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# ECO-SOLVE Mid-Project Evaluation Report

April 2026

**Authors**
This report was developed by FOS staff with input from ECO-SOLVE and key stakeholders. However, FOS staff have had full editorial control over the final contents of this report and are ultimately responsible for its findings and recommendations.



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# Executive Summary

**Executive Summary**

As ECO-SOLVE reaches the two-year milestone of its four-year mandate—funded by the European Union (EU) under the Global Illicit Flows Programme (GIFP),—this evaluation offers a critical opportunity to reflect on current progress and refine the strategic approach. Launched with the ambitious goal of disrupting the global flow of illicit environmental commodities through data, innovation, community resilience, and international cooperation, the project has successfully transitioned from foundational planning into a highly active, multi-faceted operational mechanism.

Over the past 24 months, ECO-SOLVE has set its holistic strategy into motion across four core outputs:

- **Data for Disruption:** The Global Monitoring System (GMS) has expanded to ten active data hubs, successfully turning digital footprints into actionable, open-source intelligence for law enforcement.
- **Multilateral Engagement:** A strategic pivot has positioned ECO-SOLVE as a premier convening platform, elevating the issue of environmental crime at major forums like the United Nations Transnational organised Crime (UNTOC) Conference of the Parties (COP) and through the milestone Paris Conference.
- **Community Engagement:** Targeted grants are fostering localised resilience and empowering frontline defenders in high-risk biodiversity hotspots.
- **Grant Hub (Amplifying Grants):** The project is actively working to bridge the global forensic data deficit by piloting cutting-edge AI and DNA technologies in real-world enforcement settings.

This progress has been achieved against a highly complex global landscape characterised by under-resourced law enforcement agencies, shrinking spaces for civil society, and shifting geopolitical priorities. Despite these headwinds, ECO-SOLVE has consistently proven its value as a genuine "force multiplier"—whether by brokering trust between local communities and authorities in Indonesia, providing vital open-source intelligence to overstretched investigators in South Africa, or elevating the voices of grassroots defenders at UN negotiations in Vienna.

**Conclusions and Strategic Recommendations**

The primary hurdle identified across all components of the evaluation is bridging the gap between short-term, localised interventions and long-term, systemic scale. The project faces a crucial "momentum into impact" challenge: it must ensure that high-level diplomatic resolutions and raw open-source intelligence successfully translate into concrete, law enforcement actions.

To maximise impact in the second half of the project, ECO-SOLVE should implement the following strategic adjustments:

- **Scale and Sustain Interventions:** To achieve true global scale, short-term catalytic funding must be paired with extended timelines or clear pathways for institutional handover. The project must define scaling objectives for its hyper-localised community grants and provide technologies with the follow-on funding and diplomatic backing required to cross the "academic-operational gap" into standard frontline law enforcement use.
- **Align Outputs for Cohesive Impact:** Break down operational silos to ensure that all Outputs are capitalising on each other's strengths. For example, the global policy advocacy (Output 2) is directly fuelled by the on-the-ground intelligence (Output 1) and technological innovations (Output 4) produced across the project. Datahubs (Output 1) could use their LE connections to support first-line defenders (Output 3). Or, Output 2's connection and advocacy could be used to support regional policy change based on Output 1's trend data. Many of these potential synergies have already been identified in the theories of change. ECO-SOLVE would benefit from a more structured conversation about how to foster and strengthen these connections.
- **Pivot to Strategic Law Enforcement Support:** Because environmental law enforcement agencies are chronically under-resourced, simply handing over detection reports is not always sufficient. Data hubs should pivot toward actively helping authorities formulate strategic responses. Simultaneously, the project should consider how to maximise the impact of crime trend data generated by the hubs to influence national and regional policy to create supportive environments for law enforcement action.
- **Broaden and Integrate Partnerships:** Multilateral advocacy efforts should be expanded beyond civil society to engage bilaterally with "middle-ground" states, African voices, and private sector tech and banking entities. Internally, ECO-SOLVE must combat grantee isolation by establishing formal mechanisms for cross-project communication and increasing the integration and oversight of partner-run data hubs.

## Project Summary

As ECO-SOLVE crosses the two-year milestone of the project, this mid-project evaluation offers an invaluable opportunity to pause, reflect, and assess progress. Launched as a four-year initiative funded by the EU under the GIFP, ECO-SOLVE was designed with an ambitious and urgent mandate: to disrupt the global flow of illicit environmental commodities through data, innovation, community resilience, and international cooperation. This evaluation is fundamentally learning-focused; its goal is not simply to audit past performance, but to draw directly from the real-world experiences of staff, hub liaisons, and grantees to refine the strategic approach, adapt to emerging challenges, and maximise impact through the project's conclusion in August 2027.

Over the past 24 months, ECO-SOLVE has successfully transitioned from its foundational planning stages into a highly active, multi-faceted operational mechanism. The project's holistic strategy is now in motion across its four core outputs. The GMS has expanded to ten active data hubs across the globe, turning digital footprints into actionable intelligence for law enforcement. Simultaneously, a strategic pivot has successfully positioned ECO-SOLVE as a central, convening platform for multilateral engagement, highlighted by the successful Security and Development Dialogues and the "Paris to Belém-Abu Dhabi" trajectory. On the ground, targeted community grants are fostering localised resilience in high-risk biodiversity hotspots, while the Amplifying Grants are actively working to bridge the global forensic data deficit by piloting cutting-edge AI and DNA technologies in frontline settings.

This progress has been achieved against the backdrop of a highly complex and often volatile global landscape. Interviews conducted during this evaluation reveal the distinct operational realities of fighting environmental crime today: under-resourced law enforcement agencies, shrinking spaces for civil society, and shifting geopolitical priorities. Yet, despite these headwinds, ECO-SOLVE has consistently demonstrated its value as a genuine "force multiplier." Whether it is brokering trust between local communities and authorities in Indonesia, providing vital open-source intelligence (OSINT) to overstretched investigators in South Africa, or elevating the voices of grassroots environmental defenders at UN negotiations in Vienna, the project is proving that innovative, cross-sectoral approaches can drive meaningful change.

The following pages synthesise the insights, successes, and challenges uncovered during this mid-term review. This report will explore the effectiveness and operational realities of each output, examine the vital synergies between the data-driven and community-led approaches, and evaluate how the project is navigating complex relationships with law enforcement and multilateral institutions. Finally, it provides actionable recommendations to ensure that ECO-SOLVE continues to scale its technological innovations, sustain its partnerships, and achieve its ultimate goal of dismantling the networks driving environmental crime.

## Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation was conducted by Foundations of Success (FOS) - Europe. FOS-Europe is a mission-driven enterprise dedicated to accelerating and amplifying the impact of the global conservation community. We help teams overcome obstacles to evaluation and learning by promoting systematic approaches to realistic evidence collection and adaptive management. We believe that monitoring and evaluation is most valuable when it directly supports a team's management decisions and boosts their overall effectiveness. For the ECO-SOLVE mid-term evaluation, we adopted a dialogue-based approach grounded in the Conservation Standards.

To conduct the evaluation, we followed a structured, five-step methodology:

- **Step 1: Theories of Change and Evaluation Questions** - We collaborated with key ECO-SOLVE representatives to draft a theory of change for each of the four project Outputs. These frameworks helped us identify and agree upon the high-level evaluation questions that guided the rest of our work.
- **Step 2: Tool Design** - Using the agreed-upon evaluation questions, we designed tailored topic guides for key informant interviews, ensuring they were adapted to the context of the various target audiences.
- **Step 3: Data Collection** - Our data collection relied on a mix of methods. We conducted a comprehensive desk review by uploading relevant project reports and background documentation into a secure LLM for deeper analysis. We also conducted 2-8 key informant interviews per Output., and held informal, one-on-one discussions with the ECO-SOLVE Output leads to gauge their perceptions of the project's implementation and progress. These key informant interviews were conducted with agreements of confidentiality to encourage candid responses, especially from grantees. The ECO-SOLVE team does not have access to the notes or transcripts from these conversations.
- **Step 4: AI-Assisted Analysis** - We leveraged NotebookLM to process and summarise the collected evidence. To guarantee the integrity of our findings, FOS evaluators manually reviewed all AI-generated outputs for accuracy.
- **Step 5: Reporting and Synthesis** - We synthesised our analysis into this final summary report, organised by the theory of change for each Output, designed to provide clear and actionable insights for both the ECO-SOLVE team and donors.

Interviewees were proposed by the ECO-SOLVE team on the basis that those with direct engagement with the project's activities would have the most substantive and instructive knowledge. However, the interviewee pool was deliberately designed to include actors who operate independent of ECO-SOLVE's funding — including state diplomats from the French and Peruvian missions to the UN, and representatives of major established conservation

organisations (WCS, IFAW*, WTI*, TRAFFIC*[1]) with their own institutional bases and no financial reliance on the project. FOS retained full editorial control over findings and was not bound by any obligation to reflect the views of interviewees favourably. For the purposes of this evaluation, FOS feels that the evidence presented in interviews is sufficient to make recommendations. Moving forward, ECO-SOLVE could generate a more thorough understanding of their impact by interviewing stakeholders affected by the efforts beyond direct grantees and employees.

# Output 1. Data for Disruption

## Theory of Change

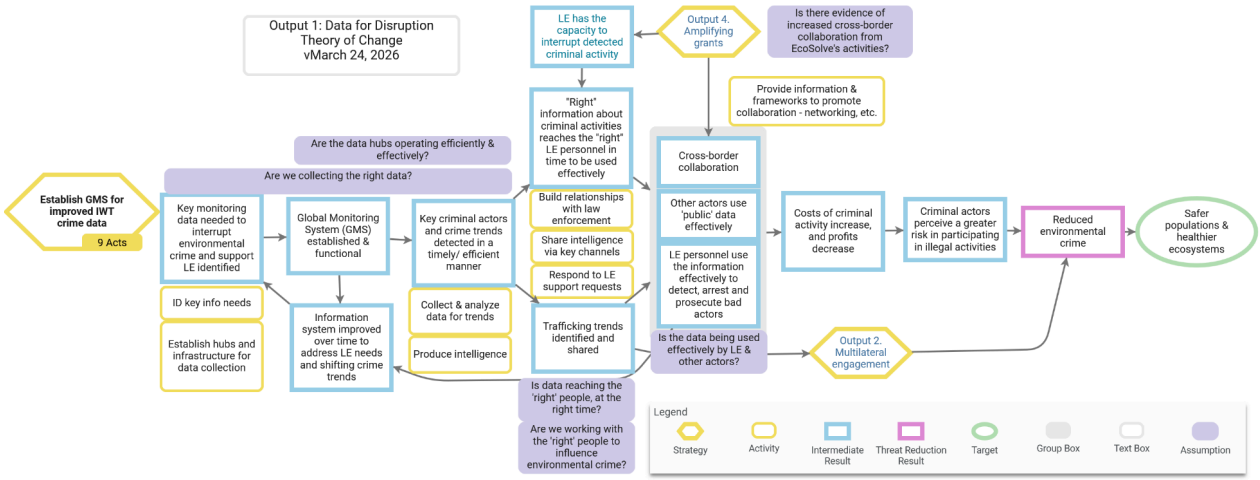



Figure 1. Diagram of the Theory of Change for Output 1 articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team and the priority questions designed to test key assumptions. A zoomed in version of the diagram is available in Annex 2.

Based on the theory of change, the core team from ECO-SOLVE, including the output leads, identified the following evaluation questions to better understand the progress toward implementing Output 1. In addition to understanding the current state of the project, these questions will also inform management decisions moving forward:

- Are the data hubs operating efficiently & effectively?
- Are we collecting the right data?
- Is data reaching the 'right' people (those with sufficient influence on environmental crime), at the right time?
- Is the data being used effectively by law enforcement and other actors?
- Is there evidence of increased cross-border collaboration from ECO-SOLVE's activities?

[1]*While these groups do represent partner grantees, they were selected for their existing efforts and relationships with LE. Therefore, their positions are not dependent on ECO-SOLVE and they operate without significant ECO-SOLVE oversight.

The following section attempts to answer these questions using the evidence generated by the desk review and relevant interviews. Ten key informant interviews were conducted between January and March 2026 with data analysts from the hubs (including partner hubs) and other key personnel from ECO-SOLVE staff working on Output 1. A complete list of interviewees is available in Annex 1.

## Evaluation Results

### *Are the data hubs operating efficiently and effectively?*

The GMS data hubs are proving to be highly effective at generating actionable intelligence, though their overall efficiency is constrained by staff capacity. The network has successfully expanded to 10 active global hubs, leveraging technological advancements like an AI-driven web scraper and a newly implemented Case Management System (CMS) to streamline data processing and cross-border collaboration. Hub analysts are even contributing to broader project priorities by providing additional functions, for example developing apps to track networks, and conducting and publishing research.

However, the operational efficiency of the hubs is hampered by resource constraints, most notably the heavy burden placed on individual analysts. In many country hubs, single analysts are wearing "too many hats," juggling open-source intelligence research, daily data entry, and complex relationship-building with law enforcement. While many analysts noted that they enjoyed the many facets of their work, it was also generally acknowledged that there was more to do - or that could be done - than was possible with current staffing. Without strict prioritisation from management, core responsibilities like generating detection reports can occasionally fall by the wayside when analysts are swamped with competing tasks.

### *Are we collecting the right data?*

Overall, the evidence suggests that the hubs are successfully capturing highly relevant and actionable intelligence, though there are inherent limitations to relying solely on open-source data to dismantle top-tier criminal networks.

All the data hub analysts felt that the data hubs are collecting what law enforcement (LE) needs to initiate or advance investigations. The hubs do not monitor randomly; they establish their "species baskets" based on CITES listings, national legislation, and direct consultation with local LE agencies to capture their priorities. LE agencies have already requested OSINT support at least 17 times from the analysts to enrich their own ongoing cases. In South Africa alone, the hub has fielded over 14 support requests, all of which contributed to active investigations. Finally, structured monitoring is proving to be an excellent proxy for broader market dynamics; the Brazil analyst noted that structural data markers (like seller concentration and the share of live vs. parts) correlate strongly with the broader GI-TOC Fauna Crimes Index.

Conversely, we must acknowledge that open-source monitoring may not always capture the right information to disrupt the *highest* levels of transnational syndicates. Several hub analysts noted that the untargeted open web monitoring (like public Facebook groups) predominantly exposes the lower links in the supply chain—poachers, opportunistic sellers, and low-level intermediaries. High-value, highly organised criminal networks (such as those dealing in rhino horn or tiger parts) are less visible on open platforms, instead using encrypted messaging apps or hidden channels. Furthermore, the data collected is often just the initial step in a much longer investigative process. As one analyst pointed out, open-source data is rarely sufficient on its own to trigger immediate arrest warrants; it requires LE to conduct deep, resource-intensive follow-up, which is difficult in chronically under-resourced departments. Finally, even when the hubs collect excellent data on a severe crime, it may not be "actionable" for political or logistical reasons. For instance, a spike in tiger trafficking in Thailand is difficult for LE to act upon because authorities lack the resources and facilities to seize, house, or euthanize captive tigers, resulting in the data being essentially shelved despite its accuracy.

In summary, the data hubs are highly effective at collecting the right information to benchmark global trends, map mid-level supply chains, and feed valuable leads to law enforcement. Many hub analysts attributed the success of their work to the fact that they collected information that addressed the priorities of LE and met those partners' needs. However, to translate this data into the complete disruption of the most harmful, cross-border syndicates, the project will need to continue investing in advanced network analysis tools and cross-border data sharing, while recognising that open-source intelligence will always need to be paired with robust, traditional law enforcement work on the ground.

### *Is data reaching the 'right' people (those with sufficient influence on environmental crime), at the right time?*

Overall, the evidence indicates that ECO-SOLVE's data hubs are highly effective at identifying and routing intelligence to the correct national-level authorities to interrupt wildlife crime. Every hub reported that they had relationships with the 'right' authorities to act on the intelligence they were gathering. The hubs strategically target central-level agencies and prosecutor's offices because these entities can securely distribute information to downstream units, which minimises the risk of inadvertently tipping off corrupt officials. For example, the South Africa hub feeds its data directly into the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment's Environmental Enforcement Fusion Centre, which then routes the packages to specific investigative units. In India, the hub leverages a 20-year organisational relationship with the central Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, and Customs authorities to ensure data reaches the right hands. Similarly, the Nigeria hub successfully identified the best pathway for its intelligence by pivoting to the Nigeria Customs Service's Special Wildlife Office, recognising that the primary environmental agency (NESREA) lacked the necessary manpower and investigative capacity to act on the data.

While the outcomes so far are largely positive, it is worth noting that sharing actionable information with the right people at the right time is a somewhat fragile result as it is largely dependent on the personal relationships analysts have built with LE in their country. Many hubs reported having a primary contact within LE that they had invested significant time getting to know. Information was often shared back and forth during informal, in-person meetings with these connections. Additional points of contact, on both ends, would increase the likelihood of long-term effectiveness by reducing the risk presented by staff turnover or capacity limitations.

### *Is the data being used effectively by LE & other actors?*

Based on the mid-project evaluation data, there is clear, documented evidence that the intelligence generated by the GMS is being acted upon by LE and yielding tangible results. Across the network, detection reports have achieved an approximate 41% positive feedback rate (25 out of 61 submitted reports). In a sector where law enforcement agencies routinely decline to confirm operational use of intelligence due to case confidentiality constraints, jurisdictional limitations, and institutional caution, any formal feedback rate represents a significant achievement. According to others in the field, ECO-SOLVE's response rate is considered high. There is concrete evidence of this intelligence translating into operational successes; for example, a detection report in Nigeria directly led to the seizure of four whole elephant tusks. Similarly, the South Asia partner hub reported that four out of their eight referred cases resulted in the arrests of five individuals and the seizure of the protected wildlife, and information led to the initiation of active investigations in Colombia and Mexico.

However, there are also significant barriers that prevent intelligence from consistently translating into disrupted crime, even when it reaches the right desks. Across the project, environmental law enforcement agencies are severely under-resourced and often treat wildlife crime as a low priority, meaning that actionable intelligence is sometimes sidelined unless it overlaps with other prominent crimes. In Thailand, for example, the justice system often does not treat environmental offences as serious crimes, making it a struggle for officers to obtain necessary warrants. Bureaucratic and institutional hurdles also restrict the flow of information; in Brazil, strict legislation prevents the Federal Police from sharing case feedback with the data hub, making it difficult to verify if the intelligence successfully interrupted a crime. In Nigeria, an official embedded within the Customs office has sometimes disrupted direct communications with the primary LE contact, illustrating the fragility of intelligence flows dependent on one-on-one relationships.

Measuring the true extent of LE action is structurally complicated by inconsistent and informal feedback loops. Hub liaisons rely heavily on informal, in-person catch-ups to get updates on their intelligence. There are currently no formal processes for LE agencies to report on the use of information and, in some places like South Africa, analysts expressed concern that more formal processes might even further inhibit communications. Coupled with the notoriously long judicial timelines for trafficking cases, these feedback gaps make it difficult for ECO-SOLVE to

systematically track whether their initial detection packs ultimately lead to successful court convictions.

### *Is there evidence of increased cross-border collaboration from ECO-SOLVE's activities?*

The evidence shows that the project is successfully laying the groundwork for increased cross-border collaboration, particularly through informal networks and targeted grants. However, translating this connectivity into formal, state-led transnational law enforcement action remains a significant challenge.

There is compelling evidence that ECO-SOLVE is successfully facilitating cross-border collaboration, driven largely by the internal connectivity of the GMS hubs. Hub analysts communicate regularly to pass leads and share open-source intelligence across regions. For example, the Cameroon and Nigeria hubs share advertisements on a near-daily basis and are currently exploring a joint detection report to address shared trafficking hotspots. Analysts are also successfully moving beyond simple ad counting to mapping complex, transnational networks—such as a recent joint investigation between the South Africa and Thailand hubs that traced the entire supply chain of an endemic lizard, identifying poachers, exporters, couriers, and international buyers. Furthermore, partner hubs like the Wildlife Trust of India are actively leveraging intergovernmental agencies like the South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) to bypass jurisdictional barriers and share intelligence across seven countries.

Beyond the GMS, the project's structure actively incentivises international cooperation through its Amplifying Grants and multilateral engagements. The grants explicitly fund cross-regional initiatives, such as the World Parrot Trust's work to pilot microbiome profiling across South Africa, the UAE, and Iraq, and TRACE's efforts to build DNA sequencing capacity in Peru, Vietnam, and Angola. ECO-SOLVE is also directly supporting cross-border law enforcement operations in the EU through the EMPACT platform, feeding intelligence into international operations targeting waste and flora trafficking.

However, hub analysts note that open-source data is often too superficial on its own to trigger complex transnational investigations, as high-level network data is rarely available on the open web. Even when intelligence is shared across borders, varying levels of trust and institutional capacity between national law enforcement agencies can stall progress.

Additionally, transnational initiatives face severe bureaucratic hurdles, demonstrated by the World Parrot Trust experiencing significant delays in the UAE due to pending Ministry of Foreign Affairs permits. When hubs do successfully refer transnational cases to international bodies or foreign authorities, they rarely receive the formal feedback necessary to confirm whether the collaboration actually led to concrete disruption of criminal activity. There is no "global police" for wildlife forensics, and navigating international bodies like INTERPOL to coordinate cross-border actions is described by project partners as a frustratingly slow process, akin to

"turning an oil tanker." Ultimately, while ECO-SOLVE is highly effective at connecting the dots across borders, the pace of international law enforcement cooperation remains a significant barrier.

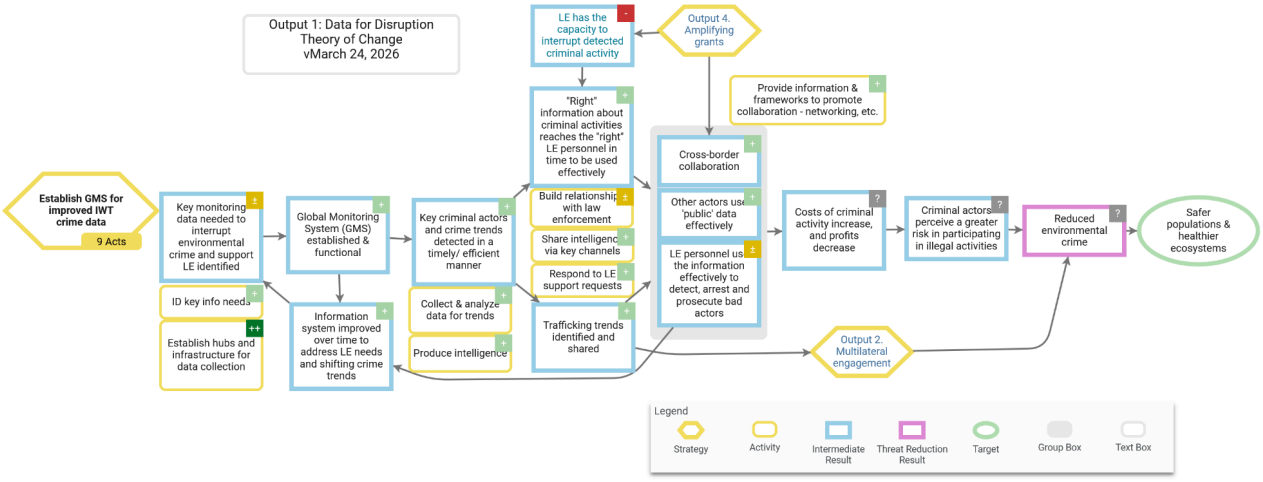



Figure 2. Diagram of the Theory of Change articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team. The status report in the upper right corner of each result and activity shows the summary progress on that factor (red - major issues, yellow - minor issues, green - on track, dark green - completed, gray - uncertain or no evidence). A zoomed in version of the diagram is available in Annex 2.

## Key Takeaways

**Prioritise and Streamline Hub Analyst Workloads** Data hub analysts are currently stretched too thin, often tasked with wearing "too many hats" by simultaneously juggling daily data entry, OSINT research, complex law enforcement relationship-building, and contributing to other project-related efforts, such as research and app development. Project management should clearly prioritise core responsibilities so that generating critical detection reports does not "fall off the side of the desk" when analysts are swamped with competing tasks, such as drafting Regional Trend Reports. To support this, the project should fully leverage the automated tools developed by the team—such as the AI web-scraper and CMS—to reduce the burden of manual searching and free up analysts for deeper network analysis.

**Actively Drive Transnational and Cross-Border Investigations** While the GMS hubs communicate well informally, management needs to explicitly push hubs to prioritise identifying the transnational movement of illicit products. The project should incentivise joint detection reports between hubs—such as the previous coordination between South Africa and Thailand, or potential links between Nigeria and Brazil/Cameroon—to ensure the network is genuinely dismantling global supply chains rather than operating as isolated national units.

**Shift from Intelligence Provision to Strategic Law Enforcement Support** Because environmental law enforcement agencies are chronically under-resourced and often treat wildlife crime as a low priority, simply handing over detection packs is not always enough to

trigger action. ECO-SOLVE should pivot towards actively helping law enforcement formulate effective responses and strategies based on the intelligence provided. Furthermore, hub liaisons must prioritise regular, informal face-to-face meetings (such as monthly coffees) to maintain these relationships, as informal check-ins have proven to be the most effective way to sustain trust and gather crucial feedback on case progress, circumventing strict bureaucratic reporting limits.

**Expand Localised, In-Person OSINT Training for Authorities** Previous OSINT trainings, such as those held in Cali, Colombia, and Jordan, were highly successful not only in transferring skills but in building immense credibility and deep trust with authorities. To maximise this impact, ECO-SOLVE should prioritise delivering these trainings in person and in local languages, as virtual, multi-country formats have proven less effective due to language barriers and lower engagement. Additionally, it was suggested that providing law enforcement with subscription grants, specialised analytical tools, and training on specific apps (such as Maltego in Brazil) could directly address their immediate resource constraints and boost investigative capacity.

**Formalise Direct Channels with Social Media Platforms & Other Private Sector Entities** To streamline the disruption of online markets, ECO-SOLVE should work to formalise direct lines of contact with the compliance teams of major social media and e-commerce platforms globally. Leveraging and expanding the "trusted flagger" status that partners like IFAW currently use in Europe could significantly amplify the network's ability to mandate swift content removal across all hub regions. The project should consider having dedicated personnel to engage with the private sector, as illicit flows are deeply intertwined with legal trade and financial systems, making corporate entities essential stakeholders in disruption efforts.

**Consider Strengthening Policy Approaches** While the bulk of this analysis focused on understanding and improving the information flows and follow up by LE, there is another possible pathway to reducing environmental crime through policy. While hub analysts are currently prioritising active relationships with LE, ECO-SOLVE could use their international standing, and political connections to drive national and regional policy based on the evidence from their trend reports. In particular, this could alleviate the pressure on one-on-one relationships with LE to have a broader impact. It could also increase synergies between Outputs 1 and 2.

# Output 2. Multilateral Engagement

## Theory of Change

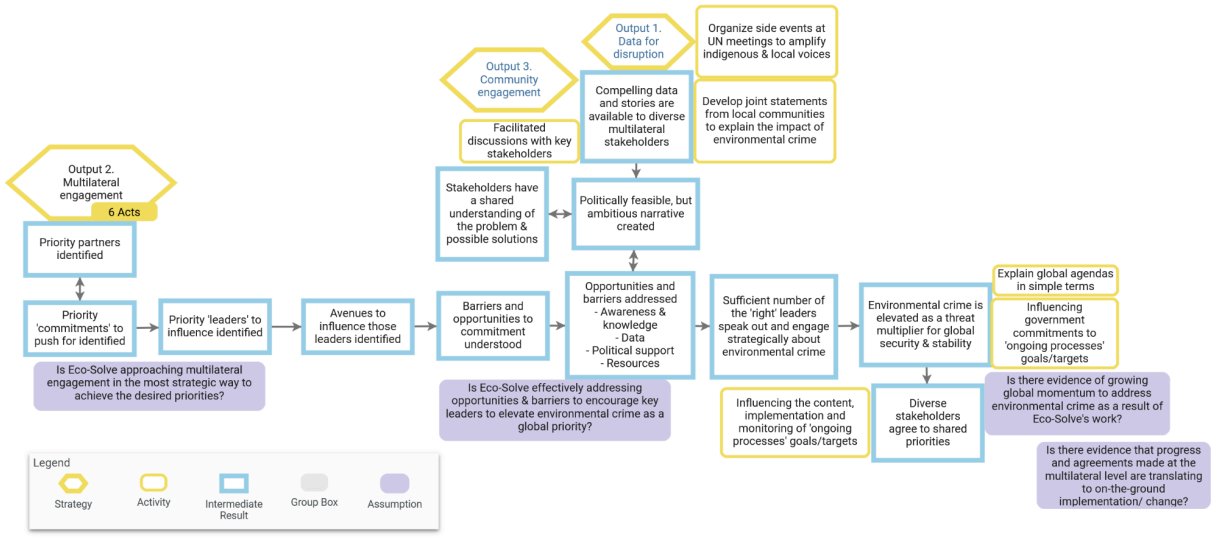



Figure 3. The first results of the diagram of the Theory of Change for Output 2 as articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team and the priority questions designed to test key assumptions. The full Theory of change diagram is available in Annex 2.

Based on the theory of change, the core team from ECO-SOLVE, including the output leads, identified the following evaluation questions to better understand the progress toward implementing Output 2. In addition to understanding the current state of the project, these questions will also inform management decisions moving forward:

- Is Eco-Solve approaching multilateral engagement in the most strategic way to achieve the desired priorities?
- Is Eco-Solve effectively addressing opportunities & barriers to encourage key leaders to elevate environmental crime as a global priority?
- Is there evidence of growing global momentum to address environmental crime as a result of Eco-Solve's work?
- Is there evidence that progress and agreements made at the multilateral level are translating to on-the-ground implementation/ change?

The following section attempts to answer these questions using the evidence generated by the desk review and relevant interviews. Five key informant interviews were conducted between February and March 2026 with key personnel from ECO-SOLVE staff working on Output 2 and

outside stakeholders familiar with ECO-SOLVE's work in the multilateral space. A complete list of interviewees is available in Annex 1.

## Evaluation Results

### *Is Eco-Solve approaching multilateral engagement in the most strategic way to achieve the desired priorities[2]?*

Overall, the evidence suggests that ECO-SOLVE's strategic pivot toward multilateral engagement has been successful, establishing the project as a premier, balanced convener in a complex diplomatic space. External partners commend the project's ability to gently advocate for ambitious outcomes—such as a new UNTOC protocol—without alienating more conservative state actors. A standout strategic success has been ECO-SOLVE's unprecedented facilitation of Indigenous and frontline environmental defenders at high-level forums like the UNTOC COP and the Intergovernmental Expert Group (IEG). The Chair of the IEG noted that this strategy was uniquely valuable, as it successfully humanised environmental crime. Additionally, the project is strategically filling a critical gap in EU visibility, ensuring that the EU's commitment to fighting environmental crime is represented in UN forums even when official seats are empty.

The project's major events, particularly the Paris Conference and the preceding Virtual Dialogues, are widely viewed as pivotal in building international momentum. There is clear evidence that this strategy is working, as other NGOs and member states (like France) have actively shifted their positions or taken up leadership roles in the wake of ECO-SOLVE's groundwork. Internally, the project is also successfully leveraging its own structure, using the on-the-ground intelligence and community insights generated from Outputs 1 and 3 to provide a robust, evidence-based foundation for its multilateral advocacy.

However, there is evidence suggesting that some of ECO-SOLVE's tactical approaches could be optimised. Stakeholders have pointed out that the project is currently missing an opportunity to engage the private sector—such as banking institutions and tech companies—which remain largely absent from these multilateral tables despite their critical role in facilitating or interrupting the illicit financial flows that make environmental crime profitable. Additionally, while the project produces a high volume of research, some external partners feel these knowledge products can be too theoretical, lacking the concise, tangible recommendations that diplomats need to take immediate action. Furthermore, these reports

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[2] Note: The desired long term priorities include - A new legally binding agreement on environmental crimes (including: 1) uniform minimum rules and standards to eliminate safe havens, harmonising global legal frameworks, 2) Strengthened cooperation mechanisms, 3) A working group to inform global response over time, 4) A commitment to include & protect civil society organisations, indigenous peoples, victims, etc., 5) Allocation of adequate resources and adoption of technology and data collection processes, and 6) Reduced tolerance for elite corruption.)

often suffer from short lifespans, losing visibility shortly after publication. In terms of audience targeting, events like the Paris Conference have been gently critiqued for "preaching to the choir"—convening states and NGOs that are already aligned on the issue, while failing to attract the crucial "middle-ground" countries needed to build a broader consensus.

Moving forward, stakeholders suggest a few strategic adjustments. To overcome the limitation of operating mostly through civil society channels, it was recommended that ECO-SOLVE expand its strategy to more actively engage bilaterally with leading member states. Additionally, stakeholders noted a disconnect between EU-level coordination and Vienna-based UNTOC negotiations, presenting a strategic opportunity for ECO-SOLVE to actively bridge these two spheres. Finally, the project's multilateral approach is currently somewhat reactive—spinning up efforts around specific international meetings—and could benefit from establishing a more permanent, systematic infrastructure or knowledge bank to sustain momentum year-round.

### *Is ECO-SOLVE effectively addressing opportunities & barriers to encourage key leaders to elevate environmental crime as a global priority?*

The evidence indicates that ECO-SOLVE is highly effective at acting as a strategic convener to elevate environmental crime on the global agenda. As a primary opportunity, the project successfully capitalised on the growing multilateral appetite for an updated legal framework, specifically the debate surrounding a potential new UNTOC protocol. Through the Security and Development Dialogues and the milestone Paris Conference, ECO-SOLVE has been widely praised by external partners and international diplomats as a "10/10" convener. Partners note that the project expertly balances ambitious advocacy with diplomacy, gently promoting an agreement without alienating moderate state actors.

A standout success in ECO-SOLVE's strategy to overcome the barrier of low political will is its unprecedented integration of grassroots environmental defenders into high-level multilateral spaces. Historically, environmental crime has suffered from a narrative that it is a "victimless" conservation issue rather than a serious security threat. By facilitating the direct participation of Indigenous leaders and local activists at events like the UNTOC COP and the IEG meetings, the project has successfully humanised the impacts of these crimes. The Chair of the IEG explicitly noted that this was extremely valuable for Member States, as it provided a first-hand human perspective on the devastation caused by illicit economies that is often lost in conceptual policy debates.

However, there is space for deeper exploration about whether the project is reaching the right audiences to overcome entrenched geopolitical polarisation. While the Paris Conference and subsequent side events successfully energised aligned states, stakeholders observed that the project is occasionally "preaching to the choir." The dialogues have sometimes struggled to attract the crucial "middle-ground" countries needed to build a broader consensus against the vocal minority of states resisting the agenda, and there is a notable lack of representation from African states in these forums. Additionally, just as states struggle with inter-agency

coordination, ECO-SOLVE could do more to unite disparate directorates within the European Union (e.g., DG Environment, DG Home, DG Justice) to present a cohesive front, and to bridge the gap between EU-level coordination and UNTOC-level negotiations in Vienna. Furthermore, project leadership acknowledges that the most significant barrier remaining is the momentum into impact challenge—ensuring that the high-level conversations and non-binding resolutions generated actually translate into concrete action and enforcement post-adoption.

### *Is there evidence of growing global momentum to address environmental crime as a result of Eco-Solve's work?*

There is mixed evidence that the project has successfully generated global momentum around environmental crime. While the project has significantly elevated the issue on the international agenda, there is also evidence highlighting the persistent geopolitical and structural barriers that make translating this momentum into binding, on-the-ground impact a formidable challenge.

On the positive side, ECO-SOLVE has played a vital role in coalescing a historically fragmented multilateral space. Through its series of Security and Development Dialogues and the milestone Paris Conference in April 2025, the project provided a critical platform for stakeholders to coordinate action ahead of major UN milestones. Partners and diplomats highly praise these efforts; for instance, an external global policy specialist rated ECO-SOLVE’s convening power a "10 out of 10," noting that the project provided the space and time for experts to focus on the topic, and that state representatives have responded exceptionally well. This groundwork helped support the adoption of UNTOC COP Resolution 12/4 and the establishment of the IEG.

Unfortunately, respondents raised questions about the depth and durability of this momentum. While ECO-SOLVE's events have energised committed nations, there still exists a vocal minority of nations resisting the agenda, and a number of uncommitted nations. The momentum is vulnerable to broader geopolitical headwinds; shifting donor priorities, reductions in international funding, and competing global crises, any of which could stall progress. Finally, significant "blind spots" remain, with crimes like illegal fishing, waste trafficking, and pollution consistently overlooked in multilateral declarations despite the project's advocacy efforts.

Ultimately, ECO-SOLVE has undeniably accelerated global conversations and helped secure important multilateral resolutions. Moving forward, the project's challenge will be to sustain this momentum by engaging unaligned states and ensuring that high-level diplomatic agreements—such as a potential new UNTOC protocol—lead to concrete law enforcement and community-level outcomes.

### *Is there evidence that progress and agreements made at the multilateral level are translating to on-the-ground implementation/ change?*

This question is outside of ECO-SOLVE's manageable interests to address. However, for their efforts in multilateral engagement to pay off, it is essential to understand if and how these agreements can lead to on-the-ground impact. This understanding will allow ECO-SOLVE to better understand the benefits and risks of investing in this strategy, while also allowing them to think strategically about how to create agreements that are more likely to be effective.

The translation of multilateral agreements into tangible, on-the-ground change remains one of the most significant hurdles for the ECO-SOLVE project and the broader environmental crime sector. While there has been undeniable success in building diplomatic consensus, project leadership and international diplomats openly acknowledge the deep work of translating multi-lateral agreements to on-the-ground change. Reaching a high-level agreement is only the first step; ensuring those resolutions effectively filter down into national legislation, enforcement priorities, and local community protection is where current frameworks frequently stall.

There is substantial evidence indicating that existing multilateral agreements are currently failing to translate into robust local implementation. Practitioners note that powerful international tools, like UNTOC and the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), suffer from major implementation gaps and are consistently underutilised by state authorities for international cooperation, mutual legal assistance, or information sharing. Globally, there is a clear accountability gap preventing on-the-ground change: the Global South often lacks the capacity and resources to enforce international commitments, while in the Global North, environmental crime legislation that threatens powerful private sector or political interests is often deliberately weakened or inadequately enforced. Furthermore, non-binding resolutions often omit concrete operational mandates, allowing member states to express support diplomatically without actually incentivising their domestic agencies to prioritise environmental crime over other pressing security issues.

However, there is also compelling evidence that when multilateral frameworks include strict compliance mechanisms or are championed by highly affected regions, they do successfully drive local change. For example, reports on the illegal wildlife trade in Laos (supported by ECO-SOLVE analysis) directly contributed to CITES applying new trade sanctions against the country. This demonstrates how treaties with strong, enforceable compliance mechanisms can effectively force state-level accountability and action. Regionally, diplomatic momentum has also successfully translated into institutional structures, such as the establishment of a special commission on public security under the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO) following the 2023 Belém summit.

Additionally, global policy experts point to the historical success of the UNTOC Human Trafficking Protocol as a powerful proof of concept for the current multilateral strategy. Following its adoption in 2003, it drove the vast majority of countries to harmonise their

national legislation to criminalise human trafficking, suggesting that a dedicated environmental crime protocol could similarly force worldwide legislative reform and empower local enforcement over time.

Ultimately, the evidence shows that multilateral progress *can* dictate on-the-ground realities, but only if agreements are paired with robust accountability systems. To bridge the implementation gap, experts agree that any future multilateral instruments—such as a potential new UNTOC protocol—must include independent oversight, transparent compliance monitoring, and tangible consequences for non-compliance to ensure that diplomatic promises evolve into genuine disruptions of criminal networks.

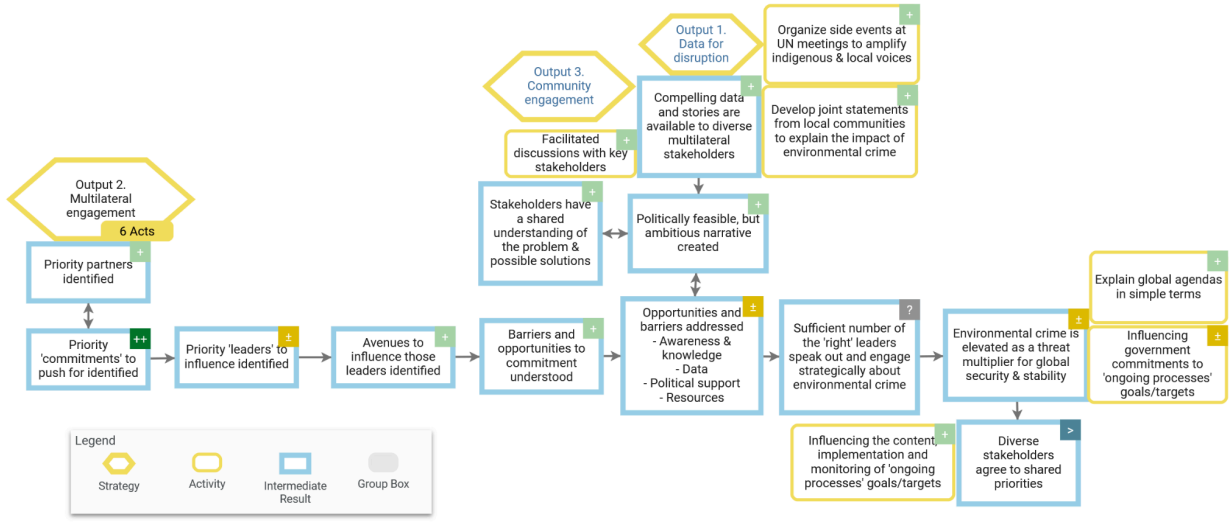



Figure 4. Diagram of the Theory of Change articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team. The status report in the upper right corner of each result and activity shows the summary progress on that factor (red - major issues, yellow - minor issues, green - on track, dark green - completed, gray - uncertain or no evidence). A full version of the diagram is available in Annex 2.

## Key Takeaways

Based on the current progress and the operational barriers identified during the mid-project evaluation, we recommend several strategic adjustments for Output 2 to maximise its impact in the second half of the project:

**Continue Capitalising on Convening Power** ECO-SOLVE's greatest strength in the multi-lateral space is their ability to convene partners and offer spaces for dialogues that move the conversation on environmental crime forward. It is critical they continue to play this role as stakeholders acknowledge that no other actors are as suited to fill this necessary niche.

**Strengthen Integration with Other ECO-SOLVE Outputs** Output 2 currently operates on a somewhat "semi-detached plane" from the rest of the project. While Output 2 successfully integrates with Output 3 (Community Engagement) to bring grassroots voices to the UN, it should proactively build stronger synergies with Output 1 (Data for Disruption) and Output 4

(Grants). Ensuring that the global policy advocacy is directly fuelled by the on-the-ground intelligence and technological innovations produced by the other hubs will make ECO-SOLVE's multilateral messaging even more compelling.

**Intensive Preparation for Multilateral Inclusion** Taking community leaders to global forums like the UNTOC Conference of Parties has been highly effective in challenging top-down narratives and humanising environmental crime. However, a key lesson is that simply placing local actors in these high-level spaces is not enough; it requires rigorous, trauma-informed preparation. Over the next two years, the team must continue to dedicate significant time to helping delegates practise their presentations, refine their messaging, and co-draft joint statements so they can safely and confidently navigate these complex diplomatic environments without feeling tokenised.

**Broaden Representation to Include the Private Sector and African Voices** While the project has been exceptionally successful at bringing Latin American and Southeast Asian frontline defenders into multilateral spaces, there are gaps in representation. Stakeholders note a distinct lack of African voices in these global forums; where possible, ECO-SOLVE could play a critical role by actively working to identify and bring African civil society and state representatives to the table. Even more notably, the private sector is currently absent from these multilateral discussions. Multiple stakeholders noted that ECO-SOLVE should bring in representatives from the banking sector (to address illicit financial flows) and technology companies (to discuss traceability and online markets).

**Target "Middle-Ground" States and Engage Bilaterally** One limiting barrier is that events like the Paris Conference energise states that are already committed while struggling to attract countries necessary to overcome geopolitical polarisation.In the lead-up to major milestones like the UNTOC COP, ECO-SOLVE should concentrate its advocacy on the 30+ "middle-ground" countries that are not yet fully convinced, providing them with strong arguments to support a new protocol. The project should also expand its strategy beyond working primarily through civil society by engaging bilaterally with leading member states.

**Shift from General Research to Concrete, Deep-Dive Knowledge Products** While ECO-SOLVE's research outputs are highly valued for keeping the conversation alive, stakeholders note that they can sometimes be too theoretical or lack the concise, actionable steps that diplomats need. Since the general gaps in the international legal framework have already been clearly identified, the project should pivot to producing deep-dive reports on specific, targeted issues, such as financial investigations of environmental crimes, the liability of legal persons, and the use of multilateral environmental agreements. Additionally, to broaden the reach and lifespan of these products, ECO-SOLVE should focus on elevating key products to stand the test of time, by ensuring that they are translated into key languages like French and Spanish to better serve local communities and practitioners in less resourced countries.

**Establish a Permanent Multilateral Infrastructure** Currently, the multilateral engagement strategy is somewhat reactive—spinning up intense efforts around specific UN meetings and

then receding. To ensure momentum is not lost between major events, ECO-SOLVE should establish a more permanent, systematic infrastructure or online "knowledge bank" that provides a continuous presence and resource for multilateral audiences. Because organising civil society side-events at the UN often happens at the last minute and struggles to attract high-level diplomats, ECO-SOLVE should also prioritise organising well-planned, standalone events (similar to the highly successful Paris Conference) to ensure the most important state representatives show up.

## Output 3. Community Engagement for Strengthened Law Enforcement

### Theory of Change

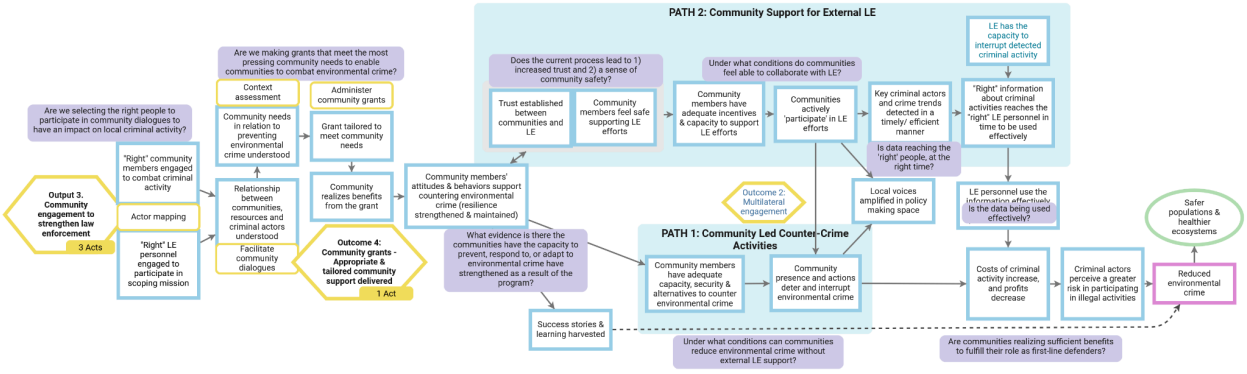



Figure 5. The first results of the diagram of the Theory of Change for Output 3 as articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team and the priority questions designed to test key assumptions. A zoomed in version of theTheory of change diagram is available in Annex 2.

Based on the theory of change, the core team from ECO-SOLVE, including the Output leads, identified the following evaluation questions to better understand the progress in each Output and make management decisions moving forward:

- Is ECO-SOLVE selecting the right people to participate in community dialogues to have an impact on local criminal activity?
- Is ECO-SOLVE making grants that meet the most pressing community needs to enable communities to combat environmental crime?
- What evidence is there that the communities have the capacity to prevent, respond to, or adapt to environmental crime have strengthened as a result of the programme?
- Under what conditions can communities reduce environmental crime without external LE support?
- Does the current process lead to 1) increased trust and 2) a sense of community safety?
- Under what conditions do communities feel able to collaborate with LE?

- Are communities realising sufficient benefits to fulfil their role as first-line defenders?

The following section attempts to answer these questions using the evidence generated by the desk review and relevant interviews. 7 key informant interviews were conducted between January and March 2026 with key personnel from ECO-SOLVE staff working on Output 3 and community grantees. A complete list of interviewees is available in Annex 1.

## Evaluation Results

### *Is ECO-SOLVE selecting the right people to participate in community dialogues to have an impact on local criminal activity?*

In evaluating the efficacy of ECO-SOLVE's community engagement strategy, there is evidence that the project is selecting highly appropriate stakeholders to participate in community dialogues and drive local impact against environmental crime. The project intentionally targets populations with deep historical, social, and cultural ties to biodiverse hotspots, employing a rigorous intersectional approach to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, traditional riverine communities, *quilombolas* (Afro-descendant communities), campesinos, women, and youth. Evidence demonstrates that these are precisely the right actors to disrupt local crime because they serve as the frontline defenders of (and sometimes offenders in) these ecosystems. Either way, their behaviour directly impacts the ecosystems and species ECO-SOLVE aims to protect. By targeting these specific groups, the project has successfully enhanced local capacities; in Indonesia, for instance, community members trained through the project are now actively using citizen journalism to document and investigate illegal logging supply chains.

Furthermore, selecting these specific community actors has proven highly effective in bridging historical gaps between civil society and law enforcement. During dialogues in Indonesia, the inclusion of both frontline forest communities and government authorities transformed initial community scepticism into a collaborative environment. Law enforcement officials noted that engaging with these specific community members was critical for identifying enforcement gaps, while the community participants gained a much deeper understanding of environmental laws and the penal systems designed to protect their lands. This targeted selection process has directly seeded highly relevant, community-led disruption initiatives, leading to successful grant applications for localised interventions like spatial monitoring and reporting tools (SMART) technology patrols in Vietnam and, in Indonesia, Indigenous "sea guardian" hubs to combat illegal fishing.

However, because ECO-SOLVE does not have permanent staff stationed in every target country, they frequently have to evaluate community relationships and select grantees from afar. It is "challenging to select people without ever being in the country." This distance makes it difficult to ensure the right organisations are identified - avoiding highly visible, established NGOs adept at securing funding that are not also deeply embedded or grassroots

organisations that the project aims to empower. For instance, prior to engaging in Madagascar, ECO-SOLVE was advised that local communities lacked capacity and that there were few viable organisations; however, they subsequently received over 60 applications, leaving the remote team confused about the actual reality on the ground and anxious about their ability to accurately vet the applicants' local legitimacy.

ECO-SOLVE often relies on local consultants or existing organisational networks to map actors and facilitate introductions. However, this introduces the risk of adopting the biases or personal agendas of those intermediaries. In Indonesia, for example, the project noted that their local fixer had her own entrenched interests and biases regarding community dynamics, which proved "a bit difficult to control from the outside."

It is also worth noting that focusing on ultra-localised grassroots actors carries significant risks and limitations. Empowering these specific frontline defenders inherently exposes them to severe security risks, including intimidation, criminalisation, and violence from organised criminal syndicates and sometimes complicit state authorities. In regions like Brazil, the deep-seated mistrust of law enforcement due to past abuses meant that joint community-police dialogues had to be entirely avoided to protect participants. Additionally, while selecting highly embedded grassroots organisations ensures authentic local ownership, these groups frequently lack the administrative capacity to manage larger funds or the political networks required to scale their impact. As a result, the impact generated by these carefully selected participants is often hyper-localised—sometimes limited to a few dozen people or a single municipality—presenting an ongoing trade-off between deep local legitimacy and the ability to influence broader, systemic criminal networks.

### *Is ECO-SOLVE making grants that meet the most pressing community needs to enable communities to combat environmental crime?*

The evidence strongly supports that the project is funding highly relevant, locally identified priorities. However, the impact of the grants is often relatively localised, compared to ECO-SOLVE's global efforts, due to the nature of funding highly embedded grassroots organisations.

There is robust evidence that ECO-SOLVE is accurately identifying and resourcing the most urgent needs of affected communities. This success is largely due to the project's intentional use of "Resilience Dialogues" and scoping missions to listen to communities *before* launching calls for proposals. Because the grants are co-designed with grassroots input, they directly address acute local threats through highly contextualised solutions. For example, the grants are meeting the critical security needs of environmental defenders by funding initiatives like the *Casa de Respiro* in Brazil, which provides safe shelter, legal aid, and security systems for threatened activists. In other regions, the grants recognise that economic vulnerability drives environmental crime, successfully funding sustainable alternative livelihoods—such as ecotourism, responsible wood processing, and agroforestry in Colombia—to provide

communities with viable economic alternatives to deforestation. Furthermore, the grants are empowering communities to safely monitor their own territories, funding Indigenous drone surveillance in Brazil and "Sea Guardian" hubs in Indonesia to combat illegal fishing.

However, there is a  persistent trade-off regarding capacity and scale. While funding highly embedded grassroots organisations ensures immense local legitimacy, these groups often lack the administrative and financial capacity to manage larger funds (ECO-SOLVE funding often benefits these organizations' capacity development). In fact, even larger organizations with significant administrative capacity are limited by ECO-SOLVE's funding ceiling. Consequently, the resulting interventions often have a localised impact—sometimes directly reaching only 40 to 100 individuals in a single municipality. This localised scale struggles to meaningfully disrupt massive, well-funded transnational criminal syndicates.

### *What evidence is there that communities have strengthened capacity to prevent, respond to, or adapt to environmental crime as a result of the ECO-SOLVE?*

Through targeted training and resources, communities have transitioned from passive observers to active environmental defenders. For instance, in Vietnam and Indonesia, communities previously knew about illegal hunting and logging but lacked the knowledge of how to safely and effectively report it. Now equipped with communication tools, GPS, and localised reporting platforms like the Village Information System (SID), community patrol teams conduct regular monitoring, gather actionable evidence, and coordinate monthly with law enforcement. In Vietnam, this increased capacity has led directly to a reduction in visible illegal activities and the return of rare wildlife to the area.

Beyond technical monitoring, communities have enhanced capacity to adapt and build collective resilience. In Colombia, communities are mitigating deforestation by establishing voluntary conservation agreements, setting up community-managed geographic monitoring systems (geovisors), and adapting their local economies to sustainable livelihoods like ecotourism and agroforestry. In Brazil, ECO-SOLVE grants have directly improved the physical security of defenders, by installing cameras and emergency sirens in vulnerable territories, allowing activists to safely remain in their communities rather than fleeing. Across the board, grantees report feeling more empowered, organised, and legitimised in their role as frontline defenders.

However, ECO-SOLVE must also consider the fragility of this newfound capacity. The most pressing limitation is long-term sustainability and technical dependence. For example, communities in Indonesia note that they will still rely on outside experts to maintain and update their digital reporting systems once the project ends. Similarly, other teams worry about continued funding following the grant.

Finally, true capacity to respond is frequently bottlenecked by severe security risks. In regions where armed groups control territory (such as Colombia) or where law enforcement is

inconsistent or untrusted (such as Indonesia and Brazil), stepping up as an environmental defender invites profound risks of retaliation, criminalisation, and intimidation. While ECO-SOLVE has successfully provided security risk management training and developed ethical guidelines to help communities navigate these threats, the structural dangers remain a massive hurdle.

### *Under what conditions can communities reduce environmental crime without external LE support?*

The evidence from ECO-SOLVE's community interventions reveals that communities can successfully reduce environmental crime without relying on external LE support, provided certain enabling conditions are met. In many of the project's priority regions, historic mistrust, state complicity, or the sheer absence of authorities makes LE collaboration either impossible or highly dangerous for local residents. In these contexts, communities are able to independently disrupt illicit economies when they possess strong internal organisation, access to technological monitoring tools, and viable economic alternatives.

One primary condition for independent success is the establishment of community-led territorial defence and active monitoring mechanisms. When communities are organised and equipped with the right tools, they can effectively deter illicit actors through physical presence and direct social pressure. For example, in Brazil’s Kayapó territory, where LE presence is unreliable, Indigenous leaders proactively established their own monitoring bases at river entry points to physically block illegal gold miners from encroaching on their lands. Similarly, in Indonesia, community patrol teams from Mekar Makmur village successfully engaged in "persuasive approaches" directly with illegal logging workers, using awareness-raising about the negative impacts of deforestation to deter the activity without ever involving the police. By equipping these patrols with technologies like drones, SMART, and locally managed geovisors, communities create an internal system of transparency and deterrence that disrupts crime at the grassroots level.

The other critical condition is the presence of strong internal governance tied to sustainable alternative livelihoods. Communities are highly successful at mitigating environmental crime when they can offer their members viable economic opportunities that outcompete the financial draw of illicit extraction. In Colombia, grassroots *campesino* organisations effectively reduce deforestation by establishing voluntary conservation agreements tied to sustainable agroforestry and responsible wood processing initiatives. Likewise, in Brazil, communities have independently worked to reduce illegal fishing by strengthening their own local fishing agreements and deploying community monitoring teams to ensure internal compliance. When communities are economically empowered and internally aligned around shared resource management rules, they effectively self-regulate, closing the geographic and social space that transnational criminal networks need to operate.

### *Does the current process lead to 1) increased trust and 2) a sense of community safety?*

In assessing whether the community engagement process leads to increased trust with law enforcement (LE) and an enhanced sense of community safety, evidence from the field reveals a highly nuanced picture. Where local conditions allow, the project's strategy of mediating relationships has successfully fostered new trust and collaboration. However, in regions burdened by historical grievances, state complicity, or active armed conflicts, attempting to build trust with traditional law enforcement presents severe safety risks, requiring the project to find alternative avenues to secure community safety.

There is strong supporting evidence that ECO-SOLVE's interventions have actively built trust and safety in specific contexts. In Vietnam, the project has effectively acted as a bridge between communities and authorities, overcoming previous hesitation by facilitating regular, monthly debriefs that bring both groups together. Because the community patrol teams are now officially recognised and supported by local rangers, community members feel empowered and safe from intimidation, noting that threats against them would now be treated as serious legal violations. Similarly, in Indonesia, formal agreements and engagement with specialised environmental and forestry law enforcement (GAKKUM) have shown openness and improved communication. This collaboration has legitimised the community's role in environmental protection, increasing their confidence that their reports will be addressed institutionally rather than ignored. In Brazil, while trust in local police is low, the project directly increased community safety by funding physical security systems—such as cameras and emergency sirens—allowing threatened defenders to safely remain in their territories. Furthermore, strategic alliances fostered with federal prosecutors (MPF) have served as a protective shield, deterring harassment and violence from corrupt local officers.

However, while ECO-SOLVE has successfully mapped and engaged with high-level, federal law enforcement agencies, they acknowledge a significant gap in their understanding of local law enforcement—the municipal police and rangers who actually interact with the communities daily. Even in Indonesia, where engagement with specialised environmental agencies (GAKKUM) has been positive, communities remain deeply cautious about collaborating with regular police. Residents fear that direct police involvement could trigger criminalisation, negative social stigma, or violent reprisals from illegal logging syndicates. The project's leadership admits that they "miss a side of the puzzle" because it is logistically impossible to go and talk with every local law enforcement agency where their grantees operate. Consequently, their understanding of the LE-community relationship is sometimes skewed toward national dynamics, missing the hyper-local realities, tensions, and corruption that directly impact the communities' safety.

Deep-seated mistrust and severe security risks continue to limit LE collaboration in several priority regions. In Brazil, historical tensions and ongoing violence perpetrated by state actors led the ECO-SOLVE team to decide not to host joint dialogues between communities and LE,

recognising that forcing such interactions could expose environmental defenders to further harm. In Colombia, working alongside police is viewed negatively by residents, primarily due to the complex territorial control exerted by armed groups and the extreme danger associated with sharing information.

Ultimately, the current community engagement process demonstrates that while structured, mediated engagement can successfully build trust with specific, specialised environmental authorities, this trust cannot be universally engineered. The project's success in improving actual community safety relies heavily on its adaptive management—meaning it correctly leans into LE collaboration in receptive environments like Vietnam, while pivoting to provide direct physical security and independent legal alliances in regions like Brazil and Colombia.

### *Under what conditions do communities feel able to collaborate with LE?*

Communities feel able to safely and effectively collaborate with LE only when a specific set of enabling conditions and safeguards are in place. First, successful collaboration almost always requires a trusted intermediary organisation to bridge the historic divide between grassroots actors and the state. In contexts like Vietnam and Indonesia, local NGOs act as these essential bridges. By organising regular joint meetings, inviting LE to community training sessions, and facilitating shared field patrols, these intermediary organisations legitimise the community's role in the eyes of the authorities and build mutual trust over time.

Second, collaboration requires an alignment of objectives where LE views the community as a partner in conservation rather than as a perpetrator. Engagement breaks down in regions where authorities historically criminalise local populations.

Finally, communities require formal recognition and robust security protocols to mitigate the severe risks of retaliation from criminal syndicates. Formal agreements, such as joint MoUs between the community, NGOs, and specialised LE, help legitimise the community's efforts and build confidence that their reports will be taken seriously. To safely navigate these relationships, projects must establish co-developed ethical guidelines and risk management procedures. Communities feel able to collaborate when they have access to secure, anonymous reporting channels, when there are strict rules against sharing personal data without explicit consent, and when interactions with LE are transparent—such as ensuring a partner organisation is present during information handovers so that community members are not stigmatised as informants.

### *Are communities realising sufficient benefits by working with ECO-SOLVE to fulfil their long-term role as first-line defenders?*

In evaluating whether ECO-SOLVE's community partners are realising sufficient benefits to sustain their roles as first-line environmental defenders over the long term, the interview data reveals a complex reality. While there is strong supporting evidence that the project delivers immediate, highly valued benefits that empower local actors, there is equally compelling

evidence indicating that the current structure of the support—particularly its short duration and limited security safety nets—leaves communities vulnerable and raises questions about projects' long-term sustainability.

Interviews with grantees confirm that communities are reaping significant, tangible benefits that immediately bolster their defence capabilities. In Vietnam, for example, project stipends and essential equipment—such as GPS devices, smartphones, and field uniforms—have transformed informal volunteers into recognised, equipped patrol teams who feel a deep sense of pride and legitimacy in their work. In Indonesia, the implementation of the Village Information System (SID) and citizen journalism training has empowered residents, yielding increased legal awareness and the confidence to actively report illegal logging. Furthermore, the grants have delivered crucial physical security benefits. In Brazil, the funding of the *Casa de Respiro* provided a necessary safe haven for threatened defenders and their families, while community-level installations of cameras, emergency sirens, and fire extinguishers allowed activists to remain safely in their territories rather than fleeing. Across the board, interviewees reported that this financial and technical backing validates their efforts and provides the immediate "breath" needed to continue their high-stakes work.

Despite these successes, substantial evidence suggests these benefits may not be sufficient for the *long term*. The most frequently cited barrier by interviewees is the short duration of the grants, which typically run for 6 to 12 months. Multiple grantees explicitly noted that this timeframe is simply too brief to mobilise broader community demographics (like youth and women), establish deep trust, or secure sustainable funding to maintain operations once the ECO-SOLVE grant ends. For instance, some partners expressed deep concern over how they will sustain basic patrol consumables and stipends moving forward, especially given that their current team of just a few volunteers is already stretched incredibly thin covering 4,000 hectares. Without ongoing financial support or capacity-building to secure alternative funding, these localised efforts risk collapsing under the weight of burnout and resource depletion.

Furthermore, fulfilling the role of a first-line defender inherently exposes community members to severe, ongoing risks of intimidation and violence from organised criminal syndicates, armed groups, and complicit state actors. While the project provides valuable risk management training, interviewees highlighted that the current benefits do not fully offset these dangers over the long term. In one interview, partners stressed that to truly motivate and protect community members, they require robust, long-term safety nets that the project currently lacks—such as formal insurance for defenders, access to responsive legal assistance if they face criminalisation, and satellite phones to ensure secure communication in remote areas. Without these deeper, systemic support structures, the heavy burden of survival and defence remains disproportionately on the shoulders of vulnerable communities.

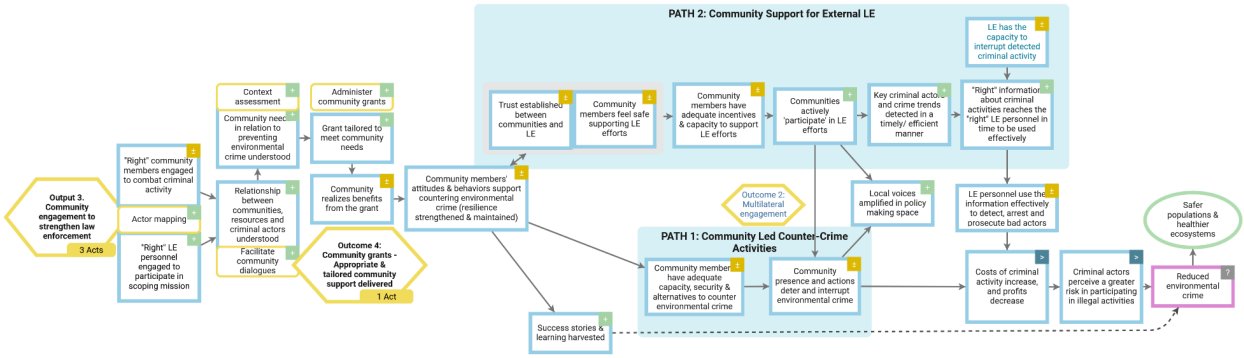



Figure 6. Diagram of the Theory of Change articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team. The status report in the upper right corner of each result and activity shows the summary progress on that factor (red - major issues, yellow - minor issues, green - on track, dark green - completed, gray - uncertain or no evidence). A zoomed in version of the diagram is available in Annex 2.

## Key Takeaways

As we assess the progress of Output 3, it is clear that ECO-SOLVE has successfully pioneered a highly localised, trust-based approach to community grant-making and capacity building. The project has demonstrated the power of working with frontline defenders as an essential holistic response to environmental crime. However, as we look toward the second half of project implementation, several strategic adaptations and lessons learned must be integrated to maximise long-term sustainability, safeguard participants, and accurately capture impact.

**Align the Scale** While the community grants have achieved undeniable success in empowering frontline defenders, our evaluation indicates a structural misalignment between the localised impact of the community work and ECO-SOLVE's broader mandate to disrupt global networks of environmental crime. Currently, the grants operate on a highly local scale, which, while deeply meaningful to the communities involved, is out of proportion with the larger project's macro-level strategies. To bridge this gap, we recommend that ECO-SOLVE deliberately considers how these successes can be scaled up and defines scaling objectives for the Output. By clarifying how localised interventions translate into broader systemic change, the project can make more targeted grant selections, better align Output 3 with the rest of the project portfolio, and simultaneously alleviate some of the ongoing monitoring and evaluation challenges.

Addressing this misalignment will require ECO-SOLVE to rethink how it selects and administers these localised grants to foster scalability. The emphasis should be on building more of what works, where it works. This could take several forms. One approach is to systematically capture the enabling conditions that drive a grant's success—or failure—and package these learnings into shareable case studies so that other communities can replicate the work. ECO-SOLVE is already producing a series of guidance documents to institutionalise its learnings. For example, the project developed a comprehensive handbook titled "CREATING IMPACTFUL Community Engagement: A Handbook for Addressing Environmental Crime

Through Local Action." Focusing on promoting these types of tools and encouraging others to adopt what works is one way to better align with ECO-SOLVE's scale.

Alternatively, ECO-SOLVE could transition toward longer-term grants that provide dedicated coaching, equipping grantees with the time and capacity to scale their own impact. Or, focus on identifying and elevating grassroots groups that demonstrate both the potential and the ambition to drive systems-level change, supporting them to engage in national or global policy discussions and share their localised expertise on a much wider stage. Whichever direction ECO-SOLVE decides to take, it will require them to adjust their theory of change and activities accordingly.

**Prioritise "Meaningful Over Measurable" in M&E** Standard quantitative metrics—such as counting the number of workshops held or patrols completed—while evidence of the level of effort sustained by the project, fails to capture the true, localised impact of community empowerment. Grassroots interventions fundamentally change how communities perceive their agency and collective power, which is inherently difficult to quantify. Moving forward, the project must continue refining its Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) frameworks to prioritise qualitative storytelling and contextual impact. Reporting templates have already been adapted to ask "what changed?" rather than just "what did you do?" and this conversational, learning-focused evaluation style should be permanently institutionalised.

**Institutionalise Security and Ethical LE Engagement** A critical lesson learned is that collaboration with law enforcement cannot be forced, as it carries severe security and criminalisation risks for communities in volatile regions. The recent co-creation of the *Guidance Note on Community Engagement with Law Enforcement* and the delivery of targeted security risk management training were major successes in Year 2. In the next phase, the project must ensure these ethical guidelines and risk assessment practises are rigidly applied before funding any joint community-LE initiatives, acknowledging that in some contexts, independent community action is the only safe route.

**Deepen On-the-Ground Scoping and Mentorship** Relying heavily on remote networks or external consultants to identify and vet grantees in new regions introduces significant risks of bias and limits the project's understanding of true grassroots dynamics. Because highly embedded community organisations sometimes lack the administrative capacity or visibility to compete for international funding, in-person scoping missions and continuous, on-the-ground support are vital. As the project expands, it must budget for direct field engagement to identify authentic local actors and provide the hands-on mentorship required to help them manage grants effectively.

**Adapt Digital Networking Tools to Local Realities** Initial plans to build a global digital network of environmental defenders using the bespoke VIVA app encountered significant structural barriers, including poor internet connectivity in remote areas, technical issues for Android users, and general app fatigue. The team successfully pivoted to using existing, low-bandwidth platforms like WhatsApp to maintain communication and build regional

networks. Future efforts to connect grantees across borders should prioritise accessibility and rely on the tools communities already use daily, rather than attempting to onboard them to new, centralised platforms.

**Plan Now** While these recommendations may not all be fully actionable mid-project, ECO-SOLVE has a unique opportunity to build a stronger and more mature follow-up phase based on all the learnings from this phase. But, this planning and design takes time and should start as soon as possible to ensure there is no long hiatus that hampers the good work being done on the ground.

## Output 4. Grant Hub

The grant hub manages all aspects of ECO-SOLVE's grant making. The amplifying grants have a section mirroring the other three previous Outputs, as the results of these grants were not adequately captured in previous sections. The sections on Partner Grants and Community Grants are much shorter as most of the findings are available in previous sections. The emphasis of those to subsections is on grant processes and management.

### Amplifying Grants

#### *Theory of Change*

Based on the theory of change, the core team from ECO-SOLVE, including the Output leads, identified the following evaluation questions to better understand the progress in each Output and make management decisions moving forward:

- Are the selected solutions showing evidence of effectiveness in monitoring or addressing environmental crime?
- Are suitable solutions being scaled up sufficiently to meaningfully reduce the forensic data deficit? Is there evidence that practises are being standardised?

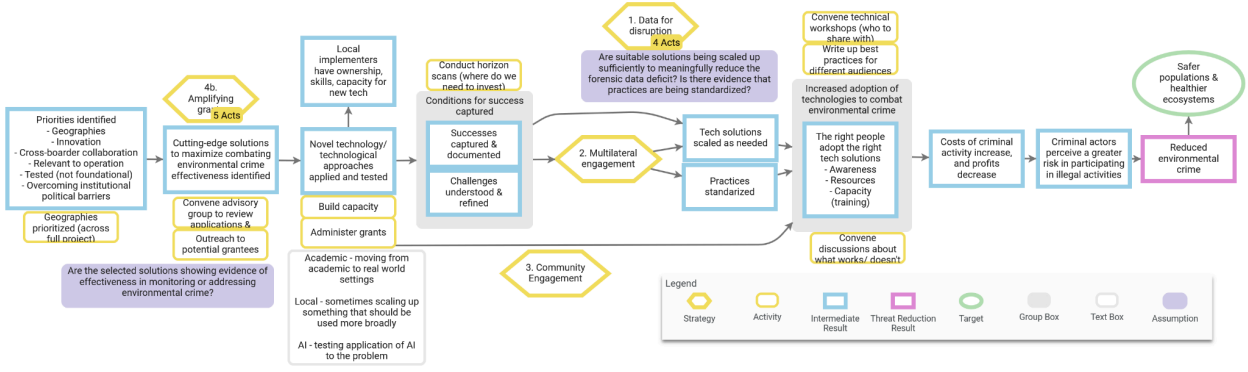



Figure 7. The first results of the diagram of the Theory of Change for Amplifying Grants: Output 4 as articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team and the priority questions designed to test key assumptions. A zoomed in version of theTheory of change diagram is available in Annex 2.

The following section attempts to answer these questions using the evidence generated by the desk review and relevant interviews. 4 key informant interviews were conducted between February and March 2026 with key personnel from ECO-SOLVE staff working on Output 4 and amplifying grant grantees. A complete list of interviewees is available in Annex 1.

## *Evaluation Results*

**Are the selected solutions showing evidence of effectiveness in monitoring or addressing environmental crime?**

ECO-SOLVE demonstrates a strong structural capacity to identify promising technological solutions through its Amplifying Grants, but its efforts reveal significant systemic barriers to finding projects that are truly "ripe" for frontline use.

ECO-SOLVE employs a rigorous, multi-stage evaluation process to vet potential technological solutions. Proposals are evaluated against strict criteria—including innovation, project design, feasibility, scalability, and impact—by an independent Advisory Group, ECO-SOLVE team members, and specialised experts like AI engineers who validate technological viability. Through this process, the project has successfully identified and funded several promising interventions that adapt existing science for operational scale. Examples include funding the World Parrot Trust to use microbiome profiling to distinguish wild-caught from captive-bred parrots, supporting TRACE Wildlife Forensics Network to implement portable MinION DNA sequencing for timber and tigers, and backing WWF Brazil's use of AI and geochemical analysis to trace illicit gold.

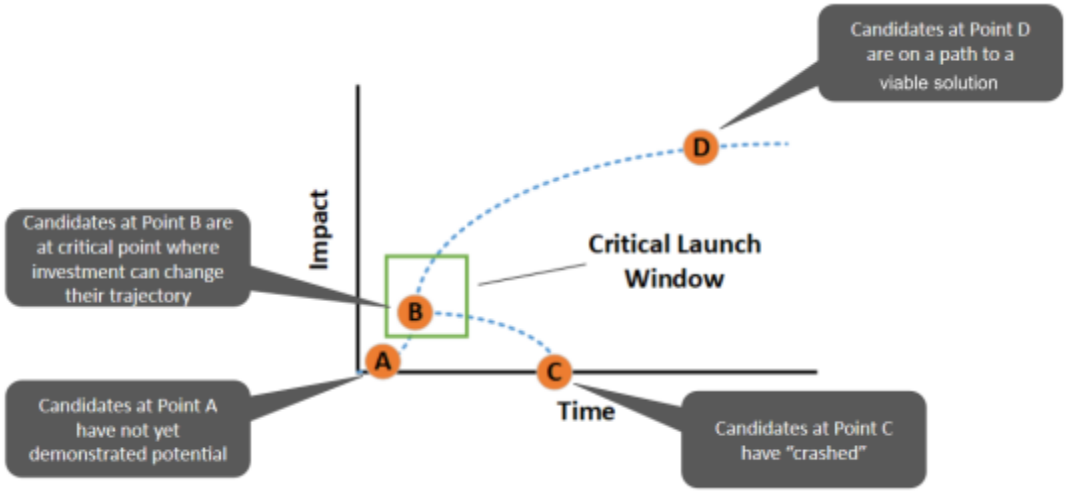



Figure 8. Illustration of a 'launch' window which is further articulated by the criteria that ECO-SOLVE uses in grant selection. ECO-SOLVE is seeking to fund grantees at Point B where the funds will have the greatest likelihood of changing the trajectory or a solution or technology.

Despite this rigorous selection process, there are persistent barriers that grantees face in scaling up their efforts, including the academic-operational gap, and the lack of in-house technical capacity. Solutions are frequently designed in academic or research settings without piloting or incorporating feedback from actual law enforcement actors. As a result, these technologies are often niche proofs-of-concept rather than user-facing tools, making it difficult to transition them directly into practical policing. Additionally, many conservation NGOs and law enforcement agencies applying for grants lack the internal technical expertise (such as AI or data science experience) required to actually build, facilitate, and maintain the proposed tools.These two limitations need to be addressed for any technological solution to truly scale.

**Are suitable solutions being scaled up sufficiently to meaningfully reduce the forensic data deficit? Is there evidence that practises are being standardised?**

ECO-SOLVE's Amplifying Grants are designed to take promising technological solutions for environmental crime and push them into practical, real-world application. Scaling means making these tools operational across borders. This involves developing joint data standards, establishing shared cross-border resources, and piloting technologies in the field to ensure the evidence they generate is admissible in judicial proceedings.

ECO-SOLVE provides targeted funding (between EUR 75,000 and 250,000 for 3 to 12 months) and strategic support to help grantees transition their tools from theory to practise. They help grantees scale by:

- **Testing in real-world environments:** Instead of lab-based research, grants force technologies into the field. For example, the World Parrot Trust (WPT) is taking a proven scientific method (microbiome profiling to distinguish wild-caught from captive-bred parrots) and testing its practical application at airports and breeding facilities in South Africa, Iraq, and the UAE.
- **Promoting affordable alternatives:** To ensure global adoption, ECO-SOLVE supports technologies that lower the barrier to entry. WPT's microbiome profiling is being amplified specifically because it is a cheaper, more accessible alternative to expensive isotope testing, allowing regions with fewer resources to adopt it.
- **Building independent local capacity:** The TRACE Wildlife Forensics Network project successfully scaled DNA sequencing by training local technicians in Peru, Vietnam, and a mobile laboratory. By the end of the training, local laboratory staff were able to conduct independent sequencing runs under remote guidance, demonstrating true capacity transfer.
- **Fostering novel partnerships:** Scaling is also achieved by bringing in new stakeholders. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) timber tracing project successfully partnered with the private sector—previously Kingfisher, a major European DIY retailer, and now Brooks Bro, a timber supply company—to test veneer and timber products against a forensic reference library, effectively scaling the technology into corporate supply chain due diligence.

- **Providing diplomatic support:** When grantees hit roadblocks, ECO-SOLVE leadership provides diplomatic and institutional backing. For example, when WPT faced political blocks in the UAE, ECO-SOLVE stepped in to try diplomatic routes to help facilitate a breakthrough.

Grantees, for their part, are supporting scaling efforts by building direct capacity through “train-the-trainer” models, working with local stakeholders to refine usage protocols, and thinking about cross-board knowledge sharing and strategies. And, in fact, there are examples of technological solutions successfully moving from the development phase into practical, real-world adoption by law enforcement, private sector actors, and frontline practitioners. For example, in Peru, local technicians at the Wildlife Conservation Laboratory were trained on TRACE’s MinION DNA sequencing technology and subsequently conducted independent sequencing runs under remote guidance, demonstrating a complete and successful transfer of technological capacity.

Despite these efforts, ECO-SOLVE and its grantees face significant structural and political hurdles in scaling these innovations:

- **Geopolitics and Bureaucracy:** The biggest bottleneck to making these tools industry standard is politics. WPT experienced this when the South African Border Management Authority inexplicably pulled out of their pilot, and when they faced massive administrative delays securing government permits in the UAE.
- **Reluctance to Share Data:** Scaling forensic intelligence requires cross-border data sharing, but countries are reluctant to share this information because they view it as secretive. Similarly, attempting to integrate these technologies into large international organisations like INTERPOL is exceptionally slow, described by grantees as being like "turning an oil tanker." Moreover, the broader environmental crime sector suffers from fragmented efforts. Without clear standards or shared data-governance structure, organisations develop tools and datasets in isolation, leading to incompatibility and wasted resources.
- **Siloed Grantee Operations:** Grantees have reported feeling like they are working in isolation. They often lack context about ECO-SOLVE's broader goals or what other projects are being funded, suggesting that a lack of cross-project communication limits the potential for synergistic scaling.
- **Legal Admissibility and Structural Costs:** For a technology to be truly "ripe" for law enforcement, its outputs must be legally bulletproof. There may be concerns about whether the intelligence generated by new AI or forensic tools would be admissible as expert testimony in criminal justice proceedings. Furthermore, structural and maintenance costs—such as expensive cloud storage, satellite data fees, and equipment upkeep—pose severe sustainability challenges for under-resourced law enforcement agencies once the initial grant funding ends.

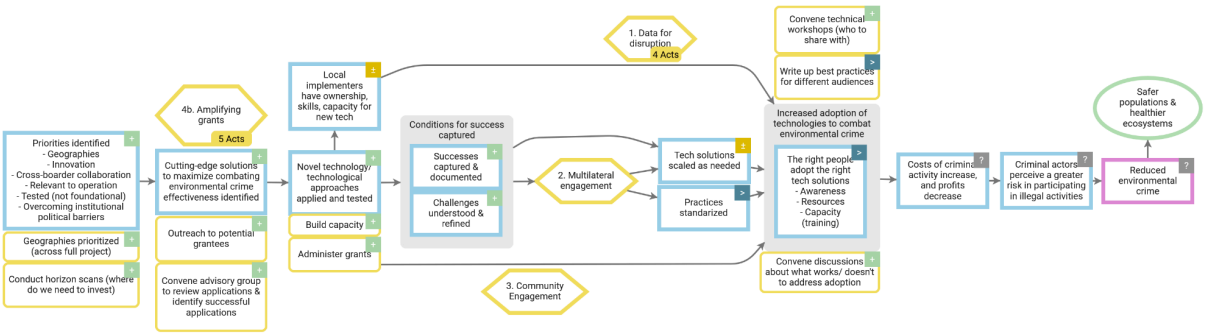



Figure 9. Diagram of the Theory of Change articulated by the ECO-SOLVE core team. The status report in the upper right corner of each result and activity shows the summary progress on that factor (red - major issues, yellow - minor issues, green - on track, dark green - completed, gray - uncertain or no evidence). A zoomed in version of the diagram is available in Annex 2.

## *Key Takeaways & Next Steps*

Over the course of the grant cycles, several lessons have emerged that can inform future investments in this space:

**Bureaucracy and Geopolitics Require Adaptive Management** Implementing new technologies across borders is heavily hindered by administrative and political roadblocks. Grantees experienced significant delays waiting for government permit approvals or navigating geopolitical security constraints. ECO-SOLVE's willingness to act flexibly—such as adapting deliverables, granting no-cost time extensions, and providing high-level diplomatic support to break bureaucratic deadlocks—proved essential to keeping projects viable.

**Field Testing is Crucial for Refining Tools** Forcing technologies out of the laboratory and into real-world environments was highly effective. By placing tools directly into the hands of provincial authorities and border management agencies, grantees received practical feedback that allowed them to actively refine their digital applications, sampling kits, and standard operating procedures for actual field conditions.

**Non-Traditional Partnerships Drive Sustainability** To ensure long-term financial and operational sustainability, successful projects embedded their technologies into existing, self-sustaining structures. A prime example is the strategic partnership between civil society and the private sector, where forensic timber reference libraries are being actively used by major European retailers to conduct their own corporate supply chain due diligence.

**Short Timeframes Limit Long-Term Rollout** Grantees note that 12 months is "vanishingly short" for doing science and establishing new law enforcement integrations. While a year may be enough to build a prototype, it is considered an incredibly short amount of time to fully develop, test, and achieve mainstream roll-out of a new tool, often leaving projects stranded

without follow-up funding to sustain their impact. Grantees worry that once they successfully produce a scalable tool, it will simply "sit in a box on a shelf" when the short-term grant expires.

**Combat Grantee Isolation** Grantees executing these highly technical projects have reported feeling like they are working in isolation, lacking awareness of other initiatives funded under the same ECO-SOLVE umbrella. Establishing formal mechanisms for cross-project communication and knowledge-sharing among grantees would help combat this siloed approach and could foster unexpected synergies in technological development.

Overall, the Amplifying Grants demonstrate that while catalytic funding successfully pilots innovation, achieving true global scale requires donors to pair that funding with extended timelines, diplomatic backing, and clear pathways for institutional or corporate handover.

## Partnership Grants

This section briefly compares the results and experiences of Partner Hubs, under Output 1, with those of ECO-SOLVE run hubs.

### *Evaluation Results*

The GMS employs a hybrid operational model, with hubs managed both directly by the ECO-SOLVE team and Partner hubs operated by established non-governmental organisations such as the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), IFAW, and TRAFFIC. This structural division creates distinct operational environments that directly influence the type of oversight, data generation, and law enforcement engagement the project is able to achieve.

Operationally, ECO-SOLVE hubs allow for a high degree of command and control. Project management can directly oversee monitoring routines, motivate analysts, and easily coordinate logistics like team meetings. Crucially, intelligence and detection reports generated by ECO-SOLVE hubs undergo a mandatory internal review process—often vetted by the project's Law Enforcement Liaison—before being shared with external authorities. In contrast, Partner hubs operate with significant autonomy. ECO-SOLVE management has no jurisdiction over their internal schedules, working hours, or staff turnover, which can sometimes disrupt momentum, as was seen when staffing changes in the Cameroon hub caused temporary operational stalls. Furthermore, Partner hubs are not strictly obligated to share their sensitive intelligence packages with ECO-SOLVE management for review, meaning the quality and frequency of their localised intelligence sharing can remain somewhat of an unknown to the central project team.

These operational differences naturally produce different results and outcomes. ECO-SOLVE hubs excel in producing reliable, standardised data that consistently feeds into the centralised GMS, ensuring that the project's methodological standards are met and that global trend reports can be generated smoothly. However, as newer entities, these hubs must invest

significant time and effort into building trust and formalising relationships with local law enforcement agencies from the ground up.

Partner hubs, while trading away strict operational control, offer outcomes that heavily leverage their pre-existing institutional assets. National organisations like WTI bring deeply established, trusted relationships with local law enforcement that allow them to follow up directly on intelligence and even participate in ground operations—a level of integration that is incredibly difficult for new hubs to replicate. Similarly, Partner hubs with large NGOs can bring unique privileges to the network; for instance, IFAW's status as a "trusted flagger" under the EU's Digital Services Act allows the project to mandate the removal of illicit content on social media platforms.

Ultimately, the differing structures mean that while ECO-SOLVE hubs offer transparency, consistency, and alignment with the project's exact strategic priorities, partnering with other organizations can open access to different networks and resources. In particular, partnering with well-established local organizations can serve as a powerful force multiplier that can accelerate on-the-ground enforcement. However, this comes with a "black box" risk, where project leadership occasionally lacks visibility into a partner's daily operations, making it difficult to assess their specific local effectiveness or intervene when internal organisational challenges arise. This degree of operational autonomy reflects the reality that the hubs were selected on the basis of pre-established institutional relationships and trusted access to highly sensitive law enforcement intelligence. Where temporary delivery challenges have arisen, ECO-SOLVE has responded with additional direct engagement, reinforced reporting expectations, and more structured communication rhythms with hub leads. That said, opaque nature of this relationship can lead to uncertainty about the quality of some work and challenges in adaptively managing outcomes.

### *Key Takeaways*

**Increase Oversight and Integration of Partner-Run Hubs** There is currently a "night and day" difference in oversight, accountability, and communication between hubs managed directly by ECO-SOLVE and those run by external partners. Furthermore, performance across the partner network is uneven. While the South Asia hub (managed by the Wildlife Trust of India) operates exceptionally well due to its mature law enforcement networks, project leadership has limited insight into the MENA hub's activities and has faced severe staff turnover and operational challenges in the Cameroon hub. ECO-SOLVE should establish stronger engagement, clearer expectations, and better oversight to ensure hubs in regions like MENA and Cameroon are fully integrated into the GMS and consistently producing actionable intelligence.

Additionally, one partner grantee did mention that the current funding is insufficient to fully cover the time and resources required to operate their hub stating that "the budget provided for such intensive monitoring is not sufficient, given the level of activities expected under this contract."

## Community Grants

The Community Grant processes and outcomes are discussed at length under the Output 3 section of this report. This section only speaks to the structural and administrative components of the grant making.

### *Evaluation Results*

Grantees report that the ECO-SOLVE community grants have had a profound, empowering impact on their communities, and they consistently praise the project's administration for being supportive and refreshingly unbureaucratic. Partners highlighted ECO-SOLVE's simplified reporting, lack of micromanagement, and supportive communication. The primary negative feedback centred on the short duration of the grants.

- **Simplified Procedures & Flexible Reporting:** "We have been enjoying our work with [ECO-SOLVE] because they have very simplified systems that really save a lot of time in terms of administrative and procedure. And also, we receive very supportive support from the team as well. Whenever we have a question... they respond quite quickly and efficiently." There was praise for the reporting templates for prioritising substance over busywork: "It is something that is simplified, it is not bureaucratic, full of tables... This is very important, because this often does not reflect the reality of the achievement of objectives."
- **Trust-Based Relationship:** "We want to continue this partnership, because it was very peaceful, it was not an organisation that was all over us, it was not an organisation that was demanding... everything was very harmonious. So that is good, that is important, because we have peace of mind to do the work."

Overall, ECO-SOLVE is doing an exceptional job of listening to communities and funding the right types of localised, bottom-up interventions. The strategic challenge for the remainder of the project will not be changing *what* is funded, but rather exploring how to provide longer-term, sustained support, build the administrative capacity of the grassroots partners, and carefully navigate the severe security risks associated with law enforcement collaboration.

### *Key Takeaways*

ECO-SOLVE must grapple with how to create a lasting impact given their structural constraints. The current duration and scale of grants may limit their ability to fully resolve complex, systemic challenges - especially against entrenched criminal networks.

## Conclusions

At its midpoint, ECO-SOLVE has proven its immense value as a dynamic "force multiplier" in the fight against environmental crime, successfully transitioning from foundational planning to a highly active, multi-faceted operational mechanism. Across its four Outputs, the project has

pioneered trust-based community grant-making, elevated critical multilateral dialogues, and deployed innovative data hubs and technologies to detect and disrupt illicit networks.

However, the primary hurdle identified across all components of the evaluation is bridging the gap between short-term, localised interventions and long-term, systemic scale. The project faces a crucial "momentum into impact" challenge: it must ensure that high-level diplomatic resolutions and raw open-source intelligence translate into concrete, law enforcement actions.

To maximise impact in the second half of the project, ECO-SOLVE should implement the following strategic adjustments:

- **Scale and Sustain Interventions** To achieve true global scale, short-term catalytic funding must be paired with extended timelines or clear pathways for institutional handover. The project must define scaling objectives for its hyper-localised community grants and provide technologies with the follow-on funding and diplomatic backing required to cross the "academic-operational gap" into standard frontline law enforcement use.
- **Align Outputs for Cohesive Impact** Break down operational silos to ensure that all Outputs are capitalising on each other's strengths. For example, the global policy advocacy (Output 2) is directly fuelled by the on-the-ground intelligence (Output 1) and technological innovations (Output 4) produced across the project. Datahubs (Output 1) could use their LE connections to support first-line defenders (Output 3). Or, Output 2's connection and advocacy could be used to support regional policy change based on Output 1's trend data. Many of these potential synergies have already been identified in the theories of change. ECO-SOLVE would benefit from a more structured conversation about how to foster and strengthen these connections.
- **Pivot to Strategic Law Enforcement Support** Because environmental law enforcement agencies are chronically under-resourced, simply handing over detection reports is not always sufficient. Data hubs should pivot toward actively helping authorities formulate strategic responses. Simultaneously, the project should consider how to maximise the impact of crime trend data generated by the hubs to influence national and regional policy to create supportive environments for law enforcement action.
- **Broaden and Integrate Partnerships** Multilateral advocacy efforts should be expanded beyond civil society to engage bilaterally with "middle-ground" states, private sector tech and banking entities. Internally, ECO-SOLVE must combat grantee isolation by establishing formal mechanisms for cross-project communication and increasing the integration and oversight of partner-run data hubs.

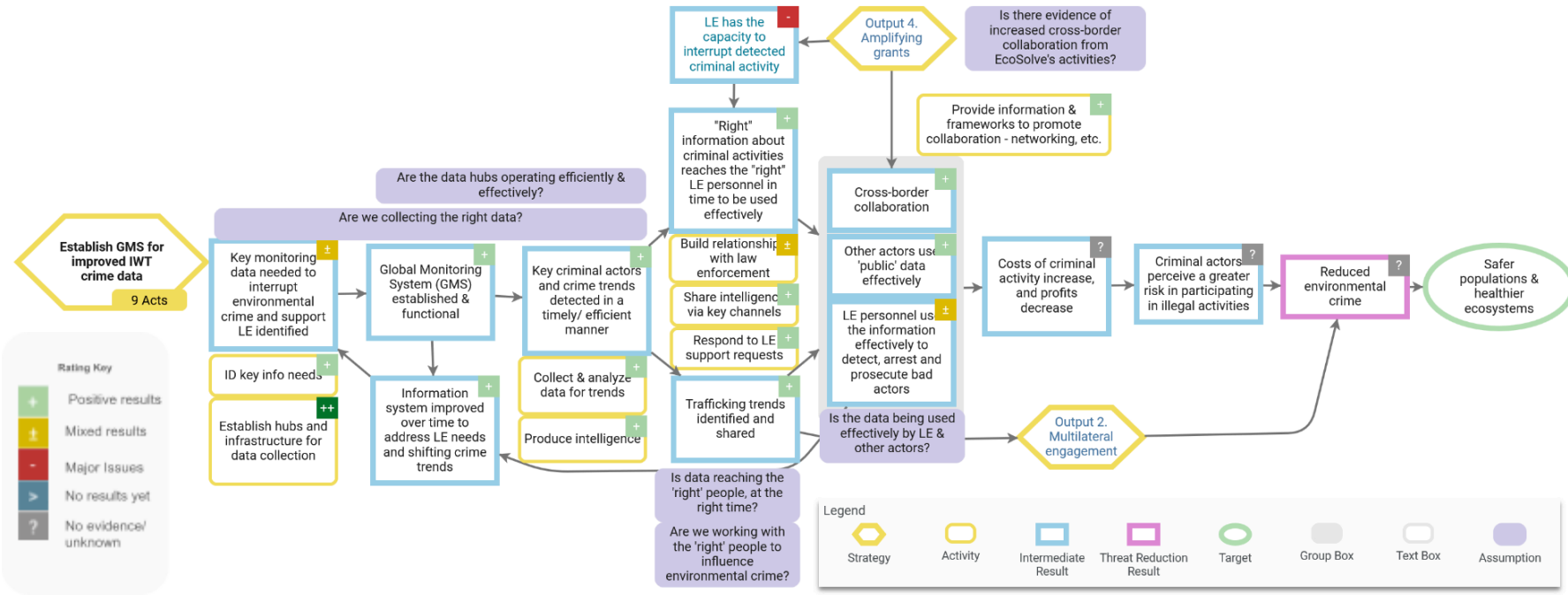
## Annex 1. List of Interviewees

| Output | Name | Role or Organisation | Interview Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Haya Fahmawi | GMS Partner hub IFAW | 9th Feb 2026 |
| 1 | Shankar Prakash & Apurva Bandal | GMS Partner hub WTI | 28 Jan 2026 |
| 1 | Wilson Ogoke | Nigeria Hub | 25 Feb 2026 |
| 1 | Matthew Eiampikul | Thailand Hub | 27 Feb 2026 |
| 1 | Melissa Viljoen-Castlemaine | S Africa Hub | 26 Feb 2026 |
| 1 | Gabriel Granjo | Brazil Hub | 6 March 2026 |
| 1 | Aysha Hales-Henao & Bricette Nguemwo | GMS Partner hub TRAFFIC | Feb 9 2026 |
| 1 | Russel Gray | Head of Data Component ECO-SOLVE | 16 Feb 2026 |
| 1 | Salvatore Amato | Law Enforcement Liaison ECO-SOLVE | 12 March 2026 |
| 2 | Carlos Sanchez | Peru mission in Vienna | 19 March 2026 |
| 2 | Nicolas Karges | France mission | 2 March 2026 |
| 2 | Alice Pasqualato | WCS | 10 Feb 2026 |
| 2 | Ian Tennant | Director of Multilateral Engagement ECO-SOLVE | 17 Feb 2026 |
| 3 | Diana Bitra | BITRA | 5 Feb 2026 |
| 3 | Raissa Menezes | Instituto Sucupira | 12 Feb 2026 |
| 3 | Nguyen Manh Ha | Center for Nature Conservation and Development | 2 March 2026 |
| 3 | Claudelice Silva dos Santos | Instituto Ze Claudio e Maria | 5 March 2026 |
| 3 | Kreissyg Abaunsa | Macarena Birding | 23 Jan 2026 |
| 3 | Laura Avila | Grants & Community Engagement Liaison ECO-SOLVE | 26 Jan 2026 |

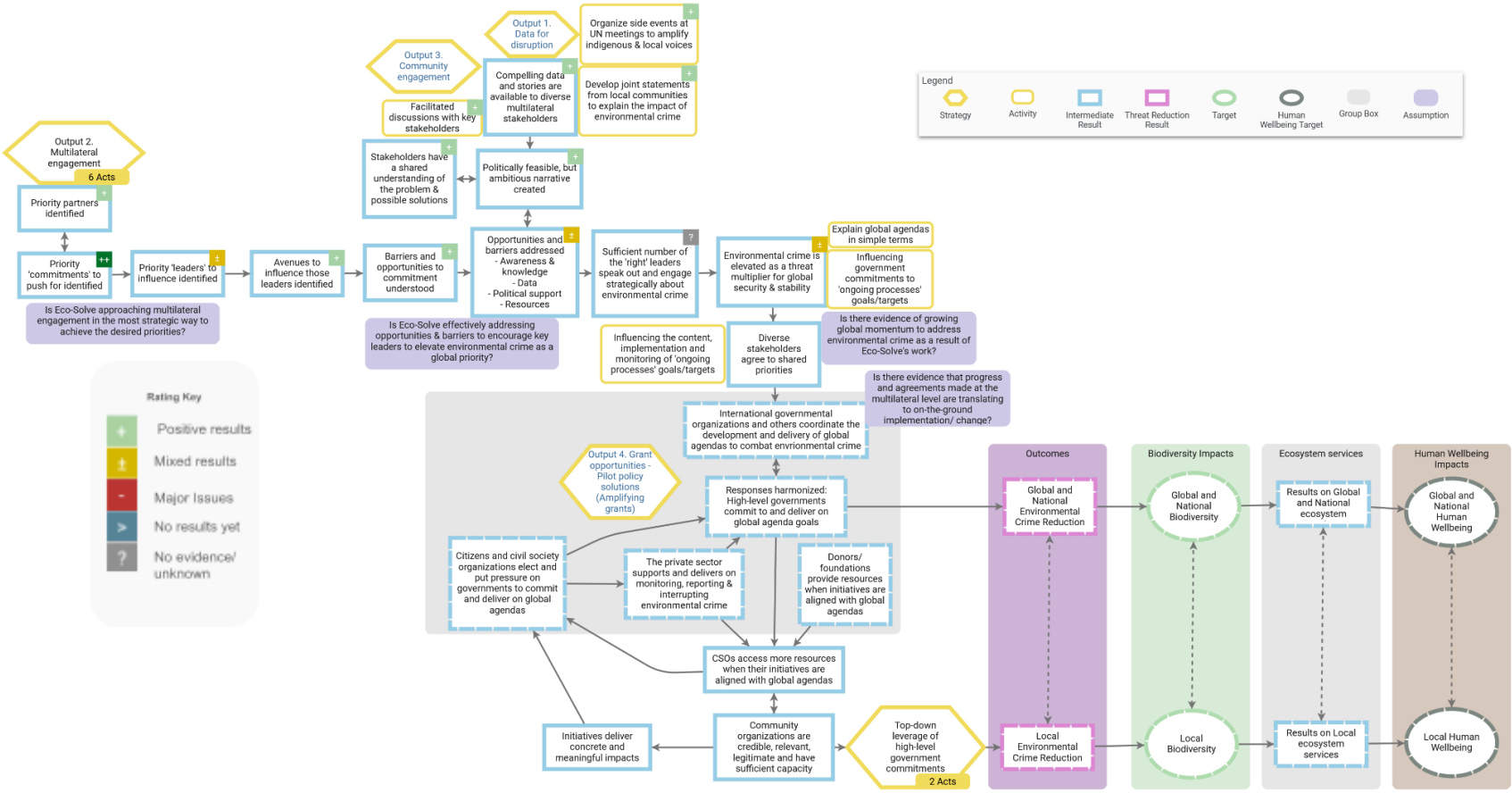
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Pablo Dufflocq & Rob Ogden | TRACE | 26 Feb 2026 |
| 4 | Steven Janssen | World Parrot Trust | 25 Feb 2026 |
| 4 | Lauren Young | Analyst ECO-SOLVE | 12 Feb 2026 |
| All | Simone Haysom | Director of Environmental Crime and Head of ECO-SOLVE | 26 Feb 2026 |

# Annex 2. Full Theories of Change

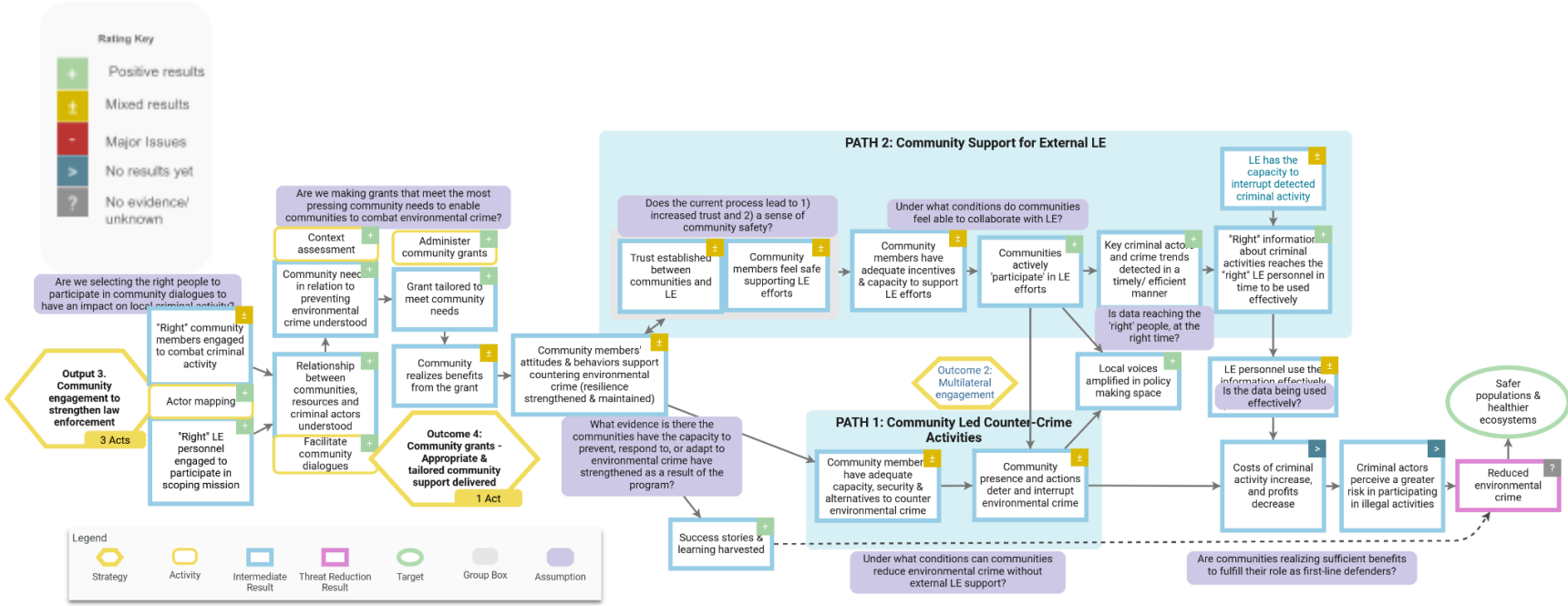
## Output 1 Theory of Change



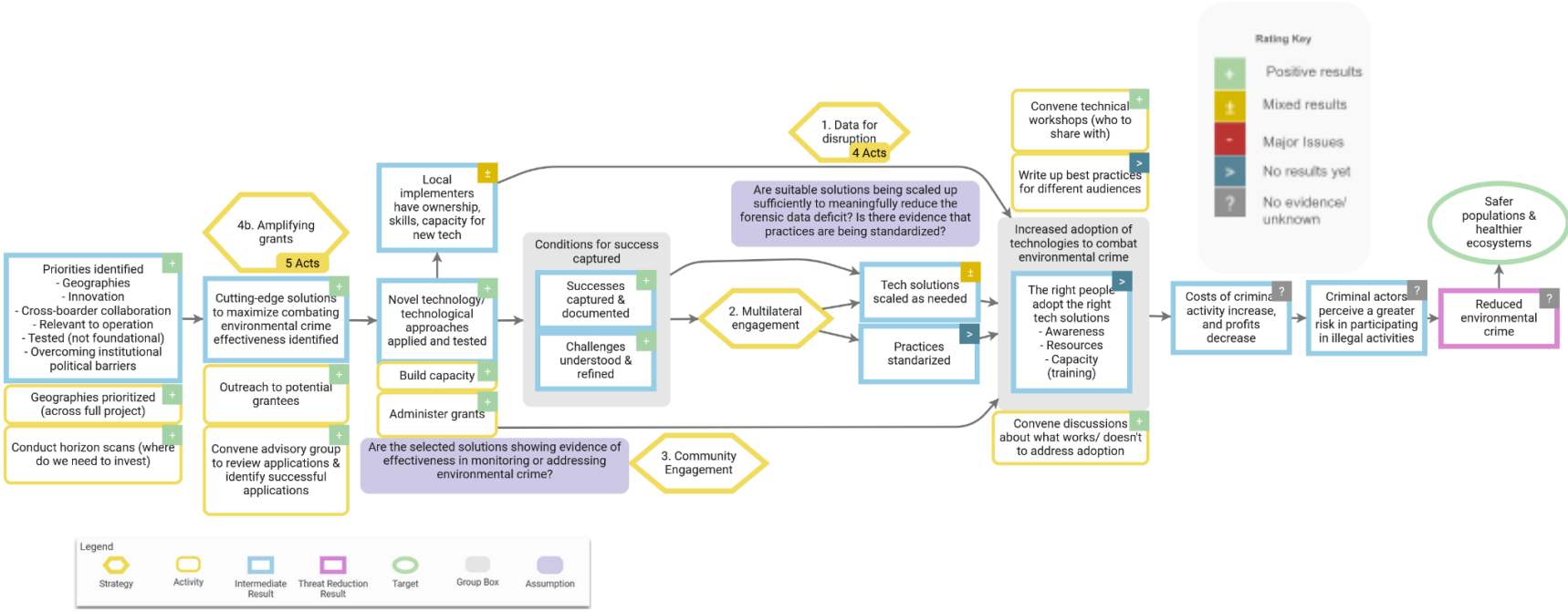
# Output 2 Theory of Change



# Output 3 Theory of Change



# Output 4 Amplifying Grants (Grants Hub)



# Annex 3. Topic Guide Questions for Key Informant Interviews

## Output 1 Topic Guide for Key Informant Interviews

*Data for Disruption Mid-Project Evaluation Questions*

**High Priority Questions**

1. Based on your experience, are we working with the right law enforcement (LE) contacts to reduce environmental crime? Are there other groups that Eco-Solve should be working with in order to strengthen approaches to reduce environmental crime?

2. Could you briefly summarise what Eco-Solve has done to build trust and formalise relationships with local law enforcement agencies? Which of these activities have been most successful? Have there been any challenges? In your opinion, is there anything else Eco-Solve should do to strengthen these relationships?

3. Of the reports your hub has shared, have any led to tangible actions? If so, can you tell us more about what happened? In your opinion, what do you think Eco-Solve can do to encourage or support more immediate action?

4. How often do you hear from LE that they have used the data from a detection pack? What, if anything, could Eco-Solve do to increase feedback directly from law enforcement?

5. Has your hub received support requests for investigations? Are these requests helping LE to close cases they otherwise could not have solved?

6. Have any of your hub's digital evidence packages successfully stood up in court proceedings?

7. What capacity development efforts has Eco-Solve supported? How useful were these efforts? What additional capacity is needed in your region to address environmental crime?

8. Has your hub tried to support any cross-border investigations? Can you tell us more about what conditions made that possible? If you've tried to coordinate a cross-border investigation and it didn't work, can you tell us more about what happened? What activities would best promote or increase cross national collaboration?

## Output 2 Topic Guide for Key Informant Interviews

*Topic Guide: Multilateral Engagement*

**Priority Questions**

1. Eco-Solve's goal in the multilateral space is to raise the awareness of environmental crime globally and to elevate it as an issue of global security and stability. In the project's effort to do this so far, do you feel like they are being strategic in their approach?

    - Would you categorise their messaging as clear and compelling?
    - Do they seem to be targeting the right audiences (and reaching them effectively)?
    - In your opinion, is there anything they could do to be more strategic?

2. The ECO-SOLVE project would like to position itself as a pre-eminent multi-stakeholder platform. Do you have a good example of when these efforts have been successful? What more could ECO-SOLVE do to strengthen their position as a convener?

3. In your experience, do you have an example of how ECO-SOLVE has effectively brought 'non-traditional' actors (eg., Indigenous and civil society voices) into multilateral conversations? Is this strategy raising awareness among national and international leaders that environmental crime is not 'victimless'?

4. What barriers does ECO-SOLVE face in raising environmental crime as a global priority? What are the greatest constraints facing global leaders in embracing this issue? Do you have any suggestions on how ECO-SOLVE could better address these barriers?

5. Are you aware of ECO-SOLVE's existing 'knowledge products' such as the Handbook for the IEG or the Paris Conference Report? To the best of your knowledge, have these products been actively used by officials or delegates to inform their positions? Are there other knowledge products that are missing that ECO-SOLVE might be well placed to produce?

6. Are there existing synergies or opportunities in global trends that Eco-Solve could capitalise or harness to increase momentum and attention to the issue?
    - Is there evidence that ECO-SOLVE's advocacy is helping to link environmental crime to broader issues (human trafficking, weapon trafficking, etc)?

7. Have you seen any evidence that environmental crime issues are gaining momentum on the global stage? If yes, what do you feel has been the driving force behind this momentum?

- To what extent can this momentum be attributed to the groundwork laid by ECO-SOLVE's dialogues and policy briefs?

8. What progress has been made toward international agreements on environmental crime so far? Have you seen any examples of international agreements on environmental crime that have led to national legislative reforms (eg, resources for law enforcement, increased data sharing & collaboration, increased security for environmental defenders)?

## Output 3 Topic Guide for Key Informant Interviews

*Community Grants Topic Guide*

**Section 1: General Questions**

1. What is the general sentiment about the project within the community or organisation? From your perspective, how is the project perceived by those directly involved? Do people feel differently about defending against (or participating in) environmental crime because of the work? In your opinion, why do people feel this way about the project?

2. Can you provide a specific example of a time your community responded to an environmental threat differently because of the training or resources provided by the grant? How would your community have responded to the threat before the grant?

3. In your opinion, what is the most valuable "benefit" the community or organisation has realised from the grant? If the project is still in an early phase, what benefit do people most expect or hope to gain, and why?

4. Does your community or organisation have the technical knowledge to maintain the new systems and tools, or does it feel dependent on outside experts? What is being done to build or maintain that internal capacity over time?

5. Defending nature brings risks of intimidation and reprisals**.** Do you feel the benefits of the grant (resources, status, protection) outweigh these security risks? Are additional support or incentives needed to motivate more community members to act as environmental defenders?

*Does your community work directly with law enforcement? If no, proceed to Section 2 and skip Section 3. If yes, proceed to Section 3.*

**Section 2: Independent Crime Reduction (Without External LE)**

1. What success has your community had in interrupting or preventing environmental crime?

2. What challenges does your community still face in interrupting environmental crime?

3. Under what conditions, if any, would you consider working with external law enforcement agencies?

**Section 3: Trust, Safety, and the LE Relationship**

1. Has the "Community Dialogue" and the project changed your view of law enforcement? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not? Would you say you trust them?

2. In your experience, are there any tradeoffs or challenges working with law enforcement? Would you say that most community members feel safer because law enforcement is part of the process? Or, are there concerns that collaborating with law enforcement might lead to the community being viewed negatively because of the collaboration? Are the tradeoffs worth the potential risk?

3. (In Indonesia & Vietnam) How helpful have specialised security risk management analyses and trainings been in helping you navigate your relationship with law enforcement?

4. Could you provide a concrete example of how law enforcement has participated in your project? From your perspective, was this form of participation important for the community and/or organisation?

## Output 4 Topic Guide for Key Informant Interviews

*Topic Guide: Amplifying Grant*

**Priority Questions**

1. How has the technology performed in real-world conditions compared to controlled environments?

2. Could you provide an example of a time your solution demonstrably reduced the time or cost required to identify illegal commodities compared to traditional methods?

3. What are the opportunities and challenges you see in scaling this technology to address illegal trade? In other countries/ regions?

4. Can you provide specific examples where data generated by your solution was converted into actionable forensic intelligence? Has this intelligence led to a seizure, an investigation, or a shift in law enforcement strategy?

5. Has the evidence or intelligence generated by your tool faced scrutiny in a judicial setting yet? What steps have been taken to ensure the chain of custody is digitally or physically secure?

6. What are you doing to build local capacity to use the technology? Are local technicians or officers now capable of running the full analysis pipeline—from sampling to reporting—without external assistance? If yes, what was the key to building this capacity? If not, what is still needed to build local capacity?

7. Is your solution currently being operated independently by national authorities, or does it still rely on your organisation's direct oversight? If it is being operated by your organisation, what might be needed to hand-over operations to national authorities? If national authorities operate it independently, what were the biggest factors making that transition possible?

8. Have you successfully developed and disseminated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or standardised reporting templates? Are these templates being accepted by the relevant competent authorities? Why or why not?

9. Can the data produced by your tool be easily shared with or understood by counterparts in other countries? Are there technical or legal barriers to cross-border data transfer or use? In your opinion, how readily accepted will the evidence be accepted across borders?

10. Has the ECO-SOLVE grant demonstrably changed the trajectory of your technological solution?

11. Is there anything that ECO-SOLVE could do to better support your journey to scale up the use of this technology to address global environmental crime?