

Final Assessment Report

Evaluation of the CEC's Results
and Performance under the
Strategic Plan 2015-2020



COMMISSION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
COOPERATION



CEC Mission Statement

In the context of environmental, economic and social linkages between Canada, Mexico and the United States, the CEC facilitates effective cooperation and public participation to conserve, protect and enhance the North American environment in support of sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations.

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Executive Summary

Conserving, protecting, and enhancing the North American environment in support of sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations is the mission of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). The organization pursues this mission by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders (including the general public, Indigenous peoples, youth, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and the business sector) to further the environmental, economic, and social linkages between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, and by its program of trilateral project work, which is established by the multi-year CEC Strategic Plan and, with more specificity, by the Operational Plans. Progress in meeting the environmental goals and objectives of these projects, across all activities of the organization, is assessed through a performance evaluation framework.



Methodology

This assessment of the CEC's performance under the Strategic Plan 2015–2020 analyzes how CEC projects carried out during this period have contributed to meeting the strategic priorities and objectives as well as addressing the cross-cutting themes adopted by the CEC Council in June 2015. It uses a mixed-methods approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data analytical processes. The evaluation was developed in four steps:

STEP I DATA COLLECTION

The team analyzed documents obtained from the Secretariat and included relevant project material, performance measurement spreadsheets, and performance reports.

STEP II DATA ANALYSIS

The team analyzed the information and reviewed project results, evaluating their contributions to the strategic objectives.

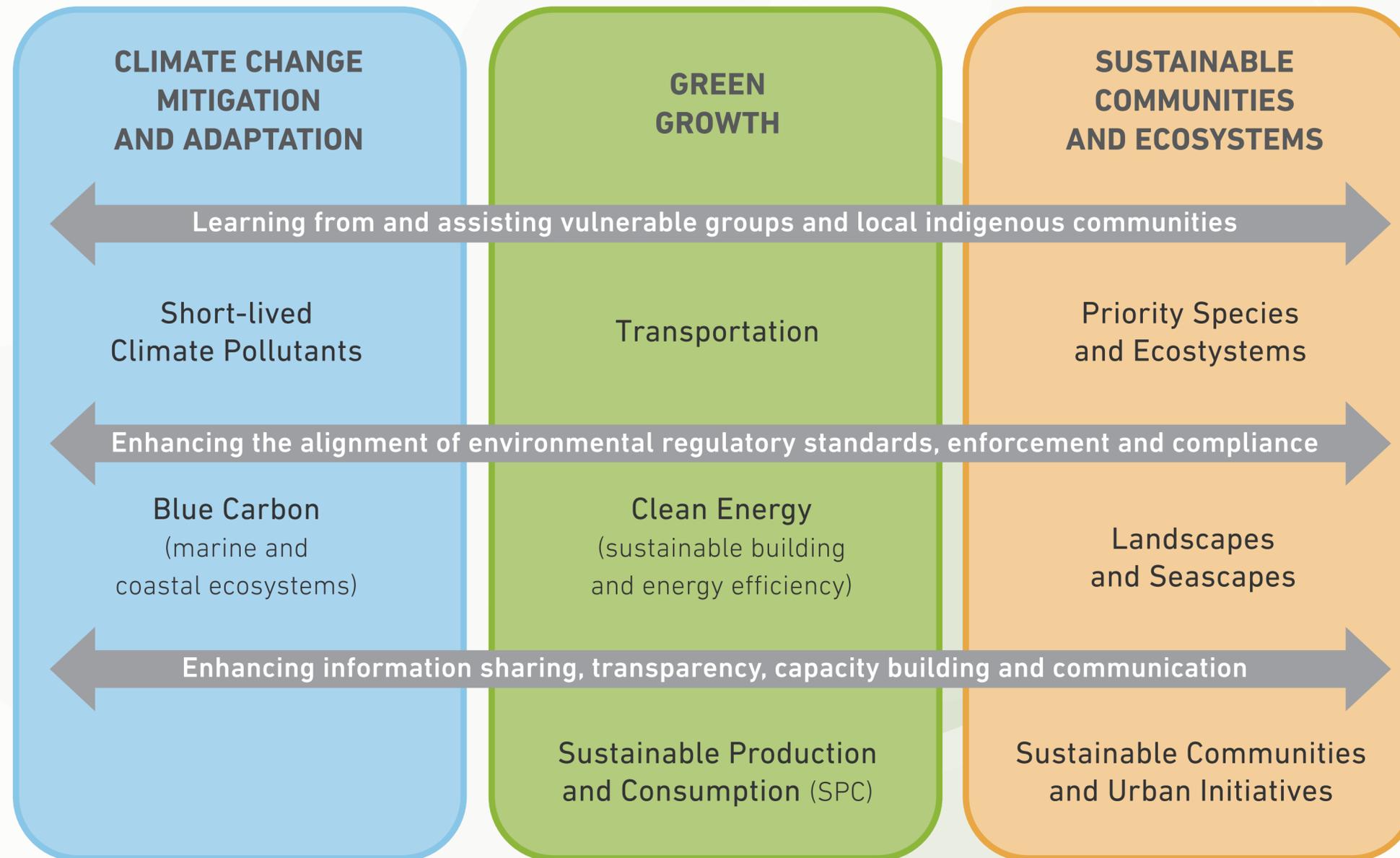
STEP III CONFIRM FINDINGS

Consultations took place with relevant Secretariat staff (current and past), government officials, or project partners.

STEP IV FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

The evaluation team developed the interim report that included findings from both the primary and secondary research and submitted it to the Secretariat for review.

Commission for Environmental Cooperation
Strategic Priorities and Cross-cutting Themes, 2015–2020



Context for the Evaluation

The Strategic Plan 2015–2020 was implemented through the Operational Plans of 2015–2016, 2017–2018, and 2019–2020. These Operational Plans included 37 trilateral cooperative projects—many of which were meant to address more than one strategic priority. The diagram below shows the CEC’s strategic priorities, cross-cutting themes, and subthemes included in the Strategic Plan 2015–2020. The report offers a synthesis of the performance, measurable results, and a brief assessment of each of these projects towards meeting project-level performance objectives.

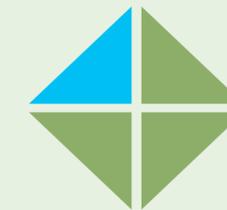


Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

The objective of this strategic priority was to minimize threats posed by climate change by taking action to plan for and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures that will protect human health and the environment from the effects of climate change. According to the analysis, 20 projects were aligned with this strategic priority and all proposed objectives were met. However, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic represented an important challenge, with direct impact on project implementation.

Attesting to the mission of the CEC, trilateral collaboration on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation through the 20 projects was a fundamental element in leveraging resources, increasing knowledge transfer and awareness to develop several multi-faceted approaches aimed at taking actions to plan for and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Some of these actions included the development of measurement and educational tools, with input from national experts of Canada, Mexico, and the United States, to help understand and increase awareness in selected communities (especially youth and vulnerable groups) about the importance of climate change mitigation and empower them to take action to prevent this issue.





Green Growth

The objective of this strategic priority was to identify actions to reduce emissions from the transportation sector to provide management systems options that will explore clean energy technologies and increase energy efficiency, and to develop information and tools in support of sustainable consumption and production. Between 2015 and 2021, 14 projects aligned with this strategic priority. Analysis of these projects showed that most of the project objectives were met.

One of the most valued elements highlighted by experts involved in the implementation was the opportunity to collaborate with other stakeholders possessing a high degree of expertise. These collaborative efforts were reflected in the design, creation, and implementation of different actions and mechanisms aimed at reducing the use of natural resources, protecting the environment, minimizing waste, and in the creation of sustainable patterns of development.



Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems

The objective of this strategic priority was to maintain efforts to improve and restore the integrity of ecosystems, landscapes, and seascapes; to conserve priority species; and to enhance rural and urban environments by working closely with communities. The three Operational Plans supported the implementation of 14 projects aimed at addressing this strategic priority. In most cases, the project objectives were met. Interviews highlighted the importance of building on existing collaborative efforts (multi-year projects) to meet the sustainable community and ecosystems goals and enhancing their contribution to the strategic objectives set in the Strategic Plan 2015–2020.

Findings confirmed that CEC projects contributed to maintaining efforts to improve and restore the integrity of ecosystems, landscapes, and seascapes; as well as efforts to conserve priority species; and enhancing rural and urban environments by working closely with communities.





Cross-cutting Themes

Cross-cutting themes were meant to act as a guiding thread between the different priorities and projects to generate linkages among program activities, enhance the CEC's capacity to reach out to key stakeholders, and communicate the value of regional cooperation on environmental issues. The cross-cutting themes were also meant to serve as policy tools to help Canada, Mexico, and the United States meet the objectives of the three strategic priorities.

For the first time, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) was to be integrated, where appropriate, in CEC projects. In addition, by enhancing the alignment of environmental regulatory standards, the three countries committed to collaborating on the enforcement of environmental laws. Lastly, the CEC sought to continue embracing new technologies and platforms to gather, share, and disseminate information produced through the different cooperative activities. The analysis of the information and interviews highlighted the following elements:





Learning from and assisting vulnerable groups and local and Indigenous communities

The issues and priority actions were addressed effectively through the implementation of mitigation options, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities throughout North America, and by integrating TEK through the participation of Indigenous communities involved in CEC conservation efforts. These actions were pivotal in fighting climate change but also in improving the livelihoods of vulnerable groups and Indigenous communities throughout North America.



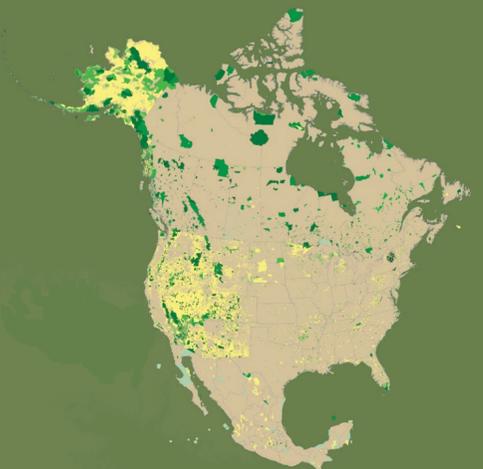
Enhancing the alignment of environmental regulatory standards, enforcement, and compliance

This theme was particularly addressed through projects that facilitated the implementation, coordination, and alignment of processes (as appropriate) and policies to strengthen compliance with regulatory standards in priority areas such as organic waste diversion and processing, emissions from goods movement through maritime transportation, standardized ISO 50001 certifications, conservation and sustainable production of selected species, among others.



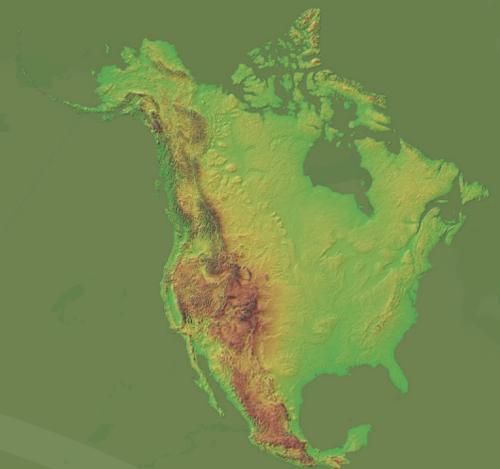
Enhancing information-sharing, transparency, capacity building, and communication

Most projects helped enhance information-sharing and communication by establishing local communities of practice in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, and aimed at generating and sharing information, enhancing transparency, and building capacity, both through the provision of data and tools and through training and communication.



Ongoing Initiatives, Tools, and Resources

In addition to its cooperative projects, the CEC is known for its ongoing initiatives, interactive tools, and mapping work. Between 2015 and 2021, these efforts have provided valuable information, state-of-the-art tools, and resources to support policy makers, researchers, students, and communities.



Main Findings per Strategic Priority

The following table illustrates the main findings per strategic priority:

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Take actions to plan for and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures was achieved by:

- Developing, comparing, and implementing greenhouse emissions mitigation actions
- Piloting protocols in key sectors, like waste management, the food industry, and transportation, to reduce emissions such as black carbon and methane
- Increasing the adaptive capacity of vulnerable populations to adverse environmental health effects from extreme events
- Improving climate change scientific knowledge



Green Growth

Identify steps to reduce emissions from the transportation sector was fulfilled through:

- Promoting innovative technologies and measures for clean and efficient transportation
- Creating awareness for monitoring compliance and enforcement of global security standards
- Sharing best practices to reduce emissions and improve air quality, community health, environmental quality, ecosystems, and climate

Provide management systems options for clean energy technologies and energy efficiency was enhanced by:

- Promoting and sharing beneficial practices for improving energy efficiency with key stakeholders (including the implementation of a training program to build capacity on ISO 50001 in supply chains)

Efforts to explore alternatives for addressing waste reduction and recycling, included:

- Diverting organic waste from landfills
- Measuring Food Loss and Waste (FLW) and increasing awareness of its environmental and socio-economic impacts
- A broader range of youth have been provided with tools to prevent, recover, and recycle food waste

Develop information and tools in support of sustainable consumption and production was addressed by:

- Developing a framework and strategy to create a self-sustaining network
- Improving the reliability of trade data on products containing environmentally regulated substances such as mercury trade in North America

Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems

Maintain efforts to improve and restore the integrity of ecosystems, landscapes, and seascapes was achieved:

- Working with the authorities of Canada, Mexico, and the United States; the CEC coordinated management processes, and identified beneficial practices at the site, and at landscape and seascape levels; achieving:
 - a coastal impact mitigation and adaptation toolkit;
 - an increased capacity of communities to prevent and reduce marine litter
 - a trilateral work plan to coordinate monarch science

Maintaining efforts to conserve priority species; the CEC undertook conservation actions such as:

- Workshops to promote sustainable trade in the region
- Community-based initiatives to engage communities in shorebird conservation
- Broadening of the Mayors' Monarch Pledge that engages mayors and local government to protect the monarch butterfly

The objective of **enhancing rural and urban environments by working closely with communities** was achieved by:

- Supporting the establishment of collaborative networks including local and Indigenous communities to share traditional ecological knowledge and experience
- Increasing the awareness, engagement, and capacity of communities in rural and urban areas in the management and sustainable use of natural resources



Recommendations

A series of recommendations were designed to strengthen future CEC efforts and activities. Some recommendations refer directly to strengthening the methodological and planning aspects of the CEC, while others seek to improve the implementation of future activities.





Develop planning mechanisms and tools for measuring results at the Strategic Plan level

The development of two main methodologies (logic model and theory of change) was recommended to strengthen the monitoring and valuation processes.

Develop a theory of change for CEC projects

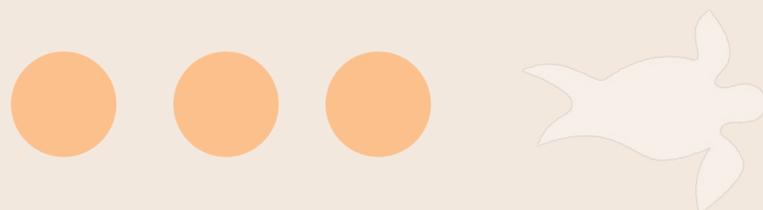
The development of a theory of change was seen as an essential tool to allow the CEC to identify the processes and actions that must be carried out to promote change by conducting a synthetic analysis of inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Design a balanced scorecard for every project

A balanced scorecard or OVAR Grid was recommended, as it could enable the identification of objectives, activities, actors, indicators, and goals. This tool facilitates the team functions and management.

Strengthen the design of projects

The CEC could incorporate in the early stages of project development the views of nongovernmental actors and key stakeholders to ensure projects are realistic and achievable and serve to enrich the planning process. A detailed workplan should also be developed during the project design phase.





Develop reliable, adequate, and comparable indicators for each of the CEC projects and the Strategic Plan

The CEC could develop macro-level indicators to measure the results of the five-year Strategic Plan and to assess the scope of aggregated efforts carried out by the CEC under each Strategic Plan.

Provide advice and mentoring to the steering committee members and Secretariat staff involved in the elaboration of the projects

The CEC could offer workshops and provide other training tools to strengthen the abilities of the main actors involved in the development of the projects to develop robust indicators.

Seize the potential to build sustained networks with collaborators and partners

The CEC's work could be enhanced through more emphasis on building and sustaining networks with project partners.

Ensure institutional commitment to implement projects

It is important that national governmental agencies involved in CEC project implementation are committed and consider the project as valuable to their priorities and resources.





Enhance the scope and impact of projects

Impact could be enhanced by considering more time for project implementation, integrating some flexibility in the budgets, improving the scalability of the projects, involving more stakeholders and experts, and creating more linkages among local communities and with other sectors.

Revisit existing projects and ensure their sustainability

The CEC could incentivize the continuity of projects by promoting follow-up engagement with the stakeholders involved and offer spaces to continue discussion on next steps, future improvements, and options for strengthening and developing new partnerships and long-term strategies.

Provide more time and flexibility to implement projects

It is recommended that projects expand beyond two years to achieve more ambitious outcomes, build collaboration, and create certainty about project sustainability.

Implement robust stakeholder mapping methodologies

The CEC could develop a Stakeholders Map to further understanding about who the main stakeholders are and identify those who could collaborate in the pursuit of institutional and programmatic objectives.

Implement effective communication mechanisms to disseminate and socialize the work of the CEC and its partners

It is important to create awareness of the projects, communicate what is being done by the organization and stakeholders, and bring more visibility to existing collaborations that will facilitate bringing new allies and partners on board.



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