



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Reversing the Flow **Annual hub exchange and learning event** **Ethiopia, 19 – 26 January 2026**

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Reverse the flow (RF)
Ni waaba
Vanqudi Community hub

Afar Pastoralist Development Association
APDA

Mabla:
Qatar Dacantiroh xina, Mahari Adan Baxi
caki gyyonuu lee dadda Yalloomih, saami

Farmo:
Qatar Dacantiroh xina lon mabla aracat
hoomih ken qebsaana

Nihiriite:
Suprongol hakiboh lee ayum
madaa lee nihrte yaaqaxa reemih
lee taamih abuuqiyiyal garbi biqaxi, hadat
lee taamih girsatan nix faaximta.
Ayyintaa lee abok ba'irah qulqulish
girsanaa.
Awwaaga lee caatuh odaahis inki qid
yalix qeemaa lee aarimni maaf'eem.

Website: +25191642570 | **Email:** afarpda@gmail.com | **Website:** WWW.apda-ethiopia.org

Address: Samara Afar Region Ethiopia
Established: 1994 D.C.

Vision:
Afar pastoralists have adequate
opportunity to enjoy basic rights human
and reach their full potential.

Mission:
Empowerment of Afar society to achieve
Vision

Values
Respect of the norms and values of the
society based on indigenous knowledge.
Flexibility, innovation and creativity in
implementing approach.
Willingness to learn from the community
and from implementing.
Accountability and transparency equally
to the community and Donor partner.

Reversing the Flow

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Report

Introduction

Reversing the Flow (RtF) is a community-led programme that uses a landscape approach to create impact with water, landscape and climate adaptation action by directly funding local initiatives. Since this approach (and the combination of approaches) is new, knowledge development and learning are central to the programme and are conditional for achieving the programme objectives. By continuously reflecting on approaches, interventions and relationships, RtF actors identify what works and what does not to fine-tune the approach and subsequently, to inform policy.

One of the learning tools is a yearly live learning event in one of the programme countries. In January 2026, APDA, ORDA Ethiopia, GOPA MetaMeta and RVO facilitated the third RtF learning event in Ethiopia. All 10 RtF partners, the RtF knowledge partner, representatives of the embassies of RtF countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) staff and members of the RVO RtF team gathered in Afar Region, the homebase of APDA.

While we regret the security situation in Amhara Region, which hindered us from visiting the operational area of ORDA Ethiopia, we were delighted to have 6 watershed representatives from Koti Kebele who joined us for part of the programme, including the community visits to share their learnings with us and exchange with their Afar neighbours.

Reversing the Flow is flexible and adaptive. This means all RtF hubs go at their own pace. By early 2026, all 10 partners have moved beyond their inception phases and have entered the stage of providing grants to local groups. Though some have progressed more on their journey than others, everyone is discovering RtF's locally-led and integrated landscape approach with communities in the lead.

During this year's exchange, our focus was on sharing lessons learnt, opportunities, how to overcome challenges, where to adjust and how to move forward in an impactful and efficient manner. Through open, lively and interactive workshops and site visits, different learnings, insights and reflections were shared.

Specific topics for the 2026 RtF exchange event included:

- RtF hubs' roles
- Policy and programming dialogue (advocacy)
- Integrated landscape approach
- Result measurement and bottom-up monitoring
- Success factors for LLA.

The report's main objective is to document the insights, plans and reflections that were discussed as a reference and report back, also to those involved in the programme who were not attending themselves. We will also share this report with outsiders interested in Locally-Led Development approaches to contribute to the broader understanding.

This document presents the main discussions, insights, reflections, questions and ideas raised during the event. The report is organised per topic. You can find the wide range of reflections that were shared during the event in the [RtF Learning Exchange Ethiopia Padlet](#).

Links to resources and presentations used are included under the respective sessions. Some specific session outputs are included as annexes to this report.

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Key observations

The third RtF learning event was lively, with open conversations and reflections, and rich of learnings. We are very grateful to the openness by the participants to share and learn together. While the Padlet captures the original notes, and the sessions report elaborates on the wide range conversations and learnings, we have selected some key observations for this summarizing section.

RtF hubs' roles

- In RtF, hubs have shifted **from an implementing role to facilitators and connectors**. They have become intermediaries between donors and communities and facilitate the regranting process. Hubs move towards strengthening local leadership, community ownership, and community-led decision-making. Hubs increasingly view their roles as enabling communities to implement, rather than implementing on their behalf.
- Hubs have **devolved decision-making power** to the communities. By strengthening community confidence and decision-making power and local ownership, they promote post-project independence. In addition, hubs incorporate local knowledge and encourage local resolving capacity.
- At the same time, we note that '**community capacity**' is an important topic in multiple ways. Hubs have experienced relying on community capacities and have discovered untapped resources. At the same time, hubs have seen the need to sometimes bring in additional knowledge to allow proper decision-making by the communities and avoid maladaptation. Linkages with local government experts are being made. How to create **access to knowledge** best within their specific context, for some hubs, is still to be found out.
- Supporting leverage and **collaborative action** with other stakeholders is at various levels for the different hubs. This is closely linked to engaging in policy dialogue and enabling community representation in decision-making over relevant policies and public/private investment decisions. The extent to which some hubs are advanced in this area depends on their connections to wider stakeholder networks and on the specific local context. More advanced hubs could mentor others.

Policy and programming dialogue (advocacy)

- Advocacy is happening in RtF at multiple levels where each actor can play its role and uses its network.
- With regards to **influencing the system of financing development**, the recurring question is how to convincingly demonstrate the value of locally-led approaches to governments, donors, and other financiers. With support from GOPA MetaMeta as the RtF knowledge partner, we are strengthening the case for LLA through 2 complementary routes: Value for money (quantity) and sustainability of results (quality), with the latter requiring long-term monitoring. Discussions led to a sharpened focus on metrics, which are needed to build the narrative. Follow-up: Further documentation will be built around the following indicators: Relevance of interventions, access to funding for local actors who suffer the most from the impact of climate change, costs and effectiveness, ownership, sustainability, empowerment, societal outcomes, and leverage.
- **On the landscape level**, hubs act as brokers on behalf of the community and create linkages between the community and government for them to influence and improve policy and programmes accordingly. For example, by stimulating the implementation of policies and allocating funding to community priorities. This links again to the hubs' role in stimulating collaborative action.
Questions for further learning: Can RtF support communities in playing a larger role in influencing policy? Can the LLA approach reduce the gap between policy and reality?
- Opportunities have been identified for cross-landscape policy action, for example, on pastoralists landscapes and related policy issues.

Integrated landscape approach

- The RtF landscape approach has led to greater **cooperation within communities**. Examples of APDA and Uttaran show that communities may appear to be (or are assumed to be) a single cooperating unit, but often they work for their own families. The landscape approach is connecting them.
- The visit to Sifra showcased the relevance of maps using scientific knowledge. In a landscape approach, **maps help communities visualise environmental change, support discussion, and guide local decision-making**. They can be used to identify risks such as erosion, monitor land-use changes, and support planning for sustainable land and water

management. The communities, including the Sifra community, can use these maps to discuss the expansion of farmland, identify areas prone to erosion, and plan future land management actions.

- Overall, we observe more focus on **community development rather than landscape-level development**. We also observe from the RtF practice that the communities and groups involved have a shorter planning horizon and work on landscape development in a more iterative way.
Follow-up: Hubs will be supported to enhance their role as facilitators of landscape development and as connectors of actors.

Result measurement and bottom-up monitoring

RtF aims to explore locally meaningful and systematically useful measurements of progress and results across 5 levels: community monitoring, landscape-level changes, hub-level monitoring, programme-level monitoring and reporting to MFA results framework. This highlights an overall tension: Indicators and frameworks that satisfy donor requirements are often poorly aligned with how communities themselves experience and describe change. In RtF, we have specifically created space for communities to discover their own way of monitoring, while we explore how to bridge this gap, building monitoring systems that are genuinely participatory, locally anchored, and still credible to external audiences.

- **Communities measure progress in concrete, visible, and often relational terms**, not through scientific metrics, but through changes they can see, feel, and compare to what came before: First, they didn't have it, now they have it. Or: They couldn't do it before, and now they can. Or referring to the physical presence of interventions: Landscapes revegetated and turned green, women accessing water nearby or families drinking safe water.
- It was also stressed that monitoring should take place during activities, rather than reporting after activities have been implemented, to properly **capture the process**. This is partly because it's not so much about isolated results, but about documenting change from the start through to long-term and possibly unexpected outcomes. Also, the way in which activities are implemented is part of the result, so must also be documented.
- **Maps and remote sensing offer powerful tools for capturing landscape-level change** over time, making visible what would otherwise be difficult to see or communicate.

Success factors for LLA

- RtF's **flexible timelines and reporting** are highly appreciated. NGOs and projects operate on timelines. Communities do not, as they move with seasons, weather patterns, and cycles of need. For programmes to be genuinely locally-led, they must be flexible and long-term.
- **Beware the mirage of participation**: Do not confuse quantity (the number of attendees) with quality (the relevance and representativeness of participants). Poor participant selection can skew your project ambitions. The hubs play a key role in facilitating meaningful participation in decision-making and addressing structural inequalities.
- While RtF had the ambition to build as much as possible on existing capacities, when it comes to institutions, we have learnt that it is highly important to assess how communities feel represented by existing institutions. Pre-established structures are often perceived by communities as disconnected from local realities. When communities do not feel represented by a governance structure, they will not engage with it meaningfully. The solution is to **foster ownership by building governance units that communities genuinely accept**, thus moving from an imposed structure to an accepted one. When communities trust and recognise a committee, they will work with it.
- Good practices nominated for documentation in 2026 relate to knowledge management and learning, monitoring, mentoring, institutionalisation, community engagement, project flexibility and technical assistance.
- Locally-led approaches are particularly suited to **delivering public goods**. They also contribute to and strengthen community harmony, coexistence, respect for diversity, and peace-building, resonating with communities' own governance systems. **Concerns** were raised about LLA in contexts of conflict and low levels of trust, how to deal with issues beyond the capacity of the community (for example, technically complex infrastructure), the conditionality of land ownership and aid dependency.

Session 1 - The shifting role of local NGOs and hubs

This session unpacked how hubs see their mandate in RtF evolving. Learning questions included how much support they give or should give to communities. Also, they explored how they anchor the RtF approach in local systems. Another focus was on how they bring together the right stakeholders and organise technical expertise for a true landscape restoration and water availability improvement approach.

Resource: [PowerPoint by IMPACT](#)

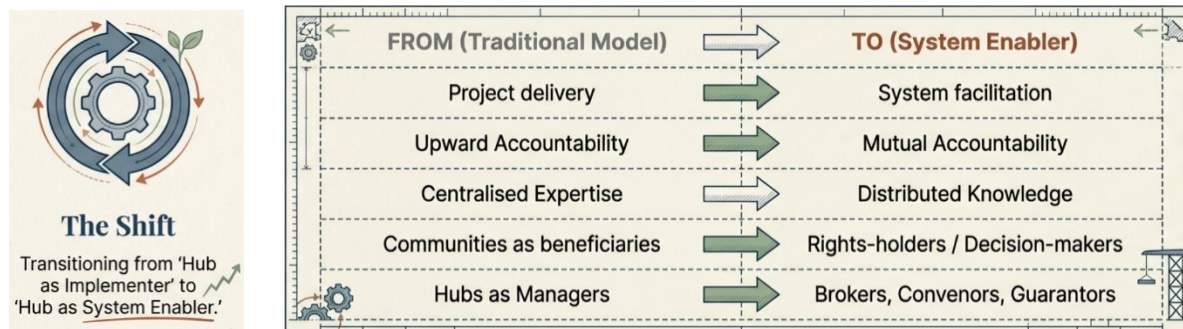
In the design of the RtF programme, the following roles were envisioned for hubs*:

- Provide financial contributions to the grassroots organisations (regranting)
 - support grassroots organisations to prioritise, develop and realise interventions following an inclusive and participatory approach
 - support coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the grassroots initiatives
 - hold grassroots organisations accountable for the use of the contribution (while the hub remains accountable to RVO for the subsidy received).
- Enable learning at multiple levels in line with the overall RtF learning agenda
 - set-up and implement reflection methods to embed a culture of learning and documentation (with local knowledge centres where appropriate)
 - help networking and exchange of knowledge between grassroots organisations within a landscape
 - participate in and facilitate participation of grassroot organisations in cross-country/landscape exchange.
- Support leverage and impact at the landscape level, through matching with other initiatives, replication and scaling of grassroots activities at the landscape level.
- Engage in policy dialogue and enable community representation to influence development and implementation of relevant policies and public/private investment decisions at the landscape and watershed level.
- Organise technical assistance.

* RVO (2022 December) Reversing the Flow – inception report, Reversing the Flow - Subsidy framework, RtF Guidance document – Proposal development hub

From implementors to facilitators: How hub roles have shifted

From the start of RtF, the hubs realised that their roles in RtF would be different from what they were used to. However, also during the programme, the hubs see their roles transforming.



Hubs saw their original roles in RtF as being facilitators and connectors, for example, engaging the community with the hub and RtF project, serving as intermediary between donors and communities, and facilitating the regranting process. While facilitation and connection remain core, there is now a clear move towards strengthening local leadership, community ownership, and community-led decision-making. Hubs increasingly see their roles as enabling communities to implement, rather than implementing on their behalf. This includes facilitating social dialogue, raising awareness on social cohesion, providing technical expertise, supporting communities in budget management, and influencing policy at sub-national and national levels. Hubs should also take on a 'helicopter' function: Maintaining an overview of the landscape, analysing the broader situation, connecting stakeholders, activities, and infrastructure, and carrying a vision to government and other financiers to invest in the region.

The role of the donor is shifting in parallel. The MFA is moving from control-based aid to trust-based cooperation, from project to process, from contracting to partnering, and from supporting improvement to supporting a movement.

Example – Friendship (Bangladesh)

RtF differs from Friendship's other projects. It focuses not on a single direct service or isolated activity, but on an overall landscape approach that enables community decision-making. Friendship now facilitates and incorporates local knowledge instead of just delivering. RtF has positioned Friendship beyond service delivery. It combines regranting with local knowledge to enable community-led, landscape-based solutions and long-term systems influence.

Example – IMPACT (Kenya)

When the facilitator replaces the executor: For years, they used their own approach, like other hubs. Often, NGOs claim to represent communities, but act like the government. RtF helped dispel the idea that communities lack the capacity to implement projects. Communities have their own governance structures that they respect, and it is important to build upon these structures for better social integration. (This may affect the resources allocated to NGO staff in the long term). The approach is sustainable since communities work for themselves. Initially, IMPACT was an implementor; now they are a / the facilitator. They do not impose this approach on their other partners but let the community try to convince other stakeholders.

Example – SOS Sahel Sudan (Sudan)

For the proper implementation of RtF, there are 2 main considerations where hubs can play a facilitating role to create clarity: 1. Establishing a clear programme focus that centres on water security and climate resilience, 2. Ensuring that benefits reach the entire community (not only specific groups) by working through a committee that is widely recognised and trusted by the community, whether formally registered or not.

Reflections on the new roles

The group discussed how they are adopting these new roles and shared the following reflections:

- The changing role also has implications for the NGO strategy more broadly. As NGOs shift toward facilitation, communities become the implementers, a more sustainable model. However, this also raises legitimate concerns: NGO staff may feel their jobs are at risk, and organisations need space to rethink their structures, learn from failures, and see facilitation as a valued and skilled role in itself.
- It is sometimes difficult to ignore your own thoughts and ideas you might have on how things should be done. You have to trust on the other doing the right thing or allow learning from failures. It is hard to let go and park your own ideas.
- While communities define and decide, RtF itself has boundaries: Thematic targets such as water and landscape. So, hubs must ensure communities work within these parameters, which complicates fully letting go.
- Community takeover requires time and preparation; it is a gradual process.
- Knowledge bias can make it difficult to stay neutral, impartial, and patient.
- A lack of trust in community capacity can lead to micro-management.
- Hubs may feel pressured to produce quick results and meet reporting requirements.
- Hubs' identities and skill sets are often tied to being implementers rather than enablers.
- Mutual trust, respect, and meaningful, transparent communication — through stakeholder meetings, consultation frameworks, and engagement with community leaders — are essential. Letting go is a gradual process.
- What is the balance between being a facilitator and ensuring project quality? How do hubs provide technical assistance without crossing into interference?
- From implementor to facilitator, how far do we go? Currently, at least 55% is regranting. Is it the vision of RtF to increase this? I think we should work towards a higher percentage. Will hubs, in their desire to empower communities, truly work to make themselves redundant? What is an optimal percentage? It can be different for different countries and hubs, probably. Are there incentives for hubs to increase this and decrease their overhead?
- Will hubs, in their desire to empower communities, truly work toward making themselves redundant? What is the optimal regranting percentage, and are there incentives for hubs to increase it?

Hubs identified several roles to develop further:

- Build community confidence and continuously strengthening decision-making power and local ownership for post-project independence.
- Trust community opinion, ideology, and capacity to fully implement initiatives, building long-term trust beyond funding cycles.
- Transfer technical skills and expertise to communities.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms.

- Advocate and act as knowledge brokers to shape policies and attract diverse support, change system thinking, not project thinking.

Unlocking and mobilising technical knowledge

A recurring theme in the reflection was how hubs create access for communities to technical knowledge they do not yet have, while respecting and building on the knowledge communities already possess. Technical knowledge needs to complement traditional knowledge. Communities have knowledge, which is too often still ignored. But at the same time, it is also important to provide certain expertise when it is not there yet.

- ORDA: When communities need support, technical support is provided, for example, assessment of water sites for a deep well.
- IMPACT: We see our role as building alliances, mapping required knowledge and stakeholders and building synergies; understand communities and the landscape; understanding key players in the landscape and how each relates to communities.
- Friendship: Build local expertise based on community-identified needs; create a shared learning platform (for example, cross-hub communities); use flexible funding to pay for local technical persons directly requested by the community.
- SOS Sahel: By engaging them (technical advisor; government department and other actors) from the beginning via mobilisation and participation in the community structures.
- Tupado: Utilisation of forms of multi-disciplinary stakeholder coordination like the technical working group and country steering group already existing in Turkana County; linkages or informing other partners of LLA initiatives within the landscapes for learning and references. This will help shift the normal programming scope.
- APIL & tiipaalga: Capitalising on best practices, signing charters at the local government level, and establishing a framework for consultation at the provincial and municipal levels. The flow should be from the bottom upwards.
- MID-P: As a hub, we should make linkages with extension officers who are available at the local level.

Example – Uttaran (Bangladesh)

In the context of waterlogging issues: It requires specific capacity to solve this. This needs participation from and close collaboration with the government. The government is mainly responsible for such activities. Uttaran + community have advocated for local government for support. Hub plays the role of a connector.

Example – TUPADO (Kenya)

When we bring all stakeholders together, we link to local offices and technical working groups. Allow the communities to reach these stakeholders within the counties. We used internal technical expertise to assist the community in developing BoQs. For example, some community groups engaged a private water engineer who charged them about KES 30,000. In this case, we advised the community not to go that route as it was expensive. We opted to second our water engineer to assist them at no cost.

Example – MIDP (Kenya)

The community faces floods and invasive *prosopis juliflora*, 2 challenges with potential synergistic solutions. GIS mapping and remote sensing can help identify nature-based solutions, combining community knowledge with external technical expertise.

Reflections on enabling access to knowledge:

- **Different types of knowledge:** One question coming back on LLA is whether communities have knowledge. This is a very general question. What knowledge do we mean? There are multiple kinds of knowledge; technical, fund management, and so on. Also, it is not homogeneous in communities: some know more. How do hubs mobilise the knowledge that is needed? Also looking within local communities. What knowledge is needed? Is it known what knowledge and capacities are available?
Also, taking up activities themselves means they are learning / gaining knowledge (video Uttaran).
 - **Follow up:** We will write a blog about this subject.
 - **Request:** Please add what should be mentioned in the blog. Examples are welcome.
- **Technical expertise:** How do communities and hubs know if they are doing the right thing? For example, what kind of trees to plant, where to drill? Is research needed? How do they avoid maladaptation? How is technical support happening with the communities from either the hub or government and what are the cost implications? Are the communities facilitating or the hub?
- **Technical advice:** It is encouraging to observe how local technical expertise, in collaboration with innovation hubs, is contributing to solutions for complex landscape-level issues (Uttaran Bangladesh).

- What about getting the right technical expertise and actors? As water-related issues are out of IMPACT's expertise, they have a strong role in linking the right actors and technical assistance to the communities. How is this for the other hubs? What 'outside' actors are you linking to the community to further assist them?
- **Knowledge on communities and context:** RtF gives a lot of space to get a better understanding of culture, customs, context. Indigenous knowledge is combined to science data. Does this lead to better implementation/activities and eventually sustainability?
- How does a hub **ensure the quality and sustainability** of LLA interventions? Although ownership is a main component of sustainability, it is not the only component. If we look at the water supply infrastructure in Ethiopia, 45% of boreholes are not functional after 2 years (WB, 2018). Reason number one is that spare parts are often not available or too expensive, and fee collection is poorly organised. Reason number 2 has to do with poor groundwater mapping, and misunderstanding water resources dynamics. 2 important factors that are out of the control of a local community. How do hubs manage these risks?
- Can hubs say no to proposed interventions by the community if they are not working based on previous experience?

Facilitating learning - learning flows

If the community is the knowledge producer, how can the hub feed that learning into the wider system? By documenting knowledge for horizontal learning and producing learning briefs (collecting, analysing, comparing).

Hubs describe various mechanisms for ensuring knowledge flows, both internally and to wider systems.

- IMPACT: Community feedback and accountability forums; Community Land Summits; stakeholder engagement; documentation and sharing; formal reports.
- tiipaalga: Hub-to-community sensitisation, communication, education (oral, participatory, general assemblies); site visits; institutional partner and on-site partner videos; success story publications.
- ORDA: Technical support and documentation; photo and video capture; expert meetings and field visits with M&E systems.
- Uttaran: Direct knowledge-sharing platform with project stakeholders; documentation.
- MIDP: Learning shared to the county through steering groups; community meetings; social media.
- APDA: Allowing community members to attend training and speak freely.
- SOS Sahel: Review meetings with all stakeholders (mid-term and annual); hub-established knowledge exchange platforms; lessons learned and success story documentation.
- Friendship: Formal feedback mechanisms; participatory review processes; valuing local knowledge and critical expertise in decision-making.

An shared insight: Connecting is not enough. Hubs must also act as translators, converting community language into NGO language, and NGO language into donor language. Initially, this seemed like something to avoid ('donor speak'), but examples from the session showed it is sometimes necessary: local knowledge, needs, and results need to be translated into donor terminology to attract funding and present results credibly.

Example – Friendship (Bangladesh)

In the RtF project, learning flows both ways, not just from management to the field. For example, during an exchange visit, community members from one Char shared innovative approaches, such as plinth to riverbank restoration with other 20 Chars. The project team incorporated these ideas into broader plans. This 2-way learning ensures that local experiences shape decisions, making our interventions more practical, inclusive, and effective.

20 Chars visit one Char to expose them to all the RtF interventions.



Questions and other issues raised

The following questions were raised during the session for further reflection and follow-up:

- **On accountability:**
 - How can NGOs be accountable to communities? What does downward accountability look like in practice?
 - How can hubs ensure community accountability where communities hold themselves accountable, without compromising the LLA approach, while ensuring funds are used effectively?

- Comparing RtF and other projects: What are the different levels of accountability between the community and the NGO?
- **On community perspectives:**
 - What do communities expect from a hub? How are they experiencing the changing role of the NGO?
 - Traditionally, communities received everything from NGOs and only participated in consultation and NGO-led implementation. This created dependency. How are communities now experiencing the shift? What are their struggles and expectations?
- **On language and inclusion:**
 - What language should hubs use when engaging communities? Jargon, even well-intentioned terms like 'gender', 'capacity building', or 'focus group discussions', may not fit the LLA approach or resonate with communities.
 - Hubs should use local languages when engaging communities to capture every opinion, including from those without formal education. As APDA noted: Using local language helps communities understand the RtF approach and identify needs on their own terms.
 - How can more space be created for women's voices in planning and decision-making? What specific barriers can be addressed to ensure meaningful participation?
- How locally-led are the hubs really working? Hubs have different approaches, some leave all decisions to communities; others still apply traditional development frameworks. Does the language used fit the LLA approach?

Session 2 - Advocacy / Policy and programming dialogue

The session aimed to strengthen the hubs' abilities to influence the systems that shape landscape management, financing, and programme delivery. It also clarified what it means for hubs to act as *system partners*. This session explored how hubs and NGOs are navigating advocacy, policy engagement, and programming dialogue, translating locally-led approaches into convincing narratives for governments, donors, and wider systems. It surfaced both promising practices and unresolved tensions between local realities and institutional requirements.

Opportunities for advocacy

Advocacy ideas were shared on how to convince other financiers to make more funding available for the locally-led approach:

- **Showcasing and documenting**, for example, the workable strategies and successes adopted by the communities in managing their own initiatives with minimal technical support. The core promise of LLA is doing more and better with less (**more impact, better results with less money**) and hubs need to demonstrate this convincingly. Many communities already have **internal revenue streams** (from tourism, carbon credits, and conservation) and are using these to implement their own projects without external influence. This is both a learning outcome and an advocacy asset.
- Building stronger **advocacy around public participation** in county development funds and national constituency development funds was identified as a practical starting point, particularly in Kenya.
- For international funders, **the shift from stories to evidence** through videos, good reports, and documented data is the first step. As one participant noted: "We can all agree that RtF is locally-led, but we have a role to play when it comes to preaching the good news to non-believers."
- Documenting best practices and developing **advocacy strategies for different levels**, local, national, and international funders, helps inform decision-makers and supports more effective, evidence-based funding decisions.
- A global opportunity is the decision at COP30 to triple adaptation funding in 2035.

Leveraging synergies

RtF's locally-led approach enables leveraging other projects and financing them in ways that more traditional, top-down programmes cannot.

Example – Uttaran (Bangladesh): Government joining in

In one landscape, local people requested a pond from the government but received no response. Once construction began with RtF support, the government offered additional support, improving dikes, constructing stairs, and improving access. The community's self-initiated action created the conditions for government buy-in.

Example – IMPACT (Kenya): Building on past investment

Communities are also leveraging earlier project outputs. Boreholes constructed under previous IMPACT programmes are now being connected through piped water systems to serve entire villages, an example of community-led continuation and expansion.

Opportunities and challenges identified:

- A key principle emerging from these examples is to **work with and through existing institutional mechanisms** rather than creating parallel structures.
 - ORDA's watershed approach illustrates this well: Working with watershed committees established and protected under national law or proclamation increases the likelihood that local institutions continue functioning beyond the RtF project period.
- Keeping LLA alive in **humanitarian settings**: By securing donor funding to address urgent basic needs in the same RtF communities, SOS Sahel created the conditions for communities to continue leading decisions and maintaining an LLA approach, even within a humanitarian setting.
 - **Question:** How to implement LLA in a context marked by security challenges?
- The **role of the private sector**: When communities map barriers and identify who is responsible for addressing them, the private sector frequently emerges as a relevant actor. Uttaran's experience shows that communities themselves can name private sector players as part of the solution; hubs can facilitate these linkages rather than bypass them.

Policy engagement: Country actions and approaches

Several country teams are actively translating LLA principles into concrete policy engagement:

- Kenya: The 3 hubs agreed to revisit the FLoCCa framework under the national climate change policy at the county level, aiming to strengthen community participation in identifying and implementing local climate projects.
- SOS Sahel: The team is exploring how to empower grassroots organisations to understand Natural Resource Management (NRM) policies, equipping them to become advocates in their own right, based on lessons from other landscapes.
- Ethiopia: Policy alignment with LLA principles is being pursued at the national level.
- Bangladesh (Friendship, Uttaran, Netherlands Embassy, knowledge partner): The group collaboratively mapped relevant policies, strategies, frameworks, platforms, and institutions, identifying challenges, gaps, and opportunities. The group also produced an action plan for 2026. The process was described as highly interactive and participatory.

A **cross-cutting insight**: How communities view their own capacity to advocate for their priorities within landscapes and toward the local government is in itself a measure of programme progress.

Example – Bangladesh

In the RtF project, the role of the community has been gradually changing. Instead of standing in front of local government offices seeking assistance, communities are now inviting government officials to inaugurate their activities, such as embankment construction, road development, and training sessions. This shift reflects the community's emergence as a system partner within the broader development landscape in Bangladesh.

Questions and other issues raised

The following topics require further reflection and follow-up.

Demonstrating the value of LLA through evidence

A key area for further reflection is based on the recurring question of how to convincingly demonstrate the value of locally-led approaches to governments, donors, and other financiers.

- How do we collect evidence to convince others that this is the way forward? Not many will initially object to increase ownership. Which fora are we using, with what kind of stories, and more importantly with what data?

Issues raised related to this are disconnections that need to be bridged:

- When building the case for LLA through 2 complementary routes, value for money (quantity) and sustainability of results (quality), the latter requires long-term monitoring. This raises a key tension that requires further exploration: **we need comparable metrics to build the narrative, but locally-led approaches call for context-specific indicators.**
- Linked to this is quality assurance: Can local NGOs insist on a **locally-led approach as a quality assurance standard** towards donors? Like, how donors have been setting up frameworks and standards for quality assurance from the top down. Moving in this direction requires a lot of advocacy and time to influence, as localisation has not been institutionalised by many donors. There is a big role for the MFA and RVO here.
- An important issue that needs reflecting upon is that the communities do not use the language such as 'climate change' or 'climate adaptation'. Yet, they are clearly affected. For example, communities describe a 'good harvest when the rains are good', not in terms of measurable rainfall data.
 - How can we **bridge the local language with the donor language** to unlock more climate funding for communities?
 - How do we translate lived experience into bankable evidence?
- One of the scaling approaches is setting aside a dedicated budget within our other donors' projects to support LLA within the existing communities' initiatives and connecting our communities with other like-minded stakeholders.
- What is the scaling strategy? What are the biggest barriers to scaling this, and how are we addressing them?

Roles of hubs, embassies and partnerships in advocacy

Clarifying the role of different actors in advancing locally-led approaches emerged as an important topic.

- The role of hubs is to act as brokers on behalf of the community and create linkages between the community and the government for them to influence and improve policy and programmes accordingly. **How are hubs actively doing this? What lessons have been learnt from this role?**

- Can RtF contribute to policy dialogues which happen through the embassy? How might embassies support hubs and communities in policy dialogues?
- To what extent will the community advocate for some policy changes or participate in global policy discussions?
- Is there scope to build advocacy partnerships with NGOs, local governments, or private sector actors to amplify efforts and engage with the wider community? How could multiplying efforts bring even more resources and support?

Strengthening policy and addressing the policy-practice gap

- Why do well-articulated and seemingly sound policies in many African countries remain unimplemented or weakly operationalised?
- Are there opportunities for RtF countries to support each other on pastoralist policies or to connect to wider networks?
- An example from Yangudi highlights tensions where communities protecting ecosystems may face competing government priorities, raising questions about how policy can better align with local stewardship. This community is in trouble as they live in a fertile area next to a national park. The community is protecting the resource (forest/wildlife), but if the government wants to create agricultural land, these resources and the livelihoods of the community will be lost.
- Can RtF support communities to play a larger role in influencing policy? Is the LLA approach able to reduce the gap between policy and reality?
 - **Follow up:** Gathering examples to make a blog on this issue?

Community and site visits

3 communities in the Afar region were visited: Ni'in Lee in Adda'ar, Yii'alo in Sifra and Tareena in Yangudi. During follow up reflections, a series of shared themes emerged:

- the depth of local and indigenous knowledge,
- the transformative potential of flexible funding,
- the shift from pastoralism to agropastoralism, and
- the importance of community ownership and governance.

The visits also raised hard questions about technical quality, community expectations, and long-term sustainability.

Traditional and indigenous knowledge

One of the most striking observations across the site visits was the richness and sophistication of traditional knowledge systems:

- **Wind, stars, and insects (APDA/Valerie):** Communities use natural signals such as wind patterns, star positions, ant behaviour to anticipate rainfall.
- **Animal entrails (TUPADO):** Elders slaughter a goat, sheep, or cow and observe patterns in the intestines to forecast rain, cattle raids, animal disease, or significant community events. Specific folds and blood vessels are read for predictions about the timing of rains, coming conflicts, or the death of senior community members.
- **River observation (Friendship):** Communities observe current flow, water temperature, and river colour to predict flood timing and river direction.
- **Dreams and seers:** Seers in some communities dream of coming conflict or rain and alert the community to prepare.
- **Animal and bird behaviour:** Migration of birds, moaning of cattle, intensifying winds, and the continuous crying of babies are all used as environmental signals.

A **shared insight** from the discussion: This is not a competition between local knowledge and satellite data. Rather, the hub's role is to link specific local knowledge holders with external technical expertise, building on indigenous knowledge as a resource, not replacing it.

Flexible funding and adaptive programming

The visit from the Adda'ar community illustrated both the resilience of communities facing severe environmental stress and the critical value of RtF's flexible approach to funding and planning.

- Adaptive planning in the face of a drying river. The community faces acute water scarcity as the river, one of the main water sources, has dried up completely, making irrigated farming impossible. Despite this, the community has not waited passively. They are already exploring adaptations, including rainwater harvesting, and their shift in activity planning demonstrates genuine adaptive capacity.
- The community originally planned to develop 30 hectares for irrigation. As the river dried up due to lack of rainfall, they redirected funds to goat fattening, a coping mechanism that generates income. The plan: Sell the goats at the right time and use the proceeds to finance the original irrigation activities once the river is replenished. This adaptation was only possible because of RtF's flexibility in fund management. As one participant noted: in most other projects, 'we cannot change activities because the budget lines do not allow it.'
- Flexibility as a programme principle: Across all sites, the flexibility of RtF funding was identified as a critical differentiator from other programmes, enabling communities to adapt in real time rather than being locked into pre-defined activity plans.

Example – MIDP (Kenya)

There is a difference in roles between RtF and other projects. In the other programme, we are implementing directly with specific targets and timelines. If there is any change of context, realignment takes more than 5 months, but RtF has no targets, no timeline. Realignment can be done on a need basis.

Community participation and ownership

- Community members voluntarily participated in constructing soil and water conservation measures, including trenches and check dams, irrigation farms, grass enclosures, and water canals.

- Participation extended beyond the formal RtF group as other community members joined in, reflecting genuine collective ownership.
- Yangudi demonstrated a strong and visible sense of unity around protecting the landscape and setting shared priorities. This raised a deeper question: What truly builds unity and trust in communities? In Yangudi, it appears to go beyond water scarcity alone; shared experiences of hardship, survival, and the importance of peace after conflict seem to have created a strong sense of collective responsibility that many communities struggle to achieve.

From nomadic pastoralism to settled agropastoralism

The community visit highlighted what is possible when communities are supported to organise formally and take control of their economic future while also facing some of the early-stage challenges that come with that transition.

- Community reflection: Kebele leader¹ reflection: “We were previously fully pastoralists, and earlier interventions focused only on pastoral activities. With RtF, we now have full decision-making power over what the intervention should be. This gave us the opportunity to try agriculture in the way we wanted. We tried it and we succeeded.”
- Example by Sifra: The group registered as a cooperative, unlocking significant benefits such as a formal bank account, accountability rules, annual audits, and market facilitation. They were glad to have made the transition, but were dealing with early teething issues. The first onion harvest remained on the fields because prices had fallen too far to make selling worthwhile. Organisations like Agriterra, which specialise in the internal capitalisation of cooperatives, could offer valuable guidance on navigating start-up challenges toward a more mature cooperative model.
- For a sustainable implementation, the next steps for Sifra include intensifying the protection of the banks of the Mille and Wahaman rivers and considering a solar-powered water pumping system to reduce carbon emissions.
- Question: Why did the Sifra community choose cash crops? Is it because they are not accustomed to eating agricultural produce, or is there limited local demand for vegetables? How does this play out in times of drought or a bad season, when cash crops cannot be eaten?
Note: The community was also growing maize for their own consumption.
- Cultural transformation: “I observed not only a livelihood transformation from pastoralism to agropastoralism but also a cultural transformation. I saw a shift from a culture of sharing (low sense of ownership because resources are abundant) to a culture of caring (high sense of ownership because they invested labour in a context of resource scarcity). One culture does not exclude the other. Caring can be a sound basis for sustainability. I would welcome more examples of such cultural differences to learn and programme differently.”

(Enabling access to) technical expertise and the risk of maladaptation

Observations at Adda'ar raised concerns: Some soil and water conservation measures appeared to have been implemented technically incorrect, possibly based on insufficient technical advice. Or overall: Are these even the right interventions in this area?

- What is the hub's role in preventing maladaptation? How should hubs guide communities or even each other when doing something for the first time?
- What happens when the required technical knowledge is not within the hub? How can hubs monitor whether technical advice provided by the government or other actors is sound, and should they be expected to check?
- After the rains come, what will the trenches in Yangudi look like? Will they require significant maintenance? Is the community prepared for that ongoing responsibility?
- The community's need for reliable water access was unmistakable. What have technical or feasibility assessments shown about longer-term solutions such as boreholes, reservoirs, or tube wells? What are the next steps, and how can the hub and programme best support that process?
- Community activities are sometimes copied from examples seen elsewhere. Do communities contextualise these sufficiently?
- When expectations are not met, how does this affect enthusiasm and community ownership? What is the hub's role in managing expectations before, during, and after?

¹ Kebele is the smallest administrative boundary in Ethiopia

Interaction with Koti kebele (ORDA Ethiopia)

The site visits were enriched by the participation of representatives from the Amhara Region, where ORDA Ethiopia facilitates their RtF project. The watershed representatives also presented their plans.

"In Afar, water is life. In Amhara, water is livelihood." This distinction shaped how communities engage: One context is about survival, the other about sustainability. In Yangudi, when communities were asked about their needs, they did not list many things. They said: Water. Within 6 months, 4 water wells were constructed and protected with bunds. Sometimes development is not about doing more but about doing what matters the most.

A particularly powerful moment came when a member of the Amhara community (from a much greener region) visited the Afar landscape. Seeing the desert environment, they envisioned a possible future for their own region and stated that, on returning home, they would work with their community to preserve their landscape. When immersion in a different environment becomes a trigger for change, cross-community learning takes on a new meaning.

Learning flows between communities: Exchange visits are generating genuine learning across landscapes, not just from programme to community, but horizontally between communities. The Amhara / Afar case is one example; others include Chars in Bangladesh sharing innovations in plinth-to-riverbank restoration.

Other reflections and questions

Observations:

- Adda'ar: The ability to link soil and water conservation measures with productive irrigation farms was noted as a significant achievement.
- In Ethiopia, community organisations can formally register, allowing them to manage funds independently through their own governance structures, which are typically led by 3 community representatives, with the hub playing a facilitative role in auditing. This stands in contrast to Bangladesh, where community organisations often cannot register formally, limiting their direct fund management. This difference has significant implications for how the LLA approach is operationalised in different country contexts.

From the visits, several opportunities were identified for further exploration:

- Investigating the link between the drying of the river and upstream activity or land use changes.
 - Studying groundwater potential and surface water harvesting options that could support irrigation.
 - Exploring opportunities to scale up beekeeping, given that honey is already part of the local diet and culture.
- Assessing longer-term water solutions such as boreholes, reservoirs, or tube wells. Also, the technical and feasibility assessments needed to advance these options.

Picture gallery



Session 3 - Landscape approach and community focus

This session aimed to reflect on how the landscape approach is working out. And how the strong community focus within RtF shapes local ownership, decision-making, and system engagement for landscape development in practice. The session aimed to examine the balance between landscape development and locally-led prioritisation, drawing on concrete experience from year 2 of implementation.

A core assumption underpins the session: RtF is not one but many activities within a community. Each intervention is a building block in a wider landscape. When implemented collectively, these building blocks increase the resilience of the landscape as a whole.

A set of [guiding questions](#) supported the reflections.

Collectively addressing root causes beyond community boundaries

Several hubs shared examples where the root causes of vulnerability extend far beyond the boundaries of a single community and where addressing them requires engagement with larger systems, government actors, and technical expertise.

The RtF landscape approach has led to more cooperation within communities. Examples of APDA and Uttaran show that communities seem to like one cooperating unity. But often they work for their own family. The landscape approach is connecting them.

On the borders of the Afar and Amhara Regions, collaboration in the landscape is key: The Amhara community, which is pure farmers, are accommodating downstream pastoralists by helping them embrace agri-pastoralism to fight food insecurity. The Sifra community was happy for upstream (landscape) protection by Amhara farmers, which also encourages them to engage in food production.

Example – Sifra Hub community group (APDA, Ethiopia)

During the Sifra community visit, MetaMeta presented a set of GPS and remote sensing maps to community members and visitors. These scientific resources illustrated key landscape changes between 2012 and 2024, including shifts in forest cover, land use, and the course of the Mille River. See the annex for the maps.

For many community members, this was the first time seeing their village from above (top view), and several initially thought the map was a photograph of their settlement. The maps immediately sparked discussion and reflection, helping participants to better understand environmental changes occurring in their landscape. Visualising how the river has shifted and how land use has expanded over time, the maps strengthened community awareness of local environmental dynamics and reinforced the importance of collective action to manage and protect natural resources.

The maps helped community members see changes in their landscape more clearly. As one participant noted: “We were not fully aware of what was happening around us. The photo/map surprised us and helped us see what has disappeared from our landscape and where these changes occurred.”

In a landscape approach, maps help communities visualise environmental change, support discussion, and guide local decision-making. They can be used to identify risks such as erosion, monitor land-use changes, and support planning for sustainable land and water management. The communities, including the Sifra community, can use these maps to discuss expansion of farm land, identify erosion-prone areas, and plan future land management actions.

Additional useful maps could include water resources, grazing areas, vegetation cover, and locations of restoration activities. When introduced through participatory discussion and linked to local knowledge, such maps become powerful tools for community learning, planning, and collective landscape management.

Example – SOS Sahel Sudan (Sudan): Desertification and the environment department

In Sudan, desertification is a primary driver of vulnerability. The community's initiative targets these root causes directly. SOS Sahel engaged the environment department from the outset to explore broader support, recognising that the drivers of desertification operate at a scale that goes well beyond any single community's boundaries.

Example – MIDP (Kenya): Floodplain mapping with Dutch expertise

A community in a floodplain landscape identified river diversion as part of their intervention. Over time, they realised the entire area sits within the floodplain, and diversion alone would not solve the problem. Expertise from the Netherlands* is now being brought in to map the full floodplain, an example of community action opening the door to a wider technical and systems-level response.

* Supported through the Dutch Risk Reduction and Surge Support (DRRS) programme

Example – Friendship (Bangladesh): Community-led protection of government infrastructure

While the government showed willingness to build an embankment in the Chars, top-down infrastructure has not always proven sustainable in the long-term. The community responded by constructing bamboo bundles to protect government-built embankments, a locally-led solution that strengthens, rather than replaces, state investment.

Example – TUPADO (Kenya): Adaptive response to consecutive failed rain seasons

Following 2 consecutive failed rain seasons, communities undertook adaptive measures in response to the combined threat of floods and droughts. These root causes required both immediate adaptation and longer-term systems engagement.

Example from Bangladesh

Embankment construction to protect Char islands can only be carried out by the Water Development Board, which requires much higher budgets, a ministry-level approval, and dedicated national budget allocation. This illustrates how certain infrastructure decisions sit entirely outside the community and hub's sphere of influence.

Questions and follow up

Many questions were raised on the integrated landscape approach. These issues will be included in further learning activities.

The role of the private sector

- Is the private sector part of the stakeholder landscape?
- Should hubs engage private sector actors, and if so, what role should they play? What are the main barriers to engagement?

Defining and monitoring landscape boundaries

- How do hubs define the boundary of their landscapes when monitoring results? How do they decide which changes, sites, and communities are included or excluded?
- What roles do communities themselves play in the mapping and scoping of the landscape, and how is that role structured?

Landscape conditions and livelihoods

- How do livelihood activities contribute to the landscape approach?
 - Friendship RtF project: Livelihoods contribute to the landscape approach through seasonal crop calendar-based farming informed by community knowledge. Farmers follow a community-developed seasonal crop calendar aligned with rainfall, flooding, and water availability, enabling timely crop selection and cultivation that improves income while conserving soil, water, and overall landscape health.
- Balance in landscape approach: What if more land has been regreened? People might buy more livestock. This might then be too much for the landscape, leading to the landscape degrading. How to introduce sustainable livestock management and avoid this maladaptive practice? Is this reality? What is the role of the hub? Can we trust local landscape management?

Session 4 – How to measure results in an LLA approach

The aim of this session was to strengthen locally meaningful and systematically useful measurements of activities across 5 levels: 1. community monitoring, 2. landscape-level changes, 3. hub-level monitoring, 4. programme-level monitoring and 5. reporting to the MFA results framework. A central tension runs through all 5 levels: The indicators and frameworks that satisfy donor requirements are often poorly aligned with how communities themselves experience and describe change. This session explored how to bridge this gap, building monitoring systems that are genuinely participatory, locally anchored, and still credible to external audiences.

Resources:

- [PowerPoint by IMPACT](#)
- [PowerPoint by UTTARAN](#)

Community-level monitoring

In RtF, we have specifically created space to allow communities to explore their own ways of monitoring. A set of reflective questions was posed to all hubs, organised around 8 themes:

1. Monitoring principles: Think of a moment when you knew something had changed in a community. How did you know? Who noticed first?
2. Community-centred measurement: What did the community actually intended to change? What does success look like from the community's point of view?
3. Co-designed indicators: What do hubs usually measure and what do communities care about? Where do these diverge, and how do communities think about indicators differently?
4. Adaptive frameworks: What should change in how results are measured? What should not change? And critically: Who decides?
5. Multi-layered accountability: How would a community know things are improving? What would they say, do, or decide differently?
6. Evidence and reporting: What can communities capture that numbers cannot?
7. Direct funding: How does direct funding change what a hub needs to measure?
8. Capacity strengthening: What skills do communities need to lead their own monitoring? What support should hubs prioritise?

Several reflections were shared related to the observed community-level monitoring:

- **How communities observe and describe change:** Communities measure progress in concrete, visible, and often relational terms, not through scientific metrics, but through changes they can see, feel, and compare to what came before: First, they did not have it; now they have it. Or: First, they could not do it; now they can. Physical presence of interventions: Landscapes revegetated and turned green; women accessing water nearby; families drinking safe water. Example from Adda'ar: Goats have multiplied; goat sales generate income; trenches and enclosures have led to more grass growing; an area treated 3 months ago is already more productive. Grass is an animal feed; its return signals ecosystem recovery.
- Capturing findings: One of the Kenya hubs stressed the importance of **monitoring during activities** instead of reporting after activities have been implemented, to properly capture the process. This is in part because it is not so much about isolated results, but about documenting change from the start until (long-term and possibly unexpected) outcomes. Also, the way in which activities are implemented is part of the result, so this must be documented too.
- Dagu (traditional oral information exchange system in Afar Region). APDA: Afar is an oral society. First oral accountability, this is most important.
- Hubs need to sensitise communities on tracking their produce or sales to understand if the initiatives implemented are giving them returns or losses.
- Tracking the process of collective / community action is important: Community cohesion and bonding are important elements to keep in the M&L agendas. How a community organises itself, how they do the collective actions, are important to monitor and learn. Whether the adopted / practised approach contributes to enhancing the social cohesion or erodes it.
- How community committees hold themselves accountable and maintain transparency with their communities and hubs is a key dimension of hub monitoring. These practices are not peripheral to results measurement; they are part of what makes results real and sustainable.

- Example Burkina: Community using WhatsApp sharing the activities, videos, voice recording messages, and photos. This is also an opportunity for a group to integrate other communities.

Example – Yangudi: Collective action as a monitoring indicator

In Yangudi, the community organised itself and invited neighbouring communities to join in the restoration of grazing lands, constructing trenches and crescent trenches together. No one was paid. Instead, they organised a feast: After the work was completed, everyone was invited to eat together. This is an old practice for mobilising collective action.

The implication for monitoring: In future years, if the community needs to repair or reconstruct these trenches, can they organise another community feast and mobilise people to do it? Tracking whether such collective action takes place and whether it sustains is itself a meaningful indicator of programme success.

Tracking community-based initiatives through accountability and transparency measures: How community committees hold themselves accountable and maintain transparency with their communities and hubs. These practices play a key role in strengthening the monitoring of project results.

Landscape-level monitoring

Maps and remote sensing offer powerful tools for capturing landscape-level change over time, making visible what is otherwise difficult to see or communicate. 3 draft maps for the Sifra site (APDA) were shared and discussed as concrete examples (see also page 17 and the annex for the maps):

- Map 1: Yearly change at the RtF site, showing the area before and after community intervention.
- Maps 2 & 3: Land-use change, highlighting the shift from forest to crop areas.
- Map 2 (river focus): Changes along the river from 2012 to 2024, showing erosion and deposition patterns.

These maps open up important questions for all hubs: How could this type of geospatial monitoring be applied in your landscape context? What stories do you most need maps to help tell? What technical resources, such as data, skills, tools, and partners, are available to develop them? And how would you introduce and explain maps like these to communities in a meaningful and accessible way?

Community reflection on **mapping as a monitoring tool**: We were not fully aware of what was happening around us. The map surprised us; it helped us see clearly what has disappeared from our landscape, where these changes occurred, and gave us a much deeper understanding of our environment.



Other reflections and questions

- Why monitor at all? From the hub perspective, monitoring is not just about satisfying donor requirements. Measuring results must be shown through the eyes of communities, too. Monitoring should be a participatory process, not something done to communities but with them.
- **Locally meaningful indicators:** Many scientific indicators do not relate to day-to-day life in the landscape. In a subsistence farming community, a season is measured by crop harvest, not by millimetres of rainfall. As hubs co-design monitoring indicators, the question is: Can we anchor them in what communities actually relate to? Communities need support in showcasing their outcome indicators through visual and pictorial means, showing how things were before, and how they have changed since the implementation.
- **How communities describe progress:** Communities describe change when their pressing problems are solved. For example, when they see landscapes revegetated and turned green, when women gain access to nearby water, and when families drink safe water. Hubs are encouraged to share examples of how their communities describe progress or change in their own landscape.

- **Communities as knowledge producers:** Drawing from IMPACT's presentation, communities are knowledge producers, not data sources. The question is how to ensure learning flows upward, from community to programme, and not only in reverse. The hub's role in this includes facilitating horizontal (peer-to-peer) learning across landscapes, supporting communities in producing and documenting practice-based evidence, and using that evidence for learning and influence. How are other hubs currently doing this?
- Should **learning be a component in an LLA approach** to create more open spaces for sharing experiences and learning? If learning is not part of it, would the programme focus too much on 'results'?
- **Cognitive bias:** What is our focus as hubs in reporting? Is it the successes or the failures?
 - We report on both since RtF is more adaptive compared to other projects as it gives communities the chance to check on their list of priorities and work towards more attainable initiatives.
 - In most cases, communities report success and the fear that support will end if they fail and deter them from reporting failures. Therefore, the need to encourage them that failing is not the end is important because it is part of life, and we generate learning from that.

Session 5 - Success factors for LLA and potential pitfalls

The aim of this session was to distil what is working and what has hindered progress in the RtF programme, drawing on experience from implementation thus far, with clear implications for improving the approach in 2026.

Resource: [PowerPoint tiipaalga](#)

Cross-cutting learnings

Besides individual reflections and pitfalls shared, these overall reflections were shared:

- **Flexible timelines and reporting as a defining feature of RtF.** NGOs and projects operate on timelines. Communities do not, as they move with seasons, weather patterns, and cycles of need. For programmes to be genuinely locally-led, they must be flexible and long-term. RtF's distinctive feature is the absence of fixed activity implementation timelines. There is no pressure to implement within specific periods, and reporting requirements are lighter than in conventional programmes. In standard development programming, donors demand monthly, quarterly, and sometimes bi-weekly reports, leaving almost no time for actual implementation. RtF offers a meaningful alternative.
- **Beware of the mirage of participation.** tiipaalga shared an important operational lesson: Do not confuse quantity (number of attendants) with quality (relevance and representativeness of participants). Poor participant selection can skew all future project data. In one case, many untargeted individuals attended a community meeting because they believed tiipaalga had arrived with humanitarian aid. This prevented identifying the community's real needs. The solution was that tiipaalga went directly to neighbourhoods to equalise participation. The lesson learnt was that locally-led approaches do not always mean large public gatherings. People sometimes come together for different intentions. Genuine representation and quality of outcomes matter far more than participant numbers.
- **Building governance structures that communities truly own.** tiipaalga also highlighted a risk that cuts across many hub contexts, namely the problem of institutional façade. Pre-established structures are often perceived by communities as disconnected from local realities. When communities do not feel represented by a governance structure, they will not engage with it meaningfully. The solution is to foster ownership by building governance units that communities genuinely accept, thus moving from an imposed structure to an accepted one. When a community trusts and recognises a committee, people will work with it. This is not about rejecting existing structures by default, but about being willing to create new ones when communities signal that existing ones do not represent them.

Hubs used a mix of existing and newly created structures for the regranting process. Sustainability beyond the RtF project is a key concern.

Example – TUPADO (Kenya)

Both existing (legally registered) and new structures were involved (though some existed informally). In our engagements with the communities, they expressed enthusiasm to continue with their initiatives even when RtF is no longer supporting them. This is subject to continued engagement to determine their commitments.

Example – MIDP (Kenya)

Initial thoughts at the office as the hub was also to target the existing structures, but when it came to the community, they developed their own new structures to manage their RtF funds. An example was the ward planning committees that formed under the climate change laws, where the community shared their fear of political interference. Post RtF period will be determined by the sustainability of the project prioritised, and how the community will shape its landscape strategy into resource mobilisations from the community to external stakeholders.

Example – Burkina Faso

Analysing existing structures is essential before defaulting to them. Some structures lack community trust due to a lack of dynamism, selfishness, or accountability. Working with them can hinder mobilisation. APIL, by contrast, chose to work with existing village development councils.

- **Follow-up question:** How do hubs assure that structural inequalities are being addressed (LLA principle 2)?

Hub-specific reflections on successes and pitfalls

The table below captures each hub's reflections on what has worked and where they have encountered red flags or recurring challenges.

Hubs	Reflections on successes	Reflections on pitfalls (red flags)
APDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community taking engagement and leadership Engaging woman participation and leadership Developing accountability in hub and community Managing resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low educational background No access for infrastructure
ORDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High community engagement Donor interest on LLA Flexibility of the project approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mismatch between the scope of the project and high community development demand. Social norms and cultural influence that limits inclusiveness
MID-P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project introductions using baraza approach – public meetings Clarity of roles and responsibilities in the re-granting process and governance structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time in decision-making is a challenge The cluster committee wanting to be the implementing entity against the agreed roles and responsibilities of the re-granting process
IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced community project ownership and decision making Opportunities for communities to leverage on other existing projects Increased community visioning on a larger scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The risk of communities becoming groups acting as 'gatekeepers' and hinder landscape approach.
Tupado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLA has created a platform for the communities to voice their indigenous knowledge in addressing climatic shocks within the landscapes The LLA approach is a unifying factor to communities sharing boundaries and other natural resources within the landscapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the pitfalls is the gatekeepers within the communities who tend to influence their agendas by taking advantage of communities' illiteracy level.
SOS Sahel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-involved government department (SC+TC) 31/51 mobilised developed their plans out waiting for funds Mobilise more resources to support humanitarian needs of the RtF community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We don't have pitfalls; we have only challenges because of the security situation.
tiipaalga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The establishment of local governance units in villages in which communities recognise themselves. Do not be satisfied with pre-established structures, often perceived as disconnected from local realities. Foster ownership by building governance units in which communities feel represented and confident. Moving from an imposed structure to an accepted one to avoid the problem of institutional facade: The creation of identification of a governance unit where the community truly recognises itself. When there is a committee that the community accepts, they work with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When supporting communities, we have an obligation to work through local leaders. However, we must be careful not to take their guidance at face value. We must observe and cross-check information, as some leaders do not work for the whole community, but either for themselves or for a particular clan.
APIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A study trip was organised, bringing together all the representatives of the villages concerned (Bissiga, Nakamtenga, Lemnogo, Foula Natenga, and Tansobdogo). The aim was to understand the establishment and operation of the CVAM (Committee for Validation and Awarding of Contracts) in Boussouma. The technical services participate in the activities and provide their technical expertise in the areas of agriculture, livestock, and the environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor targeting can lead to biased data Relying solely on community leaders can lead to poor results
APIL & tiipaalga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active involvement of decentralised technical services. Social cohesion between host populations and internally displaced persons. Active and majority participation of women. 	

Hubs	Reflections on successes	Reflections on pitfalls (red flags)
Uttaran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community capacity enhancement Proper and strategic planning process Stakeholder advocacy improving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical knowledge gap Informal documentation Social barriers for women participation
Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection established with the local government and the private sector Orientation on financial management Support with health and education beyond RtF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of technical knowledge How does this impact what type of projects can be done locally-led? What is the role of hub in overcoming this bridge?

What can be institutionalised in 2026?

Hubs were asked which success factors could be institutionalised through guidance, dedicated support, and monitoring systems. The following items were identified:

- On knowledge development and learning:
 - TUPADO: An annual learning event has helped the hubs and knowledge partners to reflect on strategies and successes to spearhead LLA implementation in our various landscapes. This should be kept throughout the years to come.
 - Tupado: Keep the mentorship programme within the hubs for ease of bilateral learning and support.
- On mentoring and monitoring:
 - APIL & tiipaalga: We believe that monitoring and evaluation must be institutionalised by relying on knowledge partners.
 - Documenting LLA MEL processes
 - Dedicated time for a 2-way mentorship between hubs or between hub and community.
- ORDA is modelling the RtF LLA approach to other projects being implemented in the organisation. Although it is early to point out one concrete example of institutionalisation, learnings and discussions are ongoing to institutionalise the approach.
- Friendship is institutionalising the LLA monitoring approach and less bureaucratic financial systems in the organisation.
- APDA: RtF strengthened our linkages with other pastoralist communities in Kenya and promoted institutionalised engagement, helping to create a pastoralist platform for interaction and a more consolidated collective voice.
- Community engagement, project flexibility and technical assistance
- Dedicated time for discussion and raising concerns or complaints during the MTE process.

In what context does LLA not work?

The group also discussed contexts where LLA is not considered the most effective.

- Conflict and displacement hotspots (TUPADO).** LLA will not work in areas where communities have faced historical injustices, such as cross-border conflicts, and where people have been forcibly displaced and moved to safer locations.
- When the problem is too large or too technical.** Communities cannot, for example, build a water treatment plant. When a challenge requires a scale or level of expertise beyond community capacity, the LLA approach alone is insufficient.
- When communities do not own the land (Burkina Faso).** Land ownership issues make LLA difficult, requiring negotiations across many communities and creating a potential for conflict.
- When communities are dependent on external aid (Hosea).** Where communities have become structurally reliant on outside support, the conditions for locally-led action are undermined.

However, there were also the following opposite arguments.

- Where all LLA principles are fully considered and programmes are planned, customised, and implemented accordingly, it is hard to identify a context where LLA would be ineffective. Even highly technical interventions can be locally-led when local actors, including technical experts, have genuine decision-making authority over priorities and processes. **The degree of local control may vary depending on risk, scale, and technical complexity**, which may require adherence to professional standards.
- LLA as a foundation for public goods and social harmony.** Locally-led approaches are particularly well-suited for delivering public goods. They also contribute to and strengthen community harmony, coexistence, respect for diversity, and peace-building, resonating with communities' own governance systems.

Mid-Term Review set-up

As per the agreement with the MFA, RVO will set up a Mid-Term Review in 2026. The RVO team used the learning event to collect input on the MTR approach, the scope and the level/kind of participation by the hubs. The request for input was guided along 5 questions.

Resources:

- [PowerPoint RVO](#)
- [IOB Evaluation \(2023 November\) Climate-smart and Future-proof?](#)
- [ALNAP \(2025 January\) Advancing locally led evaluations: Practical insights for humanitarian contexts](#)

Question 1: What role can or would you like for your hub in the MTR?

- Providing context (-based indicators) and defining key parameters:
 - Hubs should define what they want to review in their work and get a good evaluation so that they get out of the review what they want and get their needs for MTR met.
 - Define key parameters that hubs want to be assessed on.
 - Hub can provide indicators that are context-based, each hub has a different context, so indicators should match this context.
 - Providing local context as a hub, provide evidence in the evaluation (through baseline, earlier reports, and so on).
 - All hubs getting together and defining parameters together.
- Facilitating community participation in the MTR:
 - First, ask the communities what they feel should be in the concept of the MTR.
 - Hubs can facilitate communities to give their inputs.
 - Visiting all the communities is not possible, hubs can help in selecting which ones to visit and help in logistics.
 - Based on communities' indicators, hubs within the countries can review parameters.
 - Make sure communities included have diverse activities so that all are included.
 - Translating learnings back to communities.
- Peer-to-peer evaluation:
 - Members of 1 landscape evaluate the other landscape.
 - Is it possible for hubs to evaluate each other?
- How to use and get most out of the MTR:
 - How to become more autonomous should be included.
 - Hubs use MTR as a document for advocacy and fundraising.
 - Further endorsement and support for government agencies and organisations working to adopt the RtF approach.
 - Improve the programme:
 - We want to see if the process that has been undertaken has been consistent.
 - What can we learn across the process?
 - Adopting for internal development.
 - We need to review whether the hub is playing the intended role.
- Who should do the evaluation?
 - Someone who is familiar with RtF from the beginning.
 - Someone who is in this process but still external?
 - For the upcoming mid-term evaluation of the RtF programme, the profile of the evaluator(s) sought should be as follows:
 - Proven skills in project/programme evaluation.
 - Knowledge of the country and project implementation area context.
 - Mastery of the LLA approach.
 - In view of these requirements, tiipaalga would like the evaluation assignments to be entrusted to knowledge partners.

Question 2: On which level would you like to collect information with the MTR programme / hub / community / landscape / multiple and why?

- Programme level:
 - Important for strategic decision-making.
- Hub level:
 - At this level, comparisons can be made between communities.
 - It is important for advocacy.
- Community level:
 - Most important, as most is happening here, and this is the place where results can be seen.
- Landscape level:
 - Here you can see physical changes in the environment.
 - Evaluate the relevance of the chosen landscape.
 - Why do you have this level? Some argue that the community and landscape levels are the same, so the landscape level can be removed.
(Note by RVO after event: RtF has adopted an integrated landscape approach to address water security, water safety and climate change adaptation. Landscapes differ per country; however, by a landscape we specifically mean an area that goes beyond community boundaries. Thus, the community is part of the landscape but not equal to the landscape. Through results measurement, the programme also aims to show impact on the landscape as an indicator for addressing issues of water safety, water security, and climate change adaptation.)
- Other remarks
 - All levels are important as they are interconnected. And to ensure everything is running smoothly.
 - Different actors (communities, hubs, evaluators) can have different types of roles in evaluating the different levels.

Question 3: What would you like to get out of the MTR? What should be the most important goal?

Questions to be answered by the MTR:

- Are the measures leading in the right direction? Are we on track?
- Are we achieving our (landscape/hub/community) goals, for example, landscape restoration?
- Are the plan and the budget still in line?
- Do we achieve RtF's vision?
- Does the community have the ability to manage its resources and make decisions?
- The level of achievement of understanding of LLA for the community, hub and programme.
- Is the LLA approach bringing the community together, or is it driving it apart?
- Do learning events trickle down to the local level?
- Are hubs not influencing community decision-making?
- What is the role of the government in LLA, what is their contribution? And other stakeholders?
- Comparative advantage against other approaches.
- Were linkages established between communities and government authorities and politics?
- Community self-assessment to provide ground truth.
- Hub assessment on LLA principles.
- Does the programme use findings to inform strategic decisions?
- Scalability of LLA?
- Is LLA appropriate for conflict regions?
- The usefulness of the approach in a world landscape. It is a bold programme that works bottom up. Are others adopting to release from dependency and to address climate change impact, and so on? Can local NGOs get their act together against donor top-down approaches?

Question 4: What pitfalls do you see for this MTR? Do you have lessons / experiences to take into account?

- Getting permission from the government (SOS experience). If it is not a Sudanese company, they need an extra permission letter, as the government wants to know why you are asking the people. They might reject questions or the MTR as a whole.
- The timing and designs of questions could be pitfalls.

- Usually, MTRs collect information from the community, and they do not share the findings back to the community.
- The use of a landscape committee to undertake preliminary monitoring to inform the evaluator on the stage of the initiative. A good practice that makes the community feel part of the evaluator's team.
- How to break the fear of evaluation? In my experience, I often found that our implementing partners feared the evaluation, thinking any negative results might cause discontinuation of the fund. Therefore, they always tried to show the good results/high achievements and tried to hide the gaps. The community might share this fear. With that fear of funding discontinuation, they may give biased answers or try to hide the truth. They may only answer in a way that would give the evaluator of us the confidence that this project is going very well.
- Avoid rigid indicators developed by, for example, RVO or MFA. Instead, give priority to an impact evaluation with indicators that are developed together with the community; follow their definition of success.
- Working with someone who does not understand LLA, the programme or the local context, for example, an evaluator from a Northern country.
- When supporting communities, we have an obligation to work through local leaders. However, we must be careful not to take their guidance at face value. We must observe and cross-check information, as some leaders do not work for the whole community, but either for themselves or for a particular clan.

Question 5: What should a successful MTR look like in terms of results and process?

- Consult the community on whether they are ready to have a mid-term review. Is the donor flexible if the community wants to have in a different timeline?
 - How could it be done?
 - Add concepts/ideas from the community to the midterm review checklist.
 - Reflexive monitoring is in place in the hubs. How can this MTR add to the system?
 - The process was too tedious for the community.
 - The need to do it as locally as possible?
 - How can we make it local if the evaluator is not part of the implementor or the LLA approach?
 - Inclusivity: Include all the actors in the data collection. So, make sure also marginalised groups participate in, for example, focus group discussions.
 - The evaluator knows the local context, the LLA approach, the programme and the philosophy behind it. Take the time to inform the evaluator about this.
 - Storytelling to capture change that goes beyond a single indicator, but that also shows impact further down the line.
 - Time to change course: During the MTR, success or failure signals need to be identified to help take corrective measures early enough.
- **Follow-up:** The next step is for RVO to make a first design of the MTR plan of action. RVO will take the above input into consideration.

Knowledge management and learning

In a locally-led approach, knowledge does not flow in one direction from programme to community, or from donor to implementer. It flows in multiple directions simultaneously: Between communities and various stakeholders within a landscape, between hubs across countries, and outward to governments, donors, and the wider development system. This chapter captures how that knowledge is currently moving, where it is working well, and where it can be strengthened.

3 levels of learning were discussed:

- Landscape-level knowledge sharing between communities and actors within a landscape;
- Hub-level learning within and between hub organisations;
- External sharing and learning: The extent to which RtF evidence is reaching and influencing wider audiences.

The session was guided by a set of questions related to the different levels of learning. Specific answers to these questions are included in the annex.

The chapter closes with the proposed follow-up in 2026: The development of a series of 'how-to' guides on various topics.

Landscape-level learning

Question: Is knowledge sharing between different communities and other landscape actors currently effective? Can you share an example where community-level knowledge sharing has led to a success?

Across all hubs, landscape-level knowledge sharing is happening and is widely described as effective. The most common and powerful mechanism is direct peer exchange between communities, whether through formal exchange visits, joint monitoring events, or informal observation and copying of practices.

Several recurring patterns have emerged. Communities observe what neighbouring or peer communities are doing and adapt it to their own context, particularly in natural resource management, land use, and livelihood activities. Exchange visits organised by hubs or across projects have been a consistent catalyst. Examples include:

- Women's forums in Kenya that have created dedicated spaces for investment in women-led projects, building social capital across communities.
- Financial reporting and advocacy practices shared between community groups in Bangladesh that have improved transparency and engagement with local authorities more broadly.
- The Merti cluster that has begun flood interventions, while the South cluster deliberately waited to observe outcomes before starting their own, treating a neighbouring community's experience as a pilot from which to learn before acting.

Observation: In RtF, landscape-level learning aims to engage other stakeholders in the landscape development. By sharing ambitions, priorities, examples and learnings, one can stimulate collaborative action by other stakeholders. While we see this leverage effect in the RtF landscapes, we have also seen examples of the risk of 'spreading maladaptation'. This also means that hubs carry a responsibility to ensure that decisions are supported by the right technical knowledge, so that what spreads across the landscape is grounded in sound practice, is suitable for a specific context and does not inadvertently reinforce maladaptation.

At the same time, as we cannot control this kind of sharing within a landscape, it is important to stimulate or create a safe space to share and jointly learn from 'failures'.

Hub-level learning

Question: How are we learning within our own hub programmes and exchanging that knowledge with other hubs? Is this currently going well? Can you share a positive example? How can we improve this process?

Hub-level learning is progressing well across most contexts, with the annual learning event consistently identified as the most valuable mechanism. Quarterly online exchanges, bi-annual in-country learning visits, and direct peer communication between hub finance and programme staff are also functioning amongst others through WhatsApp groups. In Kenya, hub officers consult each other directly for clarification and learning. For example, IMPACT's finance team supporting MIDP's financial reporting processes as IMPACT was further ahead in the implementation.

Internally, hubs are using a range of tools. SharePoint and document repositories (tiipaalga), continuous reflection with communities' feedback into organisational practice (Friendship), and annual community learning forums with thematic sessions on water, livelihood, and governance (IMPACT Kenya). ORDA is applying RtF learning to other programmes within the organisation, embedding the LLA approach more broadly.

While online and annual offline exchanges are valued, several hubs noted that learning at the inter-hub level needs to go further. A recurring suggestion was to move beyond Zoom and online meetings toward direct, in-person exchanges and find ways to connect communities from different hubs directly with each other, not only hub staff.

Question: What opportunities do you see for cross-learning with another hub?

Hubs have several ideas and wishes for cross-hub learning and mentorship on specific topics:

- ORDA Ethiopia proposes to learn from MIDP and TUPADO on cultural and social norm influence.
- SOS Sahel Sudan learnt from MIDP's pitfall experience that communities can struggle with decision-making, particularly around fund release, when more time is needed to reach an agreement.
- MIDP draws lessons from ORDA and IMPACT on resource allocation and the structuring of community and landscape-level governance.
- TUPADO wishes to learn from IMPACT on monitoring and regranting strategies and lessons.
- tiipaalga & APIL want to learn more from SOS Sahel Sudan and IMPACT Kenya on mentorship opportunities.
- Friendship highlights SOS Sahel Sudan's practice of communities using their own funds as a model worth sharing, as it builds both sustainability and ownership.

External sharing and learning

Question: Is our evidence reaching the wider audience to support our advocacy goals? How can we strengthen this?

Evidence from RtF is reaching external audiences through a variety of channels and the networks of all partners: Social media (Telegram, LinkedIn, blogs), county steering group meetings, provincial consultation frameworks, reports shared with local authorities, community masterplans, and formal publications. The knowledge partner plays an active role in amplifying stories through water and development channels. Friendship uses its website, Padlets, and community presentations to demonstrate LLA to donors, governments, and institutions.

The strongest example of evidence-based external advocacy came from Sudan, where RtF evidence and strong local structures directly enabled SOS Sahel Sudan to continue operating when all other NGOs were suspended.

Example – SOS Sahel Sudan (Sudan): Evidence enabling continued operations

When the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) suspended the operations of all NGOs working in the landscape, SOS Sahel mobilised its steering committee to advocate for the Right to Food programme. As a direct result of this evidence-based, relationship-driven advocacy, SOS Sahel was the only organisation permitted to continue its work in the area. A powerful demonstration of what strong local structures and credible evidence can achieve under pressure.

Example – Uttaran (Bangladesh): Community-Based TRM Masterplan

Uttaran's Community-Based Tidal River Management (TRM) Masterplan (2025) for Satkhira, developed with Both ENDS, is fully based on community-designed and approved plans. This is a strong example of community evidence being packaged into an externally credible document that supports both policy advocacy and landscape-level planning.

Example – IMPACT (Kenya) – Internal advocacy through dedicated community funds

IMPACT's organisational strategic plan supports LLA through the creation of the KIPOK Fund and the Ereto Solidarity Fund, funding mechanisms that communities can access easily, without restrictions. This internal advocacy can be extended through an external strategy targeting forums such as IFFIP, UN agencies, and international platforms.

What needs strengthening?

While evidence is reaching some audiences, the reach is uneven and the packaging is inconsistent. Several hubs noted the need to move from sharing stories to producing structured advocacy materials, such as policy briefs, documented case

studies, and targeted dissemination through strategic platforms. An explicit advocacy strategy at local, national, and international levels would strengthen the collective impact of individual hub efforts.

Follow up: Proposed 'How-to' guides

Question: Which topics should be covered this year?

Part of the advocacy strategy is inspiring by showing examples and best practices. In 2026, we will work on and publish a series of 'How to' documents which showcase how to address specific topics in RtF and related programmes. We will base these documents on the rich input available from blogs, reports and meetings.

The following topics have been identified:

- **Regranting processes**
 - Documenting how the hubs make funding accessible for local groups / communities, including governance structures, roles and responsibilities, and similarities across contexts.
 - How communities view and engage with the proposal write-up process in support of LLA initiatives.
 - Financial accountability within communities, how communities manage and report on funds.
- **Community-led monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL)**
 - Community-led MEAL: What it looks like in practice, and how hubs support it.
 - Using community data to design and scale landscape interventions.
 - How communities monitor their own initiatives, tools, processes, and peer accountability.
- **Grounding locally-led adaptation**
 - Deepening the understanding of LLA with evidence from RtF and other (hub) projects.
 - The uniqueness of Reversing the Flow and how RtF is changing norms in the development world.
 - How LLA can reach more remote communities.
 - Articulating the RtF approach to NGOs, communities, and governments.
- **Integrated Landscape Approach**
 - The landscape approach to LLA: How to think and work at the landscape scale.
 - *Note by RVO: We are expecting a publication on Integrated Landscape Approach and LLA by PBL and IIED.*
 - Adaptability of LLA by communities and partners supporting other initiatives within the landscape.
 - A comparison between FLoCCA and the RtF programme.
- **Financial systems and accountability**
 - Making finance and marketing user-friendly at the community level.
 - Leveraging evidence to improve financial accountability.
 - Less bureaucratic financial systems that maintain accountability without burdening communities.
- **Specific thematic and contextual topics**
 - Remote monitoring, tools and approaches for hard-to-reach and insecure contexts (SOS Sahel Sudan).
 - Participatory planning and stakeholder engagement.
 - Capitalising on best practices and how to document them (APIL Burkina Faso).
 - Short video clips, blogs, and posters as evidence-based advocacy tools (TUPADO).



Other reflections

General reflections

- **Shocks/emergencies:** Communities experience shocks in their lives. But they can cope. With some extra resources, they can take up their own shocks better and work on their future. Development programmes are often tightly planned and not able to cope with uncertainty. Do we see any specific advantages or disadvantages of localisation / the RtF approach to work in a conflict region or with emergencies?
- **Leverage effect:**
 - **RtF as an additional resource.** APIL mentioned that their communities also have their own resources and see the RtF money as one additional resource, instead of a single money source. How does this influence how projects are perceived and carried out? And how is this for other hubs?
 - In Bangladesh, RtF regranted money creates a social place of dignity for communities in standing before the government and other stakeholders. This also creates more opportunities to receive funds from others. They are showing themselves as a systemic partner, not only as aid recipients.
 - On the other side, there are examples of a community being deprived of support from local NGOs because they had already received funds from RtF.
- **Reduction of costs when doing locally-led.** Fewer staff, no pressure in spending (no waste of money), cheaper activities as locally purchased (fewer overhead). Uttaran sees a strong reduction in operational project costs (fewer community mobilisers, field facilitators, and so on). This was also true in the ORDA Ethiopia case. It did not establish a project office or hire project staff members. It only hired 2 fully paid staff members. 7 other professionals were only paid 20-30% of their salaries. The frequency of field travel is limited as communities are owners and implementers of the project. This all reduced operational costs.
 - A follow-up question: Should a community also get paid for this? Or do they do free labour? Not sure if a community should be paid. But we should acknowledge that it is a resource with a certain value. It is not priceless.
- **Navigating the bureaucratic process.** How can communities effectively navigate bureaucratic processes?
- **Gender:** All hubs have shared examples of women's representation and participation in decision-making. Could you also share examples of how their involvement strengthened (or is expected to strengthen) project outcomes?
- **How do we manage the risk of elite capture?** Elite capture, or the fact that well-positioned individuals within a community can use RtF to advance their own interests at the expense of the larger group or favourite friends and relatives, is a well-known risk when dealing with community-led projects. In APDA, for example, literate people are more likely to be selected as committee members or participants in the project. IMPACT from Kenya had an interesting way to manage this risk. Any group of people chosen to represent a certain community can only participate in the RtF intervention once! Any new initiative should be handled by a completely new group of community representatives.
- **Localising aid structures.** We do not want to create small NGOs within the communities (through committees): How to avoid this?
- **Accountability:** RtF did not do an extensive organisation assessment for the following reasons:
 - Selected organisations were part of previous networks and recipients of other international or Dutch funding.
 - Organisations were visited.
 - References were checked.
 - Financial health was checked.
 - We checked whether they had received finance from other donors, assuming they had done a thorough assessment.
- **Question:** Did we miss important criteria that the Dutch government sets for NGOs they work with? Like decent salaries, complaints mechanisms, and so on.
- **Question:** How to deal with this in other locally-led funding opportunities?
- **Cultural differences:** Letting go? Asking questions? We all bring our own cultures. to the table. Therefore, it is important to ask questions to understand the local context. The activity might differ from your ideas. For example, is protecting ponds for children necessary? Or are children not around in that area, so it might not be a useful addition? An example in WhatsApp discussion.

- There is a balance between introducing new ideas and information and acceptance of it regarding culture, context and traditions.
- **MIDP: Community-Based early warning, forecasting and actions.** Meteorological Data, information, meanings and community actions; We have a set of practices across our regions and hubs that are worth recognising and appreciating them as well as actions thereof. <https://cbon.trimweb.it/>



Where is RtF on the spectrum between LLA and top-down?

- **Comparing the LLA approach with regular development projects:** As RtF has a learning component, we are critical of ourselves. This is a positive. But can we also compare our approach and results to traditional development? It is important to come up with some metrics to measure success or failure for the purpose of improving in future implementations.
- **How do we position ourselves with respect to more radically different approaches?** RtF is active on a spectrum between a top-down implementation and locally-led development. It relinquishes a lot more control than most traditional development approaches. But even more radical initiatives exist, like GiveDirectly. With GiveDirectly, donors and individuals can send money directly to extremely poor individuals with mobile money. A project launched in Kenya in 2017 is still active here and running until 2030. Measured impact so far reports reduced infant mortality, increased economic activity and multiple other benefits. RtF still imposes a topical focus and a hub on a community. GiveDirectly enables unconditional cash transfers, in line with thinking about Universal Basic Income. Is this too radical for RtF, and why? What amount of local decision-making is enough, and what other factors play into that decision?

Community ownership

- **Ownership is essential.** Comment Valerie (APDA): A big mental chance for a community to know they have their future in their hands. They called the project 'our future'. The problem is that with a top-down approach, people concerned have no say. Now it is fully up to them. RtF allows APDA to give full ownership and responsibility to the community.
- **Future leadership.** As communities perform the activities, youth and children see what is happening and become inspired. This leads to aspiration and potential future leadership.
- **Exit strategies.** How are hubs preparing for this? Is there an exit strategy needed when communities are in the driver's seat? Is there really an 'exit'?
- **Community-led decision-making in practice (RtF – SOS Sahel Sudan).** A clear understanding of the RtF approach among community leaders strengthens local ownership, oversight, and monitoring of initiative implementation.

Networking event

On 26 January, the Embassy of the Netherlands, in collaboration with RVO, APDA, ORDA and MetaMeta, convened a knowledge-sharing workshop in Addis Ababa on LLA. The event brought together 48 participants, representing a diverse mix of national and international NGOs, research institutions, development partners, and knowledge organisations working in Ethiopia and beyond.

The day followed a week of RtF learning activities in Ethiopia and provided a platform to consolidate insights, exchange experiences, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders interested in locally-driven climate resilience. The session was followed by a networking reception at the residence of the Netherlands Embassy.



Resources:

- [PowerPoint Reversing the Flow](#)
- [PowerPoint RtF by ORDA Ethiopia](#)
- [PowerPoint RtF by APDA](#)

The RtF project and its approach to LLA were clearly and convincingly presented, drawing on practical experiences from field implementation in pastoral and rural landscapes. Presentations highlighted how accessible and patient funding enables communities to define their own priorities and take leadership in adaptation processes. APDA, ORDA Ethiopia, SOS Sahel Sudan, Impact and MIDP Kenya shared concrete examples of how shifting decision-making closer to communities has enhanced ownership, relevance, and sustainability of interventions. Reflections from the recent annual RtF learning event further enriched the discussion, demonstrating that locally-led adaptation is not only a principle but an operational model being tested and refined in practice.

Participants responded with strong interest and positive engagement. Many appreciated the clarity of the approach and the honest reflections on both achievements and challenges. A key recommendation emerging from the open discussion was that LLA should not be reduced to another development buzzword or short-lived project slogan. Instead, it should remain rooted in genuine power-sharing, long-term commitment, and measurable impact. Participants emphasised that maintaining integrity in the application of LLA principles will be critical for its credibility and effectiveness.

Constructive reflections were also raised regarding the capacity of communities to manage larger-scale and technically complex projects. While there was broad agreement that communities possess deep contextual knowledge and strong adaptive capacities, participants noted that implementing highly technical infrastructure or managing significant financial resources may require additional support. This underscores the importance of continued capacity strengthening, technical backstopping, and adaptive facilitation roles for NGOs and intermediaries. The discussion highlighted that locally-led does not mean isolated; rather, it calls for advocacy and partnerships that respect community leadership while ensuring quality and accountability.

Overall, the workshop created a dynamic and thoughtful learning environment. It strengthened shared understanding of the RtF approach, generated meaningful dialogue on the future of locally-led adaptation in Ethiopia, and reinforced commitment among stakeholders to move beyond rhetoric toward sustained, practice-based transformation.

Annexes

Session 3 – Maps of Yi 'Aalu landscape

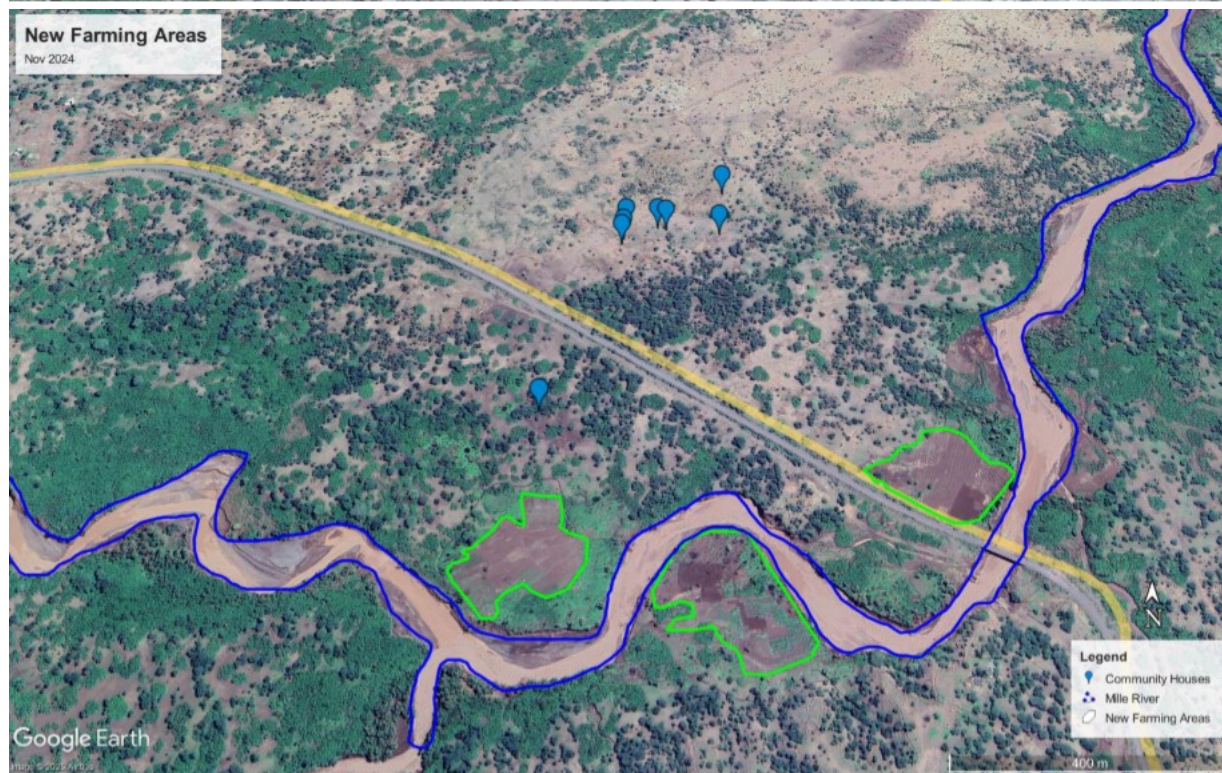
Map 1 – The **general site map** shows the location of Yi'Aalu village, the Mille River, roads, and settlement areas. This map served as an entry point to help the community recognise familiar landmarks and understand how to read the map.



Map 2a & 2b – The **river morphology map** (Mille River) illustrates how the river course has shifted between 2012 and 2024, highlighting areas of erosion and sediment deposition and helping the community the understand river dynamics and related risks.

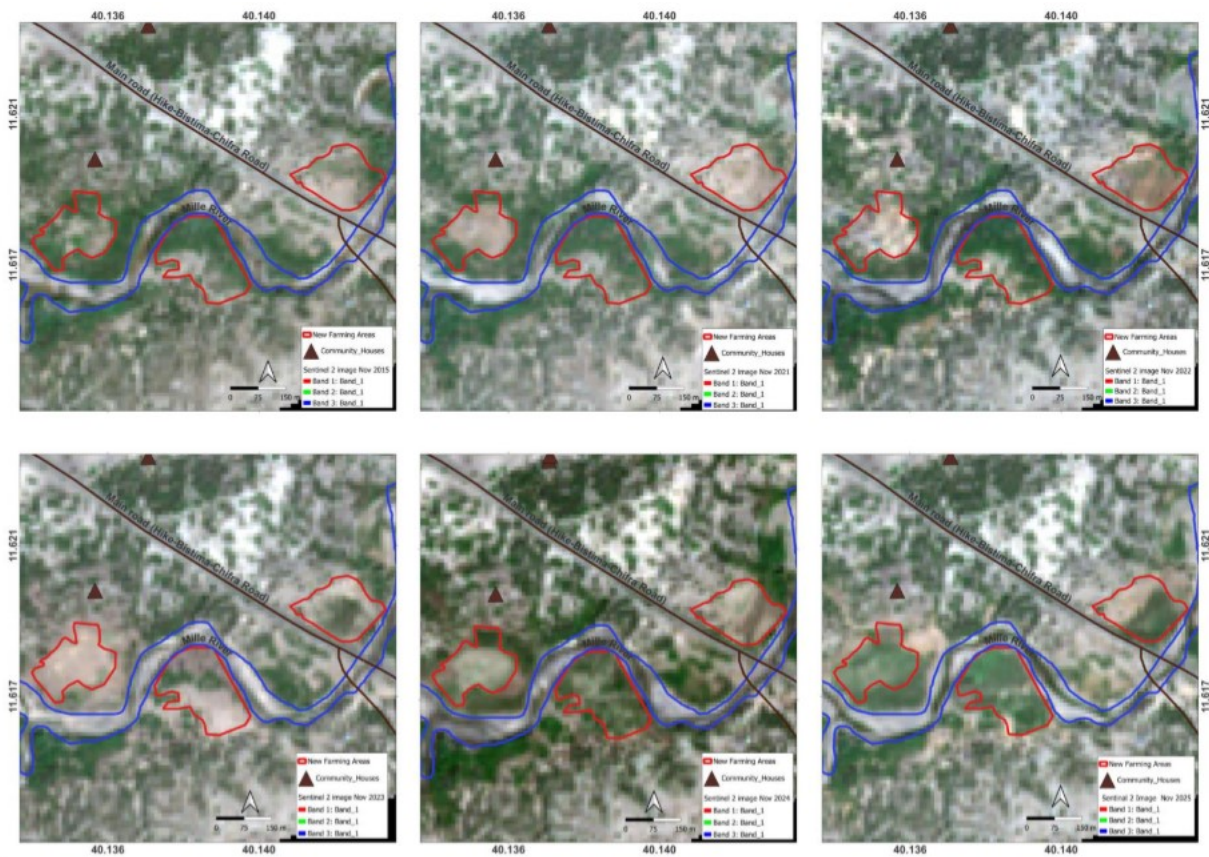


Map 2a



Map 2b

Map 3 – The land-use change maps compare earlier landscape conditions with recent years, showing the transition from previously unused or forest areas to cultivated farmland and highlighting the expansion of farming activities.



Session outputs

Session 1 – Shifting the role of local NGOs as hubs

The table below summarises how each hub has described the shift in their role:

Hub	Original role	What has changed
APDA	Based on community needs. Principles to further enable and continue the role of APDA in relation to the community.	Localisation ... developed. Community ownership and decision-making, community system lead.
ORDA	Facilitation	More participation; Improved community ownership, empowerment and inclusiveness. Financing their budget, knowledge...
MIDP	Facilitator of the regranting process.	More roles beyond the regranting process.
IMPACT	We thought we were implementers as we always have done with other projects.	We are facilitators now, technical expertise providers. Field work has reduced.
TUPADO	Linkage of RVO with the community, facilitating hub.	Policy advocacy at the County/sub-national and national level; The hub can also rally their other donors to adopt the LLA approach in their supported programmes or funding.
SOS Sahel	Facilitate the community to adopt RTF project.	Maintaining the LLA approach within the humanitarian setting and we are not an implementer, we are just a facilitator.
tiipaalga	Help community in optimisation.	Facilitation and accountability. Previously, tiipaalga decided on the activities to be carried out. Now, the communities decide on the actions and carry them out. Decision-making power rests with the communities.
APIL	Realising local initiatives.	Awareness-raising on social cohesion and community work (facilitator of social dialogue). Knowledge transfer on the community-based approach to the system of awarding contracts to service providers.
Uttaran	Engaging the community with the hub.	Hub landscape partnership. Key functions are that landscape hubs support inclusive community development by connecting stakeholders, funding grassroots actions, strengthening learning, scaling local solutions, and influencing policy.
Friendship	Connectors and learning platforms, elevate community, solutions, link local realities to a wider system.	Move from connecting and facilitating to strengthening local leadership and an influencing system for sustainability and scalability.

The table below captures hub-specific reflections on difficulties, conditions for effective partnership, and roles to strengthen:

Hubs	Difficulties staying in the facilitator/connecting role	What it takes to be an effective connector and system partner	Which roles the hubs should strengthen
APDA	No problem as we live in a position of mutual trust.	Trust, leading to let go.	Build community confidence.
ORDA	Give an conducive environment platform for the communities. It empowers the community, ownership, accountability and ..., builds trust, sustainability, respect community interest/sits community on....	Respect the communities and GRO's demand what the hub's role would be. There should be meaningful communication. Build trust and should be transparent.	Decision-making power, strengthen accountability, the role of a hub should be facilitator and technical assistant.
IMPACT	Taking over by community requires time and preparing them, it's a gradual process, facilitator roles is enabling/giving space for communities to work for themselves.	/	Continuous empowering, community structures to work for their community through capacity building.
Tupado	The of the LLA model that places local communities at the centre of the programme implementation and decision making, shift of power.	/	Trusting the community's opinion/ ideology or capacity to fully implement their initiatives.
tiipaalga	The facilitation role is essential to ensure that actions defined by communities are eligible for RTF funding; and guarantee efficient and optimised resource management.	Stakeholder meeting, provincial and municipal consultation framework, meeting with community leaders	Transfer of technical skills to communities.
APIL	To facilitate easier management of activities. Difficulties in remaining neutral and impartial.	Stakeholder meeting, consultation framework (province, municipality, etc.), meeting with community leaders	Transfer of technical skills to communities.

Hubs	Difficulties staying in the facilitator/connecting role	What it takes to be an effective connector and system partner	Which roles the hubs should strengthen
Uttaran	Biasness of knowledge. It sometimes felt like why is a community going for that/such activity. We may not know their knowledge or find it difficult to stay patient to see their result.	/	Technical expertise.
Friendship	Lack of trust in community capacity leads to micro-management; own organisational identity and skill are tied to being an implementor, not an enabler; taking pressure for quick result and reporting pushed us to implementation.	/	Build long-term trust beyond funding cycles. Strengthen local ownership for independence after project, advocate and broker knowledge to shape policies and attract diverse support.
SOS Sahel	/	Participatory meetings between different stakeholders for sustainable/equal partnership	/

Knowledge management and learning

Examples of landscape-level knowledge sharing per hub

Hub	Example of landscape-level knowledge sharing
APDA Ethiopia	Land use management practices copied by communities after an exchange visit to a different (type of) landscape; communities learning from each other's best practices.
ORDA Ethiopia	Watershed user communities exchange experience across watersheds.
MID-P Kenya	3 clusters share experiences during proposal development and monitoring; Merti cluster acting as pilot for South cluster on flood interventions.
IMPACT Kenya	Ward-to-ward learning exchanges; private landowners adopting community restoration knowledge; women's forums driving investment in women-led projects.
SOS Sahel Sudan	Formal exchange visit enabling transfer of sustainable water resource management practices across landscapes.
tiipaalga Burkina Faso	Knowledge sharing between villages, for example, Nioniogo and Moanega, as part of the baseline assessment process.
Uttaran Bangladesh	Peer sharing on financial reporting and advocacy practices; improved transparency and engagement with local authorities.
Friendship Bangladesh	Kenya learning workshop introduced landscape approach; regranting confidence built through peer learning.

Examples of hub-level learning

Hub	Key mechanism	Standout example or improvement needed
APDA Ethiopia		Would benefit from more structured documentation and report sharing. Experience sharing workshops; virtual exchanges; annual learning event.
ORDA Ethiopia	Inter-hub learning events; quarterly online exchanges; experience visits.	Should be continued and deepened.
MID-P / IMPACT Kenya	Bi-annual in-country learning visits; direct peer communication between staff.	Finance team peer support between hubs (IMPACT to MID-P) is a strong model.
TUPADO Kenya	Annual learning events; direct consultation with IMPACT and MID-P.	Will apply regranting and monitoring lessons in upcoming regranting phase.
SOS Sahel Sudan	Exchange visits; peer discussions.	Bangladesh peer exchange led to structural simplification of approval process.
tiipaalga Burkina Faso	SharePoint; internal meetings; involvement of other programme managers.	Bangladesh event prompted strategic reduction in village scope.
Uttaran Bangladesh	Lessons shared across hubs and with external actors; LLA approach influencing other donor-funded projects.	Transferability of LLA to other projects is a strength to build on.
Friendship Bangladesh	Continuous community reflection; structured documentation with knowledge partner; peer exchanges and field stories.	Knowledge partner as a bridge between community learning and organisational practice.

Hub videos

During the learning event, several hubs showed their recent video publications:

- [IMPACT](#)
This video showcases a series of community-led initiatives implemented through direct sub-granting in Burat (Isiolo County) and Mukogodo East and West (Laikipia County), Kenya. It highlights how local communities are designing and executing their own projects independently, demonstrating strong ownership, capacity, and resilience without reliance on external implementation support.
- [MIDP](#)
Merti Integrated Development Programme is one of the implementing hubs in Isiolo County, Kenya. This documentary gives voice to the challenges faced by communities along the Ewaso Ng'iro riverbed and highlights their learnings and locally led adaptation actions under the RtF project – turning challenges into action that is community-led, inclusive, and rooted in local knowledge.
- [ORDA Ethiopia](#)
This video, developed under the Reversing the Flow (RtF) project in Koti kebele, Amhara Region, Ethiopia, demonstrates how communities carry out a Community Situation Initial Assessment (CSIA) as a baseline for action. It illustrates participatory approaches to data collection and documentation, enabling communities to identify their potentials, challenges, constraints, and gaps, and to design locally driven interventions and development measures.
- [Friendship / RVO](#)
The work of Friendship in Bangladesh features this video, which shows how, through inclusive collaborations and innovative working principles, the Netherlands' water programs contribute to water security, water safety, and climate resilience across the world. The Netherlands also learns from these approaches. Countries and communities worldwide face similar water challenges, and no one has all the answers, so we must stay open, learn from each other, and build resilience together. This video shows how the Netherlands works on this and what the impact of that is. One of the programmes highlighted to show how the Netherlands fosters collaboration is The Reversing the Flow (RtF) programme in Bangladesh, which shows how RVO supports locally-led approaches: RtF funds hubs like Friendship that empower communities in vulnerable situations to strengthen their water security. These communities have valuable knowledge and capacities. Yet, limited resources exclude them from realisation, and traditional top-down approaches withhold them from decision-making over their priorities. By connecting these communities with other communities, experts, and governments, and providing logistical, technical, and foremost financial support, Friendship helps them in organising and implementing effective solutions.
- [Uttaran – First Phase of Implementation](#)
This video reflects on the first-year implementation phase of Locally Led Actions Sustainable Water and Land Management (LANDWATER), marking its successful completion. Over the past twelve months, community members have come together to implement the solutions they designed and monitored themselves. This collaborative effort represents a meaningful step toward long-term, locally driven transformation. With facilitation by Uttaran and support from the Reversing the Flow (RtF) programme of RVO (mention Netherlands Enterprise Agency page), the LANDWATER project has initiated delivering community-owned change on the ground.
- [Uttaran 2 - Project Inception](#)
This project video captures the inception phase of the Locally Led Actions Sustainable Water and Land Management (LANDWATER) project. Over time, community members in Bangladesh have come together to identify and prioritize the key challenges in their landscape- laying the foundation for solutions that they will design and lead. This collaborative process marks a powerful first step toward long-term, locally-driven transformation. With facilitation by Uttaran and support from the Reversing the Flow (RtF) programme of RVO, the LANDWATER project is set to bring meaningful, community-owned change to the region.

Reversing the Flow partners



Reversing the Flow knowledge partner

GOPA MetaMeta

This is a publication of

Netherlands Enterprise Agency
Prinses Beatrixlaan 2
PO Box 93144 | 2509 AC The Hague
T +31 (0) 88 042 42 42
Email: rtf@rvo.nl
Website: <https://english.rvo.nl/subsidies-financing/rtf>

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