome 2	Moderately satisfactory
Output 2.1	Satisfactory
Output 2.2	Satisfactory
Output 2.3	Satisfactory
Output 2.4	Satisfactory
Outcome 3	Moderately satisfactory
Output 3.1	Satisfactory
Output 3.2	Moderately satisfactory
Output 3.3	Satisfactory

3.3.2. CREDIBILITY AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS DROVE EFFECTIVENESS, BUT TIME AND RESOURCE LIMITS CONSTRAINED RESULTS

A combination of institutional consolidation, credibility, and relationships enabled AGSTA's effectiveness. The creation of the FAST clarified roles and strengthened coordination, giving IUCN a coherent strategic focus on agriculture. Strong HQ leadership and cross-team collaboration sustained momentum, while regional and country offices progressively embraced the new FAS perspective. Quarterly technical exchanges further reinforced this shared direction, supporting internal uptake. Externally, IUCN's credibility and neutral positioning provided legitimacy as a convener, especially in the CGDs, where its impartiality created safe spaces for dialogue. Pre-existing relationships in countries such as Vietnam, India, and Tanzania also gave AGSTA a strong platform, building on NbS dialogues, 30x30 discussions, and existing MoUs. Involvement of government champions in those countries helped strengthen buy-in and facilitated smoother implementation. Interventions were particularly effective when they aligned with policy windows or donor priorities, for example when CGD coincided

with national planning cycles or when tools fed into proposals linked to global frameworks such as NbS and LH.

Short implementation windows and modest budgets constrained the scope and ambition of country-level work. For instance, Burkina Faso's ~EUR 162,000 budget and one-year implementation timeline left little room for translating and localising tools or engaging decentralised actors (see 3.4.2). While AGSTA generated tools and narratives that offered conceptual clarity, their influence often remained at the discursive level. Late delivery, limited user-testing, and the absence of structured uptake strategies meant momentum frequently dissipated after initial traction. The project also lacked a mandate to engage deeply with financing systems. Although AGSTA occasionally contributed to the framing of proposals in contexts such as Vietnam and Rwanda, these contributions were opportunistic rather than systematic, reflecting both the limits of the project's scope and the slow cycles of donor funding. External disruptions further undermined progress: in Rwanda, regional tensions derailed cross-country project proposal, while in Vietnam and Guatemala administrative changes delayed or disrupted dialogue processes. These shifting political landscapes highlighted the fragility of AGSTA's influence when dependent on external alignment.

3.3.3. INFLUENCE REMAINS AT AN EARLY STAGE DESPITE VARIED RESULTS ACROSS COUNTRIES

Across most of stakeholders interviewed at country level, CGDs emerged as the most consistently effective entry point for policy influence. In Rwanda, CGDs opened the door for IUCN to join the Rwandan Regenerative and Conservation in Agriculture coalition and to contribute to the design of the country's PSTA 5[xxxii]. In India, they enabled engagement with high-level institutions that had previously been difficult to access, including the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and state-level departments, while also convening diverse actors such as private sector coalitions like the Climate Collaborative. In Vietnam, CGDs were often cited as the project's most visible and impactful contribution: they created safe spaces for dialogue, familiarised provincial and academic stakeholders with concepts like NbS, and built cross-sector networks that persisted beyond the project. In Guatemala, national and regional CGDs helped frame biodiversity relevance in agriculture, contributing to shifts in national policy positions, including formal recognition by the MoA that "agriculture requires conservation." Interviews with country programme managers suggest that CGDs were most effective processes were underpinned by trusted facilitation, engagement of government champions, and receptive political conditions, which will help secure buy-in and sustain dialogue beyond single events.

Tools contributed primarily to strategic framing and donor alignment rather than direct practice change. Products such as the LHMF and soil health indicators introduced new conceptual approaches, shifting attention from production to ecosystem health. In India, field tests of the LHMF were conducted in the Northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra to assess its relevance for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. The study not only evaluated the framework's applicability but also identified technical constraints and provided recommendations for strengthening it through capacity building, policy engagement, and stakeholder collaboration. Similarly, in Rwanda (Sebeya region), experiments assessed the potential of invertebrates such as lumbricus to improve soil health and serve as an NbS. In Burkina Faso, solutions for managing drought through NbS were piloted in the community of Soglozi. In Vietnam, uptake proved comparatively more effective because the project adopted a stepwise approach: initial farmer training and confidence-building laid the foundation for introducing more complex tools like the LHMF and NbS criteria. This sequencing enabled farmers, local authorities, and extension services to understand and trust the methods before they were applied at scale. Compared with India, Rwanda, and Burkina Faso where limited piloting and resources constrained evidence generation and uptake, the Vietnam approach demonstrated how careful sequencing, local engagement, and capacity building can increase tool adoption, inform decision-making, and provide a stronger basis for institutionalisation. Across contexts, tools were still more influential for donor alignment and framing than direct uptake by producers, but Vietnam illustrates the potential for field-level impact when introduction is carefully staged.

Project proposals expanded IUCN's footprint in food and agriculture financing but remain early in influence. Standardised approaches, including GEF and GCF funding proposal templates supported donor engagement across all countries, with three proposals already funded (Burkina Faso, Vietnam, and Tanzania) and others under discussion (India, Guatemala). In Burkina Faso, a GEF-aligned concept secured USD 12 million in GEF funding. In Tanzania, also, a proposal funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) has been approved, with implementation expected to begin shortly. In Vietnam, the Coca-Cola proposal has been approved with a total budget of USD 2.2 million, covering Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. In Rwanda, regional proposals on soil fertility and value chains gained traction but were not pursued due to donor criteria and regional tensions. Although not all proposals translated into funding, most demonstrated strong conceptual traction, donor relevance, and clear alignment with AGSTA's objectives.

However, the tangible influence of these proposals remains limited at this stage. Financing outcomes are shaped by multiple factors beyond AGSTA's direct control, including pre-existing processes, political traction, and the presence of active partners. Where these enabling conditions exist, as in Burkina Faso, AGSTA's contributions added value, but in contexts without such conditions, the proposals' potential impact on actual financing or implementation is not yet perceivable. This highlights that while proposal development is a critical step, further follow-up, advocacy, and engagement will be needed to convert these outputs into measurable results.

3.4. EFFICIENCY

3.4.1. BROADLY IMPLEMENTED WITHIN BUDGET WITH STRATEGIC RESOURCE USE

AGSTA's EUR 3,091,775 budget was deliberately phased to reflect project priorities and sequencing. Expenditure patterns varied across years, but these shifts were the result of strategic reallocations rather than implementation gaps. This approach ensured coverage of high-profile activities in later years while preserving overall efficiency.

Year 1 (October 2021–December 2022) recorded relatively low expenditure of EUR 506,789, consistent with its focus on design, early tool development, and inception meetings. Spending was directed primarily to staff, consultancies, and coordination, with fewer costs linked to travel or large events.

Delivery accelerated in Year 2 (January–December 2023) when expenditures rose to EUR 1,131,698. This reflected the first major peak of implementation, driven by national dialogues in Tanzania, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, and India, and regional dialogues in Uganda (ESARO), Guatemala (ORMAC), and Burkina Faso (PACO). Significant investments were also made in refining the LHMF, conducting an extensive legal review, and increasing IUCN's external visibility at key events, including the joint event "NbS for Decent Rural Employment in Agrifood Systems" with FAO at the Committee on World Food Security in October 2023 and a side event on "NbS in Agriculture" at COP28 in December 2023. Expenditure also increased with the hiring of a communications consultant, who established a dedicated global communications function to enhance AGSTA's visibility and outreach.

In Year 3 (January–December 2024), expenditures decreased to EUR 732,556, a -15% deviation from the budgeted EUR 862,648. This was a deliberate budget re-phasing and resource reallocation to the final project year. Funds were shifted to 2025 to support the WCC and Regional Conservation Fora (RCFs); national dialogues were postponed to the final year (in Rwanda, India, and Vietnam in particular); and budget lines were rebalanced, with higher spending on travel and event logistics offset by reductions in capacity-building workshop costs. Spending patterns also reflected a balance between in-house delivery and outsourced work – for example, the legal review was undertaken internally, while the flagship report was outsourced. Communication expenses were also lower than expected, partly absorbed by other projects, in anticipation of more intensive campaigns in 2025.

The forecast for Year 4 (January–December 2025) stands at EUR 720,731, positioning AGSTA to absorb remaining funds through resource-intensive activities in its final phase. These include the launch

of the sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard and online courses, continued development and launch of the LHMF, and convening at the WCC and RCFs. With a burn rate of 33% as of September 2025, the project is on track to use up the entire budget by the end of the year.

Overall, the financial trajectory demonstrates a deliberate pacing of expenditures. Variations across years reflected intentional reallocations rather than implementation gaps, enabling the project to maximise visibility, support key activities, and sustain influence through to its conclusion.

3.4.2. PROJECT SCOPE EXCEEDED AVAILABLE RESOURCES, AND EFFICIENCY RELIED ON CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Although AGSTA's budget was executed efficiently, its allocation did not match the project's scope and ambition. Around two-thirds of resources (EUR 2,092,989) were allocated to HQ functions such as staffing, product development, advocacy, and communications, which was coherent with its institutional building and catalytic mandates. However, the results framework and country-level expectations pointed toward more tangible delivery, including piloting, anchoring, and capacity-building. At country level, envelopes of approximately EUR 160–320k per country (EUR 162,533 for Burkina Faso, EUR 318, 993 for Rwanda and Tanzania, EUR 158,700 for Vietnam, and EUR 158,700 for India[25][xxxiii]) were sufficient for convening processes. However, they were too limited to adapt tools, build institutional partnerships, or support sustained uptake. As a result, many activities were layered onto other IUCN projects or supported by external funding, which allowed for efficiency but constrained consolidation and sustainability. Most countries managed to stay within budget, often by embedding AGSTA within ongoing IUCN projects such as LOGMe in Burkina Faso, the Sebeya Project in Rwanda, the Agriscape project in India, and SUSTAIN project in Tanzania. In Vietnam, AGSTA deliverables were completed using alternate funding from Coca-Cola due to delays and absorptive constraints. These alignments allowed for cost-sharing, bundled events, and cross-programmatic coherence. The project also benefited from donor complementarity, notably through France-IUCN partnership, FFF initiative, and Pernod Ricard-supported portfolios on NbS, which enabled cofinancing for the development of key knowledge products such as the LHMF. However, while alignment with other initiatives enhanced efficiency and coherence, they often served as substitute for dedicated project funding.

Budget fragmentation further diluted the depth of delivery. Resources were spread across a wide range of workstreams including tools development, CGDs, policy engagement, partnerships, training, and communications. While each strand contributed to AGSTA's strategic narrative, the breadth of work limited substantial progress in any single area. Teams felt under pressure to meet numerous targets within compressed timelines, especially after the one-year extension, with insufficient space for embedding, iteration, or learning..

Short project duration, limited staffing, and a HQ-centred coordination model restricted AGSTA's ability to sustain results. In Burkina Faso, the initial one-year timeframe required a no-cost extension to complete deliverables, while only one staff member was assigned despite also managing other sustainable agriculture initiatives. This constrained scaling and stakeholder engagement, even where outputs were delivered on time. At HQ, the small size of the FAST and a central coordination model limited its ability to provide structured technical support, follow-up, or learning facilitation for country offices. Country engagement was often reactive, dependent on informal relationships and pre-existing connections. Collaboration varied across contexts: in Vietnam and India, well-established relationships enabled smoother coordination, while in Burkina Faso and Rwanda, limited regional bandwidth and shifting focal points required heavier HQ oversight.

[25] IUCN, Project summary report from 01/2021-12/2024 shared by Tatiana Chudina

3.5. SUSTAINABILITY

3.5.1. MEANINGFUL INSTITUTIONAL GAINS ACHIEVED WITH SUSTAINABILITY TIED TO STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION AND FUNDING

AGSTA catalysed meaningful institutional shifts within IUCN, but sustaining these gains will require stronger uptake mechanisms, long-term funding, and deeper institutional integration beyond project-based efforts and individual champions. One of its most notable achievements was the creation of the FAST. However, the team remains small and heavily dependent on project-based resources, making its long-term viability contingent on sustained funding and continued political support within the Union. Encouragingly, the current funding pipeline, supported by donors such as the AFD, and the Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM), shows promising growth and diversification[26xxxiv], reflecting donor confidence and providing a foundation for institutional sustainability.

At the regional and national levels, AGSTA's integration was uneven, often relying more on individual leadership and contextual synergies than on institutionalised mechanisms. In ORMACC, the project leveraged existing workflows, engaged relevant ministries, and embedded its approaches into broader biodiversity-agriculture strategies, while in Vietnam it created valuable entry points into national policy debates on NbS and land-use planning. Yet in many other contexts, like in Rwanda (where there is a Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture initiative (DeSIRA) initiatives[27], AGSTA remained parallel to core programming, constrained by limited staff capacity and weak cross-project coordination. This reflects a broader structural challenge within IUCN: new thematic areas struggle to gain systematic traction without aligned funding or formal mainstreaming into planning cycles. Relevance alone does not guarantee integration; it requires active coordination and resourcing to embed innovations across institutional levels. In this context, sustainability relies not only on continued donor funding but also on the institutional anchoring of the FAST within IUCN's core programme, ensuring that agricultural systems work is maintained beyond individual project cycles.

At the same time, promising signs of sustainability have emerged as AGSTA-generated tools and approaches are increasingly being adopted in ongoing initiatives and investment pipelines. Outputs such as the LHMF and NbS guidance have been advanced through proposals (e.g. Vietnam's GCF MERIT proposal, Burkina Faso's USD 12 million GEF project, and DANIDA-supported programming in Tanzania). In addition, the Solnaterre proposal (Rwanda and India) and NATAE in North Africa are examples of initiatives building directly on AGSTA's tools and methodologies. While these efforts reflect proactive engagement by HQ, regional and national staff, they also signal growing recognition and uptake of AGSTA outputs beyond the project's immediate scope. Sustained impact will require identifying tools for institutionalisation, assigning responsibility, and aligning them with programme and fundraising structures, while leveraging the momentum from these emerging pipelines to strengthen FAST's institutional anchoring and ensure continuity of agricultural systems work across IUCN.

3.5.2. LONG-TERM IMPACT REQUIRES STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF ENABLING CONDITIONS AND RISKS

The durability of AGSTA's outputs depends on how effectively IUCN proactively manages enabling conditions as strategic levers rather than externalities. Political alignment, institutional readiness, operational capacity, and funding all shaped results across contexts. In Vietnam and India,

[26] Source: slide 7 of the FAS Team Retreat presentation done by Pascale Bonzom (27-30 January 2025)
[27] (I) Agroforestry Rwanda is a DeSIRA project implemented by IUCN Rwanda (2020-2025) in the Eastern Province and peri-urban areas of Kigali. Its general objective is to increase the pace and scale of agroforestry-based restoration of degraded agricultural lands and sustainable use of biomass energy, with associated improvements of land health, livelihoods and poverty reduction.

early alignment with national priorities allowed AGSTA to gain traction in policy dialogues and pilot initiatives. In Burkina Faso and ESARO, by contrast, shifting government priorities and political instability disrupted continuity and limited uptake, highlighting the context-dependent nature of AGSTA's influence. IUCN's reputation for technical credibility and neutrality facilitated high-level engagement where governments were receptive, but where priorities favoured ground-level delivery, credibility alone was not enough.

Demand from national institutions and donor interest create clear opportunities for uptake, but weak delivery infrastructure and limited localisation remain constraints. Donor interest in sustainable agriculture and NbS provides potential to embed AGSTA outputs into new funding pipelines, such as the Coca-Cola CGD in Vietnam. However, practical uptake is hindered by several factors. First, the technical nature of tools like the LHMF or sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard makes them difficult to use without tailored support or simplification for local contexts. Second, limited translation, contextualisation, and adaptation restrict their accessibility for frontline actors, including farmers, extension services, and local NGOs. Third, engagement with implementing partners is often ad hoc or insufficiently resourced, meaning that key actors lack both the capacity and guidance to integrate the tools into existing workflows or institutional processes. Finally, short project timelines and modest budgets constrain follow-up, monitoring, and iterative adaptation, leaving promising outputs underutilised and reducing the likelihood of long-term institutionalisation.

Financing opportunities exist but their short-term and project-based nature constrains sustainability. This primarily reflects a structural limitation related to project funding at IUCN rather than a design or implementation issue. While donor interest will create pathways to integrate AGSTA outputs into larger programmes, the reliance on short-term, project-based funding poses risks for long-term institutional embedding and continuity of uptake.

3.6. Adaptation & Learning

3.6.1. Strategic HQ-led adaptation improved internal alignment but were not matched by changes in country level delivery

AGSTA demonstrated meaningful adaptation over the course of the project, but these adjustments were largely incremental and driven by HQ, with limited impact on operations at the country level. Following the 2023 MTR, AGSTA revised its ToC and results framework to provide clearer structure around its catalytic role and three strategic outcomes. At HQ level, these revisions improved internal alignment and guided upstream objectives. However, without co-design processes, clear operational guidance, or dedicated resources for country teams, most adaptations remained tactical and centrally led. While national teams could adapt stakeholder engagement approaches, they often felt unable to meaningfully influence core elements such as delivery models, tool use, or integration into national systems. This misalignment reflected structural design rather than timing: flexibility was encouraged in principle but was not embedded through co-design processes, adaptive planning tools, or decision-making pathways. Future phases will need to clearly define what types of adaptation are expected at each level, who holds decision-making authority, and how teams are resourced to act on learning in real time.

AGSTA's tools, including the LHMF, biodiversity metrics, and sectoral interpretation of the NbS standard, were revised in response to country-level feedback, improving technical relevance but had limited impact on real-world adoption or policy influence, highlighting an area for deliberate focus in future phases. For example, the LHMF was adapted to allow flexible indicator use and clearer application across agroecological zones. However, these revisions focused primarily on technical content rather than uptake, localisation, or institutional embedding. While the tools were technically sound, contextualisation and integration into national systems remained challenging. Delays in tool delivery, limited translation, and late capacity-building support further constrained uptake. While

a user uptake survey was planned by mid-2024, it came too late to inform the majority of implementation.

The CGD model also evolved in structure and intent. Early CGDs prompted a pause and redesign, moving away from templated events to formats adapted to national contexts. Participation tracking and revised templates improved documentation, and outreach to local actors was expanded in countries such as Tanzania, Burkina Faso, and India. These changes reflect a shift from procedural event delivery to strategic alignment. However, learning from CGDs was not consistently captured in MEL systems or linked to policy influence, and follow-up mechanisms were often absent.

3.6.2. ADAPTIVE USE OF MEL TO INFORM STRATEGIC DECISIONS

AGSTA's MEL function was introduced reactively and remained underdeveloped and secondary to delivery priorities throughout most of the project's duration. For much of its implementation, the project lacked a dedicated MEL system, structure, and staffing, limiting its ability to track progress, support course correction, or build a compelling case for institutionalisation. Early monitoring focused largely on budget execution rather than outputs or outcomes. According to interviews with the HQ MEL specialist, one key reason MEL remained underdeveloped was that it was not a formal donor requirement, which reduced the prioritisation of resources and attention for establishing a comprehensive system. In addition, early in AGSTA's cycle, IUCN did not have an institutional MEL framework for global catalytic projects, and staffing for MEL was only partially in place by late 2023. A formal MEL framework, including indicators and results tracking, was only introduced after implementation had begun, and even then, remained under-resourced.

HQ MEL staff had very limited allocation, country teams had no structured reporting mechanisms, and responsibilities were unclear at regional and national levels. In some countries like Rwanda, MEL specialists were never engaged. Consequently, MEL could not meaningfully inform activity design or programme decisions. These gaps reflected broader institutional limitations, as mandatory MEL requirements were absent during the early years of AGSTA.

While later updates to the logframe and ToC improved conceptual clarity and alignment, MEL remained largely a compliance and planning tool rather than a driver of learning. Country-level tracking was often isolated from HQ, limiting the project's ability to capture insights, iterate activities, or demonstrate influence on partner behaviour, institutional uptake, or evidence use. The system also did not reflect AGSTA's catalytic delivery model, which focused on convening, influencing, and enabling change rather than direct service delivery. As a result, outputs such as tools and dialogues were tracked as completed deliverables, without assessing their adoption, adaptation, or policy impact. This limited the project's ability to demonstrate contributions to national strategies, donor mobilisation, or private sector engagement. **At the same time, while MEL tools were introduced late, they did generate data that informed the 2024 ToC revision and annual planning, reflecting emerging progress towards more evidence base learning.**

3.6.3. CROSS-CUTTING LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

3.6.3.1. Field-level experimentation and delivery were essential to strengthen credibility and test models

AGSTA's early phases focused on strategic positioning and tool development, but the lack of systematic field testing limited its ability to demonstrate relevance. Regional teams from all six pilot countries and focus group with cooperatives of farmers involved in tool applicability assessments, especially in Rwanda, consistently highlighted that credibility and uptake depend on evidence generated through small-scale pilots. Where pilots did occur, they highlighted the potential of field-level experimentation to align project objectives with local priorities and to showcase concrete benefits for communities. The Vietnam trial on flood-based rice systems, for instance, effectively linked AGSTA's

narrative to national food security and ecosystem goals, sparking cross-sector engagement. The RYNAN InSentinel tool[28], which provided farmers with real-time pest monitoring data, was praised for making ecological health visible and actionable at the farm level; something national teams described as crucial for both local relevance and policy traction. Yet such cases remained exceptions. Most tools were insufficiently connected to delivery systems and offered few demonstrable benefits for farmers, extension services, or institutions. The project experience showed that without such validation, influence on policy and scaling remained limited, especially in contexts where stakeholders expected evidence of results.

3.6.3.2. Tools needed embedded uptake pathways and localisation support

Implementation revealed that even technically sound tools did not always translate into use without clear pathways for uptake. Country teams observed that many tools were perceived as too conceptual or complex, having been designed primarily for technical audiences. In Burkina Faso, for instance, the country project manager acknowledged the relevance of the NbS Standard in addressing issues such as excessive use of chemicals but noted that effective adoption required simplification and translation into local languages. Similarly, project managers in Rwanda, India, and Tanzania emphasised the need to adapt tools for non-technical audiences to ensure their practical impact on the ground. This demonstrated the importance of localisation and integration into institutional and local systems to sustain use and ensure that tools progress from pilots to practice.

3.6.3.3. Dialogue approaches were most effective when linked to ongoing policy processes

CGDs fostered valuable cross-sector dialogue but experience showed that isolated events rarely led to durable policy outcomes. CDGs were widely appreciated yet many were implemented as stand-alone events and their impact depended heavily on whether discussions were followed by concrete mechanisms for uptake. The third national dialogue in Rwanda, which aligned with the “Five Fruit Trees per Household” programme implemented by MINAGRI and APEFA, illustrated the potential for CGDs to feed into national programmes when timing, alignment, and follow-up were ensured. However, the lack of systematic documentation and policy linkage elsewhere limited their influence, highlighting that the effectiveness of dialogues depended on their continuity and integration within broader policy processes rather than on one-off convenings.

3.6.3.4. Institutional capacity development required time, stability and dedicated resources

AGSTA helped embed agriculture as a core theme within IUCN and facilitated the creation of the FAS team, but reliance on project-based staffing and funding exposed vulnerabilities in sustaining institutional learning. Staffing transitions, reliance on IAs, as well as IUCN’s structural approaches affected continuity and institutional learning. Resources for internal coordination, learning, and pipeline development were often reactive rather than strategic. These challenges highlighted how institutional strengthening depended on stable structures, consistent funding, and long-term investment in staff and systems, rather than short project cycles.

3.6.3.5. Country engagement success depended on political traction and institutional readiness

Country-level progress varied widely, shaped by differences in political traction, institutional buy-in, and operational capacity. In Vietnam and India, the presence of engaged ministries, existing partnerships, and political alignment created favourable conditions for tools and CGDs to gain traction.

[28] RYNAN InSentinel tool is an automated pest and insect monitoring system developed by RYNAN Agriculture.

In contrast, in countries like Burkina Faso, insecurity and shifting national priorities in Burkina Faso limited sustained engagement despite initial enthusiasm. These differences revealed that political will, institutional capacity, and operating conditions determine the feasibility of policy influence and scaling.

3.6.3.6. Gender and youth considerations require explicit design and resourcing to move beyond representation

Integration of gender and youth considerations across AGSTA remained limited. **While the project demonstrated awareness of IUCN's gender policy and made efforts to ensure inclusive representation in convening activities, this did not translate into structural integration within core technical workstreams or tools**. At international and national levels, AGSTA prioritised representation in dialogues and events, including efforts to achieve gender-balanced panels at major international events and the inclusion of women and youth in CGDs. In India, for example, CGDs achieved approximately equal representation of women and men. However, the absence of explicit gender or youth targets, indicators, or dedicated resources limited the ability to systematically track inclusion or assess outcomes beyond participation. Within the project's technical components, gender and youth considerations were not explicitly embedded. The project's nature constrained opportunities to tailor tools or methodologies to differentiated needs.

Experience from AGSTA suggests that inclusive representation alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful gender and youth integration. Structural integration requires explicit objectives, design features, and resourcing from the outset, particularly where technical tools and frameworks are intended to inform policy and investment decisions. Encouragingly, newer initiatives building on AGSTA, such as the FFEM-funded Solnaterre project in India and Rwanda, are incorporating clearer gender and youth targets, alongside capacity-building and policy components.

CONCLUSION

AGSTA has demonstrated that IUCN can play a meaningful role in shaping the interface between agriculture and biodiversity, positioning itself as a credible convener and technical leader in this space. The project demonstrated clear **relevance**, responding to urgent global needs to align food systems with biodiversity goals. The project also displayed strong **coherence** by creating synergies across IUCN's programmes and with external agendas. The establishment of the FAST strengthened links to work on NbS, LH, and ecosystem management, while alignment with CBD, UNFCCC, and national strategies reinforced IUCN's credibility as both a convener and a technical contributor.

In terms of **effectiveness**, AGSTA succeeded in producing technically sound tools, piloting promising approaches, and strengthening IUCN's institutional positioning. However, uptake and influence remained limited in many contexts due to delayed delivery, modest localisation, and insufficient embedding in national systems. **Efficiency** was broadly maintained, with expenditures kept within budget, but implementation was affected by ambitious objectives, staffing transitions, and HQ-driven processes that reduced space for country teams to adapt and lead.

Sustainability prospects are mixed. Tools such as the LHMF and NbS standard attracted strong interest and are being advanced in proposals and projects, which consists in promising signs of continuity, but without dedicated strategies for adoption, capacity building, and integration into institutional processes, their continued application is not guaranteed. CGDs proved valuable in convening diverse stakeholders and strengthening IUCN's profile, yet their influence on concrete policy or practice changes was more limited, and their role may require further clarification and institutionalisation. Finally, **learning and adaptation** were visible, particularly in tool revisions and updates to the ToC. These changes showed responsiveness, yet were often incremental and concentrated at HQ, with limited translation into operational adjustments at the country level.

Overall, this evaluation finds that **AGSTA's key achievement has been to establish the institutional and strategic foundations for IUCN's engagement in sustainable agriculture, strengthening IUCN's internal capacity and external credibility while achieving only partial alignment with the broader ambition of transforming agricultural systems**. The project consolidated agriculture as a core theme within IUCN, strengthened internal capacity, and positioned IUCN as a credible actor in global food systems debates. At the same time, AGSTA has not yet translated these achievements into systemic influence or sustained uptake at national level. This tension between institutional development and field-level transformation is a central lesson of the evaluation and identified gaps can be traced back to the project design and ambition primarily but also to structural barriers inherent to IUCN's operational approached. AGSTA was framed as a vehicle for transforming agricultural systems through policy influence, knowledge development, and investment, yet its resourcing, staffing, and timelines were better aligned with institutional development, positioning, and foundational laying.

The evaluation also points to significant potential for field-level influence, contingent on clear uptake pathways, operational partnerships, and sustained funding. Tools such as the LHMF and the NbS adaptations could be leveraged to translate knowledge into practice, but this will require deliberate strategies for adoption, localisation, and institutional integration. Exploring how knowledge can be effectively applied at the field level represents a critical area of focus for future programming.

Going forward, future efforts will need to shift from producing technical outputs toward enabling their uptake and institutionalisation. This implies prioritising fewer geographies with strong political traction, embedding co-design and local experimentation as central modalities, resourcing uptake strategies alongside tool development, and strengthening partnerships with actors who can sustain delivery at scale.

With these shifts, IUCN can consolidate its emerging role and ensure that its contributions extend beyond thought leadership to tangible, lasting impact in transforming food systems for biodiversity and resilience.

3.7. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Type	Recommendation	Details
Strategic focus and design	**SR1. Prioritise depth over breadth by focusing on a limited number of countries with high political traction and delivery capacity**	A future phase should focus on three to four countries selected against clear readiness criteria, including policy alignment with NbS/FAS objectives, presence of government champions, IUCN office capacity to manage follow-up and ensure continuity, and potential for co-financing or leveraging complementary funding at national level. Work should follow a staged model: initial demonstration and localisation (for example, a CGD linked to a national plan and a locally piloted tool), followed by institutionalisation, and only subsequently replication or scale-up. Concentrating effort in this way will generate tangible proof-of-concept, improve sustainability, and reduce the fragmentation observed in Phase 1. In these cases, deliberate efforts will be required to build trust and secure institutional access. Future programmes should involve early assessments of policy windows, mapping national priorities, and co-planning of activities with relevant ministries. Building co-ownership with national institutions will be essential to ensure continuity beyond individual relationships.
	SR2. Redraft the ToC to include assumptions (on political alignment, institutional readiness, etc.), reflect FAS' phased delivery model and define explicit external adoption pathways	The current ToC remains largely inward-facing, emphasising product development and internal positioning, with scale and adoption pathways implicit. A revised ToC should articulate the phases of IUCN's delivery model (i.e. foundation-building, demonstration, institutionalisation, and scale) and clearly define how outputs move from IUCN ownership to external adoption. This includes identifying end-user institutions (ministries, producer organisations, etc.), clarifying the incentives for uptake, and setting measurable milestones such as policy documents citing LHMF indicators or NbS criteria. This structured change logic will provide a realistic framework for tracking progress beyond delivery, strengthen internal decision-making, and offer donors a clearer view of AGSTA's pathway to influence.
	SR3. Rethink the purpose of CGD to ensure concrete impact	While CGDs have the effectively positioned IUCN and fostered initial stakeholder connections, to date, there is little evidence so far that they have translated into concrete institutional change or policy shifts. A future phase should rethink the purpose of CGDs. Lessons could also be drawn from other IUCN initiatives such as BIODEV2030, which

	similarly uses national dialogues to push forward reform agendas with productive sectors. National dialogues within BIODEV2030 have engaged sectoral stakeholders in exploring reforms scenarios, generating insights that will be subsequently to inform policy briefs and guide decision-makers.
SR4. Develop an outcome-oriented partnership and engagement strategy to amplify reach and scale impact	While the project has initiated collaborations with external actors, these arrangements remain largely informal, early-stage, and focused on knowledge exchange rather than co-ownership or co-investment. Future phases should provide clear guidance on partnership protocols and objectives, formalise collaboration from the outset, and engage systematically with agricultural constituencies beyond IUCN's traditional membership. Partners such as government agencies and agriculture extension and advisory services (like the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Board (RAB)[29], provincial extension services in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam), producer organisations (like Confédération Paysanne du Faso (CPF)[30], NGOs (like Sustainable Agriculture in Tanzania (SAT))[31], and private sector actors (such as RYNAN Technologies[32] in Vietnam) should be selected based on complementary mandates, resources, and networks, with structured agreements outlining clear objectives, shared accountability, and defined roles. This approach will enable AGSTA to extend its influence and achieve scale without overstretching internal capacity.
SR5. Systematise collaboration with IUCN Commissions and thematic team at design phase to support prioritisation, credibility, and uptake	AGSTA demonstrated the value of engaging IUCN Commissions and thematic teams in strengthening the scientific, legal, and policy credibility of its outputs. However, these collaborations were largely ad hoc, exploratory, or transaction-based, with variable levels of ownership and uneven integration into country-level delivery and uptake pathways.

[29] The RAB is an autonomous body established by LAW N°38/2010 OF 25/11/2010 and governed by Presidential Order N° 074/01 OF 09/12/2022. Its mission is to develop agriculture and animal resources through research, agricultural extension and animal resources extension in order to increase agricultural and animal resources productivity and quality, as well as their derived products.

[30] CPF (Confédération Paysanne du Faso) was created to represent the interests of different rural organisations in a single framework. It aims to defend the interests of its members, consisting of umbrella organisations, core organisations and agricultural producers. CPF represent about fifteen umbrella organisations, themselves made up of core organisations: 30,515 core organisations and approximately one million producers.

[31] SAT is a non-profit organization created in 2011 that aims at transforming practises in Tanzania through proper knowledge dissemination and farmers' capacity building.

[32] RYNAN Technologies is a tech innovator that creates and develops advanced solutions (pest management to water monitoring solutions) that empowers farmers and organisations to cultivate more sustainably.

		A future phase should move from opportunistic engagement to a strategic and prioritised collaboration model. This would involve identifying, at design stage, a limited number of thematic priorities (OECMs in agricultural landscapes, ecosystem-based approaches, governance and legal enablers for NbS/FAS) and formally assigning lead and supporting Commissions or thematic teams to each priority. For each collaboration, the expected value added (technical validation, policy positioning, standard-setting, or uptake support) and the intended outputs should be clearly defined. Collaboration modalities should combine HQ-led delivery with structured Commission input, ensuring both efficiency and legitimacy. Where possible, Commission engagement should be linked to concrete country pilots or case studies to ground global-level work in practice and strengthen feedback loops. Dedicated resources, clear timelines, and focal points on both sides should be allocated to avoid delays and over-reliance on voluntary contributions.
Implementation and coordination	**SR6. Formalise a co-design process with country teams at inception to align expectations and capitalise on local opportunities**	Phase 1 relied on informal flexibility, but country teams expressed uncertainty over how far they could adjust deliverables or sequencing, limiting the programme's ability to capture emerging local opportunities. A structured co-design process at inception would clarify roles and enable timely localisation. This should include joint planning workshops to map national entry points, annual prioritisation of deliverables based on local demand and absorptive capacity, and a light adaptation protocol that defines what can be modified, how decisions are taken, and how flexible resources can be accessed. This will improve relevance, strengthen ownership, and enable country teams to leverage local policy windows more effectively.
	SR7. Treat country-level adaptation, uptake, and internal integration as core design features	Phase 1 demonstrated that delivery, adaptation, and uptake are fragile when dependent on a small core team, limited country focal points, and ad hoc coordination. Future phases should embed country-level adaptation and uptake into project design, clarifying roles, decision rights, and resourcing for national teams. At the same time, internal coordination should be treated as a standalone workstream, with clear responsibilities for joint work planning, ring-fenced staff time, and shared milestones in the results framework. Dedicated budgets for localisation, training, and simple uptake tracking, combined with structured internal coordination, will ensure technical expertise is mobilised consistently, cross-unit synergies are realised, and strong technical outputs are translated into measurable policy and practice change.

3.8. OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Type	Recommendation	Details
Delivery and sequencing	**OR1. Consolidate deliverables into sequenced country packages to enhance depth and efficiency**	Phase 1 produced numerous small, parallel deliverables, which stretched country teams and limited the follow-through needed for institutional uptake. Future phases should streamline work into fewer, high-value packages per country for example, a CGD linked to a tool and a targeted pilot and deliver these in sequenced phases. This would allow each intervention to be tested, adapted, and embedded before moving to scale, producing tangible cases that strengthen IUCN's credibility and funding prospects. This could include limiting new tools/publications to a few high-impact products that respond to clear institutional or user demand; sequencing activities to ensure each deliverable has space for piloting, training, and uptake before moving to the next; using existing platforms (CGDs, GEF proposals, regional events) to bundle outputs to maximise visibility and efficiency.
	OR2. Align CGDs with mapped policy or financing windows and establish structured follow-up mechanisms	CGDs were most effective when linked to active reforms or donor pipelines, but where follow-up lagged, their influence diminished. Future programming should map policy calendars and financing windows at inception, schedule CGDs to align with these, and assign clear follow-up responsibilities with minimal resourcing (for example, six-month progress briefs or integration into a proposal or action plan). This would help ensure that convening translates into measurable institutional uptake rather than isolated events.
Uptake and performance tracking	**OR3. Develop a standard localisation and uptake plan for each tool to ensure outputs are actionable at field level**	AGSTA's tools were widely valued but often remained abstract for practitioners and decision-makers. Future phases should integrate a localisation and uptake plan into the design and budget of each tool. This should include identifying institutional users, producing simplified and modular formats for non-technical actors, translating and endorsing tools where appropriate, and defining handover responsibilities at the point of design. A simple feedback mechanism should capture user experience to support iterative refinement. This approach will convert knowledge products into practical resources that inform decision-making and field implementation.

	OR4. Integrate MEL from inception to track influence and guide adaptation	Phase 1's MEL was introduced late and focused largely on activity tracking, limiting its contribution to real-time learning and external communication. A future phase should establish a lean but robust system that goes beyond counting activities to capturing evidence of influence and uptake. This should include indicators such as the number of institutions adopting AGSTA tools, references in national policy or planning documents, and resources mobilised using AGSTA products. At the same time, field-level M&E should be reported regularly and connected to the broader project framework, complemented by structured reflection sessions. Together, these measures would enable FAS to track not only delivery but also tangible changes in policy, practice, and institutionalisation, while strengthening the evidence base for internal learning and external investment cases. Future MEL systems should be embedded from the outset, resourced adequately, and tailored to reflect country priorities and capacities. They should track changes in partner behaviour, institutional uptake, and system-level influence, aligned with the project's theory of change. MEL should be phased, with early stages focused on piloting and feedback and later stages on embedding metrics within national systems. Data collection must be feasible, outputs should support both accountability and adaptive management, and feedback loops between field teams and HQ should ensure insights drive real-time learning. The IKEA Foundation could consider making a robust MEL system a formal requirement in future projects, ensuring partners allocate sufficient resources and attention to monitoring, learning, and demonstrating impact.

4. ANNEXES

4.1. EVALUATION MATRIX

Relevance	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*
1. To what extent was the project aligned with IUCN's strategic vision, priorities, and programme goals for food and agricultural systems transformation?	• To what extent AGSTA was aligned, and remains aligned, with IUCN's *new* Food Agricultural Systems (FAS) vision and ToC? • How has AGSTA contributed to shaping IUCN's positioning and strategy on sustainable agriculture? • What elements of the AGSTA ToC require refinement to align better with institutional priorities and support scale-up?
2. To what extent was the project relevant to the context and end beneficiaries?	• To what extent do the project outputs reflect and support the main global and national priorities for sustainable food and agriculture in the pilot countries? • To what extent is the project aligned with direct beneficiaries (IUCN staff) needs/priorities? • To what extent is the project aligned with the end beneficiaries' (e.g. farmers and value-chain) needs/priorities? • How is AGSTA's value added perceived by these stakeholders?
Coherence	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*
3. To what extent was the project coherent internally within IUCN initiatives?	• To what extent and how effectively has the project been integrated with other IUCN initiatives at global, regional, and country levels? *including agri-related initiatives led by IUCN within the agriculture team and other teams (Sustain Pro/Eco, BIODEV2030, France-IUCN partnership, and regional and national projects related to FAS, etc.)* • What factors enabled or limited integration across teams and levels?
4. To what extent was the project coherent with external initiatives?	• To what extent does the project complement ongoing efforts by external actors (e.g., NGOs, governments, private sector) in sustainable food and agricultural systems? • What strategic partnerships did AGSTA build or strengthen, and where were opportunities missed? • What is IUCN's comparative advantage in this space?
Effectiveness	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*
5. To what extent did the project achieve its intended results?	• To what extent were outputs and outcomes achieved across each of the project's workstreams? • Did the project have any unexpected positive or negative results? • Are the results likely to be achieved during the project period?
6. Which enabling/constraining factors affected its implementation?	• What internal/external factors enabled its successful implementation? • What internal/external factors constrained its implementation?
7. Which intervention types (dialogues, tools, pilots) generated the most significant policy, practice or financing changes, and why?	• What observable changes (e.g. in policy, practice, financing) can be linked to each intervention type? • What design features or contextual factors contributed to those changes? • Which enabling factors are transferable to other contexts or potential future projects?
Efficiency	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*

8. How efficiently were resources and implementation arrangements managed to deliver results?	• What were the actual expenditure rates against the budget? To what extent are activities being delivered within budget? • To what extent is the project cost-effective? • To what extent is the project's budget aligned with its objectives? To what extent was the distribution of resources across countries and workstreams appropriate for the intended outcomes? • To what extent were AGSTA's implementation arrangements (e.g. team structure, coordination) suited to its scope? How effective were they in supporting collaboration and delivery? • Are there any financial challenges that have affected resource allocation or may affect them in the future?
9. To what extent did the new MEL system improve adaptive management? *(new)*	• What was the process and timeline for setting up the MEL system for the AGSTA project, and what constrains affected its implementation? • To what extent has the upgraded MEL been used to track progress, support learning, and improve management decisions or efficiency? • What are the main limitations and opportunities for strengthening MEL in future phases?
Sustainability	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*
10. What is the likelihood that AGSTA results and capacities will persist and scale after 2025, within IUCN and in the six pilot countries?	• To what extent have AGSTA results been integrated within IUCN's institutional systems and how likely are they to endure? • To what extent are AGSTA's results likely to be sustained or scaled by non-IUCN partners within the pilot countries and more globally? • What external risks or enablers could affect the scaling or replication of AGSTA results?
Learning and adaptation	
Key evaluation questions	*Sub-questions*
11. To what extent did the project adapt to relevant internal/external circumstances?	• To what extent did the project adapt its approach based on learning (including mid-term review), stakeholder feedback, and evolving contexts (including internal organisational shifts)? What was changed as a result of this?
12. What lessons have emerged from project implementation that can inform future design and delivery of similar initiatives?	• What lessons from AGSTA's implementation can inform future design and delivery of similar initiatives? • Which key AGSTA interventions (common ground dialogues, pilot projects, tool development) are best positioned for scale-up, and what changes would strengthen them? • Which countries and partners should be prioritised in the next phase?

4.2. LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Organisation	Name	Position	Date
IUCN FAS team Secretariat	Silvia Cardellino	Senior Programme Officer - Project Manager AGSTA	25.06.2025
	Simon Julien	Knowledge product and capacity building Lead	27.06.2025
	Orsolya Nyarai	Policy and NbS Lead	24.07.2025
	Camille Darbo	Communication & events coordinator	26.06.2025
	Tatiana Chudina	Finance and Budget Officer	18.06.2025
IUCN India Country Office	Meenal Pahuja	Country Lead	01.07.2025
	Nishant Jain	Co - Lead	01.07.2025
IUCN Vietnam Country Office	Andrew Wyatt	Country Lead	04.07.2025
	Phong Nguyen Thanh	Agriculture and NbS specialist	09.07.2025
	Jake Brunner	Regional head, Lower Mekong Sub-region	04.07.2025
	Thi Thuy Anh Nguyen	Communications Manager	04.07.2025
	Thi Kim Dung Nguyen	Finance Manager	04.07.2025
IUCN Guatemala country office	Adolfo Ottoniel Monterroso Riva	Country Lead	27.06.2025
IUCN Burkina Faso country office	Jacques Somda	Country Lead	04.07.2025
IUCN Rwanda country office	Kaori Yasuda	Country Lead	17.06.2025
	Jules Rutebuka	AGSTA project manager	16.06.2025
	Jean Claude Habimana	Communication Officer	16.06.2025
	Ephrem Imanirareba	Former AGSTA project manager	16.06.2025
	Etienne Ndayambaje	MEL specialist	17.06.2025
IUCN Tanzania country office	Anthony Mhagama	Programme Manager -SUSTAIN Country Lead	27.06.2025
IUCN PACO	Germain Goungounga	Programme Coordinator, PACO	27.06.2025
IUCN ESARO	Innocent Kabenga	Regional Head ESARO -Country Lead for Kenya	27.06.2025
IUCN ORMACC	Tania Ammour	Senior Advisor & project Lead ORMACC	27.06.2025
IUCN European Regional Office - NbS and Agriculture publication	Schnell Alberto Arroyo	Head of Programme and Policy	27.06.2025
IUCN Secretariat - STAR metrics and Contribution for Nature platform	Antonin Vergez	Senior expert for Natural Resources Economics (STAR)	18.07.2025
WWF	Martina Fleckenstein	Global Policy Director	23.07.2025
Ikea Foundation	Julia Hug	Program Manager, Agricultural Livelihoods	24.06.2025

	Nic Vand Der Jagt	MEL Manager	23.06.2025
External Consultant – IUCN secretariat	Simon Cooper	Communication Consultant	09.06.2025
National Expert Rwanda	Ngoga Tenge	LH and NbS expert	17.06.2025
	Pascale Rushemuka	Agronomist	17.06.2025
	Philippe Munyandamutsa	LH and NbS expert	17.06.2025
Farmers organisation	Vincent Nshizirungu	KOAIRA (cooperative of farmers growing potato in Rega and Arusha cells)	18.06.2025
	Sandrine Muziranenge	KOAIRA (cooperative of farmers growing potato in Rega and Arusha cells)	18.06.2025
External partners RWANDA	Alexandre Rutika	Technical advisor- Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources of Rwanda	20.06.2025
	Oscar Nzabonimpa	Managing Director of APEFA Rwanda	20.06.2025
External partners Vietnam	Nguyen Khoi Nghia	Scientists – testing the tools and participated in the CGD, Can Tho University	09.07.2025
	Pham Van Tri	Director of the Dragon Research Institute for Climate Change	09.07.2025
	Tran Dain Nghia	Former team leader, Climate change, NDC, NbS and REDD+ Research Group, Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture & Rural Development (IPSARD)	04.07.2025
	Nguyen Khai Hoan	Ministry of Agriculture and Environment - Central Project Office	04.07.2025
	Bui Hai Nam	Deputy Director General, NIAPP	07.07.2025

4.3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Author	Title of the document	Time of publication
IUCN	Council document C113/4/1, Programme 2026-2029	24 April 2025
Tommaso Demozzi, Barbara Pia Oberč, Ana Prieto López, Ludovic Larbodière, Maria Ana Borges	Sustainable agriculture and Nature-based Solutions	2024
Ana Prieto López, Facundo Odriozola, Barbara Pia Oberč, Tommaso Demozzi, Diarmaid Ó Cuanacháin, Ophélie Cuvillard	Assessing the biodiversity-agriculture nexus	2024
Family Farmers for Climate Action	Money well spent?	November 2024
IUCN	IUCN Evaluation Policy	June 2023
IUCN	Nature 2030: a programme for the Union 2021-2024	February 2021
L. Larbodière, J. Davies, R. Schimdt, C. Magero, A. Vidal, A. Arroyo Schenell, P. Bucher, S. Maginnis, N. Cox, O. Hasinger, P. C. Abhilash, N. Conner, V. Westerberg, L. Costa	Common ground: restoring land health for sustainable agriculture	2020
P. Dussan Lopez	Land health monitoring framework: towards a tool for assessing functional and habitat diversity in agroecosystems	2023
IUCN	Unite for Nature on the path to 2045: a 20-year strategic vision for the Union. Congress Decision 147: 20-year strategic vision	28 April 2023
Rwanda Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources	Fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (PSTA 5)	June 2024
IUCN	Report of the National Common Ground Dialogue in India	2023
IUCN	Agriculture and conservation: living nature in a globalized world IUCN flagship report series n°2	2024
IUCN	2021 report on the Species Survival Commission and the Global Species and Key Biodiversity Area Programme	2023
IUCN	AGSTA annual report 2024	2024
The World Bank	Climate-smart Agriculture Investment Plan for Burkina Faso	April 2020
Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources	Fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (PSTA 5)	June 2024
IUCN India	Report of the workshop: Mainstreaming Nature/Ecosystem-based Solutions and Land Health Monitoring in Agriculture	March 2024
Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF)	Study to field test IUCN's Land Health Framework in an agricultural landscape, provide guidance to improve the framework under the IUCN's project AGSTA	March 2024
Ikea Foundation	Progress Report - Interim Financial and Revised Budget 01/01/2024 – 31/12/2024	31 March 2025
IUCN	Final report 01/10/2021 – 31/12/2022	30 March 2023
IUCN	AGSTA annual report 2023	March 2024
IUCN	FAST team retreat 2025 PPT	27-30 January 2025
IUCN	2025 Communication Strategy and Operational Plan (Draft 5)	2025

IUCN	IUCN FAS Theory of Change, summary narrative	008 May 2025
IUCN Burkina Faso	Infranational Dialogue on Sustainable Agriculture in the Central-East and Central-South administrative regions of Burkina Faso, report	June 2023
IUCN Tanzania	AGSTA Inception Workshop and National Dialogue Report	February 2023
IUCN Vietnam	Report on the National Common Ground Dialogue	October 2023
IUCN Guatemala	Regional Common Ground Dialogue Report	November 2023
Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial	Améliorer la santé des terres par le dialogue et les Solutions fondées sur la Nature	26 Avril 2023
IUCN	Management Response to Mid-Term Review	April 2024
TERO Coopérative d'Experts Engagés	Mid-term review of the project: Accelerating the Global Transition to Sustainable Agriculture	March 2024
IUCN	IUCN internal staff time agreement for project implementation: Common Ground Dialogue in Rwanda, next steps towards WCC-2025	May 2025
IUCN	IUCN internal staff time agreement for project implementation: Common Ground Dialogue in Vietnam, next steps towards WCC-2025	April 2025
IUCN	Stakeholders' Dialogue on Sustainable Agricultural Practices in Ghana Report	October 2023
IUCN	Report of the National Dialogue Workshop on Sustainable Agriculture in Niger held from October 25 to 26, 2023 in Dosso	October 2023
IUCN	Introduction to Conservation and Agriculture (Online Course)	Octobre 2025
IUCN	Roundtable Dialogue on IUCN Motion 002: Accelerating action for nature-positive, sustainable agriculture and food systems	October 2025
IUCN	Policy and legal enabling conditions for sustainable agriculture: A multilevel comparative approach	2025
IUCN	Common Ground Dialogue on Sustainable Agriculture in and around High Biodiversity Landscapes in India (Workshop summary, New Delhi)	August 2025
Farfan, M. et al. (Soils for Europe Consortium)	Outlook on the knowledge gaps to improve nature conservation of soil biodiversity (Soils for Europe 1: e149005)	September 2025
IUCN and FFEM	Note d'engagement de projet: Solutions fondées sur la Nature pour améliorer la santé des terres (Solnaterre), Rwanda&Inde	September 2025

4.4. PROJECT'S ACHIEVEMENTS PER OUTCOME AND OUTPUT

Outcome/output	Rating	Achievement
Outcome 1: A IUCN vision and strategy for FAS transformation and sustainable agriculture are established and key stakeholder groups are engaged (e.g., members, commissions, partners, civil society) for FAS transformation and sustainable agriculture supported by key stakeholders by 2025	**Satisfactory**	Most outputs (1.1, 1.2, 1.3) have been delivered satisfactorily, demonstrating strong progress in vision-setting, dialogue facilitation, and policy analysis. While outputs 1.4 and 1.5 are rated moderately satisfactory due to partial delivery as of mid-2025, more work on knowledge products and communication is expected by the end of 2025. The principal limitation lies in the outcome framing around "establishing a strategy and securing support" does not reflect the project's most significant achievement: repositioning agriculture within IUCN and securing legitimacy for a new institutional agenda. While the outputs are substantial and well-articulated, the outcome framing underrepresents their broader strategic significance.
Output 1.1: UCN constituencies (Secretariat, Members, Commissions, and other stakeholders) are mobilised and actively engaged to establish the foundations of IUCN FAS vision and strategy by Q3 2025	Satisfactory	The engagement of IUCN constituencies to shape the FAS vision and strategy has been progressed according to plan. A foundational vision document was developed, and the ToC was completed in 2024 and has been turned into an infographic for easier dissemination and appropriation. Extensive stakeholder consultations were held throughout 2023-2024, complemented by regular quarterly calls with FAS focal points. In 2024, IUCN members identified FAS as a top priority across all five RCFs. Engagement at the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025 was extensive, multi-layered, and strategically aligned with the growing prominence of FAS within IUCN's agenda. Overall, engagement has been meaningful throughout project's implementation.
Output 1.2: Facilitated national and regional "common ground" multistakeholder dialogues among agricultural and conservation actors by Q3 2025	Satisfactory	National-level common ground dialogues were successfully organised in all six target countries, engaging agricultural and conservation actors around shared priorities. Three national dialogues have been organised in Rwanda, two in Burkina Faso, one in Tanzania, one in India and another one to be held soon, one in Vietnam, one in Guatemala. In addition, regional dialogues were convened, fostering cross-country learning and collaboration. One regional dialogue has been organised in East Africa (Uganda), one regional dialogue in West Africa (gathering Burkina Faso, Niger, and Ghana), and one in Central American (Guatemala). These efforts have contributed to a constructive policy environment, and in several instances, led to the signing of joint declarations demonstrating tangible outcomes. At ESARO level, there has been one joint communication (link) between IUCN, Ugandan MoA, representative from the government of Uganda, civil society and ASARECA (farmers organisation). While the overall level of engagement and coverage meets expectations, ongoing follow-up and implementation of agreed commitments will determine the long-term impact.
Output 1.3: Published a legal review of global and regional instruments, policies and laws supporting sustainable agriculture and disseminated it	Satisfactory	The legal review has been conducted. The report has been prepared and is being finalized. It will be launched by end of December 2025.

to key stakeholders by Q3 2025		
Output 1.4: Advanced methodologies and partnerships to integrate agriculture's biodiversity impacts into sustainability metrics by Q2 2025	Moderately satisfactory	Progress has been made toward integrating biodiversity impacts into sustainability metrics, but the output remains partially delivered as of mid-2025. A manuscript has been finalised in 2024 (Antonin Vergez's proposal paper on how to reflect more sustainable agriculture practices into the star metric). However, these remain early steps in terms of scientific uptake and operational use. Further work around this output is expected by end of 2025.
Output 1.5: Established and maintained communication channels (e.g., webpage, LinkedIn, newsletters) to increase visibility and impact of IUCN FAS vision and work by Q3 2025	Moderately satisfactory	Considerable communication efforts have been made, including the restructuring of the IUCN FAS webpage and the launch of an active LinkedIn channel in 2024. Several communication materials were developed to support outreach. These actions have laid a solid foundation for increased global visibility (at the HQ level). However, the regular and strategic use of communication channels at country level could have been strengthened. Initially, communication was not budgeted as a separate line but was embedded within other activities. In 2023, a strategic shift was made to consolidate efforts around communication, hiring a consultant to develop a global communication foundation. Internal agreements with countries included communication components, and Panorama stories were introduced as a key platform to showcase country-level results.
Outcome 2: Increased awareness and evidence of sustainable agriculture's benefits through publishing frameworks, tools, and organising international side events, by 2025	**Moderately satisfactory**	All four outputs under Outcome 2 have been delivered broadly in line with planned timelines. Key achievements include the development and launch of the LHMF and platform (Output 2.1), progress in soil biota monitoring with technical and scientific contributions to the IUCN Red List (Output 2.2), publication of the global flagship report on sustainable agriculture (Output 2.3), and proactive advocacy at major international fora such as the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD (Output 2.4). These represent important technical and policy milestones. However, the outcome rating is assessed as moderately satisfactory because progress to date remains more evident in the production and dissemination of tools and knowledge than in their uptake and use by partners and farmers, or other target stakeholders. While advocacy has been proactive, concrete evidence of adoption, integration into decision-making, and measurable influence on practices or policies remains limited at this stage. Sustained engagement and capacity support will be needed to translate these outputs into broader, outcome-level change.
Output 2.1: Developed and published a land health monitoring framework and launched an online tool to guide users through the LHM assessment at national, landscape, farm, and soil levels by Q2 2025	Satisfactory	The LHMF was successfully developed and published in 2023, providing a solid conceptual and technical foundation. The corresponding online platform is being refined to reflect partners' needs. The framework has already contributed to technical discussions and pilot testing in several countries.
Output 2.2: Strengthened opportunities for monitoring soil biota conservation status and land health within	Satisfactory	Solid progress has been made in strengthening soil biota monitoring. A scientific article has been completed (2024). Key technical milestones were achieved, including the finalisation of a definition for "soil species" (2024) and the inclusion of 400

agricultural landscapes by Q2 2025		beneficial soil species plus 100 additional species on the IUCN Red List (2024). An internal data table and report were produced, and a workshop was convened in 2024 to support expert engagement.
Output 2.3: Published a global and regional cost-benefit analysis report on transitioning to sustainable agriculture as part of the IUCN Flagship report series, by Q4 2024	Satisfactory	The flagship report on agriculture and conservation was successfully published in 2024, meeting the planned timeline and scope. This publication contributes to the global evidence base on sustainable agriculture and supports advocacy and policy engagement efforts.
Output 2.4: Engaged in awareness raising and policy advocacy in at least three international fora (e.g., CBD, CCC, CCD COPs) to promote the transition to sustainable agriculture by Q4 2025	Satisfactory	IUCN participated in three major international fora to date: UNFCCC (2023), CBD (2024), and UNCCD (2024) meeting the minimum target ahead of schedule. In addition, 15 events have been organised (3 in 2023 and 12 in 2024), along with one advocacy campaign in 2024. In 2025, the FAST has participated in the AFSF in Dakar, the Copenhagen Organic Summit alongside other events.
Outcome 3: Facilitated the transition toward sustainable agriculture by supporting internal and external stakeholders in identifying opportunities and developing strategic projects by 2025	**Moderately satisfactory**	Most outputs under Outcome 3 are on track, with satisfactory progress across guidance development, training, and capacity-building efforts. The NbS guidance document (Output 3.1) is set to be launched by the end of 2025, aligned with project timelines. Field workshops on NbS and LHMF have been delivered in all pilot countries, and an online course is expected to be launched at the WCC in October 2025 (Output 3.3), demonstrating strong capacity-building engagement. While Output 3.2 is rated moderately satisfactory due to the cancellation of two proposals, the development of six investment concepts, 3 of which have already secured funding represents tangible progress in expanding IUCN's sustainable agriculture portfolio. However, the overall outcome ambition of "facilitating transition to sustainable agriculture" was high for a single project phase. Systemic transition cannot yet be demonstrated, but the groundwork established provides a basis for deeper engagement in future cycles.
Output 3.1: Developed a guidance document to assess, monitor, and develop NbS interventions in the agricultural context by Q3 2025	Satisfactory	Guidance has been developed and is currently being refined to reflect recent developments regarding the Global NbS standards. It will be launched by end of 2025.
Output 3.2: Expanded the IUCN portfolio on food and agricultural systems through comprehensive analysis and the development of six innovative investment proposals involving state and non-state actors by Q3 2025	Moderately satisfactory	Project proposals were developed in each target country using structured approaches such as GEF and GCF canvases. In the case of Rwanda, two proposals were designed, including one national and one regional project. As of December 2025, three proposals (Burkina Faso, Vietnam; and Tanzania) have secured funding, proposals in India, and Guatemala remain under discussion, and two were not taken forward. This represents meaningful progress in proposal preparation and donor engagement, but the claim of portfolio "expansion" is only partly substantiated, since most concepts have not yet advanced to implementation.
Output 3.3: Provided field workshops and training to key stakeholders on NbS guidance and LHMF and developed an	Satisfactory	Six workshops were delivered in the pilot countries, providing training on NbS and LHMF. The online course has been launched at the WCC in October 2025.

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