

D1.3. KICK OFF REPORT. EMPOANDES



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Foreword.

This Kick-off Meeting Report provides a concise summary of EMPOANDES' project Kick-off meeting (KOM), held during 20-22 January 2026 in Quito, Ecuador. It captures the key presentations, discussions, decisions, and next steps agreed by the partnership. It is intended as a practical reference to support implementation, ensure continuity across Work Packages (WP), and document the governance arrangements and shared roadmap established at the project's start.

3

This report was drafted by Jon Xavier Olano and Enric Aguilar, and reviewed and validated by the EMPOANDES consortium: University of Helsinki (Alexander Mahura), Centro Internacional para la Investigación del Fenómeno del Niño (Felipe Costa), Universidad Central de Ecuador (Jorge Espinosa)



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Contents

Foreword.....	3
Executive Summary	5
Pre Kick-off meeting exchanges.	6
Kick-Off Meeting.....	8
Meeting Overview	8
Participants	9
Day 1 (20 January 2026).....	10
Work Package Presentations and Key Outcomes	11
Day 2 (21 January 2026)	12
Constitution of the Executive and Communication Board.	12
Field Visit	13
Day 3 (22 January 2026).....	15
Immediate actions (February 2026)	19
Governance and coordination	19
Project documentation and shared workspace	19
WP2. Needs analysis and national workshops (Task 2.3).....	20
WP6. Communication routines and early visibility	20
External Advisory Board and synergies.....	20
Conclusions	21



Executive Summary

The EMPOANDES Kick-off Meeting (KOM) served as the formal starting point of the project's implementation phase, bringing consortium partners together to establish a shared operational baseline, confirm governance arrangements, and agree on immediate priorities and next steps. The following bullets summarise the main outcomes and decisions resulting from the meeting.

5

- The EMPOANDES Kick-off Meeting (KOM) was held in **Quito, Ecuador (UDLA partner), 20-22 January 2026**, in a hybrid mode combining **on-site and online** participation to ensure broad consortium representation.
- This meeting **reviewed the project rationale, objectives, WPs and team roles**, recognising updates since proposal submission, and aligned partners on priorities for the **first implementation phase (M1–M3)**.
- After completion of the WP review, **the Executive Board and the Communication Board were formally constituted** (see composition in **Annexe 2**), establishing the core governance and communication architecture from the outset.
- Key management agreements included the **Executive Board online meetings schedule (April, June, September 2026)** and a proposal to host the **first General Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia (January 2027)**.
- Day 3 networking presentations positioned EMPOANDES within a wider ecosystem of initiatives; the **GIZ session (PROGESS + IGRRD)** was particularly relevant to explore synergies beyond EMPOANDES and reinforce **European added value** through coordinated cooperation with partner countries.



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Pre Kick-off meeting exchanges.

Following the signature of the Declaration of Honour and the Accession Form, the consortium initiated a structured series of five online pre-KOMs (05/11/2025, 17/11/2025, 01/12/2025, 15/12/2025 and 12/01/2026; see Table 1 and example on Figure 1) to accelerate implementation readiness and minimise start-up risks, using these sessions not merely for administrative follow-up but to establish an operational “working baseline” across partners. Through this process, partners tracked key accession and financial identification steps, aligned early project-management routines, clarified roles and responsibilities, identified immediate bottlenecks, tested communication channels and decision-tracking practices, and began coordinating sequencing and interdependencies across WPs, particularly those requiring rapid mobilisation. In parallel, the consortium assessed logistics and venue options and agreed to convene the hybrid (onsite + online) KOM in Quito, Ecuador, during the week of 19 January 2026, enabling timely travel coordination, institutional availability, and a KOM agenda oriented toward delivery needs rather than purely ceremonial objectives, and ensuring the project could move quickly and efficiently from formal signature to effective delivery.

Pre-KOM meetings	data	Link a presentation	Link a vídeo
1st pre-kick-off meeting	05/11/2025	link	link
2nd pre-kick-off meeting	17/11/2025	link	link
3rd pre-kick-off meeting	01/12/2025	link	link
4th pre-kick-off meeting	15/12/2025	link	link
5th pre-kick-off meeting	12/01/2026	link	link

Table 1. List of EMPOANDES Pre Kick-Off Meetings

D1.3. Kick Off Meeting Report

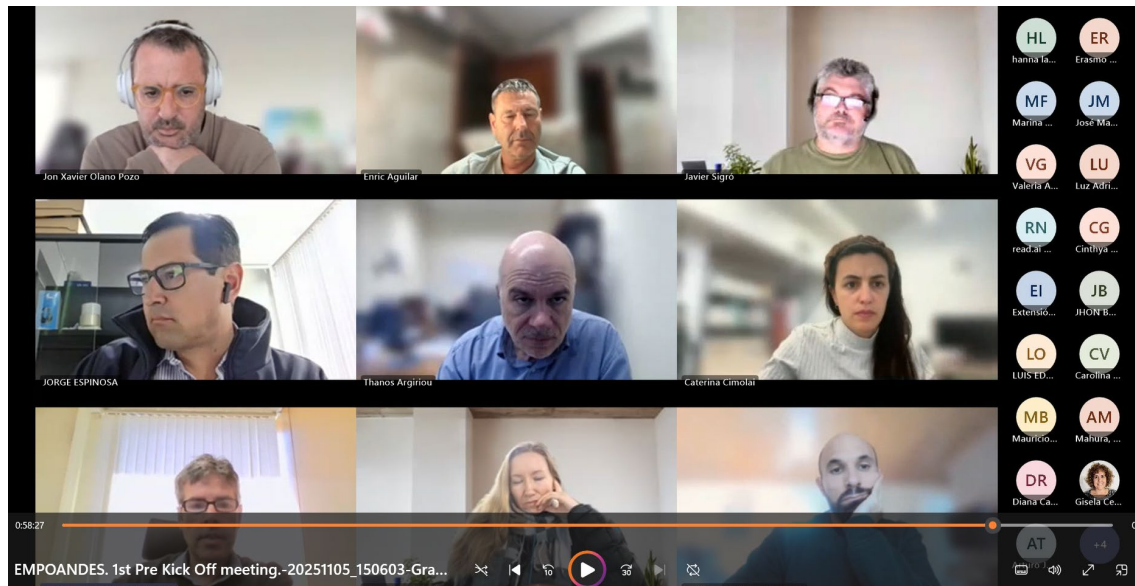


Figure 1. Screenshot from the first Pre-Kick-Off Meeting (November, 5th, 2025)

During the pre-Kick-off preparations, the consortium agreed on the project's visual identity through a formal vote on the proposed logo options (see Figure 2). The voting results, by e-mail and approved at the fourth pre-kick-off meeting, were: **Option 1a (7 votes, 58%), Option 1c (3 votes, 25%), Option 1b (1 vote, 8%), and Option 2 (1 vote, 8%).** Based on this outcome, **Option 1a** was selected as the official **EMPOANDES project logo**, and it will be used consistently across project communications and dissemination materials.

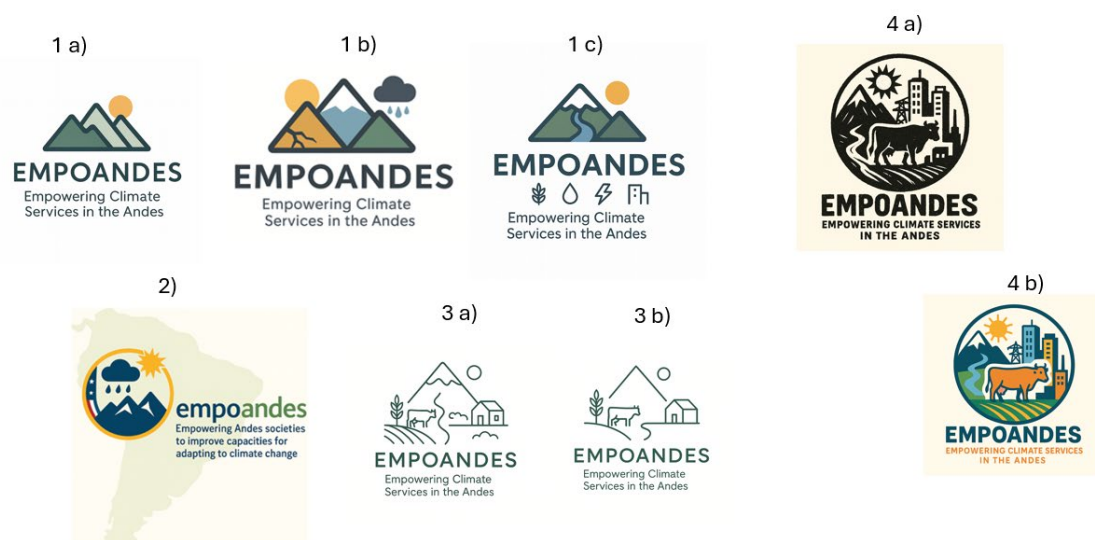


Figure 2. Proposed logo for EMPOANDES project

Kick-Off Meeting

Meeting Overview

The EMPOANDES KOM took place in Quito, Ecuador, on 20–22 January 2026. This meeting (on the UDLA Campus in Quito; see Figure 3) combined in-person/onsite and online participation to ensure broad representation across the consortium. Onsite attendance included representatives from the Project Coordinator (URV), European partners (University of Patras, UPAT), and Latin American partners participating on site, notably Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno (UNAP), Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAC), Universidad de Las Américas (UDLA), Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE), Centro Internacional para la Investigación del Fenómeno de El Niño), Instituto Nacional de Meteorología e Hidrología (INAMHI) de Ecuador, Yachay Tech (YT), and Dirección Meteorológica de Chile (DMC). Additional partners joined online due to availability constraints, including the University of Helsinki (UHEL), Universidad del Valle (UV), Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales (IDEAM) de Colombia, Servicio Nacional de Meteorología e Hidrología (SENAMHI) de Perú, and the University of Concepción (UCE). The meeting developed at Universidad de Las Américas (UDLA), kindly facilitated by Prof. Rasa Zalakeviciute, whose collaboration was critical for the local organisation and the smooth delivery of the meeting. On the third day, 22 January 2026, the meeting format was partially opened to selected external organisations to foster synergies between consortium partners and related initiatives. In this context, GIZ–Colombia participated as an invited organisation, given its collaboration links and thematic connections with URV, IDEAM, CIIFEN and other relevant actors.





Figure 3. UDLA Campus in Quito was the venue of Kick Off Meeting

Participants

The KOM brought together nearly all the consortium. On-site participants included Enric Aguilar and Jon Xavier Olano (URV); Athanasios Argirou and Iannis Kanarakis (UPAT); Rasa Zalakeviciute (UDLA); Jorge Espinosa (UCE); Luis Pinedav (Yachay Tech, YT); Erasmo Rodríguez (UNAC); Roberto Alfaro and José Mamami (UNAP); Diana Espinoza, Pier Maquilón and Felipe Costa (CIIFEN); Bolívar Erazo (INAMHI Director, Permanent Representative of Ecuador with WMO), David Galarza and Cristina Valdivielso (INAMHI); and Claudia Villarroel (DMC), together with additional members of their institutions. Online participants included Hanna K. Lappalainen, Alexander Mahura, and Svyatoslav Tyuuryakov (UHEL); Jhon Jairo Barona Arturo, Elkin Jesus Salcedo, Francisco Henández (Universidad del Valle), Arturo Cama, Teresa Godilia García, Grinia Jesus Avalos, and Giovana Egas (SENAMHI); Paola Bernal (IDEAM), and Jorge del Río and Martin Jaques (University of Concepción), among others. A complete list of participants, including institutions and roles, is provided in Annexe 3.

The only partner institution not represented during the meeting was the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina (UNALM).

Day 1 (20 January 2026)

To ensure a coherent start to implementation, the KOM included a recap and alignment block to re-establish a shared baseline across the consortium despite staffing and role changes since proposal submission. Partners adopted EMPOANDES' core rationale—closing the gap between available climate information/technical expertise and the capacity to translate it into usable climate services—and reconfirmed the project's overarching objectives and workflow: diagnose needs and capacities, develop competency-based curricula and learning resources, strengthen staff skills, pilot and validate training offers in real contexts, and disseminate results to drive sustained institutional integration and regional cooperation.



Figure 4. Enric Aguilar, EMPOANDES Project Coordinator, during the first session of KOM

Dr. Enric Aguilar, EMPOANDES Coordinator, during the first session of KOM

The consortium then reviewed each WP to confirm scope, sequencing, responsibilities, and early operational priorities, as summarised in Table 2 below. The presentations of WP's can be found here: [link](#)



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Work Package Presentations and Key Outcomes

Work Package (WP)	KOM deliberations	Key decisions / outputs	Dependencies & timing	Lead
WP1. Project management and coordination	Set the management backbone: coordination routines, governance cadence, and financial/administrative principles.	Confirmed Executive Board meeting rhythm (April, June, September 2026). Discussed longer-term consortium calendar; Bogotá proposed for General Assembly (Jan 2027), to be approved at next Executive Board.	Immediate (early stability + roadmap for governance milestones).	Enric Aguilar (URV)
WP2. Definition of HEIs and community needs	Mobilisation of needs/context analysis, with emphasis on participatory workshops (Task 2.3).	Agreed on a practical approach on how/when to run national workshops, clarified the convening role of hydromet services, and responsibilities between the WP lead and national organisers; outlined initial rollout sequencing aligned to the early timeline.	Early-start WP (drives downstream WPs). Revisited on Day 3 to ensure coherence.	Pier Maquilón (CIIFEN)
<u>WP3. Curricula development</u>	<u>High-level alignment on scope, outputs, and workflow for competency-oriented learning offers.</u>	<u>Confirmed objectives and positioning in results chain; ensured shared expectations and readiness rather than detailed planning.</u>	<u>Triggered by WP2 diagnostics; starts once needs/gaps analysis is underway.</u>	<u>José Mamami (UNAP)</u>
WP4. Staff capacity building	Bridge from design to piloting/institutional uptake; alignment on objectives and interfaces.	Reconfirmed roles and timing assumptions; URV proposed Erasmo Rodríguez (UNAC) as co-leader to support cross-country leadership balance.	Scheduled after WP2 findings mature and WP3 outputs develop; preparatory discussion at KOM.	Jon Xavier Olano (URV) + Erasmo Rodríguez (UNAC)
WP5. Piloting capacity development and community empowerment	Space to test, validate, and refine outputs via pilots and practical engagement.	Concise recap of purpose, pilot modalities, and need for later coordination; Ecuador partners nominated Jorge Espinosa (UCE) as WP5 Lead.	Later-start WP; depends strongly on WP2–WP4 content/targeting/methods.	Jorge Espinosa (UCE)
WP6. Dissemination and communication	Early-start enabling WP: align dissemination logic and operational steps for visibility + internal coordination.	Confirmed dual-track approach (internal routines for timely info flow + external communication for milestones/results). Noted website already online as main entry point; materials centralised in shared workspace; recordings stored in Teams with selective mirroring to the website. Day-to-day steering channeled through the Communication Board (“governance-by-design”) with reporting to the Executive Board.	Immediate / early-start (supports all WPs and governance bodies from project start).	Jon Xavier Olano (URV)

Table 2. Summary of WP's discussions



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Figure 5. EMPOANDES family photo after the adjournment of the meeting on Day 1, 20 January 2026

After the WP5 presentation, the meeting was adjourned at 16.23h (UTC -5) until the next day 21 January 2026 at 09.00h (UTC -5).

Day 2 (21 January 2026)

Constitution of the Executive and Communication Board.

During Day 2 of KOM — immediately after the WPs review sessions—the consortium formally constituted the Executive Board and the Communication Board, confirming the governance framework as the backbone for coordination, accountability, and quality assurance. The roles of the Project Coordinator (PC) and the supporting Project Management Office (PMO) were reaffirmed, including responsibilities for overall coordination, reporting readiness, evidence consolidation, and facilitation of consortium decision-making. The Executive Board was validated as the primary strategic and oversight body to steer implementation across WPs and resolve issues in a timely manner. The WPs leadership was also reconfirmed to secure clear technical



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steering and day-to-day coordination: WP1 led by Enric Aguilar (URV); WP2 led by Pier Maquilón (CIIFEN); WP3 led by José Mamami (UNAP); WP4 co-led by Jon Xavier Olano (URV) and Erasmo Rodríguez (UNAC); WP5 led by Jorge Espinosa (UCE); and WP6 led by Jon Xavier Olano (URV). In the dedicated Executive Board session, the Board was formally established, bringing together WP Leaders and designated institutional/partners leaders (full composition in Annexe 2), while the Communication Board was constituted with nominated partner representatives to steer communication routines, content planning, and dissemination actions (composition in Annexe 2).

In parallel, partners aligned on the internal communication rules and workflow routines to operationalise delivery from the outset, clarifying the distinction between day-to-day technical coordination at the WP/task level, project-wide operational coordination facilitated by the PMO, and formal decision-making channeled through the governance bodies. To ensure traceability and reporting readiness, the consortium agreed that governance and coordination will rely on regular meetings supported by documented minutes/notes, action points, and decision logs. To underpin these routines, the meeting confirmed the establishment of a shared file repository as the single reference point for project documentation (templates, minutes, deliverables, milestones, evidence, and dissemination materials), noting that the setup was still being finalised due to access management and security requirements linked to institutional policies. The consortium agreed to complete these arrangements as a priority, so that the repository becomes fully operational. Finally, partners acknowledged that a preliminary version of the EMPOANDES website is already available and will serve as the main public entry point for project news, results and outputs, to be updated progressively as communication routines and content pipelines are consolidated (<http://empoandes.eu>).

Field Visit

On Day 2, the KOM included field visit to

Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE) Hacienda facilities (see Figures 8 and 9), where the Faculty of Agronomy conducts teaching, research, and applied training. The visit was strategically relevant to plan ahead for the liaison between EMPOANDES and the

D1.3. Kick Off Meeting Report

existing programmes at UCE, supporting the project's aim of moving beyond stand-alone outputs toward verifiable institutional integration. The activity included an institutional welcome—led by the Dean and the PhD Programme Director, who outlined academic priorities and opportunities to mainstream EMPOANDES results—and a guided tour by Dr. Jorge Espinosa and his team, enabling partners to understand UCE's infrastructure and working context firsthand. Overall, the visit strengthened mutual understanding and trust within the consortium and created favourable conditions for subsequent coordination, particularly regarding piloting, implementation, and longer-term sustainability at the host institution.

14



Figure 6. Visiting UCE facilities in Quito



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Figure 7. Reception from UCE to EMPOANDES Consortium

Day 3 (22 January 2026)

On Day 3, EMPOANDES dedicated the last segment of the KOM to networking and synergies, structured as a sequence of short project presentations (see Figures 12, 13 and 14) by the consortium, followed by an open exchange. The consortium members carefully selected and exposed meaningful projects, which will connect with EMPOANDES activities or serve as inspiration to reach excellence. This session helped to situate EMPOANDES within a wider ecosystem of ongoing initiatives and to identify concrete complementarities for implementation. The agenda covered: an introductory rationale (“Why networking”), followed by presentations on ClimED (URV/UHEL), CLUVEX (UHEL), and Climate University (UHEL).



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Figure 8. Dr. Svyatoslav Tyuryakov, UHEL, presenting in online mode during Day 3.

After coffee break, the ENANDES & ENANDES+ (CIIFEN/DMC/SENAMHI), PROGRESS + IGRRD (GIZ/CIIFEN/URV) and additional partner initiatives, including FIASA-CA (2024-030) (UCE), GLORIOUS + a meteorological anomalies identification system for Ecuador using sub-seasonal forecasts (YT), two UNAP contributions on Lake Titicaca basin impacts (water resources and droughts), and CLIMEX (UPAT) were presented.



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Figure 9. Mr Felipe Costa, Director of CIIFEN, presenting the ENANDES project during Day 3.

Particular emphasis was placed on the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) contribution (within PROGESS + IGRRD), as it provided an immediate bridge to collaboration beyond EMPOANDES while remaining fully aligned with our objectives and regional scope. The discussion highlighted the added value of engaging with German development cooperation as part of the broader European cooperation landscape: it strengthens the “European added value” narrative through coordinated European engagement with partner countries, supports policy coherence and complementarity across initiatives, and helps translate shared European principles—such as effective partnerships, capacity strengthening, transparency, and results orientation—into tangible joint actions on the ground. In operational terms, this session helped position EMPOANDES to avoid duplication, leverage existing networks and investments, and identify pathways for scaling and sustainability through structured cooperation between European actors and third-country institutions across the Andean region. All the presentation of the day can be found through EMPOANDES’ website [link](#)



Figure 10. Mr Max Graser, from GIZ, presenting the PROGRESS project during Day 3.

Immediate actions (February 2026)

Following the Kick-off Meeting, the consortium agreed on a set of immediate actions to ensure a rapid transition from alignment to execution. Priority was given to establishing the operational infrastructure (governance rhythm, documentation workflows and shared repository), and to launching the earliest-start work streams, notably WP2 and WP6.

Governance and coordination

- Circulate KOM minutes and decision log to all partners, including consolidated action points, owners and deadlines, taking into view that the KOM Report will be submitted before February 28th.
- Confirm the 2026 governance calendar and hold the first short follow-up coordination call, aligned with the agreed cadence leading to the Executive Board meetings (April, June, and September 2026).
- Confirm Executive Board and Communication Board compositions (as per Annexe 2) and share contact lists for operational coordination.
- As requested by the National Hydrological and Meteorological Services, the coordinator will ask the EU Project Officer about the possibility of retaining the budget of the three institutions (INAMHI, SENAMHI and IDEAM) to develop a more efficient management of the funds.

Project documentation and shared workspace

- **Put in service the shared file repository** (access rights, security settings, folder structure) and communicate the agreed **document naming and version-control conventions**.
- Upload and organise the **KOM slide decks and supporting materials** in the shared workspace; ensure **videos/recordings** are indexed in the MS Teams channel.



WP2. Needs analysis and national workshops (Task 2.3)

- Under WP2 leadership (CIIFEN), **launch the national-level planning track** for Tasks 2.1 and 2.3 by:
 - drafting a **common workshop blueprint** (objectives, target groups, expected outputs, facilitation roles);
 - proposing **indicative dates** per country and identifying the **national conveners** (including the involved hydrometeorological services);
 - defining a minimal set of **data collection instruments** (e.g., questionnaire/interview guide, registration list, consent/attendance templates);
 - asking the Project Officer to extend the deadline of the first deliverables on WP2 until the end of July 2026.

20

WP6. Communication routines and early visibility

- Through the Communication Board, define and publish a short communication plan for the first quarter, including:
 - internal routines (what is shared, where, how often);
 - public-facing outputs (news items, KOM summary, first announcements).
- Stabilise and update the project website (v1) by adding initial content (KOM news, partner list, governance snapshot) and establishing the workflow for future updates.

External Advisory Board and synergies

- Shortlist and validate proposed External Advisory Board candidates and initiate contact, aiming for confirmation before the next Executive Board (tentatively April 2026).
- Document identified synergy opportunities discussed on Day 3 (e.g., with GIZ–Colombia and related initiatives) and assign a focal point for follow-up.



Conclusions

The EMPOANDES Kick-off Meeting in Quito, Ecuador (20-22 January 2026) marked the transition from award to implementation by consolidating a shared baseline across partners, updating roles and assumptions since proposal submission, and aligning on early priorities for M1–M3—especially those early-start workstreams that will condition downstream outputs. It delivered concrete operational outcomes through the formal constitution of the Executive Board and Communication Board, reinforcing a functional governance and communication architecture from the outset, and confirming a predictable governance rhythm with Executive Board meetings planned for April, June, and September 2026 and initial planning for a General Assembly proposed for January 2027 in Bogotá. Partners also reaffirmed the need for robust internal workflows—centralised documentation, traceable decision-making, and standardised practices—while progressing the shared repository setup and prioritising the completion of security and access arrangements. Beyond internal organisation, the KOM strengthened consortium cohesion through the UCE Hacienda visit and Quito social programme, and positioned EMPOANDES within a broader ecosystem via the Day 3 (22 January 2026) networking session, enabling early identification of synergies (notably with GIZ) and reinforcing European added value through coordinated cooperation with third-country institutions, ultimately leaving the consortium implementation-ready with clear next steps for the coming months.

