


COAST Annual Learning Synthesis 2024-25: Summary

Introduction

The COAST programme

The Climate and Ocean Adaptation and Sustainable Transition (COAST) programme, funded by the UK's International Climate Finance under the Blue Planet Fund, is a seven-year initiative designed to strengthen climate resilience and prosperity for vulnerable coastal communities through equitable and sustainable management of coastal resources. COAST operates in priority countries including Mozambique, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, with additional engagement in Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria.





The programme is implemented through four key components:

- ▶ **the COAST Facility** - led by DAI - which combines technical assistance and tailored grants to strengthen governance, coastal stewardship and sustainable livelihoods
- ▶ **the Asia–Africa BlueTech Superhighway (AABS)** - led by WorldFish - which harnesses south–south collaboration to pilot and scale evidence-based nature-positive innovations in aquatic food systems
- ▶ **the Blue Carbon Action Partnership (BCAP)**
 - led by the World Economic Forum (WEF)
 - which addresses barriers to high-quality blue carbon projects by catalysing multi-stakeholder conversations on policy, finance and standards
- ▶ **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) services** – led by Itad - which is responsible for collecting, organising, analysing and learning from MEL evidence generated at component and programme levels to support decision making and adaptation. The MEL services team play a key role in coordinating across COAST's components to support the integrated delivery of the COAST programme.

The annual learning synthesis

COAST's first annual learning synthesis covers the period April 2024–March 2025, and captures lessons from COAST's early design and implementation phase. It focuses on three of COAST's **Programmatic Learning Questions**:

- ▶ **Poverty alleviation:** What are the links between poverty alleviation and nature-based solutions, including sustainable aquaculture, small-scale fisheries and marine habitat protection, sustainable management and restoration?
- ▶ **Strategic partnerships:** How can we establish and sustain relevant and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships in line with COAST objectives?
- ▶ **Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI):** How might we apply best practices for GEDSI?

This brief summarises the lessons emerging from the programme.



Key Lessons

1 Poverty Alleviation: Links with Nature-Based Solutions

- ▶ **Sustainable aquaculture, small-scale fisheries, and marine habitat restoration have strong potential to reduce poverty** by creating income opportunities, improving food security and strengthening social capital within coastal communities. Under COAST, AABS is piloting integrated multi-trophic aquaculture systems, reducing pressure on small-scale fisheries and diversifying livelihoods, to promote more secure income and reduced poverty.
- ▶ **The relationship between poverty alleviation and nature-based solutions is complex and highly context-dependent**, with benefits varying by ecosystem type, intervention design, and time horizon, and often taking time to materialize. BCAP's work on blue carbon credits illustrates this complexity: while credits can generate income for communities, they require long-term ecosystem restoration, supported by robust governance frameworks before benefits are realized.
- ▶ **Community engagement and adaptive co-management are essential for interventions to succeed**, as participatory approaches enhance both poverty reduction and ecological outcomes. The COAST Facility is embedding participatory planning in its technical assistance and grant-making processes to ensure interventions reflect local priorities and build ownership.
- ▶ **Gender and social inclusion dimensions significantly influence poverty outcomes**, with women playing critical roles in fisheries and aquaculture. Disability inclusion is also important and requires greater attention to avoid reinforcing inequalities. AABS has begun applying gendered value chain analysis to aquaculture work packages, while BCAP is exploring women's roles in blue carbon ecosystems to inform National Blue Carbon Action Partnership (NBCAP) strategies.

Next steps on understanding poverty alleviation include generating evidence on multidimensional poverty through MEL-supported studies, such as AABS's planned research on trade-offs between nutrition, economic, and environmental impacts in Zanzibar's Dagaa value chain.

2 Strategic Partnerships: Building effective collaboration

- ▶ **Early and sustained engagement with government stakeholders is critical for anchoring partnerships and ensuring alignment with national priorities.** BCAP demonstrated this by securing ministerial support for NBCAPs in Indonesia and the Philippines, leveraging FCDO's convening power during COP28 to formalize inter-ministerial secretariats.
- ▶ **Partnership models must remain flexible and adaptive to local political and social contexts,** as rigid structures often fail to respond effectively to changing priorities. For instance, **BCAP** shifted from national-level coordination to more relational, subnational engagement in Indonesia when government priorities evolved.
- ▶ **The quality of partnerships - measured by trust, inclusiveness, and shared ownership - is as important as their formation.** AABS's co-development approach with local research institutions in Kenya has strengthened momentum and ownership. To capture such progress, MEL services have designed indicators for partnership quality, which will be piloted in 2025-26.
- ▶ **FCDO's convening power plays a strategic role in enhancing credibility and unlocking high-level buy-in,** which strengthens policy alignment and accelerates programme delivery. Partners are increasingly aligning their engagement with FCDO diplomatic moments and technical dialogues to reinforce shared messaging and unlock political traction.

Next steps on strategic partnerships include refining monitoring systems to capture partnership quality, deepening coordination between components in shared geographies (e.g., Indonesia and the Philippines), and leveraging global forums such as ASEAN Blue Economy dialogues to sustain momentum.





3 GEDSI: Applying best practices

- ▶ **Shared ambition creates alignment, but technical gaps need to be addressed to achieve theme ambitions.** COAST's GEDSI Ambition Statement has created a shared framework and aligned expectations across partners, but technical gaps remain in applying intersectional analysis and operationalising disability inclusion. For example, components report challenges in integrating disability considerations into fisheries and aquaculture interventions.
- ▶ **Capacity strengthening enables practical application of GEDSI approaches.** Capacity-building initiatives, such as the **AABS** GEDSI Capacity Building Workshop, introduced tools like the Women's Empowerment in Fisheries and Aquaculture Index (WEFI) and gendered value chain analysis, which are now influencing programme design and NBCAP strategies under **BCAP**.
- ▶ **Achieving transformative change requires more than technical tools; it demands trust-building, locally grounded facilitation, and participatory approaches** that address visible and hidden power dynamics. Components are experimenting with participatory methods such as Photovoice and community mapping to elevate lived experience in design and monitoring.
- ▶ **Learning platforms and monitoring systems are essential for understanding progress in GEDSI.** GEDSI is now a standing item at COAST Partner Coordination Forums, facilitated by the MEL services team. These have helped surface common challenges in implementing a GEDSI responsive approach in COAST, and facilitated exchange across components. Monitoring activities are focussed on disaggregated outputs and going forward will aim to capture deeper outcomes related to empowerment and systemic change. **MEL services** is embedding outcome-focused measurement across MEL cycles.

Next steps on GEDSI across components include operationalising GEDSI country strategies through dedicated advisors in priority countries, strengthening participatory approaches to knowledge production, and improving monitoring systems to capture empowerment and agency

Looking Ahead: COAST programme learning agenda 2025-26

In 2025-26, COAST is focussing on learning questions on exit strategies and scaling approaches:



Exit strategies: How might we develop and implement a robust exit strategy?



Scaling approach: How might we scale efficiently and effectively within the COAST programme context?

We will continue to prioritise poverty alleviation, partnerships, and GEDSI as cross-cutting themes. Enhanced monitoring will generate rich evidence for adaptive management, and evaluation activities will capture deeper insight on COAST's delivery to date. In our next learning synthesis, we will elevate insights on sustainability, scaling, and embedding inclusion across all programme dimensions.





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