

SUMMARY PROJECT REPORT

Strengthening Capacities and Civic Participation for Climate-Resilient Communities in Chile

July 2024 – June 2026

PROJECT LEADS

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BY THE NUMBERS

3 Local Climate Action Plans formally approved	391 Documented direct engagements	85% Share of capacity gains municipal teams credit to the project	8 Bilingual methodology guides published
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Introduction

Chile's 2022 Climate Change Framework Law requires every one of the country's 345 municipalities to develop a Local Climate Action Plan (PACCC), but provides no dedicated funding to do so. By May 2025 only about 6% of municipalities had successfully produced a PACCC. This two-year project (July 2024–June 2026) was designed to close the gap between the legal mandate and municipal capacity. The project was funded by [Columbia World Projects](#) Social Impact Awards, and led by Columbia's [National Center for Disaster Preparedness](#) (NCDP, Climate School) and the [Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation](#) (GSAPP), in partnership with Chilean local partners including the [Center for Climate and Resilience Research](#) (CR2, Universidad de Chile), Itrend ([Instituto para la Resiliencia ante Desastres](#)), and the [Columbia Global Center Santiago](#). Together the team worked directly with three Chilean municipalities — Alto del Carmen, Coquimbo, and San José de Maipo — to develop and begin implementing their PACCCs, and to turn that experience into replicable tools for municipalities across Chile.

Background

Chilean municipalities operate under two mandates: a 2021 National System for Disaster Risk Prevention and Response, and the 2022 Climate Change Framework Law. In practice, the two frameworks are rarely integrated at the local level, and municipalities consistently lack capacity in climate risk assessment, community engagement, disaster-risk/climate integration, local climate financing strategies, and monitoring and evaluation key elements of both frameworks.

As such, the project sought to build municipal capacity to engage community stakeholders in the development and implementation of robust Climate Action Plans. The project began with an open call to municipalities — run through CR2 as part of Chile's largest capacity-building effort for sub-national climate staff — which drew 65 applications from 64 municipalities across 14 regions. Three were selected for the severity of the climate risks they face, their geographic diversity, and their demonstrated commitment to climate action: Alto del Carmen (Atacama Region, shaped by glacier and mining pressures), Coquimbo (Coquimbo Region, a coastal territory facing drought and warming seas), and San José de Maipo (Metropolitan Region, whose watershed supplies water to 80% of greater Santiago). The project's premise was that technical assistance, delivered flexibly and in sustained partnership with municipal staff, could convert a legal mandate into an actual, locally owned plan — while generating tools other municipalities could use in their efforts.



Coquimbo, Coquimbo Region, Chile



Alto del Carmen, Atacama Region, Chile

Objectives

- + Provide customized technical support to municipal governments in developing and implementing Local Climate Action Plans (PACCCs).
- + Support community participation processes in climate action planning.
- + Promote the integration of climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) into other territorial development strategies.
- + Strengthen local climate leadership and promote collaborations across municipalities and institutions.
- + Promote lessons learned and planning methodologies to contribute to national and international debates on local climate action.



Communities of Coquimbo conduct a collective vulnerability assessment during a climate change workshop; March 2025.

Methods

The project unfolded in two phases. Phase 1 (2024–early 2025) established its foundations: the open municipal call, selection of the three partner municipalities, signed MOUs, initial capacity-perception surveys, key-stakeholder mapping, identification of technical priorities, and co-developed workplans with each municipal team. Once workplans were in place, the project sustained a regular cadence of engagements through project close — coordination meetings roughly every two weeks with each municipal team, weekly meetings among the implementing institutions, and ad-hoc sessions built around each municipality's priorities. In total, the team logged 158 working meetings and about 168 hours directly with municipal staff, with engagement heaviest in Coquimbo, where additional hands-on support was redirected after municipal staff turnover.

Phase 2 (January 2025–June 2026) delivered the participatory planning and capacity-building: a climate perception survey, key-stakeholder interviews, community workshops with participatory vulnerability and risk mapping, and technical workshops on prioritizing adaptation/mitigation strategies, climate financing, disaster-risk-reduction (DRR) integration, and monitoring, reporting, verification and adaptation (MRVA) — including a joint inter-municipal session in June 2026. This was conducted through 23 workshops and community activities with 391 documented participations, plus over 30 sets of analyses and recommendations feeding directly into the three plans. In parallel, the project distilled its approach into 8 bilingual (Spanish/English) methodology guides and disseminated the model nationally and internationally through webinars, a national survey of municipal climate-planning experience, and panels at COP30 (Belém, Brazil, November 2025).

Findings and Results

All three partner municipalities formally approved their PACCCs by project close — against a national baseline where, at the project's start, only ~6% of Chile's municipalities had done so. San José de Maipo approved its 2025–2030 plan first, in 2025, and the project moved beyond planning into implementation support: the project team advised the creation of a Municipal Climate Action Technical Working Group, co-developed a full monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) system, and supported two concrete measures (a river-basin protected-area designation and a community education program). Coquimbo and Alto del Carmen both approved their plans in June 2026, at project close, after the national PACCC deadline was extended by a year; the Municipality of Coquimbo invited Project Manager Antonia Samur to author the prologue of its approved plan, and San José de Maipo's team went on to train its counterparts in Coquimbo and Alto del Carmen on monitoring and reporting — an early sign of the peer-to-peer transfer the project aimed for.



Participants debate prioritization criteria for climate action measures in multistakeholder workshop in Alto del Carmen. July 2025.

Capacity Change

An end-of-project evaluation, comparing entry and closing surveys of municipal staff, found capacity gains across the board: self-assessed capacities rose by an average of +0.68 on a 1–5 scale, with the largest gains (+0.86) concentrated in the technical, plan-specific capacities the project targeted most directly, followed by municipal-institutional capacities (+0.66) and general climate knowledge (+0.50). Staff who engaged most intensively improved substantially more than those who engaged only sporadically, and municipal teams attributed roughly 85% of their capacity gains to the project, against a more conservative 58% estimated by the implementing-partner professionals who worked alongside them. Partners rated achievement across eight objective areas between 3.7 and 4.9 out of 5 (highest: replicable methodologies and PACCC support; lowest, though still positive: DRR integration and inclusion of underrepresented groups), and rated overall project success 9.2/10 and coordination 4.9/5.

Dissemination reached well beyond the three partner municipalities. Four national webinars on local climate action planning drew 370 attendances: the January 2026 launch of the methodology guides drew 166 attendees from 15 countries and 50 municipalities, and a three-session follow-up series co-organized with WWF Chile and the Chilean Association of Municipalities registered 216 participants. At COP30 in Belém (November 2025), two municipal climate leaders from the partner municipalities joined the Columbia project leads for three formal panel presentations, and the project's approach was later presented to Kenyan practitioners through the Columbia Global Center Nairobi. Two design commitments were only partially delivered — deeper disaster-risk integration in Coquimbo and the socio-environmental justice component in Alto del Carmen — both traced to unplanned staff and institutional turnover among partners rather than to the project model itself.

Key Outputs



- 3 Local Climate Action Plans (PACCCs) formally approved — San José de Maipo (2025), Coquimbo and Alto del Carmen (June 2026).
- 8 bilingual methodology guides for municipal climate action planning, with 30 supporting materials, published on Columbia's Academic Commons (Spanish DOI: [10.7916/vsms-hm95](https://doi.org/10.7916/vsms-hm95) · English DOI: [10.7916/4f1t-zp24](https://doi.org/10.7916/4f1t-zp24)) and at municipioscolumbia.cr2.cl).
- A co-produced MRV (monitoring, reporting and verification) system, operating in San José de Maipo and adopted in Coquimbo, plus AI-assisted tools for monitoring-data analysis.
- 391 documented direct engagements across 23 local workshops and activities, plus 4 national webinars with 370 attendances.
- 3 formal panel presentations at COP30 (Belém, November 2025), including two municipal climate champions from the partner municipalities.
- A national survey of municipal climate-planning experience (56 respondents, 43 municipalities) documenting capacity needs across Chile.
- A teaching case study for the Columbia Climate School on the Pascua Lama mining conflict and climate vulnerability in Alto del Carmen (in review).
- A policy brief and two further academic articles, plus one article submitted for journal review on participatory decision-making in local climate planning.

Antonia Samur (NCDP) and Karina Cabello (Municipality of San José de Maipo) present at the Science for Climate Action Pavilion, COP30, Belém, Brazil, November 2025.

Project Significance

The project's lessons point to why this model matters: capacity gains were concentrated in the staff who engaged most intensively; partners and municipal teams alike concluded that those gains only last when ownership sits with municipal decision-makers rather than external experts; and knowledge transfer between municipalities (San José de Maipo training its peers) established a learning relationship that does not depend on Columbia. That resilience became directly relevant when Chile's national government changed in March 2026, introducing uncertainty around national climate policy: the project's central lesson — that locally owned capacity and subnational networks are the most resilient carriers of climate action through political transitions — is one with clear relevance to climate governance well beyond Chile. By working intensively with three municipalities of different sizes, regions, and capacity levels, it produced not just three approved plans but a tested, transferable model — needs-based technical assistance, co-produced tools, and peer-to-peer transfer — that other Chilean municipalities are eager to use.

Research to Practice at Columbia

The project mobilized a broad cross-section of Columbia faculty and staff — NCDP and GSAPP as project leads, Columbia World Projects and three Global Centers (Santiago, Río de Janeiro, and Nairobi), each playing a distinct role in collaboration with local Chilean partners. The Columbia Global Center Santiago proved pivotal not just as a convening space but as the administrative backbone that made the partnerships with Chilean institutions feasible, a lesson the project team sees as transferable to other Columbia projects operating internationally. Three graduate students (two MS Urban Planning candidates from GSAPP and one MA Climate and Society candidate from the Climate School) were integrated as Graduate Research Assistants, contributing directly to municipal baseline profiles, plan reviews, and case-study development — giving them sustained, real-world exposure while their work fed directly into deliverables municipalities actually used. The project's own closing lessons — trust-based, flexible support beats a fixed toolkit; capacity sticks when institutionalized in processes and budgets rather than resting on individual staff; and academia is an under-used but actively sought partner for local governments — offer a template for how Columbia's applied, community-facing projects can be structured and sustained.



Residents of Alto del Carmen map critical infrastructure and socio-environmental threats using local knowledge.

The Methodology Guides

Developed together with the three partner municipal teams and shaped by the priorities they identified, Community Participation and Planning Guides for Local Climate Action (2026) distills two years of joint work into eight practical methodologies for municipal teams developing or implementing a Local Climate Action Plan. Four cover community participation — climate risk perception surveys, key stakeholder interviews, participatory vulnerability and risk mapping, and community participation strategies — and four cover municipal planning capacities: prioritizing climate actions, local climate financing strategies, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, and integrating disaster risk management into climate action. Each guide sets out objectives, target audiences and step-by-step implementation, and comes with 30 downloadable supporting materials in editable formats (in Spanish). Written for municipal staff, the guides are designed to be adapted by any local government facing similar mandates with limited resources. Published in Spanish and English: <https://doi.org/10.7916/vsms-hm95> (ES) · <https://doi.org/10.7916/4ft-zp24> (EN) · <https://municipioscolumbia.cr2.cl>.



Project team members on a field visit with a resident of Alto del Carmen to identify local climate perceptions and priorities.

Columbia World Projects

The Columbia World Projects Social Impact Award gave the team the flexibility to sustain two years of trust-based, adaptive engagement with three municipalities rather than a fixed set of one-off deliverables — the kind of support municipal partners named as the single most valuable thing the project offered. That flexible funding structure is what allowed a multi-institution, multi-country consortium (NCDP, GSAPP, CR2, Itrend, and three Columbia Global Centers) to convert one grant into three approved climate plans, eight publicly available bilingual methodology guides, and an international platform for local Chilean voices at COP30.

Next Steps

- + Publication of a policy brief on implementing the Climate Change Framework Law and building local capacity (expected late 2026).
- + Completion of the Alto del Carmen teaching case study and two further academic articles, all in preparation.
- + A proposed follow-up measurement of municipal capacities in one to two years, to test whether the gains recorded at project close are sustained.
- + Exploration of follow-on funding to scale the model — including certificate programs, expanded student engagement, research collaborations, and common M&E frameworks across municipalities.

Project Team

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