COAST Annual Learning Synthesis 2025–26: Summary

Summary of lessons emerging from Climate and Ocean Adaptation and Sustainable Transition (COAST) programme implementation

November 2026



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 (BPF), is a seven-year initiative designed to strengthen climate resilience and prosperity for vulnerable coastal communities through the equitable and sustainable management of coastal resources. Since 2023, COAST has been operating in priority countries including Mozambique, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, with wider engagement in Kenya, Tanzania, and Bangladesh, from 2023- to 2026.

In the period 2023-–2026, COAST was implemented through four key components:

- **COAST Facility (2025–2030), led by DAI**, combines technical assistance and grants to strengthen inclusive coastal governance and resilient livelihoods, linking community action with government systems, markets, and finance.
- **The Asia–Africa BlueTech Superhighway (2023–2026), led by WorldFish**, uses South–South collaboration to pilot and scale nature-positive innovations in aquatic food systems.
- **The Blue Carbon Action Partnership (2023–2026), led by the World Economic Forum**, addresses barriers to high-quality blue carbon projects through collaboration on policy, finance, and standards.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Services (2024–2030), led by Itad**, collect, collate and analyse evidence from across the programme, and facilitate learning to support decision-making and adaptation.

The Annual Learning Synthesis

Each year, COAST undertakes an Annual Learning Synthesis to elevate evidence and experience from across the programme. The synthesis supports reflection and adaptation within COAST while generating lessons that inform the design and delivery of other coastal resilience and international development programmes. This summary presents lessons for COAST, the BPF and wider UK government (HMG) programming. It is also intended to be a resource for funders and implementers working within coastal resilience and related areas. This is the second Annual Learning Synthesis summary for COAST, and it covers the year April 2025 to March 2026. It focuses primarily on the two prioritised Programmatic Learning Questions for that year:

- **Scaling approaches:** How can we scale efficiently and effectively?
- **Exit strategies:** How can we develop and implement a robust exit strategy?

It also builds on the previous edition of the synthesis to elevate lessons on strategic partnerships and gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI). The findings draw on external evidence reviews, internal learning sessions, component reporting, annual monitoring data and the COAST process evaluation.

1 Scaling approaches: Scaling inclusive coastal adaptation solutions

COAST learning and evidence processes highlight that the scaling of coastal adaptation and poverty-focused interventions is a complex, political and systemic process. It requires multiple pathways, strong institutions, inclusive design, adaptive learning and aligned finance. It follows that scaling outcomes are shaped by how programmes manage trade-offs, context and power.

COAST learning processes have highlighted the following lessons:

- **Scaling is a systemic, multi-dimensional and multi-pathway process that depends on stakeholder coordination, capital and institutional readiness**. COAST learning to date has reinforced the recognition that scaling requires coordinated action across policy and regulation, finance, markets, institutions, and community systems, in a way that effectively supports linkages across scales. This learning is reflected in Blue Carbon Action Partnership (BCAP) roadmaps which integrate science, policy, finance and stakeholder engagement to set out realistic pathways for scaling blue carbon solutions. Through developing these roadmaps and associated stakeholder platforms, BCAP has brought together government, research, community and finance stakeholders to strengthen coordination around national blue carbon priorities and financing frameworks.
- **Scaling plans and approaches need to be cognisant of, and responsive to, different levels of scaling readiness across contexts, technologies, stakeholders and resources**. COAST learning emphasises that technical viability alone is insufficient for effective scaling – affordability, institutional capacity, stakeholder support and market demand also play important roles, and need to be understood and adapted to before a solution is introduced. For example, in Nigeria, Asia–Africa BlueTech Superhighway (AABS) efforts to better understand local environmental conditions and community contexts were critical for generating the community interest and buy-in needed to enable uptake within a new community. Their market assessment for finfish monoculture production revealed a demand for a more diverse range of aquatic products, while their approach to introducing Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) – a sustainable aquaculture model that co-cultivates species from different trophic levels – revealed the need to adapt the innovation to use brackish water.
- **Inclusion, equity and power dynamics shape whether scaling outcomes benefit vulnerable groups or reinforce existing inequalities**. In COAST evidence reviews, we have learned that scaling can reinforce or reduce inequality, depending on how it is designed. Inclusive scaling requires meaningful participation and attention to the power dynamics surrounding resource ownership and decision-making, while scaling without



confronting power dynamics reproduces exclusion and risks maladaptation. It follows that GEDSI needs to be embedded from the outset. COAST components are applying this principle in different ways: COAST Facility integrates GEDSI within its grant-making and technical assistance process; AABS engages GEDSI specialists to review workplans, design discussions, indicators and delivery approaches; and BCAP emphasises inclusive participation as a key aspect of the enabling environment for scaling blue carbon investments.

- **Finance, trade-offs and practical constraints determine what can realistically be scaled**. Through COAST learning processes, we have learned that programmes must navigate trade-offs between speed and inclusion, efficiency and sustainability, replication and adaptation, and breadth and depth. Experience within COAST has shown how these trade-offs can lead partners to pursue different approaches to scaling. In small-scale fisheries, COAST components have sometimes prioritised strengthening resilience rather than expanding the size or geographical reach of interventions. Components have found that scaling small, context-specific approaches while maintaining meaningful stakeholder engagement can be difficult. Their experience suggests that, depending on the objective and context, strengthening the depth of outcomes may be more appropriate than increasing reach.

- **Scaling is iterative, learning-driven and process-focused, requiring rigorous evidence on what is working, where pathways are emerging, and what adaptations are needed**. In COAST, we have learned that scaling requires continuous learning and adaptation, iterative testing and refinement, and attention to processes as well as outcomes. Components are putting this into practice through regional learning and exchange, which allows approaches to be compared and adapted across different settings. For example, regional collaboration on fisheries data systems in the Western Indian Ocean is supporting the development of shared tools and practices, enabling learning from one country to inform implementation in others. AABS has found that these exchanges support the sharing of practical knowledge and the development of regional networks. The experience also shows that lessons need to be adapted to the institutional and implementation context of each country rather than transferred unchanged.



Key takeaways: Scaling is not a question of making an intervention larger. Rather, programmes should strive to define the type and purpose of scale being pursued, assess readiness across the wider system, and invest in the relationships, finance and learning processes required to successfully adapt approaches without unintentionally reinforcing exclusion.

2 Exit strategies: Sustaining outcomes beyond COAST

Experience across COAST shows that sustainable exit in coastal programmes depends on early, phased and context-specific planning that embeds interventions within systems, builds local ownership and capacity, secures finance and networks, and adopts a resilience and equity-focused systems-level approach capable of adapting to shocks and sustaining outcomes beyond programme support.

COAST learning processes have highlighted the following lessons:

- **Exit planning must be embedded from the start of the programme, with phased planning, clear ownership and context-specific pathways defined**. In COAST, we have learned that early integration of exit thinking helps put in place the partnerships, financing and structures needed for transition. While milestones such as stakeholder capacity, readiness and ownership can help inform the exit process, challenges in sequencing and coordination during implementation can undermine sustainability potential, reducing the opportunity for learning transfer and continuity. To support sustainability and future programme exit, COAST components have focused in particular on facilitating local ownership, governance and management of coastal adaptation solutions, including through embedding knowledge and operational capacity for IMTA among farmers in Kenya, and nurturing uptake of interventions within local government systems in the Philippines.
- **Exit planning should aim for sustaining outcomes rather than sustaining activities – systems, networks and resources are key to achieving this**. COAST evidence reviews reveal that a successful exit does not require every programme-funded activity to continue. Instead, it requires the outcomes of those activities to become embedded within wider systems, relationships and resources. Components are applying this principle by connecting their work to the institutions and frameworks expected to remain after programme support ends. The COAST Facility is aligning its work in Vietnam with national five-year plans and regulatory systems, while BCAP is seeking to sustain outcomes through roadmaps and policy frameworks. However, programme experience has shown that institutional alignment alone may not be sufficient: sustainable exit also depends on securing the resources needed to continue and adapt the work.
- **Resilience, systems thinking and transformation are central to realising long-term sustainability**. Exit strategies need to anticipate political change, economic disruption, climate impacts and other external shocks, while sustaining the capacities needed to respond and adapt. Within COAST, implementing partners have observed how elections have affected programme continuity in Mozambique. AABS also found that coastal livelihood systems, such as gleaning, are sensitive to environmental and socioeconomic variation. Partners' experience therefore reinforces that local actors and systems need to be able to respond as political, environmental and livelihood conditions change. Exit strategies need to build their capacity to adapt post-implementation.
- **Equity, inclusion and power must remain central before, during and after exit**. In COAST, we have learned that exit strategies must address inequality, the distribution of benefits and the inclusion of marginalised groups so that transitions do not reinforce existing inequalities or enable elite capture. COAST evidence reviews highlight the importance of transferring power, strengthening local stakeholders' skills and access to resources, and institutionalising inclusive governance during programme delivery. The evidence suggests planning throughout implementation for who will hold authority, control resources and shape decisions after external support ends.

Key takeaways: Sustainable exits require early and context-specific planning that progressively embeds ownership, capacity, finance and decision-making within the systems and networks expected to sustain outcomes, while retaining a focus on resilience, equity and adaptation to shocks.

3 Strategic partnerships: Connecting communities, policy, finance and knowledge

COAST experience highlights that multi-stakeholder partnerships are a core enabler of effective and sustainable coastal programmes, with results emerging from locally grounded, government-aligned, and cross-sector collaborations that connect community action with policy systems, finance and knowledge networks. They require careful coordination, strategic partner selection and inclusive engagement to manage complexity and maximise impact.

COAST learning processes have highlighted the following lessons:

- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms are critical enablers of effective delivery and impact, enabling knowledge exchange, coordination, innovation, scaling and finance mobilisation**. COAST has facilitated the establishment and strengthening of multiple structured platforms, bringing together actors with different but complementary knowledge, mandates and resources. Experience shows that these partnerships require significant investment and careful coordination and governance.
  For example, a core focus for BCAP was the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms that connected governments, communities, researchers, civil society and investors in order to exchange knowledge and expertise on blue carbon initiatives. BCAP found that regular engagement through these platforms strengthened coordination and supported the development of key tools, including national roadmaps and financing frameworks.
- **Partnerships are most effective in terms of delivering sustainable outcomes when they promote integration across levels, sectors and skill sets**. In COAST, we have learned that effective multi-stakeholder partnerships operate across levels that include: global (investors, experts); national (government, policy actors); and local (communities, government, implementers). Within this, linkages across levels and disciplines are key to the success of investments and the ability to ground them in local realities. In Mozambique, for example, AABS facilitated engagement between national fisheries authorities, regional partners and local fishers to support the uptake and implementation of digital vessel-tracking tools.
- **Diverse multi-stakeholder partnerships strengthen inclusion and legitimacy, while targeted, strategic partnerships within these broader networks enhance effectiveness and scalability**. COAST components have highlighted that broad, inclusive partnerships ensure representation and thereby improve legitimacy. They help ensure that partnership approaches reflect different priorities, needs and forms of knowledge. Such partnerships are most effective when grounded in local organisations and networks, pre-existing relationships and trust,



and a deep contextual understanding. COAST reporting and evaluative evidence indicate that partnerships that actively involve communities lead to stronger ownership, better alignment with local realities and more durable outcomes. For example, through consultation with indigenous maritime ethnic groups such as the Sama-Bajau communities, Indigenous women, young men and women and people with disabilities, the COAST Facility has identified that co-management arrangements are more durable than single-actor approaches.

- **Government partnerships are foundational for policy influence, long-term institutional alignment, sustainability and scale**. The COAST experience suggests that strong and sustained government engagement can align programme activities with existing policy systems and support implementation and uptake. Across COAST, this includes the COAST Facility's engagement with local government units in the Philippines, multiple directorates within Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, fisheries ministries across AABS countries, and the Vietnamese government through BCAP. Components have learned the importance of sustained coordination and relationship management to ensure effective government partnerships.

Key takeaways: Partnerships are an essential enabling factor for ensuring effective implementation, scaling and sustainable outcomes. Similar programmes should identify the relationships needed across local, national and international systems, while investing in trust, coordination and clearly defined roles from the design stage.



4 GEDSI: From participation to empowerment

COAST experience highlights that achieving meaningful, transformative and sustained inclusion requires moving beyond participation to embedding GEDSI in systems, addressing power dynamics, strengthening evidence and resourcing, and enabling genuine decision-making power for marginalised groups.

COAST learning processes have highlighted the following lessons:

- **GEDSI approaches are most effective when integrated early, embedded in systems, processes and delivery, and treated as a core aspect of design and implementation**. Integrating GEDSI from the outset allows it to inform programme systems, resources and delivery. However, achieving GEDSI responsiveness, that is, empowering women and marginalised groups in ways that respond to their differential needs and vulnerabilities, takes time. COAST Facility reporting highlights the value of involving GEDSI specialists early and integrating GEDSI more strongly into reporting templates, environmental and social management processes and action plans, but it also flags that this does not automatically result in responsive or transformative outcomes. Within COAST, disability inclusion is less developed, with limited disability-disaggregated data, disability-specific analysis and implementing-partner experience. The COAST Facility has commissioned a Disability Scan to identify opportunities to strengthen disability inclusion, including potential partnerships with organisations of persons with disabilities and budgeting for reasonable accommodations.
- **Participation does not equal empowerment, however; transformative approaches require time, resources and therefore trade-offs**. In COAST, we have learned that evidence about who participates does not necessarily demonstrate whether participants meaningfully influence decisions or gain greater authority. COAST learning distinguishes consultation, which solicits input, from co-design, which supports shared decision-making and has greater potential for transformation. In the Philippines, the COAST Facility's Women-Managed Areas are being used as governance and resilience platforms that give women a more direct role in coastal resource management, representing efforts to move towards women having greater influence over coastal governance. Learning discussions within COAST have elevated that deep, transformative GEDSI approaches that address structural inequalities and historical marginalisation require dedicated and reliable resourcing, time and in-depth understanding of local context, gender and power dynamics, including localised barriers to inclusion.
- **Context, power and governance shape GEDSI outcomes, but translation of this knowledge in order to achieve measurable outcomes is a challenge**. In COAST, we have learned that representation, leadership, and power and knowledge dynamics influence whose experience and insights are elevated and applied in order to shape outcomes. It is therefore critical to understand the political economy and governance systems, local social norms and existing power dynamics within a project or programme context, for example, using tools such as political economy analysis and by meaningfully engaging with local stakeholders. COAST's process evaluation found that governance-focused activities face tensions associated with challenging power structures. In this context, COAST partners have recognised the value of identifying government 'champions' as entry points for change. For example, in Indonesia, COAST Facility partners are linking

Key takeaways: GEDSI-responsive programming requires reaching beyond the ambition of increasing participation to aim for embedding GEDSI within systems and resources. This requires distinguishing participation from decision-making and influence and carefully examining how context and power affect outcomes. Programmes require strong evidence that links approaches to sustained changes in agency, authority, equality and inclusion outcomes over time.



Looking ahead: COAST programme learning agenda 2026–27

In 2026–27, COAST will deepen learning around two priorities agreed at the COAST Partner Coordination Forum.

Blue Finance

How can COAST effectively catalyse and mobilise Blue Finance to support resilient, inclusive and sustainable coastal development?

We will define COAST's Blue Finance approach, articulating COAST's additional contribution within the Blue Planet Fund and wider Blue Finance landscape, reflecting the roles of external stakeholders, and exploring how to strengthen GEDSI integration.

GEDSI

How might we apply best practice on gender equality, disability and social inclusion?

COAST will map programme approaches to explore how GEDSI is applied across small-scale fisheries, aquaculture and coastal habitats, and how progress towards more responsive and transformative practice can be supported and evidenced.

Solving complex challenges through evidence and learning

Find out more about our work

www.itad.com

Itad Ltd
International House
Queens Road
Brighton, BN1 3XE
United Kingdom
T: +44 (0) 1273 765250

Itad Inc
c/o Open Gov Hub
1100 13th St NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC, 20005
United States

Itad Kenya
1870/610 The Westwood
Building Vale Close
Westlands, Nairobi
Kenya

@ItadLtd
Itad
mail@itad.com