

Supporting inclusive economic growth and NIRAS' work in private sector development and trade

A vibrant private sector is the engine of economic growth, with growth comes more jobs and improved livelihoods.

NIRAS works directly with firms, as well as across value chains, with investors and with governments to stimulate local economic development and business that is inclusive and innovative.

Our Offering

Long-term development cannot be secured without a sound revenue base for emerging economies. In our experience, working with the private sector can deliver **sustainable impact**: businesses can contribute to poverty reduction by creating jobs and buying from or providing affordable products and services to low-income people.

However, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) often lack the expertise and resources they need to grow, constraining productivity and economic development. NIRAS deploys a range of approaches to identify suitable SMEs and provide pre- and post-investment support to accelerate their progression.

One such approach is the use of **technical assistance facilities (TAFs)**, which can be used to either find and support a specific cohort of firms (e.g. in a particular sector) or to provide targeted capacity building to investees of a fund, maximising returns and enhancing both social and commercial results. An approach adopted by

the **Energy Enterprise Coach (EEC) Programme**, for example, is to use NIRAS' network of country offices, partners and experts in 18 countries to support in the identification, shortlisting and selection of suitable SMEs.

NIRAS has developed a **business development services toolbox** to facilitate efficient firm-level support, from the initial diagnostic process to the identification and deployment of expert service providers. This work often focuses on enabling businesses to access finance, including grants, debt and equity. Our work on the **Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) Component A**, for example, led to about €14.7M being leveraged in private finance by the SMEs we supported in four countries (Malawi, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Rwanda).



*As well as providing TA to firms, NIRAS has an extensive portfolio of fund management programmes, with approximately **€300M** deployed in grants to the private sector and not-for-profits.*



NIRAS, with our partner Intellec, was contracted as the fund manager and technical adviser for **WE4F East Africa**. 15 companies were supported through their journey by disbursing funds, as well as the provision of technical guidance. Major achievements included leveraging nearly **€10M** in additional finance and abating **more than 6,000 tonnes CO₂ per year**.

In our journey working with firms, we always consider how they might incorporate and cater for the disadvantaged and marginalised. We are passionate about women's **economic empowerment**; closing the gender gap is key to achieving the SDGs. We also aim to minimise environmental impact and promote **climate-friendly practices** when designing and implementing private sector interventions. For example, sometimes hurdles to growth are not internal to the firm, and so we might look at the value chain or the wider **market system** to understand where constraints are hampering firm development. These constraints might relate to lack of availability of resources (such as labour, knowledge or infrastructure) or to the ability of firms to procure inputs or to sell / trade their products or services.

Building on our deep understanding of **market linkages** and **export promotion** to increase business competitiveness, NIRAS works with trade policy specialists to **reduce barriers to trade**. This includes strengthening trading standards, better trade infrastructure and helping firms to meet the evolving export compliance requirements such as the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

Sometimes interventions are also needed in the business enabling environment when policies or



In the GIZ-funded Circular Economy for a Climate-friendly Development programme in Peru (2022 – 2024), NIRAS reached over **6,900 micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** with awareness campaigns, digital platforms and events. 75 MSMEs initiated concrete transformation processes, often resulting in tangible investments and operational changes. Furthermore, practical tools such as the 'Circularity Calculator' enabled companies to assess their baseline and plan targeted improvements, reinforcing their resilience and long-term competitiveness.

regulations inhibit business growth. These can take the form of advice to government, supporting advocacy through industry associations, facilitating public private dialogues (PPDs), etc. We have experience in engaging at regional, national and global policy levels on critical issues that can unlock private sector led transformation.

Our research helps to bridge evidence gaps to ensure that investors and policymakers have

access to the right information and people to make inclusive business models succeed.

From firm-level support to facilitating change in the wider ecosystem of business services, markets and trade, and working in the policy environment, NIRAS has private sector development capabilities to drive commercial, inclusive and sustainable business growth.



NIRAS provided TA to the Institutional Strengthening component of the EU MiPYME COMPITE programme in Paraguay (2019-25), strengthening the regulatory and public service framework and institutional capacity, thereby improving services and the business opportunities for MSMEs. Among other results, the programme saw a 53% increase in productivity across 430 businesses supported.

Business Development Services



We help small businesses to realise their potential by diagnosing and addressing their constraints.

NIRAS provides support throughout a business's growth journey, undertaking market assessments and feasibility studies for entrepreneurship programming; implementing innovation hubs at pre- and post-incubation stages; deploying, and building the capacity of, local business development services (BDS) providers; improving access to finance using

grants, debt and equity; and facilitating B2B linkages up the supply chain. Increasingly, we see the value of technical assistance facilities (TAFs), which sit alongside a fund and provide pre- and post-investment support to its portfolio of firms, strengthening their commercial performance as well as enhancing their social and environmental results.

Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusinesses (CASA)



FUNDER
FCDO



DURATION
03/2019 – 03/2026

NIRAS and partner Swisscontact implement the Component A of CASA in Malawi, Nepal, Rwanda and Ethiopia (previously Uganda). Adopting a market systems development (MSD) approach, CASA addresses constraints across production, sale, service provision, and investment functions to foster sustainable and inclusive growth.

Using technical assistance and catalytic grants, CASA has supported [96 agribusiness partners](#) to pilot innovative inclusive business models that address key barriers to scale, including accessing new markets (including export), securing inputs, product diversification, and access to finance. In doing so, CASA has strengthened the integration of smallholder farmers in the supply chain, creating benefits for income, [climate resilience](#), food security, and women's economic empowerment.

A key component of support has been to facilitate investment in agribusinesses [through pre- and post- investment technical assistance](#).

In total, CASA has leveraged £10.7 million in private capital, with £4.63m from third parties which has included foundational support to the emerging private equity space for agribusiness investments in Nepal.



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Mobilising Finance for Forests (MFF) TA Facility – Component 1: Advisory services for the replication and scaling of MFF investments



FUNDER
FMO



DURATION
05/2022 – 12/2026

MFF invests in private companies whose activities have a high degree of impact on at-risk tropical forests. The MFF investment helps these companies reorient their activities or grow their business away from deforestation and towards deforestation-free practices while producing a financial return for the companies. The MFF TAF is a means to “de-risk” investments by making them more likely to succeed. For the investees, it is a way to gain access to world-class expertise, specifically tailored to their needs. NIRAS, in consortium with the Stichting IDH and Form International, are responsible for managing and delivering the Advisory Services portion of the TAF for MFF. Operating as a demand-driven facility, the NIRAS-led team respond flexibly to the needs of the client companies by developing and delivering high-quality TA through a network of in-house and associated consultants and experts. NIRAS set up the operational procedures and principles which enable rapid deployment of resources, as well as managing the overall implementation of the TA assignments, ensuring quality, and monitoring the facility activities.



NIRAS is managing the Mobilising Finance for Forests technical assistance facility to help agro and forestry companies grow and expand, while reducing deforestation in vulnerable tropical forests around the world.

Kenya Industry and Entrepreneurship Project: KIEP250+



FUNDER
World Bank



DURATION
07/2020 – 03/2025

KIEP strengthened the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Kenya, enhanced innovation and productivity in select SMEs and facilitated grant assistance, productive linkages and technical assistance for mature SMEs. NIRAS partnered with Intellectap to deliver KIEP 250+ to support business improvement initiatives for 142 eligible SMEs through performance-based grant funding. An extensive outreach campaign attracted SMEs to apply to the project and a comprehensive diagnostic tool was developed to identify areas requiring support. From this an improvement plan was developed for the selected SMEs and pre-qualified BDS providers were deployed to deliver training and coaching, resulting in increased productivity, job creation, and revenue for the 142 SMEs, of which 48% are women-led. In total, 139 new products, services and processes were developed, consolidating innovations an integral part of the SMEs’ activities and securing their sustainability and potential for future growth.



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Trade



Trade is key to economic development and enables market expansion and participation in global value chains.

The inter-connectedness of the world's businesses has never been greater and nor have the opportunities – and threats – for developing country enterprises as they seek to benefit from physical and digital trade linkages. Trade fosters competition, reduces poverty and increases specialisation, and NIRAS delivers

all aspects of trade from supporting firms to meet international export standards through to helping government ministries to implement reforms needed to enter into trade agreements and to conduct effective trade promotion.

International Forest Investment & Trade (InFIT I & II)



FUNDER
FCDO



DURATION

Phase 1: 10/2014 – 09/2018

Phase 2: 05/2019 – 03/2023

In 2014 the UK and China established collaboration on International Forest Investment & Trade (InFIT), with oversight from UK's FCDO, the China National Forestry and Grassland Administration and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce. Since 2014, NIRAS has run the InFIT Project Management Office, a key aspect of which was to facilitate collaborative policy research, international knowledge exchange and the development and testing of systems to improve supply chain transparency and improved business practices. Working in the areas of timber, minerals, food and industrial commodities, InFIT participants also developed systems and tools that enable Chinese timber-importing enterprises to comply with policy and regulations and contributed to updating international norms related to responsible trade. For example, InFIT-supported research informed: amendments to Chinese Forest Law preventing the buying, processing or transporting illegally sourced timber; the guidelines for mining that were recognised by OECD and London Metal Exchanges and; the first standards for sustainable natural rubber production which helped build commitment to improved practices along the rubber supply chain. Among other things, NIRAS supported the Research Institute of Forest Policy and Information in establishing the China Responsible Forest Product Trade and Investment Network. The multi-stakeholder platform promoted responsible industry engagement in forest product trade and investment alongside the provision of advice surrounding timber legality and ESG practices in natural resource management in developing countries.

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EU-LAC Critical Raw Materials Support Action



FUNDER
EU



DURATION
11/2023 – 11/2025

Critical raw materials (CRM) are crucial for the EU's economy, forming the bedrock of essential technologies across strategic sectors, from e-mobility and renewable energy to aerospace and defence. This project aims to operationalise strategic partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean across the entire raw materials value chain. As part of this effort, the project has also focused on mapping and evaluating critical and strategic raw material value chain projects to identify key investment opportunities. Research was conducted with around 300 EU companies, along with industry associations and chambers of commerce, leading to the identification of gaps and opportunities in the target countries. Based on these findings, mitigation measures and policy recommendations have been proposed. In addition, several business missions have been organised, facilitating bilateral meetings between public and private stakeholders and financiers to explore concrete investment opportunities.



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Accelerated Growth for SMEs (AGS)



FUNDER
MFA Finland



DURATION
08/2021 – 07/2024

The AGS programme set out to improve the competitiveness of small and micro-sized Zambian businesses and strengthen business partnerships between Zambia and Finland. The programme provided targeted support to MSMEs through a business acceleration and training programmes, e.g to meet international standards, and facilitated foreign direct investment from Finnish companies. It also assessed the regulatory and institutional frameworks for MSME development in Zambia and built the capacity of several trade and investment support institutions such as the National Advisory Board for Impact Investment (NABII), the North-Western Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NWCCI) and Impact Capital Africa (ICA). AGS-supported MSMEs saw an average of 240% in revenue growth; the programme helped create 62 partnerships between Zambian and Finnish businesses; and it trained 507 MSMEs. It also helped create 700 jobs, mostly in mining, renewable energy and forestry.



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Business Enabling Environment



Creating the conditions for inclusive, climate-smart growth.

Facilitative norms, regulations, policies, and public infrastructure are essential to allow for entrepreneurship, markets and trade to flourish and benefit society and the climate. NIRAS supports the creation of stable business enabling environments, with a focus on improving the investment climate for inclusive job-creation, increasing MSME productivity, and empowering business support

organisations. This work includes engaging at regional, national and global policy levels on critical issues that can unlock private sector led transformation. Our research helps to bridge evidence gaps to ensure that investors and policymakers have access to the right information and people to make inclusive business models succeed.

Ghana Private Sector Competitiveness Project Phase II (GPSCP II)



FUNDER
SECO



DURATION
11/2022 – 12/2027

GPSCP II aims to contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth through enhanced trade and competitiveness in the cashew and oil palm value chains. The programme supports the Government of Ghana (GoG), and in particular the Tree Crops Development Agency (TCDA), by implementing three components, the first two of which aim to enhance the business enabling environment: a Strategic Cooperation Partnership, supporting TCDA to implement high-impact reform activities; and a Rapid Response Mechanism accessed by the GoG to support and align reform initiatives leading to systemic benefits for selected value chains. The third component is a matching grant fund for the private sector to strengthen production, processing, market linkages, service provision, sector associations, access to finance, and skills development in the two value chains.



GPSCP II programme contributes to

inclusive and sustainable growth

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Local Economic Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (LED BiH)



FUNDER
SDC



DURATION
08/2023-07/2027

LED BiH fosters partnership-based mechanisms of cooperation, organisational capacities, scale-up mechanisms, and support functions to promote inclusive and sustainable local economic development, and catalyses systematic, local economic development by attracting investment and improving the competitiveness and productivity of SMEs in target locations. By promoting public-private partnerships and strategic alliances between local governments and the private sector, LED BiH creates a more business-friendly and inclusive environment, supporting greener economic strategies by working with local institutions. The combination of systemic changes with direct interventions for local economic development allows LED BiH to support better and more sustainable prospects to generate a decent income for the local population.



By promoting public-private partnerships and strategic alliances between local governments and the private sector, LED BiH creates a more business-friendly and inclusive environment, supporting greener economic strategies by working with local institutions.

MiPYME COMPETE



FUNDER
EU



DURATION
09/2019-03/2025

MSMEs represent 90% of Paraguay's business sector and employ 70% of the workforce, contributing significantly to economic growth. However, their growth is hindered by low competitiveness and an unfavorable business environment, with low productivity and technological innovation in the agro-processing and industrial sectors. To address these challenges, NIRAS provided technical assistance to the EU Cooperation Programme MiPYME COMPETE, aimed at strengthening national policy, enhancing public services, and improving the business environment. NIRAS supported institutional, regulatory, and service framework improvements, provided capacity building to public institutions, and worked closely with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to tackle structural obstacles for MSME development, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.



In the last four years, MiPYME COMPETE has supported

+330 industrial and
+100 agricultural MSMEs,
helping them achieve:

53% increase in productivity;

24% drop in production costs;

68% reduction in product defects;

61% increase in sales; and

27% growth.



Methodologies and Tools



We use a range of approaches to assess constraints at the micro and macro levels of economic development and design effective interventions.

Before embarking on private sector development work, we undertake research to ensure that our interventions are rooted in a strong understanding of the operational context. Clients expect projects to deliver sustainable change, and we are well versed in adopting a **market systems development (MSD)** approach. The MSD framework enables the mapping of relevant ecosystems and the development of an understanding of market players' incentives to identify effective levers of change. **Political economy analysis (PEA)** is an important

element of preparation for MSD, and more generally to map where power and influence lie to inform project design, particularly when working in the business enabling environment. **Value chain analysis (VCA)** is another methodology frequently deployed to identify where capacity and resource gaps are limiting economic development and inhibiting market linkages and business partnerships. These tools, along with many others, are the foundation of good project design and are at the heart of our successful PSD programmes.

Territorios Forestales Sostenibles (TEFOS) Pillar 3



METHODOLOGY

Political Economy Analysis



FUNDER

FCDO



DURATION

05/2024 – 12/2026

TEFOS 3 is a flagship multi-year programme funded by the UK Government in Colombia. It aims to reduce deforestation in priority areas affected by the armed conflict by working through three main components: value chain development for forest products, including the facilitation of public-private partnerships to improve the commercialisation and market access for sustainable products and services; conservation; and sustainable forest management.

Considering the fragile nature of the context of operation, TEFOS 3 conducted a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) to evaluate all possible intervention approaches. The PEA sought to better understand the political, institutional, and economic dynamics at play that contribute to deforestation, biodiversity loss, and poverty, and highlighted the importance of the development of the value chain for local forest and agriculture products as a potential solution. It also identified the challenges and opportunities present at institutional and community levels, examined the progress of negotiation processes with illicit armed groups active in the territory, and identified intervention mechanisms for the project, with this context in mind.



TEFOS 3 aims to reduce deforestation in priority areas affected by the armed conflict.

MSD Helpdesk



METHODOLOGY

Market Systems Development



FUNDER

SIDA



DURATION

Phases I – IV: 07/2020 – 12/2026

NIRAS and Agora Global Ltd have been implementing Sida's Market Systems Development (MSD) Helpdesk since 2020 in four separate contracts across a wide range of geographies. The Helpdesk has received high client satisfaction and through cooperating with senior MSD experts around the world, has implemented over 88 short-term assignments. The work has ranged from: support to strategy development; portfolio reviews for embassies; delivering MSD trainings and workshop; supporting MSD specific monitoring and evaluation methods and systems; and developing website content. The project also supported Sida in setting up an open access MSD toolbox that can be used by anyone to integrate MSD perspectives in their work.



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Agricultural Sector Development Support Programme (ASDSP) Phases I & II



METHODOLOGY

Value Chain Analysis



FUNDER

Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock



DURATION

Phase 1: 07/2012 – 08/2017
Phase 2: 02/2019 – 05/2024

ASDSP delivered sustainable development of Kenyan crop, livestock, and fish production to improve incomes and food and nutrition security with a particular focus on women and youth inclusion. It employed value chain analysis as a critical tool, conducting thorough analyses of market dynamics and identifying policy constraints. Early on in phase 1 of the programme, Kenya's 47 counties prioritised three value chains each that were used in the entire implementation of ASDSP's two phases, with NIRAS providing technical assistance for both phases. The programme facilitated interactions between value chain players, including producers, processors, and marketers to improve performance as well as connecting them to private and public service providers to strengthen linkages. In addition, value chain platforms were created to improve consultation between government and the private sector, and initiatives to improve access to market, such as a mobile app to disseminate market information, were implemented.



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International Development Consulting

We work across a broad spectrum of areas – such as energy, water, fund management, and rural and economic development – to build capacity and create sustainable development solutions for a better, more equal and stable world.



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