Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project “Promoting Sustainable Land Management in Albania Through Integrated Restoration Ecosystems (SLM Albania)” (GEF ID: 9477)

Evaluation Office of the
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Promoting sustainable land management in Albania through integrated restoration of ecosystems -SLM Albania 9477
January/2023

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This Terminal Evaluation was prepared for UNEP by Dr Justine Braby, as an external consultant.

The evaluator would like to express her gratitude to all persons met and who contributed to this evaluation, these persons are listed in Annex 2.

The evaluator would also like to thank the project team and in particular Ersin Esen, Sonja Gebert and Valmira Bozgo for their contribution, collaboration and facilitation throughout the evaluation process. The translator for the evaluation mission was excellent and supported smooth communication for the interviews and discussions.

The evaluating consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will contribute to the improvement and advancement of sustainable land management and ecosystem preservation in Albania.

BRIEF CONSULTANT BIOGRAPHY

The evaluation was conducted by Dr Justine Braby, contracted as an external evaluator. Justine has her academic background in zoology, education and law, as well as completed courses in economic development and depth facilitation. Her professional expertise ranges from project development, implementation to evaluation of GEF and other donor-funded projects for agencies like UNEP, UNDP, FAO and IUCN. She has been focusing her expertise on evaluations and has had extensive experience in terminal evaluations spanning across the world. She has technical expertise in climate change, sustainable land management, biodiversity and ecosystem services, alternative development paradigms and economic development, coastal zone management, water resources management, protected areas, among others (including publications experience in these fields). Justine is from Namibia and currently living and working in Mexico.

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ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Joint Evaluation: No

Report Language(s): English.

Evaluation Type: Terminal Evaluation

Brief Description: This report is a terminal evaluation of a UNEP/GEF Medium-Sized Project implemented between 2017 and 2021, entitled "Promoting sustainable land management in Albania through integrated restoration of ecosystems (SLM Albania)". The project's goal was to strengthen the capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and promote sustainable land management practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration. The evaluation sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the National Forestry Agency, the Municipality of Kolonja, and other project partners.

Key words: sustainable land management, SLM, sustainable forest management, SFM, reseeding, reforestation, forest management, forest rehabilitation, pinus negra.

Primary data collection period: August-September 2022

Field mission dates: 5 - 13 September 2022

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AZBNR	The Agency for Agricultural and Rural Development
DMC	Municipal Council Decision/Directive
EU	European Union
FMO	Fund Management Officer
GEF CEO ER	The Global Environment Facility Chief Executive Officer Endorsement Request
ICA	Internal Cooperation Agreement
IPARD	EU pre-accession for funding Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development (formerly included Water Administration)
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
MoTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment (formerly Ministry of Environment)
MSP	Medium Sized Project
MUD	Ministry of Urban Development
NFA	National Forest Agency
NPC	National Project Coordinator
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) at the Prime Minister's Office
PD	Project Director
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Reporting
PM	Project Manager
PMAT	Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
SSFA	Small-scale Funding Agreement
TBD	To be determined
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought
UNEP RoE	United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Europe
URI	Urban Research Institute
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

Table 1: Project summary

GEF Project ID:	9477		
Implementing Agency:	UNEP Ecosystems Division (formerly DEPI) (GEF BD LD unit, BD and Land Branch)	**Executing Agency:**	UNEP Vienna Programme Office Ministry of Tourism and Environment in collaboration with Kolonja Municipality
Relevant SDG(s) and indicator(s):	SDG 15, target 15.1., indicator 15.1.1. (forest area as a proportion of total land area), target 15.2., 15.2.1. (progress towards SLM)		
Sub-programme:	Healthy and Productive Ecosystems	**Expected Accomplishment(s):**	SP3 Healthy and Productive Ecosystems (b) (i)
UNEP approval date:	14 August 2017	**Programme of Work Output(s):**	2018-2019
GEF approval date:	12 May 2016	**Project type:**	Medium Size Project
GEF Operational Programme #:	5	**Focal Area(s):**	Land Degradation
		GEF Strategic Priority And GEF Core Indicators (identify these for projects prior to GEF-7)	Strategic Programme for GEF 5 - LD-1 (1) and LD-3 (4) Core Indicator 1.2 Land area under effective management in production systems with improved vegetative cover (indicative expected results - 21,288 ha benefiting from application of SLM approaches)
***Expected* start date:**	21 June 2017 (GEF CEO Endorsement)	**Actual start date:**	23 October 2017
***Planned* completion date:**	31 July 2020	**Actual operational completion date:**	31 December 2021
***Planned* project budget at approval:**	USD 10,583,242	**Actual total expenditures**	USD 800,047
GEF grant allocation:	USD 950,000 incl agency fee (USD 867,580)	**GEF grant expenditures reported:**	USD 800,047
Project Preparation Grant - GEF financing:	USD 45,662	**Project Preparation Grant - co-financing:**	0
***Expected* Medium-Size Project/Full-Size Project co-financing:**	USD 9,670,000	***Secured* Medium-Size Project/Full-Size Project co-financing:**	USD 9,670,000
First disbursement:	31 October 2017	**Planned date of financial closure:**	December 2022
No. of formal project revisions:	1 (output change to results framework)	**Date of last approved project revision:**	15 February 2021
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	3	**Date of last/next Steering Committee meeting:**	**Last:** 3 Feb 2021
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation *(planned date):*	27 May 2019	**Mid-term Review (*actual date*):**	January - June 2020 (in-country: February)
Terminal Evaluation *(planned date):*	6 months before project end	**Terminal Evaluation (*actual date*):**	June - November 2022 (in-country: September)
Coverage - Country(ies):	Albania	**Coverage - Region(s):**	Europe
Dates of previous project phases:	N/A	**Status of future project phases:**	N/A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

1. The GEF/UNEP project "Promoting sustainable land management in Albania through integrated restoration of ecosystems" (GEF ID 9477) was a Medium-sized Project (MSP) with a budget of USD 10,583,242, with GEF contributions (USD 950,000) and substantial co-financing from Government and partners (USD 9,670,000). The project ran from 23 October 2017 until 31 December 2021.
2. The project was implemented by UNEP Ecosystems Division, executed by the UNEP Vienna Programme Office (on request of Government) in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the Kolonja Municipality.
3. The project objective was to strengthen the capacity and skills of national and local institutions and promote sustainable land management practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration. It aimed to address this objective through two Components intended to realise the achievement of three outcomes (1.1) a shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors, (1.2) (demonstrated) capacities and support for SLM strengthened, and (2.1) pressures on natural resources in at least 20,000 ha reduced through application of SLM activities.[1]
4. This report encompasses the terminal evaluation of the GEF/UNEP "Promoting sustainable land management in Albania through integrated restoration of ecosystems" (abbreviated to "SLM Albania Project" for the purposes of the report).
5. A Theory of Change (TOC) was reconstructed for the purposes of the evaluation (Figure 3 in the main report) which shows the causal pathways from outputs to project outcomes to intermediate states, and finally the project long-term impact, on the basis that key drivers and assumptions outlined in the TOC would be maintained. The broader impact for the project was to move toward land degradation neutrality in the country (particularly in forest and pasture ecosystems).
6. In line with UNEP's Evaluation Policy, the Terminal Evaluation was conducted with two main purposes: (1) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (2) to promote operational improvement, leaning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and its key partners toward moving the results towards impact for the country and the Land Degradation (LD) agenda. An external evaluator was commissioned by the UNEP Evaluation Office to conduct the Terminal Evaluation between June and October 2022. This was done through extensive document studies, online interviews in anticipation of the country visit as well as site visits and country-level interviews during the country mission 5-13 September 2022.

Key Findings

7. The project achieved its outputs, but the quality and extent of these was variable. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) proposed effective revisions to activities to allow the project to achieve them as practically as possible. This, and also the overall final implementation of the project, however, resulted in a much less ambitious effort than was envisaged at design.
8. Key deliverables under Component 1 were of good quality, and the country has benefitted from a strong legal gap analysis, support to the implementation of its Forestry Law (although uptake of this support is not evidenced), and good local-level directives towards SLM (including the grazing mechanism and LD monitoring).

[1] CEO Endorsement Request, 2017.

9. The training of trainers (TOTs) was probably the highlight of the capacity development exercises run and provides a good model for replication to continue the decentralisation process of knowledge transfer to the forest bodies at municipal level.
10. The communication and outreach of the project is commended for its effort in attempting to mainstream the understanding of SLM and forest ecosystem conservation to several target groups.
11. For Component 2, some advances have been made in understanding land degradation through mapping of LD across 21,288 ha, and the commitment to implement a rehabilitation site plan for 120 ha of the most degraded forest and pasture land - but this is far from the outcome target of having almost 22,000 ha under applied land degradation management.[2]
12. Outcome 1.1 - There is some evidence to show a strengthened legal and institutional framework in the country, but not enough to show how this will significantly and positively impact SLM in the country in a broader sense.
13. Outcome 1.2 - Capacities have been strengthened, but in many cases not entirely demonstrated in their application, although, as mentioned, the model for the TOTs and inclusion of the National Forestry Agency has replicability for further capacity strengthened which will likely be applied.
14. Outcome 2.1 - Pressures on natural resources in an area covering at least 20,000 ha have only slightly been reduced through a greater understanding of LD across the area and also through a site rehabilitation plan that could be replicated if funding and human resources can be secured (the evaluator did not find sufficient evidence that this will indeed happen). The outcome is ambitious and what was finally achieved (given the large amount of co-financing committed) is minimal (less than 10 ha under rehabilitation which largely failed, 120 ha under an implementation plan with insecure funding and commitment).
15. The overall possibility of achieving longer-lasting project impact as per the Theory of Change, i.e. that Kolonja Municipality has taken on SLM and rehabilitation efforts beyond closure and there is potential and commitment to spread to other regions is moderately likely.

Conclusions

16. The project performance is assessed as Moderately Satisfactory overall. A full table of ratings is presented in the conclusions section of the main report (Table 3).
17. The project performed well in terms of its delivery on the legal and institutional outputs, as well as some of its capacity development and communications activities. It responded well to stakeholder engagement and displayed some good practice around partnerships building, particularly through the involvement of the National Forestry Agency who came in late (the Agency was established late in the project implementation).
18. Overall, the project was convoluted and ambitious in that it set out to do multiple things focusing on agriculture and forestry. The MTR provided more focus, but ultimately, an overall lack of direction and strategy led the project to underachieve in terms of the reconstructed Theory of Change. While it can be argued that it achieved substantial delivery when compared to a relatively small GEF budget, the co-financing, which was large (>9 million USD) should have reflected greater ambition and commitment from the country in terms of the TOC.

[2] As stated in the target, applied land degradation management including SLM activities/SLM management.

19. This said, the project did lay some foundational steps toward thinking about SLM in the context of forests and pastureland and this has moved the conversation and action forward towards the TOC impact, even if it has not moved it as far as the project intended.

20. Sustainability of project results will depend on the commitments made by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE), the National Forest Agency (NFA), and the Kolonja University at the closing meeting[3], and some additional recommendations made by the evaluator to this effect.

Key lessons learnt

21. **Lesson #1:** ensuring championship by key influencers should include a mix of technical and political actors; this project had one effective political champion at a high level but this championship was lost when the position was changed and more technical-level championship should have been fostered by the project to ensure sustainability of the project results within MoTE.

22. **Lesson #2:** making the best use of a strategic inception phase and having a strong Project Management Unit (PMU) with a solid technical background as well as making the most use of the experience of the Implementing Agency (IA) can benefit a project and reduce the risk of waiting until too late to change the project results framework.

23. **Lesson #3:** working with and co-creating with farmers and resource users through learn-by-doing approaches can enhance ownership and championship at the local level.

24. **Lesson #4:** servicing and maintenance of rehabilitated sites (by the project and the key partner in sustaining project results after project closure) should be a priority in implementing the rehabiliation plan.

Recommendations

25. Recommendations are provided in detail in the main report, but are summarised briefly below:

26. **Recommendation #1:** Hold a strategic project closure meeting to present on rehabilitation activities and embed results sustainability (Project-level; partners: Executing Agency (EA), National Forestry Agency (NFA) and Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE), Municipality of Kolonja Forest Body, key experts involved in the rehabilitation including from Tirana Agricultural University, timeline: took place 4 November 2022 as a result of this recommendation).

27. **Recommendation #2:** Hold a strategic meeting with the GEF country focal point and key partners on how to nest LD into the country through future projects (Project-level/UNEP; partners: UNEP Regional Office, MoTE, key partners as appropriate and relevant, timeline: this year).

28. **Recommendation #3:** Integrate the gender recommendations foming from the women's workshop into future GEF projects in Albania, most notably the Albanian Alps GEF/UNEP project (under Component 2). (Project-level, Partners: EA and MoTE, timeline: by end of year);

29. **Recommendation #4:** Municipality of Kolonja to support and empower those champion farmers applying SLM in their farms through the extension services provided by the expert training, as well as creating inclusion and incentives for support to protection of rehabilitated sites by engaging communities, making sure to allow equal access to women (Partner-level; partners: several, timeline: starting with closure meeting discussions, ongoing).

[3] The closing meeting report was sent to the evaluator in the final iteration of this report.

30. **Recommendation #5:** MoTE to champion SLM Handbook through presenting it to the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) at the Prime Minister's Office. (Partner-level; partners: MoTE, timeline: at discretion of MoTE).

31. **Recommendation #6:** NFA to be supported by MoTE in delivering key decentralisation training (modeled on the TOTs done by the project) across all the Municipalities (Partner-level; partners: NFA and MoTE, municipalities, timeline: starting with closure meeting discussions, ongoing).

INTRODUCTION

1. This report encompasses the terminal evaluation of the GEF/UNEP "Promoting sustainable land management in Albania through integrated restoration of ecosystems" (GEF ID 9477) (abbreviated to "SLM Albania Project" for the purposes of the report).
2. The project was a Medium-sized Project (MSP) with GEF contributions coming from the Land Degradation Focal Area GEF Trust Fund Account to UNEP as the GEF Implementing Agency, through the UNEP Ecosystems Division. The project falls under the Ecosystem Management Subprogramme (EMSP)[4] of the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2017. It contributes to expected accomplishment – "(a) Use of the ecosystem approach in countries to maintain ecosystem services and sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems is increased" for the period 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 respectively.
3. The GEF CEO formally approved the project on 21 June 2017. The project had its first Steering Committee meeting on 13 July 2017, and officially started implementation on 23 October 2017. The project was officially closed (at least operationally) on 31 December 2021 (an implementation period of just over 4 years).
4. This was the first LD/SLM related GEF-funded project in Albania.
5. The project budget was USD 10,583,242 of which USD 950,000 (USD 867,580 excluding the agency fee) was the GEF allocation, and USD 9,670,000 was planned (in-kind) co-financing allocation from project partners.
6. In line with UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme Manual, as well as the updated guidance[5] for evaluators (developed by the Evaluation Office), the Terminal Evaluation of the SLM Albania Project was undertaken to assess performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. As per the TOR, the evaluation has two primary purposes:
    i. To provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and
    ii. To promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and its project partners (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Municipality of Kolonja, National Forest Agency, and others.
7. The evaluation identifies lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation, and also for the future planning, evolution and uptake of the project-related tools in general.
8. The main target audiences for the evaluation findings are:
    - GEF Secretariat (as the funding entity)
    - Implementing Agency (UNEP): Biodiversity and Land Branch of the GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit of the Ecosystems Division
    - Executing Agency (UNEP): UNEP Vienna Programme Office
    - Co-executing Agency (Albania Government): Ministry of Tourism and Environment
    - The Project Steering Committee
    - Co-financiers and key project partners: Kolonja Municipality, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Agricultural University of Tirana, Urban Research Institute, Womens Association of Kolonja

[4] Now "Healthy and Productive Ecosystems"
[5] Most of which was updated in 2020.

EVALUATION METHODS

9. The evaluation was conducted by an external consultant (herein after referred to as the 'evaluator'). The evaluation took place between May and October 2022 under the management of the Evaluation Office of UNEP, based in Nairobi.

10. The evaluation employed a participatory approach with the UNEP Task Manager and the key project partners (UNEP Vienna Programme Office Project Manager and National Project Coordinator) were kept informed of progress throughout the evaluation; other project stakeholders were provided with an opportunity to comment on the evaluation findings in the draft Terminal Evaluation Report. This process is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

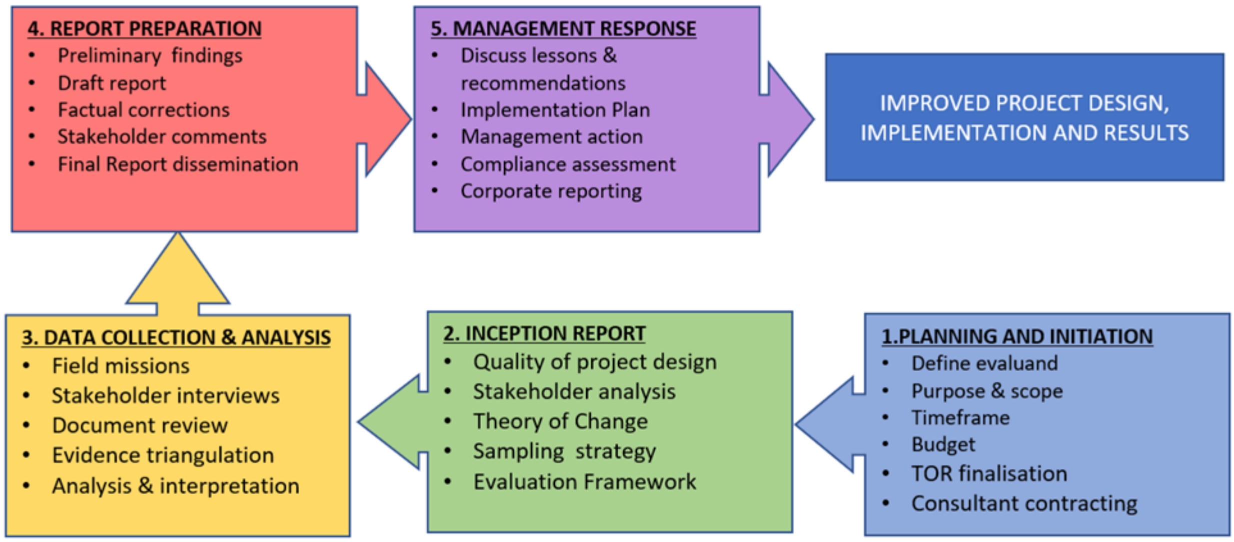


Figure 1. Evaluation Process

11. In line with UNEP Evaluation Guidelines, the project was assessed with respect to a minimum set of evaluation criteria grouped into the following 9 categories: Strategic Relevance, Quality of Project Design, Nature of External Context, Effectiveness (availability of outputs, achievement of project outcomes and likelihood of impact), Financial Management, Efficiency, Monitoring and Reporting, Sustainability and the Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-cutting Issues.

12. The quality at project design was assessed during the Inception Phase of the Evaluation and can be found in the Inception Evaluation Report, available from the UNEP Evaluation Office.

13. As per UNEP guidance, the evaluation ratings are on a six point scale.[6] The UNEP Evaluation Office has developed detailed descriptions of the main elements required to be demonstrated at each level (i.e. Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory) for each evaluation criterion. The evaluator has considered all the evidence gathered during the evaluation in relation to this matrix in order to generate evaluation criteria performance ratings.

[6] Most criteria are rated against the following points on the scale: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU); Nature of External Context is rated from Highly Favourable (HF) down to Highly Unfavourable (HU); Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU).

14. A Theory of Change was reconstructed during the Inception Phase of the Evaluation[7] based on an extensive desktop review of all project documentation, and initial interviews with key project partners. This Theory of Change was then presented and discussed with project partners involved in the evaluation, inputs and suggestions for improvement were sought, and the revised version can be found in section IV of this report.

15. The strategic questions for the evaluation related to project-outcome level, as adapted from the evaluation Terms of Reference (TOR) were:

    a. What evidence is available to show that the project strengthened the legal and institutional framework for SLM? To what extent has there been a shift toward SLM in agriculture and forestry sectors? (Outcome 1.1.)[8]
    b. To what extent has the project increased capacity of Government and local stakeholders to better manage land resources? (Outcome 1.2.)[9]? Has this capacity been applied?[10]
    c. To what extent has the project been able to reduce pressures on >20,000 ha of land through the application of land use plans and enhanced understanding of SLM through SLM demonstrations and rehabilitation efforts? (Outcome 2.1)
    d. In how far has the project coordinated with other projects who have the ability to carry results forward (e.g. through the World Bank and Balkan Center, as well as through the GRN)?[11]
    e. To what extent has the project supported gender equality in participation and decision-making in SLM?[12]
    f. What evidence is there that Kolonja Municipality has taken on SLM and rehabilitation efforts beyond project closure? What evidence is there that there potential or commitment for spread to other regions? (long-lasting project impact)

16. For projects funded by the GEF, findings from the evaluation are to be uploaded in the GEF Portal. To support this process, evaluation findings related to the 5 topics of interest to the GEF are summarised in Annex 6. The intended action/results on the 5 topics were described in the GEF CEO Endorsement and Approval documents. The 5 topics are: i) performance against GEF's Core Indicator Targets; ii) engagement of stakeholders; iii) gender-responsive measures and gender result areas; iv) implementation of management measures taken against the Safeguards Plan and v) challenges and outcomes regarding the project's completed Knowledge Management Approach.

17. The evaluator developed an evaluation matrix (found in Annex X, below) which consisted of an extended set of questions based on the above strategic considerations as well as the evaluation criteria set out in the TOR.

18. A combination of methods and tools were applied during the evaluation to collect information necessary to answer all evaluation questions in an evidence-based manner. These can be found below:

    a. <u>Inception Stage and Document Review:</u> This included planning of the evaluation, development of the questions, reconstruction of the Theory of Change. For the Project Design Review (which is a part of the Inception Process) all project design documentation was reviewed.[13] The IA (Ecosystems Division), the EA (UNEP

[7] The project developed a relatively robust Theory of Change at design, but there are several weaknesses and the evaluator had to reconstruct the TOC to better understand the project intention and its causal pathways.
[8] Linked to assumptions A1 and A2/D1, as well as D3 and A4/D4 of the Theory of Change.
[9] Linked to driver D2 in the Theory of Change.
[10] Linked to assumption A7 in the Theory of Change.
[11] Linked to Driver/Assumption D5/A5 in the Theory of Change.
[12] Linked to Driver/Assumption D6/A6 in the Theory of Change.
[13] Note that for this MSP, there was no Project Document, only a CEO Endorsement Request.

Regional Office for Europe - Programme Office in Vienna, in collaboration with Kolonja Municipality) provided the majority of documentation during the Inception Stage and thus the evaluator undertook a thorough review of all project-related documents received. The full list of documents can be found in Annex 4. The inception stage also included a few key interviews with the IA and the two EA partners. The Inception Report was developed and included the evaluation matrix (included in Annex B of the Inception Report). At Inception stage and in consultation with the Evaluation Office, the field mission was discussed and field site visits were agreed upon.

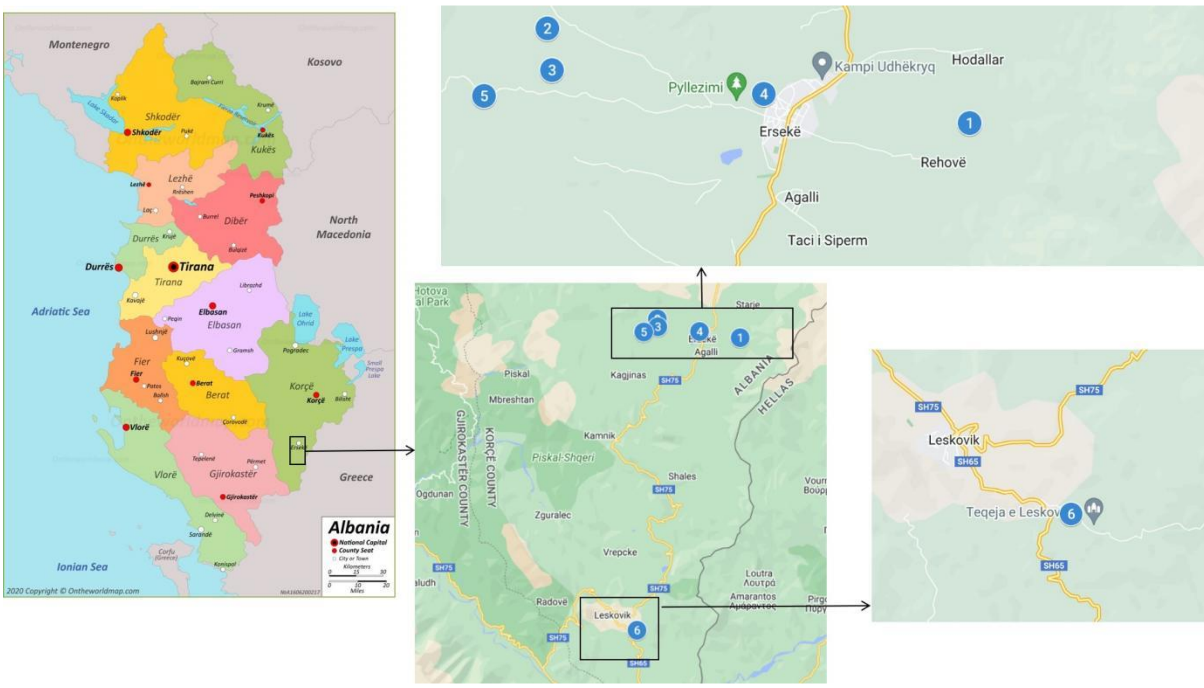
b. Pre-country Mission Stakeholder Interviews and Email Exchanges: The evaluator conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with a small set of key stakeholders during July and August, in advance of the country mission. These interviews were conducted on Zoom Professional[14] of which the majority was done using video unless internet bandwidth limitations necessitated the use of audio only. The selection of stakeholders to be interviewed was made by the evaluator, in agreement with the EAs and the IA. During the inception stage, the EA delivered an extensive list of stakeholders. During a series of discussions with the IA and the EA (most notably, the National Project Coordinator (NPC)), the evaluator noted a small set of stakeholders (nine) to contact in advance of country missions.[15]

c. Country mission: The country mission took place between 5 and 13 September 2022. The country schedule was determined by the evaluator, but scheduling and logistics were supported by the NPC. In August, a discussion between the Evaluation Office, the evaluator and the NPC helped determine which sites to visit during the country visit. These included, as shown in the map below (Figure 2), (1) Perroi i Glladolishtovnes, (2) Perroi i Varishtes, (3) an unnamed site near Erseke where a (womens') planting event was held for World Forest Day 2021, (4) an unnamed site near Erseke where the Mayor of Kolonja held a planting event for World Forest Day 2019, (5) Kabash, (6) Vithismat (near Leskovik). The country schedule and stakeholder interview list is included in Annex 2. Stakeholders for (b) and (c) were selected based on (i) their level of involvement in the project, and thus, in their contributions through interviews, support the evaluator's analysis of the project's performance against the Theory of Change, and (ii) the availability and interest. A table of respondents sample is provided below in Table 2. Generally, there was a strong representative sample. For farmers, the sample is lower for two reasons (i) the farmers were not engaged as the project had hoped and there was diminished interest (this is discussed under the results section, and in detail in the MTR), and (ii) the evaluator had requested a sample of between 8-15 farmers and the response was low (although those that did come gave considerably helpful information for the evaluation).

[14] A video conferencing and meeting platform under a Professional Subscription, https://zoom.us/
[15] Mostly for those that were not based in Albania, and with the NPC to discuss field missions, schedules and have advance interviews to understand the project stakeholder landscape in order to be most effective during the country mission.

Table 2. Respondents' sample for the Terminal Evaluation of the SLM Albania Project

Respondent Category	Entity	# People Involved (M/F)	# People Contacted (M/F)	# Respondent (M/F)	% Respondent
Project team *(those with management responsibilities)*	Implementing agency	3 (2/1)	3 (2/1)	3 (2/1)	100%
	Executing Agency	6 (1/5)	6 (1/5)	5 (0/5)	83%
Respondent Category	**# Entities Involved**	**# People Involved (M/F)**	**# People Contacted (M/F)**	**# Respondent (M/F)**	**% Respondent**
Project (implementing/ executing) partners *(receiving funds from the project)*	1	8 (7/1)	8 (7/1)	7 (6/1)	88%
Project (collaborating/ contributing[16]) partners *(not receiving funds from the project)*	10	36 (26/10)	27 (20/7)	22 (17/5)	82%
International experts	2	2 (1/1)	2 (1/1)	2 (1/1/)	100%
Bi-lateral partners	3	0 directly 3 indirectly (1/2)	3 (1/2)	3 (2/1)	100%
Farmers/Resource Users (including women's group) (incl recipients on one-time training)		- ~85	~50	6 (2/4)	7%
	-				



[16] Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc).

Figure 2. Approximate locations of sites visited during the Terminal Evaluation of the GEF/UNDP SLM Albania (GEF 9477) Project, Key: 1) Glladolishtoves, (2) Perroi i Varishtes, (3) an unnamed site near Erseke where a (womens') planting event was held for World Forest Day 2021, (4) an unnamed site near Erseke where the Mayor of Kolonja held a planting event for World Forest Day 2019, (5) Kabash, (6) Vithismat (near Leskovik) (Source: Map on left: https://ontheworldmap.com/albania/, Maps on right: Google Maps)

d. Validation of data: Once the data was gathered through the document review (a), online interviews and emails (b) and in-country interviews, document checks, and site visits (c), this was organized according to the criteria and evaluations questions as laid out in the matrix. Where data from the three areas of collection demonstrated complementarity, these were used directly in the findings. In the cases where information did not coincide, additional interviews with relevant stakeholders (either (i) through direct follow up with the NPC and through documentation verification (e.g. request for email evidence), or (ii) through triangulation with other stakeholders and written sources.

e. Preliminary Findings: The evaluator developed the preliminary findings which was circulated among the Evaluation Office, the IA and the EA in advance of a zoom discussion with the EA post-country visit.

f. Development of Terminal Evaluation Report: The evaluator developed a draft TE report and submitted it (1st) to the evaluation manager at the Evaluation Office, who reviewed it and shared it with (2nd) the IA and EAs, after which the evaluator responded and/or revised the draft for the evaluation manager to finally (3rd) share it with project stakeholders for comment. Comments were shared with the evaluator for response and/or revision for finalisation of the Terminal Evaluation Report.

19. The evaluation did not encounter any significant limitations during the evaluation.

20. Throughout this evaluation process and in the compilation of the Final Evaluation Report, efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups, in two specific ways (a) the evaluator requested for a representative sample of farmers to speak to (which was lower than requested but more time could be spent as a result with a smaller group), and (b) the evaluator requested to speak to all women who had taken part in the one-day women-specific workshop (farmers/resource users), held on 26 March 2021.

21. This evaluation was bound to the Ethical Code of Conduct as per the UNEP Evaluation policy, which includes the following key factors: (a) all interviews and information were provided in confidence and anonymously and no information can be traced back to a direct source/individual, (b) those involved in the evaluation have had the opportunity to review the evaluation findings as well as the main evaluation report, (c) the evaluator was sure to have empathy and sensitivity to different contexts and cultures in which stakeholders work. The evaluator made sure to have separate interviews with women involved in the site activities.

THE PROJECT

Context

22. The people of Albania depend on its forest and pasture ecosystems for social and economic development. However, unsustainable land use practices have resulted in land degradation, putting ecosystem health at risk. The country had various barriers to overcome in dealing with land degradation and deforestation, including fragmentation and limited harmonisation in legal frameworks and institutions dealing with sustainable land management (SLM), limited capacity and SLM show-cased examples to learn from or build on.

23. The project SLM Albania Project was designed to address these barriers by supporting the "wide-spread adoption of SLM activities in the country" by supporting "integrated landscape management planning that balances development needs and environmental services, strengthening and harmonising legal and policy frameworks for land and resource management, building capacity and coordination frameworks to undertake SLM practices, and increasing public awareness on land degradation threats". Moreover, the project sought to "address the different needs and priorities of women and men through moving away from long-standing debates about gender equality in access to land towards the mainstreaming of gender issues to achieve more gender-equitable participation in the processes and institutions that underlie all decision-making about land".[17]

24. The Kolonja municipal area (86,400 ha) was selected as the key region to focus on given that it was particularly affected by land degradation. Here, the project aimed to demonstrate integrated land use planning and ecosystem rehabilitation and showcase SLM applications for wider adoption. The project aimed to improve at least 20,000 ha of forest land through integrated land use planning and conduct rehabilitation efforts to increase the vegetative cover of 120 ha of the most degraded lands (the sites in which project activities occurred, which were visited by the evaluator, can be found in Figure 2 above).

25. The project faced two external challenges (neither of which the evaluator considers having significantly impacted the achievement of project results). These included (a) the earthquake that hit the country on 26 November 2019 where the country was put into a one month "state of emergency" which was extended to six months which caused delays in communication and overall deprioritisation of project activities by Government, and (b) the COVID-19 epidemic, which resulted in lock-down procedures between March and June 2020 and caused delays in project activities and meetings.

Results Framework

26. The project was a result of a request from the Government of Albania for GEF support to remove the existing barriers (as outlined in paragraph 22 above) to strengthen the capacities and skills of national and local government institutions and other stakeholders in Albania to undertake SLM approaches.

27. The project goal was to "enhance Albania's institutional and legislative environment to effectively mitigate the causes and negative impacts of land degradation through SLM practices".[18] The project objective was "strengthening capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and promoting sustainable land management practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration".[19] [Notably, the CEO Endorsement

[17] As noted in A.1.1. of the GEF CEO Endorsement Request.
[18] As stated in A.1.3. (alternative scenario description) of the GEF CEO Endorsement Request.
[19] As stated in B. Proejct Description Summary of the GEF CEO Endorsement Request.

Request defined ecosystem restoration in the context of having the goal towards "an ecosystem that is resilient and self-sustaining with respect to structure, species composition and function, as well as being integrated into the larger landscape and supporting sustainable livelihoods".[20] This is notable because it deviates slightly from what is considered a pure definition (a return to original-state native forest), and in the use and understanding of the term has more linkages to rehabilitation than to restoration. As this is an important distinction to be made, and was brought up during the Mid-Term Review, it will be further discussed under Changes in Implementation below.]

28. The project aimed to tackle its objective by dividing the work into two components looking at the legal and institutional framework (policy changes and capacity strengthening) and demonstrating and upscaling of SLM best practices. These, along with their associated outcomes and outputs, are stated in Table 2 below.

Table 3. SLM Albania Project Outcomes and Outputs as stated in the GEF CEO Endorsement Request, with changes accepted as a result of recommendations made by the Mid-Term Review

COMPONENTS	OUTCOMES	OUTPUTS
1. Strengthened legal and institutional framework and capacity building for SLM.	1.1. Shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors	1.1.1. SLM approaches mainstreamed into revised legal framework and land management processes 1.1.2. Strengthened Inter-Ministerial Committee to coordinate institutions, engage with local communities, and manage information flows *changed to (after Project Steering Committee meeting in February 2021, based on recommendation by MTR)* "Strengthened SLM initiatives, while engaging with local communities, and manage information flows and implementation of policies in the local level" (to match changed activities)
	1.2. Capacities and support for SLM strengthened	1.2.1. Relevant national and municipal resource managers capacitated in land use planning, SLM practices, ecosystem restoration, and use of economic instruments 1.2.2. Local landowners/resource users in Kolonja Municipality trained in utilizing SLM approaches 1.2.3. Stakeholders in Kolonja Municipality aware of land degradation issue and the importance of SLM approaches
2. Demonstrating and scaling-up of SLM best practices	2.1. Pressures on natural resources in an area covering at least 20,000 hectares are reduced through the application of SLM activities	2.1.1. Integrated land use plans in Kolonja Municipality created 2.1.2. Highly degraded forest, pasture and agricultural lands in Kolonja Municipality restored with SLM demonstrations

29. The project planned to implement the components successionally, with most activities of component 1 having been completed by year 2 and component 2 activities starting and completing in year 3.

30. The design also provided for costs management, and monitoring and evaluation, which will be covered under Project Financing below.

[20] Footnote 3 in GEF CEO Endorsement Request

Stakeholders

31. The main stakeholder groups of the project were:

a) UNEP as the IA (Ecosystems Division) and the EA (RoE) for the project;

b) National government institutions, including

i. Primarily, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment[21], which was the co-executing partner and institution within which the PMU was to be situated (this includes the Forest Police and the National Forest Agency);

ii. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development[22], which chaired the Inter-ministerial Committee on Land Protection and is the ministry with the mandate for agriculture in Albania;

iii. The Kolonja Municipality as the key partner for the work on-site and responsible for creating the enabling conditions for the implementation of all SLM activities at the local scale (including the Land Administration Protection department);

iv. The Ministry of Urban Development, which was included in design, but not in implementation (the ministry responsible for defining future development vision of country, and coordination of national and local planning);

v. The Ministry of Finance and Economy, which was not included in design, but was engaged in implementation (as a trainee in one of the capacity development activities);

vi. Other Municipalities (e.g. Maliq, Devoli, Korce) who were involved in one training event in Kolonja.

c) Research institutions and expertise for technical advice and support to the project, which include the Agricultural University of Tirana (Faculty of Forestry Sciences, and Faculty of Agriculture and Environment) and a small number of contracted international and national experts;

d) Civil Society Organisations/Non-governmental Organisations, such as the Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (included in design but not implementation, were supposed to support land use planning processes), the Urban Research Institute (not included in design, but were the main NGO implementer for the project), the Kolonja Women's Association (responsible for gender mainstreaming and empowerment in the project);

e) Importantly, farmers and farmer association (and relevant resource managers), who were the beneficiaries of the project (training, SLM demos);

f) Private sector, who were not defined but were to be involved through using economic instruments that mobilize locally available resources to ensure investment in soil conservation; this sector was finally not included other than through the economic incentives report which was pitched at a national level, and not locally (see the Findings section of this report, particularly paragraph 98).

32. Stakeholder involvement and communication channels were further analysed during the evaluation, particularly in terms of sustaining the maintenance, evolution, uptake and further use of the tools. These are further discussed in the evaluation findings.

33. The project did make an effort to disaggregate gender and allow for effective participation of women in project activities. This is discussed further in the Findings section under paragraphs 228-232.

[21] Previously, or at time of project design, "Ministry of Environment".
[22] Previously, "Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration"

Project implementation structure and partners

34. The governance structure of the project was as follows (and can be found illustrated in Figure 3):

i. UNEP Ecosystems Division (formerly Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, DEPI) was the **Implementing Agency** for the project. Thus, it was responsible for coordinating activities, monitoring the implementation of UNEP's standard monitoring and reporting procedures, and transmitting financial and progress reports to the GEF. These responsibilities are conducted through the Task Manager. The Task Manager was supported through a Programme Assistant (supporting with logistical matters and assisting in monitoring and online reporting), and the Financial Management Officer (FMO) who gave final approval to all expenditure and financial reports.

ii. The UNEP Regional Office for Europe, of which the Programme Office based in Vienna, Austria, was the **Executing Agency**. The role of the Programme Office was outlined through an Internal Cooperation Agreement with the Ecosystems Division.The Programme Office was to take responsibility for the execution of the project and its delivery through a Project Manager.[23]

iii. The **Project Management Unit (PMU)**, based in Tirana, was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the project. For the majority of the project lifespan, the PMU consisted of two individuals, namely a National Project Coordinator, and a Project Assistant (who was no longer there at Terminal Evaluation). The Project Coordinator came on board in July 2018 (the start of project implementation was 23 October 2017). Support was given to the PMU through expert consultancies, notably in-country through the Urban Research Institute (URI, which arguably implemented the majority of the project, whose team also included an expert from the Agricultural University of Tirana), and two international experts (for legal and technical aspects of the project).

iv. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) appointed a **Project Director**[24] who would server as the liaison person between the EA/PMU and the MoTE and ensure proper coordination of the project within national institutions. The Project Director was to facilitate as necessary the work of the PMU and project execution with the partners and was to ensure that the project fit into the national development and reform agenda. The Project Director was to support resource mobilization as necessary, and to discuss and agree with the PMU the project technical and financial reports before they were sent to UNEP IA. The National Forest Agency (an institution that is part of MoTE, but is housed at a different location geographically-speaking), came on board once formally established in September 2021.

v. The project had a **Project Steering Committee (PSC)**, which was responsible for overseeing and overall coordination. The Project Steering Committee changed thrice in composition (end 2017, and mid-2019, both due to

[23] The project manager manages a portfolio of projects in the Balkan Region, and on country visits to Albania the manager covers projects in implementation as well as in planning.

[24] The Project Director changed in the first year of the project when the new Minister came in and the Deputy Minister took over this role.

government changes, and then in the first quarter of 2020 as a result of the MTR). The PSC formal members were appointed by the MoEP, but participants were invited to attend by the project.[25] Members of the PSC represented the MoTE (Chaired by the Deputy Minister[26] at the time of the project lifespan) varying between three and five members, two members from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, one member representing the Municipality of Kolonja, the Director of URI was present, UNEP IA was represented by the Task Manager, for the UNEP EA, the Project Manager was the Secretariat, and the National Project Coordinator was present from the PMU. The PSC was supposed to meet twice per year, and in reality, met once every year with the exception of 2020 (where communication was done via email due to COVID-19).

vi. A **Scientific Advisory Board** was established by the project during the first two years, but just before the Mid-Review, was disbanded as it was not functioning due to lack of participation by members. A smaller technical committee was put together for the reviewing of key work related to the site rehabilitation plan and activities.

vii. The Kolonja Municipality was the **execution partner** at site level and was the government counterpart and beneficiary who would ultimately be responsible for sustaining on-site results. Farmers and communities were beneficiaries and co-implementers at site.

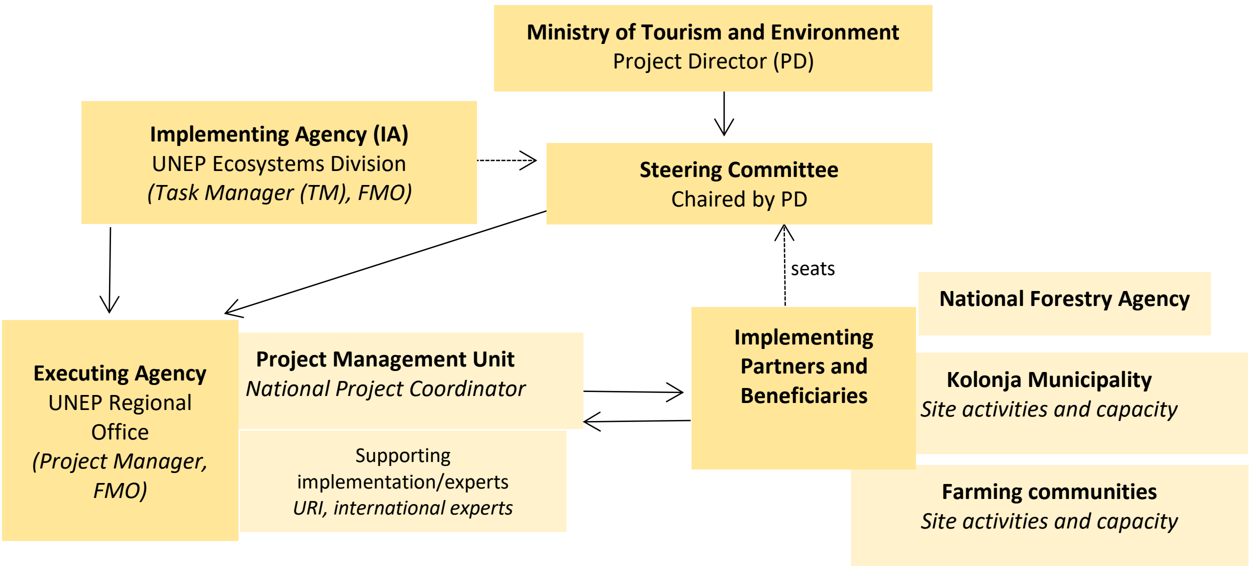


Figure 3. Simple Organigram illustrating Implementation and Governance Structure of the SLM Albania Project, as adapted from the Annex H - Implementation Arrangements of the GEF CEO Endorsement

[25] This is further clarified under the Findings section under Project Management, but it was not clear ultimately who were given formal seats and who were merely present as observers.
[26] The first meeting was chaired by the Project Director originally appointed, and then changed to the Deputy Minister who took on the position of Project Direct in year 1.

Request and updated based on information collected during the Terminal Evaluation, to reflect the situation by the end of the project.

Changes in design during implementation

35. A few changes took place during implementation of the project that warrant elaboration, these are broken up below into output-level changes, partners, and extensions.

36. Output level changes:

    (a) *Output 1.1.2.:* At Mid-Term, it was clear that the output "strengthening inter-ministerial committee" was not going to come to fruition, and thus at Mid-Term Review, all activities were changed under Output 1.1.2. The MTR advised that the output be revised completely. While the activities under the output were revised, the output was kept because output-level revisions would have necessitated GEF approval. However, the output was indeed changed, by PSC decision in February 2021, and thus re-worded to "strengthened SLM initiatives, while engaging with local communities, and manage information flows and implementation of policies at the local level".

    (b) No other output-level changes took place, but various activities were either changed/revised[27], or deleted completely[28]. This was a result of direct recommendations coming from the MTR when the MTR found that the project would not complete activities as they were laid out in project design[29], and thus reshuffled and revised them to implement what was practically feasible in the timeframe and capacity that was available.

37. Partners: In the project design, it was envisaged that the Resource Environmental Center - Albania would implement the activities, but this NGO was not functional in Albania at the time of implementation and thus URI was hired based on normal procurement procedures of UNEP.

38. Project extensions: Two no-cost extensions were approved for the project, (i) a no-cost extension for a total of 12 months from 1 August 2020 until 31 July 2021, and (ii) a no-cost extension for six months from 1 August 2021 until 31 December 2021.

39. An important note that does not have any significant impact on the results of the project, but does speak to the understanding in terms of objective and title, was made at MTR regarding whether the project was in fact dealing with restoration (as claimed) or rehabilitation (which was what was being implemented). The project design documentation (and results framework) uses these terms interchangeably but they are not synonyms in the case of forest ecosystems.[30] It is clear that the project (from the design as well as the MTR) intention was rehabilitation, and thus this wording is used for the purpose of the evaluation. This is not a change in design per se but does speak to the change of words used at the higher level in terms of discussing results.

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[27] Such as Activity 1.2.3.4. (from a best practices handbook to the development of a workshop dedicated to the perspectives of women and their work on SLM), Activity 2.1.1.1. (technical working group to focus on developing criteria for identifying, categorizing and mapping LD in Kolonja), Activity 2.1.1.2. (mapping exercise), Activity 2.1.2.2. (development of rehabilitation plans for 120 ha in 3 pilot sites), Activity 2.1.2.3. (rehabilitation of selected sites).

[28] Activities 2.1.2.4. and 2.1.2.5.

[29] For two reasons (1) technically they were not found to be practical or following a sequence of order, and (2) they were not realistic in terms of timeframe to proejct completion (even with a project extension). Please see the final MTR for more information.

[30] Rehabilitation is to ensure the long-term stability of soils, landforms and hydrology to sustain a natural ecsoystem that agrees with the future land use (enhanced, but not restored, native habitat), full restoration is the return to the original-state native forest (which in most cases with agro-forestry and pasture lands that will continue to be relied upon for intense production capacity, is not possible).

Project financing

40. The total project budget at approval was USD 10,620,000, of which the GEF allocation was USD 867,580, with planned (mostly in-kind) co-financing of USD 9,670,000.[31]

41. Total budget expenditure was USD 800,047[32] and total co-financing realized was USD 9,670,000[33]. The detailed table illustrating the actual co-financing versus planned per individual partner can be found in Annex 3. While this co-financing was signed off in the financial reporting, the evaluator could not find evidence of this co-financing in terms of expenditure reports from the actual partners who contributed these amounts.

42. The budget at design compared with expenditure is shared in Annex 3.

[31] Source: GEF CEO Endorsement Request and Project Budget Documentation

[32] This figure was derived from the final expenditure statement.

[33] Final project report.

THEORY OF CHANGE AT EVALUATION

43. The (reconstructed) Theory of Change (TOC) is a particularly important framework for assessing project performance and results-achievements of the evaluation. While it needs to maintain the elements of the original targets and intended results of the project (as the project was designed), it also needs to allow the evaluator to understand the flow from outputs through to project outcomes, intermediate states to the eventual long-lasting impact of the project, and the long-term impact the project aims to contribute to.

44. The original project design of the SLM Albania Project included a diagrammatic Theory of Change.[34] Overall, this TOC considers the causal pathways between the outputs-outcomes-intermediate states-impacts. The Mid-Term Reviewer did not comment on the original Theory of Change from the project document.[35]

45. However, the evaluator found during the inception phase that there were some issues with the original TOC, and the results framework in general, that required some reconstruction of the TOC to be fit-for-purpose for the evaluation.

46. The first issue is the fact that a large proportion of the outputs (arguably up to 6 of the 7) (could) read as outcomes (although some, e.g. the capacity-building ones, are not actionable). For the purpose of the evaluation (and not to confuse the assessing of the project logframe), it is not helpful to change the TOC to the extent that outputs need to be reworded. To this effect, the outputs were kept as is, especially as the activities as a whole do speak to the relevant outputs and this casual pathway is not questioned here. However, it is mentioned to support the improvement of project design in the future. The updated TOC, however, does include the change of Output 1.1.2 as recommended at Mid-Term Review and subsequently adopted.

47. The second issues is with the causal pathway elements within the TOC. There is a repetition of outputs and intermediate states (such as: the output for integrated land use plans which is also an intermediate state, as well as the rehabilitation of specific sites, which is also an output and an intermediate state, same as the revised legislative framework to fit SLM). Some intermediate states can be argued to be irrelevant if the outputs are achieved (e.g. local and national stakeholders are familiar with SLM policy - is that not the point of the outputs, and would this not have been achieved in the process from output to outcome?). Assumptions are either not relevant or should also be part of outputs (e.g. illegal grazing at rehabilitated sites should form part of Output 1.1.2. and 2.1.2.) or should be regarded as drivers because these are under the actual influence of the project (e.g. clearly stating the roles of stakeholders in the execution of the project, enhanced knowledge on new SLM approaches). Some assumptions and drivers are missing and have a large role to play in the progress toward impact (e.g. enhanced capacity leads to action, commitment to adopting the outputs, training is targeted and relevant).

48. For this reason, and to better guide the evaluation process, the TOC was reconstructed without losing the core intentions/ambition and elements of the original TOC; this was done at Inception stage and discussed with key stakeholders (no objections were raised by stakeholders). The changes and justifications were outlined in detail in (Table 4 of) the Inception Report and can be found in Annex IX of this report. Outcomes and outputs remained unchanged. The reconstructed TOC is presented diagrammatically in Figure 4. The accompanying description of causal pathways is provided in the following paragraphs.

[34] Annex P of the project design documentation, without an accompanying narrative in the CEO Endorsement Request.
[35] However, the MTR did recommend that one output be changed (1.1.2), which was subsequently done (to match the new activities). One important comment the MTR made that is relevant to the TOC was the clear distinction between *restoration* and *rehabilitation*, which has already been discussed (under Changes in Project Implementation above) in this report.

49. The long-term impact (in the reconstructed TOC and derived from the project's goal and objective as well as outcome level indicators) that is envisaged for the country with regard to Sustainable Land Management and Land Degradation (in the case of the project targeting forest and pasture ecosystems) is that there is "improved forest and pasture ecosystem health in Albania, and that the Land Degradation Neutrality for the country is achieved and maintained". The project's long-lasting impact (if the causal pathways all come to fruition) is that "forest and pasture ecosystems across 20,000 ha are functioning towards improved productivity and health (through, among others, improved vegetative cover and carbon storage)", and that "rehabilitation efforts/SLM initiatives is spreading to other parts of the country towards land degradation neutrality".

50. For this project's (long-lasting) impact to be reached, there are three intermediate states (IS) that needed to be achieved:

    IS1: Relevant decision-makers at local and national level increasingly integrate SLM into decision-making, including using adequate legal and economic instruments for increased land health.

    IS2: National level resource managers are able to develop programmes to support SLM nation-wide (spread beyond Kolonja) and

    IS3: Local level resource managers and users apply SLM approaches across Kolonja Municipality.

51. For project outputs to reach outcomes and intermediate states, several assumptions and drivers needed to be met. These are discussed below per causal pathway from output-outcome-intermediate state(s).

52. For the Outcome 1.1. outputs to reach the outcome (shift to more sustainable land use in policy), two assumptions needed to be met. The Output 1.1.1. (legal framework revised to include SLM) would need to have a clear process of adoption within the framework of the project (A1), and the Output 1.1.2. (strengthened SLM local policies and regulations) would need to have clear commitment to the relevant local policies, such as the grazing mechanism, LD monitoring, improved forest management plans (A2, and this is also a driver D1 because the project has some influence over the level of commitment in the engagement and co-development and buy-in process). If these measures are adopted and put in place, then there would be some shift from unsustainable land use to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors which could reach IS1 if some crosscutting assumptions and drivers are met (these are explained at the end of this section).

53. For the Outcome 1.2. outputs to reach the outcome (strengthened capacity demonstrated towards supporting SLM), all three capacity-development outputs needed to have been tailored specifically to the needs of the most appropriate stakeholders (a driver, D2). If the most appropriate capacity building was achieved, the appropriate capacities would have been strengthened. If these capacities lead to action (an assumption, A7), then the outcome would lead to IS2 (given the other cross-cutting drivers and assumptions are also met).

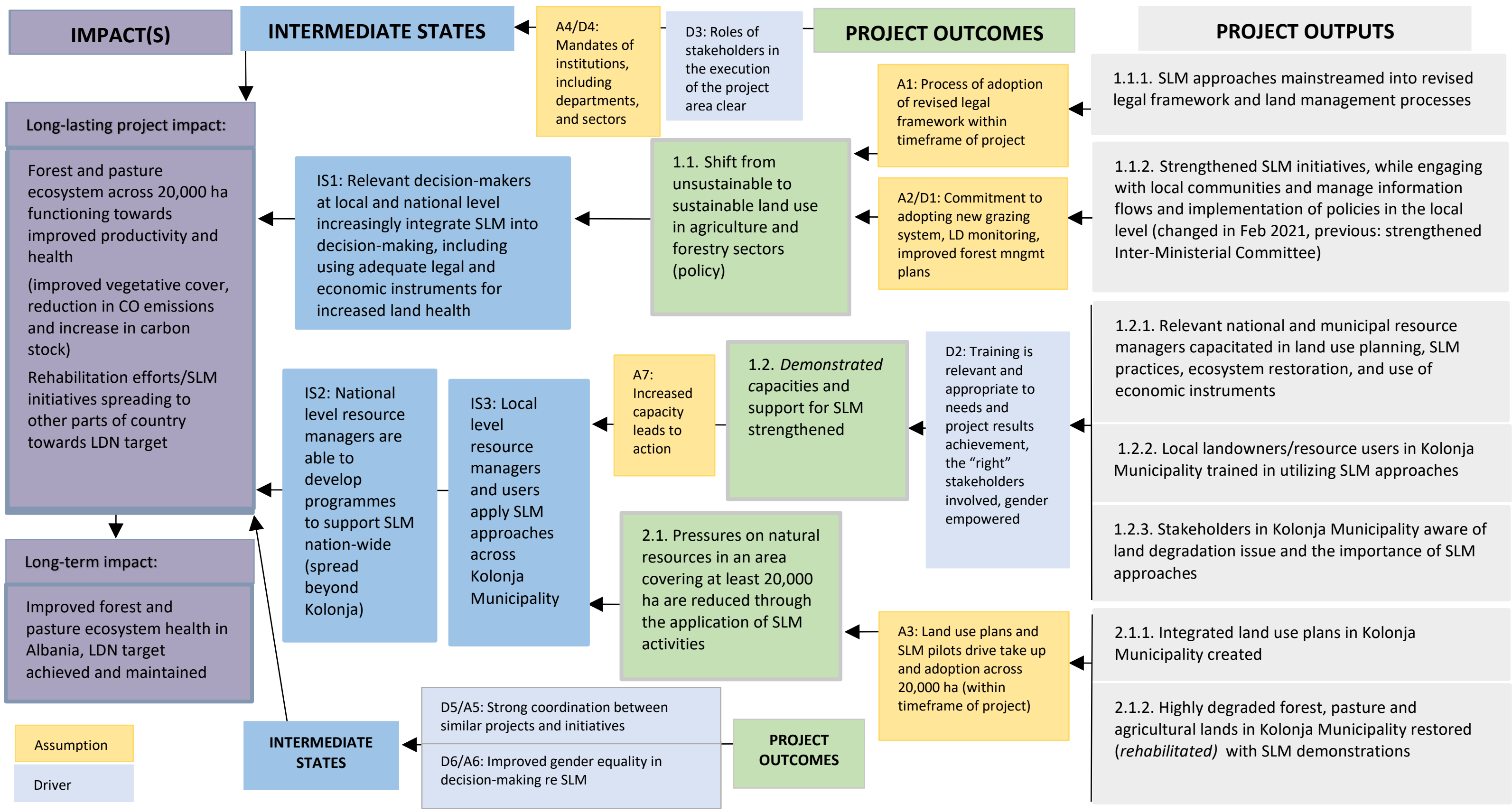
54. For the Outcome 2.1. outputs to reach the outcome (LD pressures on 20,000 ha reduced through SLM application), the SLM demonstration sites driving scale-up through land use plans would have needed to have been evidenced (at least in terms of commitment to uptake post-project) within the time-frame of the project (the evaluator notes that this is an ambitious undertaking). If this assumption that there is drive to upscale and implement the land use plans holds (A3), then pressures will have been reduced, and this successful intervention will have upscaled to the whole of Kolonja Municipality and, with time, beyond across the whole nation.

55. For the three project outcomes to reach the two intermediate states (IS1 and IS2), there are four additional cross-cutting drivers/assumptions to be met. The project needs to

make sure the roles of stakeholders in project execution are clear (D3). Although largely an assumption (A4) because mandates are stipulated within processes beyond the project's control, the project could arguably drive a part of clearing up mandates of institutions and sectors through the first outcome and its outputs (most notably through the coordinated approaches it aimed to take in bringing stakeholders together to co-revise and develop SLM planning instruments). The project aimed to drive a few interventions on gender empowerment in decision-making and participation (D6), with some sustainability and continued empowerment beyond the project's control (A6). The project also aimed to promote synergy and coordination among the similar projects and initiatives for combined effect and move to impact, this is a driver (D5), but also to an extent an assumption (A5) because it also depends on willingness and action on the part of the other project and initiative implementers to work together and support each other.

56. The extent to which assumptions and drivers held, and intermediate states are likely to be achieved and moving to impact are analysed and discussed under Evaluation Findings, Effectiveness sections (ii) and (iii) of this report.

Figure 4. Reconstructed Theory of Change diagram for the SLM Albania Project



EVALUATION FINDINGS

Strategic Relevance

A.1. Alignment to UNEP MTS and POW

57. The project falls under the Ecosystem Management Subprogramme (EMSP)[36] of the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2017. It contributes to expected accomplishment – "(a) Use of the ecosystem approach in countries to maintain ecosystem services and sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems is increased" for the period 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 respectively.

58. Because of its extension, it also aligns with Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2018-2021 and the corresponding Programme of Work (POW) 2018-2019. In particular, it aligns with MTS Subprogramme 3: Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, which aims to support countries to manage (marine) and terrestrial ecosystems through and integrated approach to maintain and restore their long-term functioning and they supply of ecosystem goods and services; two major outcomes of which are (1) health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks at national and international levels; and (2) policymakers in the public and private sector test the inclusion of the health and productivity of ecosystems in economic decision-making.

59. While the Bali Strategic Plan[37] has more of a focus on developing countries and south-south sharing, the project did align in ways in which capacity building was an important aspect in the project, although no direct mention was made to the plan.

60. Alignment to UNEP MTS and POW is rated as '**Satisfactory**'.

A.2. Alignment to Donor/Strategic Priorities

61. The GEF Trust Fund budget allocation came from the GEF-5 LD-1 Programme 1 agro-ecological intensification (USD 347,032) and LD-3 Programme 4 Scaling-up sustainable land management through the landscape approach (USD 520,548).

62. The project contributed directly, and most notably, through the core indicator 1.2. land area under effective management in production systems with improved vegetative cover by aiming to contribute 21,288 ha under improved land management (through the application of SLM approaches), in terms of its aim. The actual contribution under improved land management is much lower and discussed under Effectiveness.

63. Alignment to donor priorities in terms of focal area is rated as '**Satisfactory**'.

A.3. Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities

64. The project was a result of demand by the country. It was highly relevant in the context that it could provide valuable information for, and support, the improvement of the country's SLM legislative framework and potential related economic instruments when the country is working toward the accession to the European Union. While the new Green Deal[38] in terms of Albania focuses heavily on energy priorities, soil conservation and forestation are important activities that this project has laid some foundational support for.

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[36] Now "Healthy and Productive Ecosystems"
[37] The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building, a framework for strengthening the capacity of governments in developing countries, developed and came into force 2005.
[38] The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans - a EU-led comprehensive strategic plan against the climate crisis.

65. The National Adaptation Action Plan (NAP) under the UNCCD was developed in parallel with the project design and during the project preparation phase of the project, the NAP was completed and the project aligned to it, especially through identifying Kolonja Municipality as the site (which was a priority site in the NAP). While the country is still undergoing its process towards Land Degradation Neutrality,[39] and given the fact that this is the first LD-funded GEF project in Albania, it laid a critical and important first step towards land degradation and sustainable land management capacity and understanding in the country.

66. Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities is rated as '**Highly Satisfactory**'.

A.4. Complementarity with existing interventions

67. The project design document outlined the project's complementarity with a myriad of different initiatives, including national and regional projects. However, it was not clear on how best it could synergize and partner with, or learn from and share, with these to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

68. The MTR stated that the complementarity with existing interventions was, in principle, good, but in practice needed strengthening. It recommended that greater collaboration with the World Bank initiative as well as with an initiative of the Balkan Centre for Cooperation and Development would be helpful both in terms of learning lessons as well as enhancing sustainability and impact of the project effort.

69. The resultant management response was made evident in that some effort focused on this and several meetings and communications took place with multiple projects and bi-lateral development agencies[40], including those identified in the design document, to share work and look for avenues of collaboration tied to the project's intentions (and to ensure sustainability of results and further uptake). This, while good in terms of future UNEP-related projects and collaborations, did not have any real impact on the sustaining of this project's results.

70. Complementarity with existing interventions is rated as '**Satisfactory**'.

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

Quality of Project Design

71. A detailed review of the project design was completed and elaborated in the Inception Report of the Terminal Evaluation and thus only the summarized version will be presented here.

72. Overall, for the first project of its kind, it was ambitious with integrating SLM through rehabilitation efforts in one of the most degraded landscapes of Albania (with hopes of scaling across the country), building on country demand with a strong ownership from government and municipal actors. However, the project was not clear in terms of its activities and how it aimed to actually achieve the SLM (e.g. interventions like SLM at crop production level, versus SLM at livestock level, versus SLM at forestry level require very different interventions and institutions; it was also not clear how the project targeted activities and had a strong understanding of what to do on the ground given that the

[39] During project design, it was hoped that the LDN would have been developed by now, but by TE the LDN targets were still in the process and depended on the Agriculture Strategy to be completed.
[40] These included Environmental Programmes of the Swedish Embassy, the Balkan Centre for Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, and the French Embassy/French Agency for Development.

project preparation[41] visit there was only two days, not enough time to get a good idea for designing a project at this level).

73. The plan of also having Component 1 and Component 2 be implemented in sequence leaving some critical site interventions too late into project implementation put the project at risk, already at planning stage, of not being able to lay a strong enough foundation to sustain on-site project rehabilitation activities.

74. These issues were picked up at MTR and as a result, several recommendations were made to cut down some activities and revise others in order for the project to make realistic and practical achievements on-site, by the end of the project. These issues could have been avoided by having spent more time during the project preparation phase to understand the needs and focus the project on what was tangibly possible (versus trying to tackle as many SLM issues as possible at once).

Rating for Project Design: Moderately Satisfactory

Nature of the External Context

75. The evaluator's assessment of the nature of the external context in which the project was implemented, including any unexpected factors faced, is rated as 'moderately favourable'. While the design did have some risks identified, it could have done a better job at assessing the external context by identifying likely or at least probably issues (e.g. the change in government as a result of elections during project implementation, earthquakes being a regular occurrence with one >7 taking place roughly every five years - neither of these were mentioned as risks in the project design document).

76. The project experienced three main events that *could* have risked project results achievement, namely:

(a) at the start of the project there were assembly elections (25 June 2017) which resulted in a cabinet reshuffle and thus a change of Minister and Deputy Minister, which in turn had an influence on the leadership of the project from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (i.e. the Project Director changed in the first year from the Head of Biodiversity and Protected Areas to the Deputy Minister, and Steering Committee structural changes occurred). Assembly and parliamentary elections were held in 2021 which also resulted in changes in staff at MoEP, the biggest impact of which was felt for the project when the Deputy Minister (the champion of the project at political level) moved from their position, a new Minister and new GEF Focal Point coming in with the project needing to do hand-over of the project towards the end. This will likely have an impact on project results sustainability (this impact could have been avoided through better communication within MoEP as well as, to a lesser extent, between the project and the different actors within MoEP). This will be further elaborated on in the sustainability section as well as impact section under Evaluation Findings of this report.

(b) The earthquake which occurred on 26 November 2019 which resulted in the country being put in a state of emergency that extended over six months, which had an impact on response rates, project activity de-prioritisation in some cases as government ministries were called upon to unify in dealing with repercussions of the earthquake. These delays were, however, compensated for in the extensions to the project implementation period.

(c) COVID-19, as in most projects implemented during this time, affected the project. This was felt most during the lock-downs that were imposed between March and June 2020, as well as the longer term travel restrictions that limited visits to the sites (including by the

[41] The project received a Project Preparation Grant from the GEF.

international SLM expert), meetings at site in Kolonja and also in Tirana, as well as causing some other disruptions to planned activities of the project. These delays were, however, compensated for in the extensions to the project implementation period.

77. While the evaluator believes that (a) and (b) could have been planned (in some ways) for in the project design, given that these events are not outlier occurrences in Albania, the effects of the third could have been mitigated by having had designed activities to be conducted earlier on in the project implementation sequencing plans. This said, the evaluator has not found evidence that these events had a significant impact on project results achievement.

Rating for Nature of the external context: Moderately Favourable

Effectiveness

Availability of Outputs

Output 1.1.1. SLM approaches mainstreamed into revised legal framework and land management process

78. This output was fully delivered, but likely with challenges to sustainability.

79. The project final reporting[42] stated that this output had been achieved through the delivery by the project of the legal and institutional gap analysis, sublegal acts, "knowledge delivered" nationally to all stakeholders, and consensus being reached by all stakeholders on what was needed to mainstream SLM approaches into the land management process in Albania.

80. A comprehensive legal assessment was completed through the project which identified gaps in all relevant sectors related to SLM. Here on-going projects and processes for Albania's EU accession were identified and examined in relation to the project (which was a good effort to align national priorities with SLM priorities).

81. The project did a good job at holding several discussions with the MoTE and MARD to gather input based on what gaps would be possible to fill in this legal assessment which would be prioritised. Technical workshops were held with several other partners.[43] As a result, and due to an ongoing legal reform in the sector of forestry, the MoTE and the PSC requested that the project focus mainly on the new Forestry Law that was being approved (and is now in force) through drafting of project-relevant sub-legal acts.

82. Two bylaws (sub-legal acts)[44] to facilitate the implementation of the Law on Forest were identified, drafted, and delivered to the MoTE. Project documentation and other evidence[45] demonstrates that the two by-laws drafted were widely discussed with the MoTE, Tirana Agricultural University, and the National Forest Agency (NFA). However, differing expectations and perceptions of the content of the by-laws by some proponents with the MoTE (who are mandated to champion them through to being adopted) have resulted in

[42] PIR 2022, and Project Final Report.
[43] The project held several consultations with other partners,such as the World Bank (who had been instrumental in supporting the development of the Forestry Law), as well as the Austrian Development Agency etc. The final report was distributed to all stakeholders and Project Steering Committee (PSC). It also held workshops with Kolonja Municipality with women's associations, loca farmers, etc.
[44] Forestry by-law pursuant to Article 4/2 Ministerial decision on the criteria for the classification of the forests, Forestry by-law pursuant to Article 16/4 Ministerial Guideline on the general criteria of professionalism for the appointment of employees of the structure responsible for forestry in municipalities.
[45] Several interviews and email communications viewed by the Evaluator.

the fact that they, at the point of the Terminal Evaluation, are unlikely to be taken up to adoption.[46]

83. The project, under this output, also aimed to identify SLM priorities to be mainstreamed in multi-sectoral strategies and plans tackling land management. The project held several consultations (re above) on the gaps. The most notable contribution to this activity was a handbook identifying SLM priorities (following from the legal gap analysis already done) to be used as a tool to facilitate national stakeholders to understand the general principles of SLM and translate these into respective land use planning tools. It also outlined the framework on how SLM could be mainstreamed across country strategies. The hope was that this would be championed by MoTE to the Prime Minister level, through the newly created agency SASPAC, responsible for donor coordination and the drafting of the National Strategy for Development and Integration, in order to harmonize and mainstream SLM into this strategy. Not only was this not done, but the evaluator found that the MoTE proponents interviewed did not have recollection of the handbook.[47]

Output 1.2. Strengthened SLM initiatives, while engaging with local communities, and manage information flows and implementation of policies at the local level

84. This output was changed by PSC decision in February 2021 from "Strengthening the role of the Inter-ministerial State Committee on Land Protection and Rehabilitation in relation to institutional coordination and partnership building for SLM" to what it now reads (as Output 1.2 above).

85. The MTR recommended cutting the originally planned output completely and recommended several other local-level legal mechanisms instead that were more practically achievable. The project took on these activities and deleted the activities that had originally been designed under this output but decided to *not* change the output itself, which would have required a more formal process through the GEF Secretariat. However, in February 2021, in the project's last year of implementation, the PSC decided to change the output. For this reason, this output and its activities do not entirely fit under the set of outputs that were geared toward a more strategic, national level. The MTR went into detail as to the need for this output to be changed which the evaluator will not repeat here, suffice to say that while the inter-ministerial committee had been established, it was never functional and despite several efforts by the project, through its PSC Chair and Project Director, who had a politically prominent position at the time, never met (the meeting would have to have been called by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who is the formal chair of the committee).

86. So, in short, this entire output and its three activities were added/completely revised, at MTR.

87. Considering this, the output was fully delivered.

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[46] Several interviews were held to get to the bottom of this without a definitive answer. Evidence suggests that these proponents were consulted - in one of these consultations there was some debate about what the by-law intended to achieve and it appears that the request to the project was to change sections in the bylaws which the bylaw cannot include as this section would needed to have been changed in the Forestry Law itself. The two by-laws were delivered and resulted in, what the evaluator believes, a representative compromise in quality and practicality, but was not accepted by MoTE. In discussions with the NFA, which had been involved in these toward the end of the project when the NFA was being institutionalised, they had edited these by-laws to an acceptable state within the process of consultation. They had not heard anything again, but in early 2022, the MoTE Forestry Branch contacted the NFA for support for developing several by-laws under the Forestry Law, of which one of the two the project had already developed, were included in the request. They had delivered the one as is, and were awaiting feedback at the time of the Terminal Evaluation. The evaluator was informed that this would be clarified during the closing meeting; upon reviewing the closing meeting report in the final iteration of this TE report, it was noted that the the forest classification sub-legal act was expected soon, and the second sublegal act on foresty staff would be approved in the next year - although this was not confirmed directly by the MTE in the report.

[47] The handbook was delivered to them, as evidenced by email communications between the project and the MoTE.

88. The project did well to achieve the revised output in what was a relatively short time-frame. Final project reporting states that SLM initiatives were undertaken in Kolonja Municipality through meetings, trainings, practical applications and awareness raising activities with resource users, while the presence of policy makers and the NFA were critical in exchanging feedback, expressing needs and gaps in implementation, monitoring, and reporting at the municipal level to national level.

89. A new municipal grazing permit system (including monitoring on LD-specific indicators) was co-developed with the municipality and partners; through further consultation with local experts a system was proposed that could be easily assimilated into the local level at Kolonja Municipality. A draft Decision of the Municipal Council (DMC) was delivered to the Kolonja Municipality.[48] The evaluator was informed by the Municipality that this mechanism was still in the process of being adopted, but confirmed that it would be adopted and would subsequently be enforced.[49]

90. A proposed draft of monitoring indicators was submitted by the international SLM expert hired which was used as a foundation on which local experts and the municipality could build from and edit based on the context (mostly in terms of what was feasibly achievable within the capacity and resource limits of the unit responsible for monitoring forests and pastures in Kolonja Municipality). After much deliberation on these[50], a final set of indicators were proposed to be adopted by the Municipality (and connected in terms of report to the NFA). During the country mission, almost a year after the indicators had been developed, the evaluator could not find evidence that the indicators were being used in monitoring (at the rehabilitated sites, nor in general).

91. The last activity under this output was to facilitate the Kolonja Municipality (and the NFA) in developing improved management plans. Specific site plans for 120 ha of degraded forest in Kolonja Municipality was drafted and approved by both Kolonja and the NFA, with the intention of replicating this model in other future oriented municipalities in Albania. The evaluator found that resources were restricted to do this and while the intention is there, the replication will likely not happen unless external funding becomes available.[51]

<u>Output 1.2.1. Relevant national and municipal resource managers capacitated in land use planning, SLM practices, ecosystem restoration, and use of economic instruments</u>

92. This output was fully delivered, but in variable levels of quality, which are further discussed below.

93. The project final reporting (for which evidence was provided to the evaluator in the project implementation documentation), outlined that trainings were organised in the local, national, and international context, with a combination of classroom learning and practical application with field visits to demonstrate SLM good practice as well as forest rehabilitation interventions (and management, novel to what was already known among staff).

94. The first activity was an assessment of institutional capacities both at national and at local level to identify needs and challenges of all relevant stakeholders. Questionnaires were sent out to both institutional and local representatives, including for MoTE, MARD, and the Land Administration and Protection Directorate in 12 regions of Albania, as well as 6

[48] The draft proposes a new tariffing system based on the pasture carrying capacity. An associated annex explaining carrying capacity is also attached to the draft DMC. The new method proposed for tariff calculation and awarding contracts for pasture use takes into account the number of livestock, the period of grazing, and the type of land considered for grazing. The draft DMC and accompanying Annex were shared with stakeholders and were further discussed with municipal staff and the community of Kolonja.
[49] Interviews with several Municipal staff.
[50] Mainly
[51] Several interviews during country mission.

municipalities within the Korça Region. The institutional questionnaires covered the baseline capacity, and a strong assessment was delivered.

95. For the institutional training, a five-day training was organised in Ossiach, Austria in April 2019, for which the training programme and modules had been derived from the institutional capacity assessment. A total of 16 participants were sponsored by the project to attend the training. The MTR has already commented on the appropriateness (or lack of, in some cases) of the participants that attended the training. Those proponents who spoke of this training during the Terminal Evaluation spoke of the fact that they felt that the training, while interesting and helpful, was not applicable (because Austria "was much further ahead in the forest management" or because the persons do not work directly in forest management). However, most proponents appreciated having gone and did learn a lot in terms of best practice. While the evaluator agrees with the MTR that more people could have been trained if it had taken place in Albania, the impact made on learning from a country conducting "good practice" forest management can sometimes be more significant in qualitative terms. In this case, at least not by the time of TE, the impact was not clear in terms of behaviour change. The MTR recommended that all further project training should take place in Albania, which was adhered to until project completion.

96. The third activity under this output was to conduct trainings that would transfer competencies from central to local government. A two-day training-of-trainers (TOT) took place in June 2021 where 16 participants from the MoTE, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, National Forest Agency, Center for Transfer of Agricultural Technologies, were invited. The TOT addressed themes on SLM for forests and pastures where Day 1 focused on classroom presentations and workshops on land degradation identification, definition of national vocabulary in the field of forestry (as an important tool for reporting and mapping), and introduction to online tools such as EuroVegMap2.0 and WOCAT. Day 2 included onsite learning in the mountains of Dajti-Shen Gjergj and Bize, close to Tirana, focusing on applying the methodology that utilized bio-indicators, bio-climatic zones, landcover and the dynamic stages of forest vegetation in order to identify the level of land degradation and plan rehabilitation measures.

97. This training was further adapted and replicated in close collaboration with the National Forest Agency in order to be able to transfer this knowledge to the forest and pasture managers and users of Kolonja Municipality in June 2021. During this training, the staff of Kolonja municipality and relevant participants also discussed the best way forward in undertaking the rehabilitation of the selected sites, by the project, while proposing that a tailored approach had to be followed for each site in order to achieve the best results, with a plan to engage community members (among the 50 households, see output below) in supporting the rehabilitation activities.

98. The last activity was to identify and develop the most adequate legal and economic instruments for stimulating investment into (sustainable) land productivity. A basic analysis was done, and an 18-page report "Report on economic instruments legislative gap analysis and recommendations for revision" was developed as a product which includes more depth on EU-relevant legislation and policies (summarized in terms of gaps) in soil, water resources, biodiversity, forestry, agriculture and industrial pollution. It then provides a description of EU best practices for SLM, some of which are basic economic instruments e.g. the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) which has provision for Geering Payment. The evaluator finds this report would have been more helpful if it had been a first foundational report on e.g. a valuation on ecosystems and biodiversity, or a resource mobilisation strategy with economic instruments, relevant to SLM, agriculture and forestry. This project report does not provide real economic-incentive suggestions that Albania might think feasible to take up to stimulate investments into SLM in the country

and given the lack of knowledge of this report among project proponents interviewed at MoTE, it is unlikely this report will be taken up further.[52]

<u>Output 1.2.2. Local landowners/resource users in Kolonja Municipality trained in and utilizing SLM approaches</u>

99. This output was partially delivered.

100. The first activity was to carry out an assessment of the capacity of forest and pasture users. The MTR has already commented that the questions in the questionnaires that were used to assess training needs were not appropriate in understanding the needs. Based on reviewing the questionnaires, the evaluator agrees with this earlier finding.

101. In collaboration with the officials from Kolonja Municipality, farming households were identified and included in training activities. Three community workshops/training events were held: (1) the first one was related to land protection which included presentations on where the degraded land is, where the land is at risk of flood, (2) a workshop to understand the problems farmers faced which apparently was side-tracked and became more an airing of grievances unrelated to land degradation[53], and (3) a workshop presenting the feedback and conclusions from the previous two workshops. When the evaluator was able to speak to two farmers one-on-one, they found that the farmers benefited from additional technical services provided by the trainer of the workshops, who provided them with technical advice and support on SLM applications which they then took forward themselves.

102. A TOT took place at Kolonja Municipality and other municipalities from Korçe region, this has already been mentioned above under the previous output, however the final project reporting placed it under the training of local forest owners which does not make sense to the evaluator.

<u>Output 1.2.3. Stakeholders in Kolonja Municipality are aware of land degradation issues and the importance of SLM approaches</u>

103. This output was fully delivered.

104. A communication strategy for the project was completed which included target audiences and specific activities and which was implemented over the course of the project. The strategy was of satisfactory quality but missed an element of stakeholder/target group analysis (e.g. the pathways to influence behaviour change through strategic communications).

105. A total of six awareness raising activities were held over the five years, usually taking place during International Forest Day, World Environment Day, or World Soil Day. At these events, tree planting took place, presentations were held, environmental movies were shown, essay competitions were held.54

106. Project briefs and pamphlets, social media, and a promotional video was developed and shared throughout the project and housed in the office described in the paragraph below.

107. The last activity of this output was to establish a local platform/communication office for organizing informative and interactive workshops for sharing of information and experiences. This local office was established in 2019 within the Municipality of Kolonja

[52] The evaluator will provide a recommendation to the project in this regard.

[53] Land ownership issues, e.g. one farmer spoke for 30 minutes about how a family member had taken the more fertile land with better access to water.

[54] These included: World Environment Day 5 June 2018, World Soil Day 5 December 2018, World Forest Day 18 March 2019 on which the Mayor of Kolonja attended and 300 chestnuts were planted near Erseke, World Soil Day 5 December 2020, International Forest Day 18 March 2021 where the women's workshop took place and thereafter the same women planted 300 trees (*Acacia spp* and *Pinus negra spp)*. In addition, the project also was showcased through the International Congress for Soil Conservation 26-28 Septmber 2019.

which hosted all awareness materials, reports and analyses. The municipality updated its website, and social media was utilized to share promotional materials. Towards the end of the project, there was a change in staff and the person who was running the office and would have likely continued sustaining the communications aspects left, and there was not an effective replacement, meaning that the office/platform likely ended with the project.

Output 2.1.1. Integrated land use plans in Kolonja Municipality created

108. The activities for this output were changed significantly at MTR, made more practical and feasible in the time that was available. It was planned to work on forest managements plans which was found to be inappropriate at MTR and thus a recommendation was made to integrate land use/rehabilitation plans into the current forest management plans to include sustainable land management and land degradation issues.

109. When thinking about actual “integrated land use plans” for the whole area, then this output has only been partially achieved. This said, in terms of the MTR request to change the output activities, and strictly looking at these, then they were fully achieved.

110. An advisory technical working group was set up to support the development of criteria for identifying, categorizing and mapping degraded forest and pastureland; this group met several times to review and advise on Outputs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

111. The 21,288 ha of Kolonja was mapped in order to identify and prioritise degraded land. On-site surveying was conducted to complement the mapping and to prioritise sites needed for intervention. Following the data collection, a report describing the status of the selected sites was compiled, accompanied by GIS maps, along with best practice examples for SLM and rehabilitation. These GIS maps are not being used currently by the staff in Kolonja, from interviews and office visits, it appears that only map print outs are used at the local level.

Output 1.1.2. Highly degraded forest, pastures and agricultural lands in Kolonja Municipality restored with SLM demonstrations

112. This output was partially delivered.

113. Mapping was conducted of degraded sites by experts (Agricultural University of Tirana and Kolonja Municipality Forestry staff) and three priority sites were selected through the technical committee. A rehabilitation plan was developed for 120 ha of degraded forest and pastureland in the three pilot sites, the draft was reviewed by all relevant stakeholders and approved for implementation. The evaluator was told that the Municipality of Kolonja was actively seeking funding to implement the plan.[55]

114. Three priority sites were chosen as part of the rehabilitation plan (120 ha): (1) Perroi i Varishtes, (2) Vithismat Leskovik, and (3) Kabash. Of these, site rehabilitation activities took place in the last month of the project (December 2021) at two sites (2 ha Perroi i Varishtes, 4 ha Kabash). The evaluator visited all three sites, as well as two additional sites where tree planting occurred during outreach activities. The evaluator will discuss these here too as the project team considers these sites as part of rehabilitation.

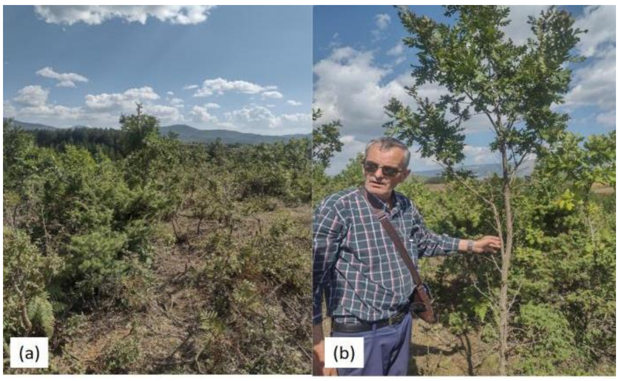
115. The field visits during the evaluation found that the majority of the rehabilitation interventions have failed. At Perroi i Varishtes, where 3,300 Pinus negra spp were planted over 2 ha, the success rate was only 30% at time of evaluation.[56] The reason for this is that the majority of the pine seedlings had died due to lack of water (August was

[55] Interviews with Municipality of Kolonja leadership. More will be elaborated on in the sustainability section of this report.
[56] This is based on a self-assessment done by the evaluator on two quadrant counts, each quadrant 6X6m where there should have been 100 trees (12 in the first quadrant, 24 in the second), and then doing basic observation of the whole area. In August 2022, the forestry staff did an inspection and found 42% success rate of the area by walking the entire 2 ha and counting the dead trees.

apparently an extremely dry month). Neither this area, nor the others, were serviced in the 8 months since the activities were done. The forestry staff had monitored the two sites regularly (the evaluator was provided with the monitoring sheets), but there were no measures put in place to deal with any negative results from monitoring. The forestry staff claimed the reason for not servicing the areas was lack of funds.[57] While it is true that if the project had implemented these activities earlier, then it could have put funds aside for some minimal servicing. However, the agreement and commitment from the Municipality was clear in terms of the implementation of the rehabilitation plan, which included servicing. The Municipality had worked at sourcing funds to plant more trees, but the evaluator finds this effort futile if the Municipality is not able to even minimally maintain the areas where planting had been done. The failure of this site could have been avoided at minimal cost to the Municipality (probably by using two water trucks twice during the month of August to irrigate the area in the time of drought).

Figure 5. Photos taken at Perroi i Varishtes, (a) overlooking the 2 ha while doing quadrant walks to assess rehabilitation effort sustainability, (b) interviews with the workers who conducted the planting activity, (c) dead pine seedling, (d) live pine seedling. Source: Justine Braby (a,c,d) Valmira Bozgo (b)

116. The same could be said, in terms of minimal servicing and follow up, for the two sites where planting was done as part of outreach (International Forest Day 18 March 2019 where 300 chestnuts were planted and apparently later “ripped out” by neighbouring communities for their gardens - this should have been followed up by the project itself, and International Forest Day 18 March 2021 where 300 pine and acacia species were planted and of which the majority had died by the time of the evaluation field visit, also something that could have been followed up by the project).[58]



[57] Other similar projects, the workers who had planted told the evaluator, usually had longer-term funds in place to support servicing.
[58] Given that these were activities that could have been checked up on in terms of monitoring within the project timeframe, it is disappointing to see that this was not done by the PMU.

Figure 6. Photos of Kabash, where rehabilitation activities in terms of thinning were done, (a) outlook on the 4 ha of Kabash rehab site, and (b) Mr Edmond Prifti demonstrating the thinning work completed. Source: Justine Braby

117. At Kabash, where thinning of bush was done for 4 ha, and the cut branches and debris were left among the trees as mulch to re-nutrify the soil (an activity that apparently was new to the Forestry Staff and appreciated in terms of new learning), the rehabilitation seemed to have been sustained. This was also the only site where the nearby community was actively involved and took ownership and also seemed to have protected it from grazing and browsing while shoots came up in the months since thinning (in relation to Perroi, where professional workers were employed and paid, and the other two which were superficial outreach activities in which only a few were planted by community members as part of the event with the rest being planted by paid workers). This did not have implications on the servicing (which was also not done), but the evaluator could see that the area had benefited from the rehabilitation activity.

<u>OVERALL AVAILABILITY OF OUTPUTS FINDINGS</u>

118. Overall, the delivery of project outputs was variable. The MTR did a good job at revising activities to allow the project to achieve them as practically as possible, and in most cases, this supported the project in achieving its outputs.

119. Some key deliverables of the project were found to be of good quality, and a value add to the country.59 These include in particular the legal gap assessment, the institutional assessment and the SLM handbook. The site rehabilitation plan was a practical compromise between high quality and what was achievable with limited capacity and resources available. The sustainability and uptake of these key project deliverables, is, in most cases, questionable.60

120. The training of trainers is a good model to be replicated across the municipalities if the NFA is able to source the funds. The local level training could have benefited by more applied work with farmers and resource users (as was done in limited cases through the championship of the local expert who took this on their own capacity).

121. The project made a strong effort in its communication and outreach activities, following a communication strategy but also responding to demand and being opportunistic where it could to capitalise on outreach opportunities, using big events, and allowing senior officials to connect with the project; it also attempted to sustain project results communication by supporting the Kolonja Municipality to house materials and use its social media platforms, and providing opportunities for school children to engage.

122. However, the site rehabilitation work, arguably one of the key elements to the project when thinking of what it tried to achieve, is ultimately the weakest point of the project.

123. Availability of Outputs is rated as 'Moderately Satisfactory'.

Achievement of Project Outcomes

124. The achievement of the project's objective, namely "strengthening the capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and promoting sustainable land management (SLM) practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration" was evaluated based on the three outcomes of the project.

[59] Based on evaluator opinion as well as reinforced by experts.
[60] To be further elaborated on in the sustainability section of this report.

125. Outcome 1.1: Shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture[61] and forestry sectors

Strategic Question: *what evidence is available to show that the project strengthened the legal and institutional framework for SLM? To what extent has there been a shift toward SLM in (agriculture and) forestry sector(s)?*

126. This outcome has been partially achieved.

127. Two logical framework indicators were used to measure the achievement of this outcome, namely (i) new comprehensive law on land management for adoption by the Government (target: new land management law/revisions adopted by Government), and (ii) at least one national coordinated multi-sectoral land management strategy designed and submitted (multi-sectoral management strategy approved by Government).

128. For (i), the project certainly made good efforts and laid foundations towards understanding the legal gaps and aligned with the needs and priorities of the Government at the time vis-a-vis the new Forest law and supporting in getting two (of many) by-laws developed under this new law. However, in terms of the ambition and the target, two small sub-legal acts that are specific to a small sub-section of a forest act is hardly "a new comprehensive law on land management". Additionally, the evaluator found no evidence that even these two by-laws had been adopted (or even accepted or championed for adoption) at the levels they should have been.

129. For (ii), the Handbook on SLM priorities to be mainstreamed in multi-sectoral strategies and plans tackling land management was a useful report in supporting the Government in understand how to mainstream SLM across country strategies. However, this Handbook (which was released in 2020) had still not found traction even among the MoTE as far as acceptance and/or adoption is concerned by the time of the evaluation (in 2022).

130. The outcome also (through the changes to the output at MTR) included several local-level adoptions of e.g. the grazing mechanisms, the LD monitoring and the improved forest management through the rehabilitation plan. While it is likely that these will be moved forward at municipal level, the enforcement and practice of these will depend on resources (both human and financial) becoming available which had not happened by the time of the evaluation.

131. Based on the legal framework and deliverables review, project communications, and extensive interviews in-country, the following findings are presented:

(a) The project laid the foundation towards strengthening the legal and institutional framework through the delivery of legal framework reporting and through bringing all relevant actors together to discuss gaps in the legal and institutional settings for SLM. In other words, it certainly lifted the SLM agenda at these levels;

(b) The project did well to address the needs of the Government by supporting the development of by-laws but may have lost its own direction in the myriad of expectations and demands coming from the different institutions in what was needed and thus may have lost sight of the actual larger goal of this outcome (i.e. the project needed more leadership and drive with regard to prioritising SLM on the general agenda);

(c) The fact that both the by-laws and the Handbook had not been adopted (and there was no evidence to suggest that they would be) is partly because of this lack of leadership outlined under (b) above, with more strategic in-house

[61] At the MTR, the focus changed to only forestry, although project implementation still had some agriculture components up until the end, e.g. through SLM training, the grazing mechanism, etc

communication, the project may have at least achieved the uptake and championship of these SLM-supportive legal deliverables;

(d) That said, the evaluator is sure that the information, at least for the by-laws, will be used to inform those by-laws that will eventually move forward and be adopted;

(e) In short, the evaluator believes that while the project certainly had added value by delivering its outputs toward this outcome and laying a foundation toward SLM mainstreaming in the policy environment of Albania, it falls short in having had its ambitions for adoption met.

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132. The process of the outputs reaching outcomes necessitated two assumptions be met, namely that the process of adoption of revised legal framework takes place within the timeframe of the project (it did not), and that there was commitment to adopting the new grazing system, LD monitoring and improved forest management (partial, for the grazing system the evaluator was told it was being adopted, the LD monitoring was not taking place, and the rehabilitation plan funds were being sought to implement but no implementation had been done since the rehabilitation pilot activities of the project).

133. Despite these assumptions not being completely met, the outcome still has the potential to move to IS1 (relevant decision-makers at local and national level increasingly integrate SLM into decision-making, including using adequate legal and economic instruments). The project has supported enough SLM integration in its capacity development and its delivery of legal support infrastructure to allow for a minimal shift in the country that could be further built on, but without it being built on, this shift will likely stay minimal.

Outcome 1.2: *Demonstrated* capacities and support for SLM strengthened

Strategic question: *to what extent has the project increased capacity of Government and local stakeholders to better manage land resources?*

134. This outcome has been partially achieved.

135. Two logical indicators were used to measure the outcome achievement, namely (i) 9 point increase in the Capacity Development Scorecard for the relevant institutions (target - 25), and (ii) at least 50 households trained in SLM practices, at least 50 households had adopted SLM practices (target - 50).

136. The project results report itself had indicated a Moderately Satisfactory level of achievement of these two targets. The capacity development scorecard level was slightly under the target (at 23), and the final project reporting is vague in terms of the level of training of the 50 households. While 50 households had been selected, not the same households were involved in the capacity assessment, or all the trainings, or all the rehabilitation activities.62 The failure of the project to engage the same households (including an effective percentage of women) shows the misalignment of the project goals with those of the community (with a few exceptions as stated under output availability above where some farmers were supported with extension services in addition to the project delivery) and indicates a failure to achieve this indicator.

137. For outputs to reach outcome in the TOC, the training that occurred needed to have been relevant and appropriate for project results achievement. This was not the case at community level. In some cases it was also not for the international training (where a number of participants were not appropriate for the results achievement). Where the

[62] This was due to (a) the fact that households were not incentivised as the project activities took place on public land, (b) it ended up focusing on forestry and not as much on agriculture, and (c) other reasons e.g. they were busy, the Municipality could not get the same people twice.

training was effective and had the "right" participants (i.e. participants appropriate for the intended result, indicator and targets) was for the TOTs both at national, and at municipal level.

138. The project made an effort to have a separate outdoor workshop for women (8 women and 1 man attended at a time when COVID-19 conditions restricted the size of in-person meetings) to discuss access to the market and SLM in general, which was useful to the women and was further applied by women interviewed in the evaluation. The objectives of the workshop were to: develop the capacities of participants to understand the links between gender and land management and forestry; inform participants about the international and national legal frameworks and their implications for promoting gender equality in land management and forestry; discuss with participants obstacles related to gender inequalities in the area of land management and forestry and inform and discuss with participants on measures to overpass the current gender inequalities in the area of land management and forestry.

139. For the outcome to reach IS3 (local level resource managers and users apply SLM approaches across Kolonja Municipality) is not likely except in smaller fragmented individual situations, and through to IS2 (national level resource managers are able to develop programmes to support SLM nation-wide spread) will likely to only be done through the capacity development model of the TOTs (there are no plans in place to do this unless external funding becomes available to NFA).

140. Given the above findings, the evaluator finds that capacities certainly have been strengthened, and in some cases these have been applied, but whether there is significance in the application at the point of evaluation is questionable (in terms of moving toward the IS3 and 2).

<u>Outcome 2.1: Pressures on natural resources in an area covering at least 20,000 ha are reduced through the application of SLM activities</u>

Strategic question: *to what extent has the project been able to reduce pressures on more than 20,000 ha of land through the application of land use plans and enhanced understanding of SLM through SLM demonstrations and rehabilitation efforts?*

141. This outcome has been partially achieved.

142. The two indicators used to measure the achievement of this outcome in the logical framework included (i) no. of integrated land use plans approved and under implementation for 21,288 ha, and (ii) increased vegetative cover on at least 120 ha of degraded land based on restoration activities. The final project reporting states that for (i) the MTR recommended a change here and thus with this change there was a somewhat successful move forward in that mapping of degraded forest and pasture land had been done for the 21,288 ha - a step towards understanding the situation and reducing pressures on this land. For (ii) it stated that this was only half achieved because while there was a rehabilitation plan adopted for 120 ha with commitment from the municipality to implement the plan, the project contributed to small rehabilitation activities at some pilot sites.

143. The project, overall, only managed to understand the land degradation situation better for the 21,288 ha and have authorities understand better what needed to be, and could be, done. The action will depend on the prioritisation and importance of healthy forests and pasturelands to the Municipality. Given its hope to grow the economy of Erseke through attracting tourism and expat "online" professionals through its natural heritage might of course support investment into keeping these forests and pasturelands healthy.63

[63] Interviews with Municipal leadership.

144. The project was only able to actually achieve rehabilitation activities on 6 ha of the land (plus some outreach level activities on approximately 2 ha; overall a small fraction of what was planned, apparently this was due to budget limitations).[64] The fact that the rehabilitation intervention sites were not maintained or serviced (for the outreach sites even during the project) does not bode well for the hope of the implementation of the 120 ha rehabilitation plan. The evaluator was assured that the Municipality was sourcing funding to implement the rehabilitation plan. In fact, during the evaluation mission, the Municipality had secured 2,000 pine trees through a sponsorship from the BMW Foundation and were going to plant them later in the year. However, given that minimal servicing to the existing rehabilitation areas could not be done and led to the failure of these sites, the evaluator is unconvinced that planting more trees will be an effective measure.

145. The only evidence that the evaluator could see in terms of SLM application was the two farmers who had been supported by the expert local trainer through additional extension services to their context-specific few hectares where they got, and used, valuable guidance to improve their productivity while applying SLM on their piece of land. This, while initiated through the workshops run by the project, cannot be claimed as a direct intervention by the project as the trainer did this work outside of the project.

146. The Municipality of Kolonja certainly received valuable tools to improve forest management and reduce land degradation, through the mapping of its entire area, through the grazing directive, through LD monitoring tools, and through the site rehabilitation plan. But there is not enough evidence provided during the evaluation to suggest that pressures have in fact been reduced on more than 20,000 ha (the only evidence that really shows behavioural action is the grazing mechanism that was adopted but even this has not been put into force).

147. Achievement of Outcomes is rated as 'Moderately Satisfactory'.

Likelihood of Impact

Strategic question: *what evidence is there that Kolonja Municipality has taken on SLM and rehabilitation efforts beyond closure? What evidence is there that there is potential or commitment to spread to other regions?*

148. Based on the findings on the outcomes and their move to the intermediate states above, the evaluator puts forward the following evidence (or lack there-of) for move to impact:

(a) The Municipality has committed to the rehabilitation plan and has been sourcing funding to implement it, but in practice the implementation of the existing rehabilitation areas has not taken place which does not show evidenced commitment. While new trees are being sourced and sponsored for planting, these are not coming with even minimal servicing. There seems to be high-level support, but prioritisation has not shown in terms of "activating" the plan.

(b) While training has taken place and seems to have been supportive, application of this training is not evidenced (e.g. through LD monitoring) at the local level.

(c) The one rehabilitation area which had local communities directly involved has had marginally greater success (arguably because only thinning had taken place, although it seems to have been "protected" from grazing disturbance by the community).

(d) Bringing on the NFA once it was instituted was a strategic move and probably the project's best act to create spread of SLM (most likely through the TOT model, and

[64] The fact that these activities were then underbudgeted at design needs to be noted - in addition to the fact that the project still has USD 67,522 left means that budget could have been available for rehabilitating and servicing more land.

through allowing NFA to support municipalities in learning and building on the foundations laid by the project in Kolonja).

(e) It is unlikely that the SLM interventions will sustain or spread unless further funding can be secured (either/both through prioritisation of budget allocation of MoTE to the Kolonja Municipality and NFA, or through external funding sources and creative fundraising, including, possibly, at community level to national funding schemes under the MARD), and due consideration to the establishment of a law on land management.

149. Achievement of likelihood of impact, as directly connected to what the project is able to control, and how it achieved its outcomes within the move to impact of the Theory of Change is '**Moderately Likely**'.

Rating for Effectiveness: Moderately Satisfactory

Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's Policies and Procedures

150. The roles of financial reporting were defined in the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the IA (Ecosystems Division) and the EA (Regional Office for Europe). All financial oversight and sign off was carried out by the FMO of the IA.

151. All contracts and agreements with service providers adhered to UNEP policy and procedure, although notably in some cases the Regional Office had to go through UNOPs to provide certain contracts because of certain limitations in contracting. While this falls within normal operating procedure, it does create additional red tape for the project.

152. The evaluator had to wait up until the final delivery of the draft evaluation report to receive final figures and even at this point final financial reporting had not been signed off, causing unnecessary delays and extra effort to follow up on what should be a simple, routine task.

153. The MTR noted two issues (a) the project office location which in the co-financing letter of the MoTE should be at MoTE but was not because of space issues, and (b) possible mismanagement of funds in that office equipment was being used by the Ministry that may be outside of the implementation activities of the project. An internal audit of this was done and no mismanagement of funds was found. Upon review, the evaluator does not believe that (b) was of sufficient concern to warrant the need for an internal audit.

154. The MTR recommended that financial planning and management (at project level) required greater oversight, noting that (a) at least one contractor had been paid for final reports when only drafts were available, (b) there were delays in approving expenditure reports which resulted in both implementation delays as well as the main contractor (URI) working without a contract in place for a fairly long period of time.

155. The evaluator noted that, while the national project coordinator was empowered after the MTR to access the financial planning and management, the red tape of approval still delayed processes. Delays in approving expenditure was a common theme throughout the project up until the final financial reporting.

156. While procurement processes showed due diligence, contracting processes appear to be quite messy with most service providers requiring contract extensions and delivering services across multiple contracts. This can be illustrated in the case of URI, who through the project lifetime had three different agreements to a total of USD 336,488, including a grant agreement from 1 December 2018 to 30 April 2019, the second 25 September 2019 to 25 July 2020, then a Small-scale Funding Agreement (SSFA) from 26 March 2021 to

August 2021. Another important aspect to note here (that will be elaborated on in the Factors Affecting Project Performance) is the fact that a service provider was allocated half the GEF budget of the project and arguably was hired to implement most activities in the project, the line between the role of the PMU and the NGO was not clear.

157. The project, strictly speaking, followed and adhered to policies and procedures, however the process of contracting seems convoluted, this with delays results in a rating of Moderately Satisfactory.

Completeness of Project Financial Information

158. Project financial information is complete (with the exception of budget expenditure by component, see paragraph 160), the evaluator received all the annual financial expenditure reports (with delays for the final one) and the detailed budget revision that was done in June 2021.

159. Co-financing information was complete although somewhat superficial, where the total co-financing expenditure shows exactly the same amount that was committed to at planning, even though the contributions varied slightly between the entities (see Annex 3).

160. Financial reporting did not include budget expenditure per component (this was not required at time of project implementation).

161. Financial reporting at the level of the agreements (particularly for URI) was complete and acceptable.

162. Financial completeness is rated as Satisfactory.

Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff

163. There were four levels of communication that needed to take place in terms of the cycle of reporting and approval, at the project-activity-level implementation (NGO) in terms of reporting, the project at country level, the project at the Regional Office (where there were also lines of communication between Geneva and Vienna), and finally with the IA (in Nairobi). Delays incurred in terms of project expenditure approvals (in Nairobi) which then also caused delays for funding disbursements to the implementing partner.

164. For much of the project, the national project coordinator was not empowered to handle any budgetary issues which caused delays and immobility in terms of project implementation.

165. This said, no complaints were received in terms of delays between MTR and TE. Communication seems to have worked well between the FMOs of the EA and the IA, and budget allocations and revisions were completed with minimal problems.

166. Communication between finance and project management staff is rated as Satisfactory.

Rating for Financial Management: Satisfactory

Efficiency

167. Time: The project was delayed by one and a half years[65] justified in the extension documentation and PIRs by delays caused by the earthquake end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic causing country lockdowns for 3 months as well as several government changes, including then, that final rehabilitation activities which needed to be completed later in the year.

[65] Arguably more, because while the project formally ended end of 2021, there is a PIR for 2022.

168. The project underwent two project extensions, the first was an extension from 5 August 2020 to 31 July 2021, and the second up from 1 August 2021 to 31 December 2021. The reasons given in the extension requests for both were identical (needing to finalise last activities under Component 2, rectify delays caused by the earthquake and by COVID-19, finalizing the designation process in the country), although at the time signed off by different people in the IA. When asked about this, the National Project Coordinator (this was verified through interviews with other stakeholders) detailed that the second extension was mostly necessary because of the rehabilitation activities needed to take place in winter (tree planting) and thus the extension was requested up until December.

169. While the delays due to the earthquake and COVID-19 are understandable, the extension request was already recommended by the MTR before COVID-19 was on the radar.[66] In addition, the plan to have Component 2 activities wait in sequence and be completed towards the end put the project at risk here to external circumstances affecting it. The implementation activities should have started in parallel with training and the evaluator is convinced that the project would not have needed that final extension.

170. The government turnovers (both at national level, when the Minister changed at the beginning and the end), and at Municipal level (the Mayor changed three times), did not only cause delays, but also caused additional effort in re-engaging new leaders into the project and having to do hand-overs (from the project side, that ideally should have been done at the institutional level if commitment and championship had been strong enough).

171. Cost-effectiveness: It is hard to assess cost effectiveness in the budget line as these are not as detailed with notes as they would have been in an actual Project Document. The project budget was small in terms of the GEF allocation (but large in terms of co-financing, including cash sums). The biggest issue that evaluator would note is the minimal budget spent on actual rehabilitation activities (USD 10,000), especially when USD 67,533 has been left over at project end. Co-financing also does not show any real contribution towards the rehabilitation activities and implementing the rehabilitation plan.

172. The project made some effort to synergise and to put the project on the radar of several bi-lateral agencies, but this did not produce real results in terms of enhancing efficiency or sustainability for the project implementation and sustaining results.

Rating for Efficiency: Moderately Satisfactory

Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring Design and Budgeting

173. The monitoring workplan and budget was provided with a narrative description as well as more detail in Annex G of the CEO Endorsement Request. The monitoring tools and reporting included the LD-PMAT (Land Degradation - Portfolio Monitoring and Tracking Tool) yearly PIR reporting, the logframe with indicators and targets, quarterly reporting as well as the MTR and the TE.

174. The plan was well budgeted with budget lines from GEF and from co-financing.

175. Monitoring design and budgeting is rated as Satisfactory.

[66] From the MTR report: Component 2 - towards the expected outputs under this component is less compared with those under Component 1 because activities related to these outputs are just now beginning. Although this is in accordance with the workplan, as mentioned in another section of this report, waiting until the last year of the project to begin these activities was not logical and is one of the main reasons why this project will now require a significant extension.

Monitoring of Project Implementation

176. All main reports were completed (with the exception of the Inception Report and Workshop reporting that was unclear), annual reports, PIRs even beyond project closure, and the LD-PMAT, were all completed, including quarterly reporting.

177. The MTR was of pivotal support to the project in terms of its monitoring and implementation structure as the project before this point was not adapting its implementation (did not use the opportunity at inception, nor in its monitoring in the first years of the project) to the monitoring results. The MTR and its management response allowed the project to flexibly adapt to what was practically achievable in the remaining time of the project.

178. The project management team should have put into practice a much better monitoring framework for the project in order to be more adaptive and have more direction.

179. Some examples where the project management should have monitoring and followed up better include (a) the case of the stolen chestnut trees brought up during the second steering committee meeting (May 2019) and then dealt with during the MTR and the issue with chestnut trees being ripped out from the areas where they had been planted (300) during one of the awareness events, (b) the fact that no follow up by the NPC/PM was done on the site where 350 trees were planted and then failed (in terms of rehabilitation effort).67 These are investments made by the project within the timeframe of the project that failed during the timeframe of the project without the project even having mentioned this in any of its reporting.

180. Overall, the management response and adaptiveness was not based on its own monitoring but rather in trying to find the best compromise to appease the project stakeholders; while this worked in some way in terms of aligning, somewhat, the project SLM to government priorities, and the project hoped that this would enhance ownership, it did not have the intended effect ultimately and also was a reason why the MTR had to come in and make the changes so late into the project (the MTR was also scheduled much too late into the project).68

181. Final project reporting was satisfactory although was not critical in its self-reflection.

182. Monitoring of project implementation is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

Project Reporting

183. As already mentioned above, reporting was regular and included quarterly reporting, PIR completion. Partners submitted their reports on time and of respectable quality.

184. Project reporting is rated as Satisfactory.

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting:	Satisfactory

[67] One solution to this problem as discussed in the 2nd PSC meeting, was to have a handover letter be signed by the project and municipality for any further planting that would take place in the Municipality. This was observed during future planting, and it did result in no more seedling being stolen. However, this did not account for the losses already incurred by the investment of the project (i.e. follow up and rehabilitation).

[68] There is evidence of the Project Steering Committee covering taking decisions and project management taking action (and adaptive action, in some cases) as a result, but this process in itself was also the platform that was used to appease project stakeholders (and in some cases a result of not fully understanding how project activities can reach outcome (something the MTR eventually helped with).

Sustainability

Socio-political Sustainability

185. The political context of Albania is relevant in that turnover at the political level happens quite regularly and thus leadership, and ownership, at this level remains challenging. An example of this is that the project's biggest champion, the Project Director and Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment, moved from their post just after the end of the project. This would not have had such an impact if, for instance, there had better communication and engagement between the Project Director and the previous Project Director (who chaired the first Steering Committee meeting in 2017).[69] So, while the Project Director level benefitted the project from the political viewpoint, this was also short lived and when turnover happened, the ownership was lost along with the political appointee leaving. While there has been a handover to the new GEF Focal Point who is knowledgeable of the project, the priorities are not, in the future, geared necessarily towards LD, neither towards championing the actual delivery of the project into the long-term.

186. The NFA is well-positioned to take forward some key elements but they also depend on direction and funding from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and therefore have their priorities linked to those of the MoTE. However, they are likely to be the ones to carry forward the key elements of the project and should be engaged as such.

187. Individual capacities have been built, some of these were not appropriate for sustaining of project results as some people who had been trained have moved on from positions. That said, the greatest ownership and sustainability from the training will likely come from the TOTs that were completed with NFA and others (but particularly for NFA) and then led in the region (by NFA), which will likely be a good model to use in the future (although again, this is dependent on financial resources which are currently not available to them).

188. That fact that the Land Degradation Neutrality agenda is still stagnant after almost five years, the lack of drive further on land degradation in sustaining the project results at political level within MoTE (as evidenced by lack of championship of the key legal deliverables) shows there is a lack of political will and/or understanding around the importance of LD in the country. This importance might be shown through biodiversity conservation (because, in effect, in forest ecosystems, they are interconnected and interdependent), it is likely that forest management might be improved at least in the protected areas and buffer areas framework related to tourism.

189. There are some avenues that can be pursued in the eco-agri-tourism sector that shows a lot of promise, but the interest in pursuing this has not gained traction in the linkages to SLM and LDN.[70]

190. Socio-political sustainability is rated as Moderately Likely.

Financial Sustainability

191. Some key examples of financial commitment or financial opportunities to sustaining results or replicating to regions the results of the projects, include (a) the fact that the Government had a large stake of co-financing committed, including at local level in cash, such as for Kolonja Municipality, (b) that the rehabilitation plan was committed to by the Municipality of Kolonja and NFA and funding was being sourced, including through the

[69] This person has also historically been the Project Director for GEF projects in Albania.
[70] The evaluator will provide a recommendation to this effect to nestle the argument for LDN and SLM into this framework of thinking.

IPARD and the AZNBR Funding Schemes run through MARD, (c) the newly instituted NFA with new leadership which might prioritise some of the helpful activities started by the project.

192. Regarding the rehabilitation plan: while some small donations are visible, the commitment to actually implement in earnest is not proven by the inability to commit minimal funding and resources to avoid the failure of existing rehabilitated sites.

193. NFA, which has the institutional interest and engagement (as elaborated below), is limited in what it can achieve by its own budget limitations.

194. The report on economic incentives may have been a window of interest to bring in if it had looked at effective economic instruments to mainstream SLM (through, e.g. the existing funding schemes under MARD), but the way it was structured and developed, as well as the lack of ownership, has resulted in the reality that it is unlikely to be used and brought forward.

195. There is no "next phase" planned, and the evaluator is unconvinced of whether a follow up project of this nature would support gaining organic traction toward the TOC impact. However, there are potential ways in which results could be sustained through existing funding opportunities (such as through creative connections to the IPARD/AZBNR schemes) and through observing the law that revenues from forest resources are put back into forest conservation. The extent to which these are to be strategically used and observed depends on the strength of collaboration between the key partners of the project. LD and SLM interventions could be strategically aligned to creative agri-tourism opportunities (and nature tourism) but this needs leadership.[71]

196. Financial sustainability is rated as Moderately Likely.

Institutional Sustainability

197. The institutional sustainability of the project results will be discussed along three key institutions and then partners thereof.

198. Generally, partnership was created quite strongly through the project, especially through the technical expert group, and there should be strong links through e.g. the expertise from the Tirana Agricultural University, the NFA, the Kolonja Municipality and the MoTE.

199. MoTE: The lack of "trickle-down" of key information and directives during the project from the Project Director meant that, despite their leadership and championship (particularly in positioning MoTE for more strategic external funding for large environmental projects), the results of this project lacked traction once the Project Director lost the political appointee position. The actual relevant department within MoTE (the Forestry Department), even with a member present at the Steering Committee, lacks ownership of the project (the results are not seen as having been developed by and with them, but rather "for them"). For this reason, there did not seem to be any institutional championship for the deliverables of Component 1 of the project.

200. NFA: Engaging NFA into the project once it was instituted (late in the project lifetime) has allowed the ownership within NFA to be quite strong, even with the new leadership, who seem to be engaged and willing to lead some elements of the components of the project (Component 1 and 2). However, the directive and final championship still depends on the forestry department of MoTE when it comes to adoption of any critical legal SLM mainstreaming.

201. Municipality of Kolonja: While the Municipality has taken on, adopted and plans to implement the key items developed by, and with, them within the project, it remains to be

[71] Ibid.

seen how they practically move things forward. The project definitely laid a strong foundation for them, and while the rehabilitation site was a failure, the foundations laid may indeed show some longer-term changes and prioritisations of SLM in forest and pastureland management (the evaluator believes this depends critically on how the project closure takes place, which is still under the control of the project.

202. The project, on request of the MTR, developed an "exit strategy", which depended very much on a hand-over of the project. While in theory the exit strategy was well written even if somewhat superficial (making the assumption than an effective handover will automatically enhance ownership and sustain results), in practice the strategic steps were not taken to actually make sure the different institutions who have a role in the puzzle of the TOC of this project play their part. In fact, some of the institutions did not even know how the final activities actually went (the evaluator had many requests during interviews from key institutions as to if these activities even took place at all), and "what now" from the project when the project had already closed - the project should have had a proper closure.72

203. It is imperative that a project closure be held to create a platform for all partners to (a) find out what happened ultimately in terms of rehabilitation, and (b) to discuss roles and responsibilities and next steps to sustain project results. The Theory of Change could be used as a platform for further discussion to be able to see how best the country can move forward with its SLM/LDN agenda. Having this meeting will have an influence on the sustainability, and without it, the likelihood of sustainability (at least in terms of institutional, but likely also financial) will be lowered substantially (including the evaluation ratings).

204. The Institutional Sustainability rating is rated as Likely.

Rating for Sustainability: Moderately Likely

Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-cutting Issues

Preparation and readiness

205. While the project design document outlines well the baseline and alternative scenarios for the country and aligns with country priorities even in its responsiveness to the country NAP in choosing Kolonja Municipality as a priority area, there were some key issues with the preparation and readiness that warrant discussion.

206. The project benefitted from a Project Preparation Grant (PPG, USD 45,662), but the evaluator agrees with the MTR that the products produced during the PPG were not as helpful as they could have been. If a proper PPG had been carried out, including more time (more than only two days) in the field at Kolonja Municipality, some activities may have been cleared up (that would not have needed fixing during the MTR), and at least some minimum criteria definitions for rehabilitation sites could have been developed. In addition, some of the risks could also have been more thought out (e.g. government turn-over, how the project should be nestled within the MoTE to avoid this turn-over, etc).

207. The plan to leave implementation of Component 2 was also a huge disadvantage to the project and resulted in sub-optimal implementation in terms of the rehabilitation planning and SLM activities in general.

208. The project should have had a proper inception workshop which included discussions on the project work plan, what was feasible, already embedding sustainability at this point.

[72] The EA relayed that there was not enough interest from MoTE to do this, the evaluator will make a recommendation to this effect and it is imperative to the project sustainability that this closure takes place and an effective discussion of roles and repsonsibilities on sustaining project results needs to be had among partners.

This opportunity was not taken and resulted in lack of adaptive management throughout the project up until MTR (and in some cases, beyond).

209. Governance and implementation structure was laid out relatively well, but a more empowered (and technically capacitated/experienced) national project team would have also helped to avoid the issues with lack of direction and power that the PMU had throughout. In addition, the project would have likely, given that this was the first LD project in Albania, benefitted from a position similar to Chief Technical Advisor, or at least an international SLM expert, coming in the first year, to support the strategic set up in technical terms, of the project, embed the national component better, and set up a more integrated rehabilitation structure for the forests of Kolonja. Instead, half the GEF budget was spent on an NGO, and additional funding on two international experts, on the implementation of what ended up not being fully sustained.

210. Given the above considerations, Preparation and readiness is rated as Moderately Unsatisfactory.

Quality of project management and supervision

UNEP/Implementing Agency

211. The Ecosystem Division was the Implementing Agency of the project. The team consisted of a Task Manager, an assistant and an FMO. The Task Manager oversees a large portfolio of projects and has a vast amount of experience and expertise. This, together with their ability to see the LD agenda in Albania in a larger global agenda (LDN, global environmental benefits), could have provided the project with much needed direction. Given that this was the first LD project for Albania, and that the Executing Agency was also “new” to project implementation in this thematic area, the EA would also have benefitted from more guidance and advice from the IA. The leadership of the IA, particularly in terms of the Steering Committee (which seemed to, based on multiple interviews and documentary evidence, have been steered in a political way), could have been stronger.

212. This vast experience and high-quality oversight potential was an overlooked opportunity for the project and may have supported, at least in the directional and strategic sense, the project. Understanding the overload that TMs face, and also that the project implementation faced external challenges such as the earthquake and COVID-19 which made travel difficult, the evaluator still believes that more “hand-holding” would have been helpful in this country case.

213. IA is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

Executing Agency and Partners

214. The Executing Agency and the PMU: There were benefits and disadvantages of the Executing Agency being outside of the country. The benefits are the birds-eye view and the positioning of project implementation within a wider regional context, and the professionalism and international network that the Regional Office brings, as well as a strongly capacitated Project Manager. The disadvantage is the inability of UNEP to implement at country level, and thus having to set up a sub-optimal arrangement for in-country implementation. The National Project Director was not an SLM technical expert, and was not supported with a team or with proper direction in very important ways, including in how effective and strategic communication and “nesting” within MoTE has a huge role to play in creating ownership and enhancing project sustainability (and replication potential). UNEP had an opportunity with this project73 to raise the LD profile

[73] Also in some ways through the championship by the Project Director/Deputy Minister of MoTE to diversify from only one or two IAs to include UNEP and other IAs in order for the country to enhance its work under the GEF funding programmes.

in Albania; the evaluator believes it missed this opportunity by not having enough direction (both from the IA as well as the EA). Given that the EA was responsible for execution, the evaluator outlines some key issues that could have been done better in terms of carrying out this project:

(a) Project execution could have vastly improved from a more strategic inception process in which project activities and timelines as well as implementation modalities could have been adjusted, this key opportunity was missed;

(b) The MTR made practical recommendations to adjust the project to attain its key results but this was very late into project implementation and resulted in project extensions (that would have occurred even without the external events of the earthquake and COVID-19 limitations);

(c) The PMU could have benefitted from a different structure (including having, e.g., an international technical advisor come on board at the initial stages of the project, or having an international SFM expert come in at the start of project implementation);[74]

(d) The project would likely have had more success with the site rehabilitation plan and works if it had started this process in parallel with the legal work (i.e. component 1 and component 2 aspects should have been done in parallel and not in succession);

(e) The project implementation should have ensured that key partners involved in the site rehabilitation were invited to the rehabilitation activities (including MoTE[75], NFA, and the experts who developed the plan);

(f) The project should have had an official closing to manage expectations and to create a platform for discussing how results would be sustained financially, institutionally (the exit strategy).[76]

215. **Implementing partners:** the implementing partners and their role in implementation is further discussed one-by-one below.

216. MoTE: The MoTE had a strong leadership role in the project with a strong champion at high level in the role of Project Director. However, two key MoTE representatives considered champions (of which the NPD was one) are no longer at MoTE and the communication to a key department at MoTE for the first years of the project was (to an extent) missing which resulted in limited ownership of project results toward the end and post-project.77

217. MARD: MARD were present at all Steering Committees and engaged in all meetings and workshops, and the communication and support was excellent at the technical level. However, at the higher level (ministerial) there was not the engagement that was hoped for which resulted in one output being changed at MTR (the strengthening of the inter-ministerial committee) and also was one of the reasons (among others) for the change in focus from agriculture, forests and pastures, to only forests and pastures.

218. URI: URI was the NGO hired (under three separate agreements) to implement a vast majority of project activities and were responsible for several (almost all) deliverables. The NGO sub-contracted several experts to support in the facilitation and advising of these deliverables and activities. This was a key partner and deliverables were generally

[74] Given that half the budget was spent on one NGO to implement activities, and USD 67,533 was ultimately not spent, the evaluator is convinced that between USD 25,000 and USD 40,000 could have been spared for such a position.
[75] Apparently the forestry department were invited and declined to come. Source: project team interviews.
[76] This will be further outlined in a recommendation.
[77] There is no evidence that illustrates uptake and championship of some key deliverables of the project, including the sub-legal acts, as well as the SLM handbook.

of high quality but there may be sustainability aspects missing as a result of such a large amount of implementation under the auspices of an NGO. Suggestions on how this could have been done better are included under the EA above.

219. Kolonja Municipality: The mayor changed three times from project design through project implementation. The forest body was the main implementing partner and a key beneficiary of the project. Despite the leadership changes, the Municipality conducted all activities well and in partnership with the relevant experts. However, sustainability of results, including the lack of follow through commitments (probably due to changes in leadership) resulted in a lack of maintenance of investments in rehabilitation made by the project.

220. National Forest Agency (NFA): the project did very well to connect with the newly established NFA during the last year of implementation resulting in a strong partnership, including allowing the NFA the platform to connect with the Kolonja Municipality and share its expertise. The NFA houses some of the key Albanian forest experts and is a key beneficiary and a good entry point into sustaining the results of the project.

221. Two international experts were hired separately by the Executing Agency, one of who's input was limited by COVID-19 restrictions (earlier involvement in the project would have avoided this limitation).

222. The rating for the executing agency and partners is Moderately Satisfactory.

223. Project management and supervision is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

Stakeholder participation and cooperation

224. The project made an excellent effort to engage all the relevant stakeholders and enhance partnerships through project activities. It did this most notably and effectively by providing a link to the newly established NFA with Kolonja Municipality, which will likely be modelled and replicated to other municipalities.

225. The project was very flexible and responsive to partner requests. However, as already mentioned in sections above, in an attempt to please as many partners as possible resulted in the limiting of its own direction and results attainment and sustainability.

226. The level of engagement at community level, although in this regard the project depended on the Kolonja Municipality, went in a direction that was not planned (i.e. the 50 households). This should be picked apart to better understand and learn from.78

227. Stakeholder participation and cooperation is rated as Satisfactory.

Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity

228. The project design documentation made an effort to integrate indigenous rights and gender equity through its project activity. In terms of the former, there was not much evidence to illustrate how this was effectively done.

229. The latter, however, showed quite some effort in implementation. The project was self-reflective on how to integrate gender considerations already when the first community meetings were held and it was discovered that they were very male-dominated. The project initially struggled with practically integrating more influence and empowerment for women and started doing this through working with the Kolonja Women's Association by allowing them platforms through selling their local products, inviting representatives to workshops and international training.

230. The MTR suggested that one of the activities be changed to hosting a women-specific workshop and event to hold discussions on how women can gain greater access to

[78] A lesson learnt on this is further outlined in the Conclusions section below.

markets and securities within the SLM arena.79 This workshop on "Gender Perspectives in Sustainable Forest and Land Management" was organized in Kolonja. Because COVID-19 restrictions had to be observed during the workshop, the number of participants was limited to nine (eight women and one man). Some of the conclusions of the workshop reached through discussions and exercises organized during the day were: 1) need for trainings related to sustainable land and forest management, protection of the quality of agricultural crops, marketing and increasing women's entry into markets; 2) need for flexible training based on mobile training centres, that can be easily approached by women; 3) need for new guarantee schemes, with a defined target of female beneficiaries in the village; 4) need for increased advertising on different schemes and by promoting special programs on local radio and television stations.80

231. This was a useful exercise and appreciated by the participants, as well as the outreach activity thereafter. More of these activities could have ensured greater participation and engagement (particularly in terms of e.g. support to access the MARD funding schemes).

232. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity is rated as Satisfactory.

Environmental and social safeguards

233. While the project focused on environmental and social health through healing forest ecosystems, there are some things to note that might be of relevance.

234. The kind of rehabilitation activities and planning were anthropocentric, meaning that they serve the use of humans only and do not necessarily prioritise the forest ecosystem in a holistic manner (e.g. planting of pine trees and black locust, for instance, which are not strictly indigenous to the area even if historically relevant). Planting but without actually taking into consideration and dealing with root causes and drivers of degradation will always on be symptomatic fixes, and dealing with rehabilitation and not restoration will also not enhance ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change.

235. This said, the environmental and social safeguards of the project are still a value add over what was there before the project, I.e. business-as-usual.

236. The environmental and social screening of the project was done at design phase and did not find any high risks, the evaluator agrees with this assessment.

237. Environmental and social safeguards rated as Satisfactory.

Country ownership and drivenness

238. Given that the project has a high replication potential, especially through the foundations laid through capacity strengthening in the decentralisation process of forest management to the local government level. This replication will depend on country ownership and drivenness.

239. The level of country ownership and drivenness has already been discussed in detail both under the Sustainability Section (Socio-political, Financial and Institutional) as well as Project Implementation, above, and will not be repeated here.

240. It remains to be said that this having been a product of direct demand, the level of ownership and drivenness by the MoTE is lower at the end of the project than what was

[79] Most notably, the workshop focused on developing the capacities of participants to understand the links between gender and land management, inform the participants about the international and national legal frameworks and their implications for promoting gender equality in land management and forestry, To discuss with participants obstacles related to gender inequalities in the area of land management and forestry, and to inform and discuss with participants on measures to overpass the current gender inequalities in the area of land management and forestry.

[80] Final Project Report.

expected during country design and implementation. However, this might change with a strategic project closing.

241. Country ownership and drivenness is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

Communication and public awareness

242. Communication and outreach was integrated into component 1 through capacity development, as well as through an output dedicated to communication and awareness. This will not be repeated here as it is already covered under the Availability of Outputs under Effectiveness.

243. The project had a communications strategy and had some good, practical outreach campaigns for various target groups (university students - including through an SLM-related forestry course, school children - through planting and essay competitions, politicians, Kolonja public, women resource users, farmers, etc) on strategic awareness days. It also had a project communications office nested in the Kolonja Municipality (including an updated website by the municipality), a one-stop shop for SLM information.

244. From an effort and resulting demand point of view, communication and public awareness is rated as Satisfactory.

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance: Satisfactory

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

245. This project was timely in that it came as a request from Government during a time when deforestation and land degradation was threatening ecosystems and livelihoods of people and was being prioritised in terms of the country plans (e.g. NAP) and the country's accession into the EU. However, the concept of LD and SLM was/is new to the country and not on the radar in relation to more embedded ecosystem health concepts like biodiversity conservation and protected areas. The project, the first of its kind in Albania, has certainly set up some foundational steps for which the country can build its LD strategy from, at least with regard to forest and pasture ecosystems.

246. The project was convoluted and ambitious in that it set out to do multiple things focusing on agriculture and forestry. The MTR focused it a bit, but ultimately, an overall lack of direction and strategy led it to underachieve in terms of the reconstructed Theory of Change. While it can be argued that it achieved substantial delivery when compared to a relatively small GEF budget, the co-financing, which was large (>9 million USD) should have reflected greater ambition and commitment from the country in terms of the TOC.

247. The project did well in engaging stakeholders and responding to country priority and demand during implementation, but this was one of the reasons for the limited direction and more strategic adaptiveness.

248. Partnerships through the project laid a strong foundation for further work, particularly through the involvement of the National Forest Agency which was established late in the implementation of the project but brought benefits in terms of enhancing the quality of deliverables such as the sub-legal acts, enhancing platforms for partnership and embedding some sustainability and ownership institutionally. The partnership with the Agricultural University of Tirana, as well as local (academic) expertise at Kolonja, provided valuable contributions and probably will sustain in the supporting of activities through continued communications.

249. The ownership and communications within MoTE was complicated by a change in championship early on from the technical level to the political level which may have raised the profile and power, but ultimately did little to really embed and champion project results within the project. The project will need to work (through the closing meeting) to bring the technical champions forward in a way that these results can be driven by the MoTE.

250. While the project developed some good quality deliverables for component 1, particularly in supporting the implementation of the Forest Law, the uptake of the key contributions (sub-legal acts, and the SLM handbook on mainstreaming SLM into country strategies) has not gone as planned (so far, see above point). The grazing mechanism is likely to be enforced in Kolonja, but there was no evidence to suggest the LD indicators were in use at the time of the evaluation.

251. The project achieved well in its capacity development, especially the TOT models and knowledge decentralisation. Its outreach, especially targeting students and school children, was a strong contribution to SLM for the country.

252. The project also put much effort into the engagement and empowerment of women in the project activities, did its best to identify gender disaggregated issues related to the project objectives at an early stage in the project and consider effective participation and inclusion during the entire implementation lifetime of the project.

253. The site rehabilitation plan was a good compromise between what was to be achieved through the project plan, and what was ultimately feasible to do with the budget, capacity

and left over time. What the project ended up with was a better understanding of LD pressures on the land through the mapping of LD across 21,288 ha of forests and pastureland in Kolonja, and a plan to implement rehabilitation and SLM/SFM across 120 ha of the most degraded sites, and actual rehabilitation of ~9 ha of land (of which more than half failed). However, this compromise meant that the contribution, in terms of global benefit for LD, was insignificant when talking of any real land degradation reduction on the ground. What was supposed to be one of the key activities of the project, became its weakest contribution. While the commitment to implement the plan in terms of more rehabilitation is there (from the Kolonja Municipality and support by NFA, through demonstrated evidence of more funding support of e.g. 2,000 additional pine trees), very basic maintenance of existing rehabilitated sites was not done causing the failure of these sites. A lesson here should be learnt in terms of prioritising the servicing of rehabilitated sites and dealing with actual drivers of degradation before planting more trees (which is the equivalent of superficially and symptomatically dealing with a chronic problem).

254. Building on the point above, there was a lack of direction in how to really deal with land degradation - the root drivers/causes (e.g. illegal logging, forest use). Bringing in communities to discuss this openly through co-solving and co-creating, setting up demonstration sites of sustainable use, SLM demo sites of small ha farms, setting up cooperatives, linking these demo sites to market incentives under the thematic areas of e.g. agro-eco-tourism and nature-based tourism could have had some potential in dealing with such drivers. Implementing the rehabilitation plan in a way that deals with these drivers and also includes servicing/protecting actual rehabilitated sites before starting new ones would go a long way in sustaining project results.

255. This all said, the project did lay some foundational steps toward thinking about SLM in the context of forests and pastureland and this has moved the conversation and action forward towards the TOC impact, even if it has not moved it as far as the project would have liked.

256. Sustainability of project results depended on an effective closure meeting; the evaluator was informed that this recommendation made by the evaluator led to a closure meeting on 4 November 2022. The evaluator reviewed the final report of the closure meeting and sees that commitments were made by the relevant institutions. However, commitments in terms of financial backing (e.g. most notably, the maintenance of rehabilitated sites by Kolonja Municipality) were not detailed. The sustainability therefore ultimately rests on whether these verbal commitments are acted upon.

257. LDN does not seem to be high on the agenda for the country. When asked about this, as already mentioned, the evaluator was told that the development of targets was waiting on the finalisation of the agricultural strategy. This is a strange sequence as the evaluator would have thought that LD indicators should inform agricultural strategy, and not the other way around (agricultural productivity depends on healthy land).

258. Thinking about nesting LDN within economic arguments, such as economic valuation of healthy forests (to nature based tourism, for instance, among other benefits) and within the framing of biodiversity conservation and climate change vis nature-based solutions, would probably be a more strategic leverage point to prioritise and get action done in terms of LDN.

259. The table below provides a summary of the ratings and findings discussed in Evaluation Findings (Chapter V). Overall, the project demonstrates a rating of Moderately Satisfactory.

Table 4. Summary of project findings and ratings of the SLM Albania Project

Criterion *The criterion rating and the overall project rating is based on the automatic calculations based on the Weighting of Ratings table in the UNEP Evaluation Guidance package.*	**Summary Assessment**	**Rating**
A. Strategic Relevance	**Project is relevant to the country, the donor priorities and the higher level strategies of UNEP.**	**HS**
1. Alignment to MTS and POW	Aligned MTS 2018-2021 (SP 3) and POW 18-19	S
2. Alignment to Donor/GEF strategic priorities	Linked to GEF-5 LD1 Programme 1 and LD3 Programme 4	S
3. Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities	High project relevance to country, demand-led, in line also with its EU accession priorities.	HS
4. Complementarity with existing interventions	Strong alignment to existing interventions although visibility and value within UNEP and GEF not as high as it could be.	S
B. Quality of Project Design	**Project had some issues in its design, particularly spending more time focusing on outputs and drivers during the PPG (especially in field).**	MS
C. Nature of External Context	Some external events could have been included under risk management (e.g. government turnover, and even the earthquake which is not an 'outlier' occurrence in the country) - COVID-19 and the earthquake as well as the government changes impacted the project in terms of delays, but were not the main reasons for project results achievement issues.	MF
D. Effectiveness	**The project achieved most of its outputs and was pragmatic in its achievement of what was 59easible and possible (thanks to the MTR revising the project results framework). The outcomes were partly achieved and the project is a long way from achieving its longer-lasting and long-term impacts.**	**MS**
1. Availability of outputs	Output achievement was variable, key deliverables of good quality, all outputs could arguably be "ticked off", but the use of some outputs and the uptake is not convincing. Capacity building elements and outreach laid good foundations.	MS
2. Achievement of project outcomes	Outcomes were partially achieved, but still a far way away from real significant change for both outcomes.	MS
3. Likelihood of impact	Likelihood of impact depends on some of the project outputs being taken up and sustained which depends (to some extent) on the closing meeting. Given that the outcomes have not been achieved, it is unlikely that the impact will be reached any time soon as a result of the project intervention.	ML
E. Financial Management	Financial management constrained by delays, lack of empowerment during majority of project time for the NPC to control budget, contracting processes complicated and convoluted needed multiple extensions.	**S**
1.Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures	Generally good adherence, with some limitations and red-tape causing delays.	MS
2.Completeness of project financial information	Financial reporting satisfactory on the whole.	S
3.Communication between finance and project management staff	Generally considered effective despite having four tiers of communication in some cases (with	S

Criterion *The criterion rating and the overall project rating is based on the automatic calculations based on the Weighting of Ratings table in the UNEP Evaluation Guidance package.*	**Summary Assessment**	**Rating**
	half of the project budget going to one entity for implementation)	
F. Efficiency	**Project could have avoided vulnerability to external circumstances and be more effective in general by having had more direction throughout, delays constrained project delivery, project budget especially in terms of the rehab activities, could have been done better.**	**MS**
G. Monitoring and Reporting	**Monitoring and design overall good in terms of planning, and in terms of the reporting fine at implementation but lacked adaptive management.**	**S**
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	Strong plan overall, well budgeted.	S
2. Monitoring of project implementation	Monitoring was not actually used for project adaptive management. Did not make use of inception meeting to re-think project activities.	MS
3.Project reporting	Generally good reporting, minutes of SC, PIRs, available, quarterly reporting.	S
H. Sustainability	**Sustainability overall, linked to the move to impact, was not what it was hoped despite the effort of the exit strategy and the effort put in to align with stakeholder priorities along the way.**	**ML**
1. Socio-political sustainability	Socio-political sustainability is not strong in terms of political championship (which is a disappointment after having this championship up until the end of the project and then losing it).	ML
2. Financial sustainability	Financial sustainability has some opportunity in the efforts made by NFA and Kolonja Municipality to source funding, but nothing real committed yet.	ML
3. Institutional sustainability	The rating for this meeting depends on the project closure meeting where roles and responsibilities can be discussed in terms of sustaining project results.	L
I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues[81]	Project dealt with several challenges pertaining to design and implementation which impacted project results sustainability. More guidance, direction could have supported better overall delivery.	**S**
1. Preparation and readiness	Generally good project design document in terms of baseline situation and strategy alignment. But project could have benefited from a better PPG process.	MU
2. Quality of project management and supervision	Several issues exist that impeded project implementation from the project management and supervision front. The project management did the best it could but could have benefited from a better inception process, a more strategic alignment to technocrats within MoTE, and more technical capacity within the core team.	MS
UNEP/Implementing Agency	More guidance and direction could have helped this project, being the first of its kind in Albania.	MS
Partners/Executing Agency	Several issues exist, but the project management put a lot of effort in, although it lacked overall direction.	MS

[81] While ratings are required for each of these factors individually, they should be discussed within the Main Evaluation Report as cross-cutting issues as they relate to other criteria. Note that catalytic role, replication and scaling up are expected to be discussed under effectiveness if they are a relevant part of the TOC.

Criterion *The criterion rating and the overall project rating is based on the automatic calculations based on the Weighting of Ratings table in the UNEP Evaluation Guidance package.*	**Summary Assessment**	**Rating**
3. Stakeholder participation and cooperation	Strong partnerships fostered through project, good involvement of stakeholders generally.	S
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity	Strong efforts made in terms of its sphere of influence on gender equality in particular.	S
5. Environmental and social safeguards	Overall good screening of environmental and social risks at design, no significant risk of maladaptation, although some notes on restoration versus rehabilitation when it comes to ecosystem health and increased resilience.	S
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	Ownership in some instances good (e.g. NFA and Kolonja), but real practical ownership limited.	MS
7. Communication and public awareness	Strong efforts made in communications and awareness, project did its best to capitalise on the opportunities to provide outreach and awareness, strong training element.	S
Overall Project Rating	**Project achieved most of its outputs, but sustainability and ownership could have been enhanced, as well as overall direction of the project to better elevate SLM on the national agenda.**	**MS**

Lessons learned

260. The project final report outlined a few lessons, including (a) learning and adapting to external events such as COVID-19 through changing modalities of working with local experts and utilizing online training and virtual communications, (b) starting project pilot activities (rehabilitation activities) at the earliest stage of the project and extracting lessons throughout implementation in order to also direct and benefit from the delivery of national and legal components, and (c) with regard to involvement of women in project activities, conducting these early on and keeping constant lines of communication in order to facilitate their participation. The evaluator agrees that while some of these are supportive lessons, there are more valuable, strategic lessons to be learnt from the project that are related more to strategic planning, implementation, and communication.

Lesson 1: Ensuring championship by key influencers in the technical *and* political level is important for sustaining project results

261. One of the key weaknesses in uptake is the loss of championship of the project during government turn-over at the end of the project (as well as the way in which the initial turn-over disrupted, in a way, the technical championship). During the first years of project implementation, the political champion for the project was not necessarily communicating and sharing directives to the technical level throughout the project. While this championship was supportive in raising the profile during the project, it resulted in some technocrats 'feeling left out' that were instrumental to project delivery and sustainability.

262. Although admittedly this was an issue that should have been resolved within the MoTE structure of internal communication, the project could have benefited from more experience, nuance and strategy in how to deal with this so that when the political champion left (which in the case for Albania is apparently fleeting given the regular turnover of the higher level staff), the project could still be championed within positions that are likely to stay on and have an influence on the technical sustainability.

Lesson 2: Making the best use of the inception phase of the project, and having a strategic governance structure for the PMU could support strategic implementation and project direction

263. An inception process is there to properly reflect on the continued relevance and feasibility of project outputs and activities and implementation modalities. Doing this properly could avoid the kind of implementation and direction challenges the project faced up until six months before project closure when the MTR came in (late) to do this.

264. As this was the first project under the LD portfolio and the NPC was new to GEF project implementation, the project management would have benefitted by an international technical advisor coming in to support the project at least in the first year, particularly someone with forestry and SLM expertise.

265. Using the expertise of the IA TM, in the case of this project, would have benefited the direction too - projects such as these can benefit greatly from the experience and expertise of a TM of their portfolio to drive the project.

Lesson 3: Working with, co-creating and incentivising farmers and resource users can go a long way in achieving better project results and sustainability and empowering champions at local level

266. The project goals and the goals of the farmers did not align, particularly because there was not effective co-creation, and the rehabilitation activities were done on public land that communities obviously did not feel that aligned to. The 50 households that were supposed to be engaged and benefit from the project were chosen and then did not actually come back for the capacity development round nor for the rehabilitation activities. The most effective community-driven work was in Kabash, where communities were part of the rehabilitation and felt that that the land was "part of their community". Then, arguably, the more sustained SLM-type applications took place at the small-holder farm level where continued support was provided on-site for farmers who had participated in the training.

267. The project would have benefited more from doing a proper demands/needs assessment (not in the way the questionnaires were done, but in-depth facilitation dialogues), and through identifying some lead farmers to demo SLM applications on their household or smallholder farms in order to inspire other farmers. In terms of forestry, cooperatives and co-creation of rehabilitation with communities could have ensured more community involvement and protection, including through market access by providing small grants through the project to run cooperative small agri-eco-tourism demonstrations. These would have had more traction within the community and together with experts who were used for training as extension service, rather than workshop style training, could have set up some lead farmers and womens' groups into becoming champions for SLM in their community.

Lesson 4: Maintenance and servicing of rehabilitated sites (and planting sites) is as, if not more, important than rehabilitating new sites

268. It is not just important to continue rehabilitating new sites in the rehabilitation plan, but servicing and maintenance of the rehabilitated sites is more important.

Recommendations[82]

269. The following recommendations are intended to enhance cooperation, sustaining of project results, and support towards the TOC impact and nest LDN in the country in a more strategic way. They are divided as per the following: (a) Project-level

[82] Please see the "Guidance for Evaluation Managers and Evaluation Consultants on Presentation and Quality of Recommendations within a Main Evaluation Report" among the evaluation tools.

Recommendations – recommendations to UNEP that pertain specifically to the SLM Albania project, and (b) Partner Recommendations – recommendations that pertain to partners of the project.

(a) Project-level Recommendations:

Recommendation #1:	**Hold a strategic project closure meeting to present on rehabilitation activities and embed project results sustainability**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation[83]:	Many key partners are still not aware of what actually happened onsite regarding the rehabilitation activities that took place at the end of the project, the project is dealing with critical limitations to its sustainability that can be relatively easily fixed by getting the right stakeholders around the table to host a discussion and project closing. The project needs to urgently have a proper closing meeting and this meeting can be used as a platform for discussing the sustainability of key project results: the organisation should be facilitated through the NPC of the project and the meeting should be **hosted/led** by the NFA under the guidance and leadership of the MoTE. Here the key partners, including NFA, MTE, Kolonja Municipality and the key experts hired by URI (Professor Arsen Proko from Tirana Agricultural University, Mr Dhimiter Pina, Mr Ali Laho) that were involved in the site rehabilitation planning/activities. The agenda for this meeting should include (a) a discussion and agreement on how the key project results of Component 1 will be achieved (most notably the sub-legal acts and the SLM handbook, usefulness of the economic incentives report), and (b) the final site rehabilitation activities should be presented by the Kolonja Municipality to the key partners NFA, MTE and the key experts as well as the monitoring results of the sites and a practical discussion should be held on how to implement the rehabilitation site plan (what is needed, what is missing and what is practically feasible).
Priority Level[84]:	Critical and urgent
Type of Recommendation[85]	Project-level
Responsibility:	UNEP Regional Office for Europe/EA PMU
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Meeting was held 4 November 2022.

Recommendation #2:	**Hold a strategic meeting with the GEF focal point and key partners on how to nest LD into the country through future projects**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation[86]:	LDN and SLM are undervalued in general in the country, and its importance needs to be raised and integrated into future projects.

[83] The same challenge/problem can lead to a recommendation of more than one type, i.e. one or more of the following: Project Level, UNEP-wide or Partners recommendation.
[84] Critical, Important or Opportunity for Improvement.
[85] Project Level, UNEP-Wide or Partners recommendation.
[86] The same challenge/problem can lead to a recommendation of more than one type, i.e. one or more of the following: Project Level, UNEP-wide or Partners recommendation.

	There is a lot of potential in aligning the LDN global agenda in the country with existing priorities within the nexus of biodiversity conservation (already here are some opportunities within the upcoming UNEP/GEF Albanian Alps project). Lessons from this project and other discussion points are of value: (a) Aligning SLM-demos and rehabilitation efforts to the goal of nature-based tourism and agro-eco-tourism, and here, particularly, looking at how gender empowerment can be made through increasing women's access into markets and grants, (b) Conducting economic valuation studies of forest ecosystems to demonstrate the value of SFM (particularly in tourism, resilience, forest products, sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants, etc), (c) Linking LDN with existing climate change and biodiversity/protected areas conservation when understanding and setting LDN targets and understanding the importance and value of forest ecosystems.
Priority Level[87]:	Important
Type of Recommendation[88]	Project-level/future UNEP SLM-related work in the country
Responsibility:	UNEP Regional Office for Europe with MoTE
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Before end of year (2022).

Recommendation #3:	**Integrating gender recommendations into future GEF projects for Albania**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation[89]:	Taking the learnings from the women's workshop and using the conclusions for future work. The next GEF/UNEP projects in Albania, particularly the Albanian Alps (GEF ID 10839) which will be working with communities (under Component 2)and should take what is feasible from what was learned at the women's workshop in this project (i.e. separate training and discussion platforms for women, increasing women's access into markets, defined targets for women accessing any possible pilot interventions, and targeted communication to women).
Priority Level[90]:	Important
Type of Recommendation[91]	Project-level/future UNEP SLM-related work in the country
Responsibility:	UNEP Regional Office for Europe with MoTE

[87] Critical, Important or Opportunity for Improvement.
[88] Project Level, UNEP-Wide or Partners recommendation.
[89] The same challenge/problem can lead to a recommendation of more than one type, i.e. one or more of the following: Project Level, UNEP-wide or Partners recommendation.
[90] Critical, Important or Opportunity for Improvement.
[91] Project Level, UNEP-Wide or Partners recommendation.

Proposed implementation time-frame:	Before end of year (2022)

(b) Partner-level Recommendations:

Recommendation #4:	**Municipality of Kolonja to support and empower those champion farmers applying SLM in their farms through the extension services provided by the expert training, as well as create (gender-equal) inclusion and incentives for support to protection of rehabilitated sites by engaging communities**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	There is merit in supporting farmers and the extension provided by Mr Ali Laho in creating championship around demo plots for SLM, this could also be done in connection with the rehabilitation site plan. This is a point that could be discussed at the closing meeting and what is feasible to achieve here to enhance community participation and championship for the rehabilitation plan for Kolonja.
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partner level
Responsibility:	Municipality of Kolonja (and support, if possible, from Mr Ali Laho)
Proposed implementation time-frame:	To start discussing at the closing meeting, with longer-term implementation implications

Recommendation #5:	**MoTE to champion SLM Handbook through presenting it to the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) at the Prime Minister's Office**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The NSDI is an opportune place, while the country is setting strategy around external support to country priorities, to present the SLM Handbook on SLM mainstreaming. At the closing meeting, it would be beneficial for the MoTE to present on the feasibility of championing this document at this level to enhance LDN and SLM in the legal and strategic framework of the country.
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partner level
Responsibility:	MoTE
Proposed implementation time-frame:	At discretion of MoTE

Recommendation #6:	**NFA to be supported by MoTE in delivering key decentralisation training (modelled on the TOTs done by the project) across all the Municipalities**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The TOT training opportunities providing an inter-face between NFA and Kolonja Municipality is a good practice example of dealing with the decentralisation process of knowledge transfer to the municipal forest bodies, something that has been a struggle for a long time in the

	country. This model could easily be replicated by NFA starting with the key municipalities with important forest ecosystems.
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partner level
Responsibility:	NFA (and supported by MoTE)
Proposed implementation time-frame:	On-going and at discretion of the MoTE and NFA, although discussions could start at the project closure meeting.

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Place in text	Comment	Evaluator's Response
Paragraph 26 Recommendation #1: Hold a strategic project closure meeting to present on rehabilitation activities and embed results sustainability (Project-level; partners: Executing Agency (EA), National Forestry Agency (NFA) and Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE), Municipality of Kolonja Forest Body, key experts involved in the rehabilitation including from Tirana Agricultural University, timeline: ASAP).	Noted. The NAF is currently being facilitated to hold a meeting on Nov. 4th. All project level partners have confirmed participation. MoM for this meeting will be delivered as soon as available.	**N/A**
Paragraph 27 Recommendation #2: Hold a strategic meeting with the GEF country focal point and key partners on how to nest LD into the country through future projects (Project-level/UNEP; partners: UNEP Regional Office, MoTE, key partners as appropriate and relevant, timeline: this year)	Noted. A meeting is to be held in Vienna on November 17-18th with MoTE and GEF Focal Point, discussing current projects and possibilities for future projects while nesting LD into the GEF 8 agenda for Albania.	N/A
Paragraph 28 Recommendation #3: Municipality of Kolonja to support and empower those champion farmers applying SLM in their farms through the extension services provided by the expert training, as well as creating inclusion and incentives for support to protection of rehabilitated sites by engaging communities (Partner-level; partners: several, timeline: starting with closure meeting discussions, ongoing).	Noted. To be discussed at the closure meeting and strongly recommended to Kolonja Municipality.	N/A
Paragraph 29 Recommendation #4: NFA to be supported by MoTE in delivering key decentralisation training (modeled on the TOTs done by the project) across all the Municipalities (Partner-level; partners: NFA and MoTE, municipalities, timeline: starting with closure meeting discussions, ongoing).	Noted. To be discussed and strongly suggested during the closing meeting.	N/A
Paragraph 82: Two bylaws (sub-legal acts)[92] to facilitate the implementation of the Law on Forest were identified, drafted, and delivered to the MoTE. Project documentation and other evidence[93] demonstrates that the two by-laws drafted were widely discussed with the MoTE, Tirana Agricultural University, and the National Forest Agency (NFA). However, differing	Noted. This will be further clarified at the closing meeting.	N/A

[92] Forestry by-law pursuant to Article 4/2 Ministerial decision on the criteria for the classification of the forests, Forestry by-law pursuant to Article 16/4 Ministerial Guideline on the general criteria of professionalism for the appointment of employees of the structure responsible for forestry in municipalities.
[93] Several interviews and email communications viewed by the Evaluator.

expectations and perceptions of the content of the by-laws by some proponents with the MoTE (who are mandated to champion them through to being adopted) have resulted in the fact that they, at the point of the Terminal Evaluation, are unlikely to be taken up to adoption.[94]		
Paragraph 179: Some examples where the project management should have monitoring and followed up better include (a) the case of the stolen chestnut trees dealt with during the MTR and the issue with chestnut trees being ripped out from the areas where they had been planted (300) during one of the awareness events, (b) the fact that no follow up by the NPC/PM was done on the site where 350 trees were planted and then failed (in terms of rehabilitation effort). These are investments made by the project within the timeframe of the project that failed during the timeframe of the project without the project even having mentioned this in any of its reporting.	Noted. However to clarify, the case of the chestnut trees was brought up in the second steering committee meeting held in May 2019 (before the MTR took place). One solution to this problem as discussed in the 2nd PSC meeting, was to have a handover letter be signed by the project and municipality for any further planting that would take place in the Municipality. This was observed during future planting, and it did result in no more seedling being ripped out. (Attached 2nd PSC, and handover letters for tree planting in March 2021 and December 2021).	Have changed this paragraph to: Some examples where the project management should have monitoring and followed up better include (a) the case of the stolen chestnut trees brought up during the second steering committee meeting (May 2019) and then dealt with during the MTR and the issue with chestnut trees being ripped out from the areas where they had been planted (300) during one of the awareness events, (b) the fact that no follow up by the NPC/PM was done on the site where 350 trees were planted and then failed (in terms of rehabilitation effort). These are investments made by the project within the timeframe of the project that failed during the timeframe of the project without the project even having mentioned this in any of its reporting. Footnote 66: One solution to this problem as discussed in the 2nd PSC meeting, was to have a handover letter be signed by the project and municipality for any further planting that would take place in the Municipality. This was observed during future planting, and it did result in no more seedling being stolen. However, this did not account for the losses already incurred by the investment of the project (i.e. follow up and rehabilitation).

Evaluation Office Peer Reviewer		
Para 147 (e) It is unlikely that the SLM interventions will sustain or spread unless further funding can be secured (either/both through prioritisation of budget allocation of MoTE to the Kolonja Municipality and NFA, or through external funding sources and creative fundraising, including, possibly, at community level to national funding schemes under the MARD)	I think here we could also add that sustaining SLM interventions would need, in addition to secured funding, due consideration of establishing law on land management that is adopted by the Government and championed by MoTE	Changed paragraph to: It is unlikely that the SLM interventions will sustain or spread unless further funding can be secured (either/both through prioritisation of budget allocation of MoTE to the Kolonja Municipality and NFA, or through external funding sources and creative fundraising, including, possibly, at community level to national funding schemes under the MARD), and due consideration to the establishment of a law on land management.
Para 180 Overall, the management response and adaptiveness was not based on its own monitoring but rather in trying to find the best compromise to appease the project stakeholders; while this worked in some way in terms of aligning, somewhat, the project SLM to government priorities, and the project hoped that this would enhance ownership, it did not have the intended effect ultimately and also was a reason why the MTR had to come in and make the changes so late into the project (the MTR was also scheduled much too late into the project).	Is there any evidence that following the annual meetings by the Project Steering Committee, that they provided feedback to the project management team to make any adaptations to its work?	Added footnote: Footnote 67 - There is evidence of the Project Steering Committee covering taking decisions and project management taking action (and adaptive action, in some cases) as a result, but this process in itself was also the platform that was used to appease project stakeholders (and in some cases a result of not fully understanding how project activities can reach outcome (something the MTR eventually helped with).

ANNEX II. STAKEHOLDER LIST

Table 5. Stakeholders engaged for the SLM Albania Project Terminal Evaluation

Name of stakeholder	Institution	Affiliation/Role in Project	Zoom interview/Email	Date(s) of interview	Additional engagement
Implementing Agency					
Ersin Esen	UNEP Ecosystems Division	Task Manager	Zoom	Various	Follow up emails
George Saddimbah + Elizabeth Goro	UNEP Ecosystems Division	FMOs	Email	Various	Follow up emails
Executing Agency					
Harald Eger	Regional Office for Europe - Programme Office Vienna	Director of Programme Office (oversight)	Introductory email	None	None
Sonja Gebert	Regional Office for Europe - Programme Office Vienna	Project Manager (**PMU**)	Zoom	Various	Follow up emails
Iskra Stojanova	Regional Office for Europe - Programme Office Vienna	Support Administrative Oversight	Team Zoom	17 May 2022	None
Valmira Bozgo	PMU/Regional Office for Europe - Programme Office Vienna	National Project Coordinator (**PMU**)	Zoom + In person	Various	Follow up various
International Experts					
Elena Stefanoni	Independent	Legal expert	Zoom	3 July 2022	Follow up emails
Mark Anstey	Independent	SLM expert	Zoom	27 July 2022	Follow up emails
Government Executing Partner					
Ornela Cuci	Ministry of Tourism and Environment,	Project Director	In-person	In-country	

Name of stakeholder	Institution	Affiliation/Role in Project	Zoom interview/Email	Date(s) of interview	Additional engagement
	Former Deputy Minister				
Klodiana Marika	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Former Project Director (at first Steering Committee Meeting: Chair)	In-person	In-country	
Yli Hoxha	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Steering Committee Member	In-person	In-country	
Sofjan Jaupaj	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	GEF Focal Point	In-person	In-country	
Other implementing partners					
Ndricim Bytyci	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Steering Committee Member	In-person	In-country	
Mimoza Shahini	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Recipient of training	In-person	In-country	
Artur Kala	National Forest Agency	National Director	In-person	In-country	
Behar Hate	National Forest Agency	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Klitii Starja	National Forest Agency	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Mikel Nako	National Forest Agency	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Bilena Hyseni	National Forest Agency	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Bruno Asa	National Forest Agency	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Elmaz Islami	National Forest Agency	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Ilir Bala	National Forest Agency	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Erion Isai	Municipality of Kolonja	Mayor	In-person	In-country	
Amiraldo Jaho	Municipality of Kolonja	Deputy Mayor	In-person	In-country	

Name of stakeholder	Institution	Affiliation/Role in Project	Zoom interview/Email	Date(s) of interview	Additional engagement
Paquesor Cane	Municipality of Kolonja	Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Edmond Prifti	Municipality of Kolonja	Forest Body Specialist	In-person	In-country	
Islam Liso	Municipality of Kolonja	Forest Body	In-person	In-country	
Fatjon Kasko	Municipality of Kolonja	Head of Forest Body	In-person	In-country	
Kostika Malo	Municipality of Kolonja	Forest Body Specialist	In-person	In-country	
Zana Vokopola	Urban Research Institute	Director	In-person	In-country	
Edlir Vokopola	Urban Research Institute	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Drini Nushi	Urban Research Institute	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Erni Kocani	Urban Research Institute	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Arsen Proko	Agricultural University of Tirana	Expert	In-person	In-country	
Ervina Kolami	Kolonja Womens Association	Gender representative for project	In-person	In-country	
Anjeza Konini	Independent	Women workshop recipient	In-person	In-country	
Xhentil Avdyli	Independent	Women workshop recipient	In-person	In-country	
Vadiola Beqo	Independent	Women workshop recipient	In-person	In-country	
Arben Kasho	Farmer/Resource User	Beneficiary/Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Ahir Jace	Farmer/Resource User	Beneficiary/Training Recipient	In-person	In-country	
Ali Laho	Hired through URI	Expert/Trainer/Community Facilitator	In-person	In-country	
Kristaq Cepo	Kolonja Municipality	Agronomist - facilitator of site near Leskovik	In-person	In-country	
Johan Willert	Swedish Embassy	None/Possible synergy seeking	Email conversation		

Name of stakeholder	Institution	Affiliation/Role in Project	Zoom interview/Email	Date(s) of interview	Additional engagement
Elvana Zheza	Balkan Center for Coordination and Development	Synergies and information sharing	Email conversation		
Camille Marconnetc	French Agency for Development	Synergies and information sharing	Email conversation		

Table 6. Country mission schedule for the SLM Albania Project Terminal Evaluation

Day, Date	Activity
Monday, 5 Sep	Arrive in Tirana (Public Holiday in Albania)
Tuesday, 6 Sep	*Interviews and meetings Tirana* **08:30-09:15** Brief introductory meeting with Valmira (Tirana International Hotel) Ministry of Tourism and Environment: **09:30-11:00** Klodiana Marika + Ylli Hoxha **(**together**)** +translator **11:30-12:30** Ornela Cuci, Deputy Minister (no longer in position) @Taiwan restaurant **14:30-17:30** Urban Research Institute: Zana Vokopola Edlir Vokopola Drini Nushi **17:30 - 18:30** Erni Kocani @Boutique Hotel Vila
Wednesday, 7 Sep 08:30 - 12:30 12:30-14:00 lunch interview slot 14:30-16:30 16:30-20:00 coffee/dinner interview slots	*Interviews and meetings Tirana* **Morning: 08:30-12:30** Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development: +Translator **08:30-10:00** Ndricim Bytyci + Mimoza Shahini Ministry of Tourism and Environment: **10:30-11:00** Sofjan Jaupaj, GEF OP Focal Point Agricultural University of Tirana:

Day, Date	Activity
	11:30-12:30 Arsen Proko **confirmed (at Hotel Boutique Vila)** **Afternoon: 14:30-16:30** National Forest Agency: **confirmed** + translator **14:30-14:45** Brief introduction with General Director Artur Kala **14:45-16:30** Behar Hate + Alban Kostollari + Mikel Nako + Bilena Hyseni + Bruno Asa + Elmaz Islami + Ilir Bala + Klitii Starja
Thursday, 8 Sep	*Interviews and meetings in Erseke + translator all day* **Morning: (05:00-09:00)** *Travel to Erseke* **Municipality of Kolonja:** **08:30-09:00** Erion Isai, Mayor **09:00-09:30** Amiraldo Jaho (Head of Staff of Agency of Forests and Pastures) new deputy mayor **10:00-10:30** Paqësor Cane **11:00-15:00** Site visits (joined by Islam Liso, Eleni Aliko, Edmond Prifti, Paqësor Cane) **16:00-16:30** Ervina Kolami
Friday, 9 Sep All day	*Field visits and Interviews close to Erseke + translator all day* **07:30-08:30** Discussion with farmers involved in training (Arben Kasho, Ahir Jace) **08:30-09:00** Anjeza Konini, Xhentil Avdyli, Vadiola Beqo (women workshop) **09:00-10:00** Fatjon Kasko + Kostika Malo **10:00-13:00** Field Visit (Ali Laho, Edmond Prifti) **13:00-14:00** lunch, including interview with Kristaq Cepo **14:00-15:00** Fact checking with Edmond Prifti and Ali Laho **15:00** pass by Deputy Mayor for thanks and fairwells travel back to Tirana
Saturday, 10 Sep	*Rest*
Sunday, 11 Sep	*Write up of results*

Day, Date	Activity
Monday, 12 Sep	*Final interviews* **09:00-10:00** Arsen Proko follow up after being in field +translator **10:30-13:30** Meeting with Valmira go through everything **14:00-15:00** Dhimiter Pina **confirmed** +translator **15:00-20:00** Write up and Email with Prelim Findings to key stakeholders: MTE, NFA, URI, Uni Tirana, Kolonja
Tuesday, 13 September	Depart from Tirana 04:10 am

ANNEX III. PROJECT BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Table 7: Expenditure by Component for the SLM Albania Project ***not provided within the evaluation period, the evaluator sent multiple reminders over email and then was informed by the task manager that the budget reports for Albania were "in the old methods i.e. not classified under components".***

Component/sub-component/output *All figures as USD*	**Estimated cost at design (USD) Source: (PRODOC)/Original Budget[95]**	**Actual Cost/ expenditure (USD)**	**Expenditure ratio (actual/planned)**
Component 1	GEF: 247,000		
Component 2	GEF: 536,709		
Project Management	GEF: 78,871		

Table 8. Financial Management Table of the SLM Albania Project

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
1. Completeness of project financial information[96]:			
Provision of key documents to the evaluator (based on the responses to A-G below)		S	
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	Yes, well outlined at design, including separate excel budget for co-design
B.	Revisions to the budget	Yes	Yes, well communicated
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	All received, after requesting for specific documentation still missing by country mission
D.	Proof of fund transfers	Yes	n/a
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	Not really	Figures are shown in the co-financing documentation, but the evaluator did not see detailed evidence of cash expenditures
F.	A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes, budget lines, and annual level; but not for project components	
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)*	Yes	Only for the management responses to the MTR issue raised
H.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list): *legal letters of delayed funds disbursement between UNEP and Executing Agency*	No	n/a

[95] The amount in the prodoc does not coincide with the amount in the
[96] See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference

Any gaps in terms of financial information that could be indicative of shortcomings in the project's compliance[97] with the UNEP or donor rules	No	n/a
Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the evaluation process	MS	Had to request several times, there were delays, but these were apparently because they had not been signed off
2. Communication between finance and project management staff	S	
Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status.	S	Strong level of awareness of project financials by FMO and TM
Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done.	S	No real issues needed addressing, budget revisions looked clean, FMO on top of disbursements.
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager.	S	
Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports.	S	No comments on delays or issues with transfers.
Overall rating	S	

Table 9. Co-financing Table for the SLM Albania Project

Co-financing (Type/Source)	UNEP own Financing (US$1,000)		Other* (US$1,000)		Total (US$1,000)		Total Disbursed (US$1,000)
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
– In-kind support	250	257	5,900	5,900	5,900	5,900	5,900
– Other (*) -cash			3,520	3,520[98]	3,520	3,520[99]	3,520[100]
Totals	250	250	9,420	**9,420**	9,670	9,670	9,670,

Table 10. Co-financing committed versus actual per partner for the SLM Albania Project

Committed	**Actual**
UNEP	
RoE USD 250,000 (in-kind)	RoE USD 250,000 (in-kind)
Third-Party	
Ministry of Tourism and Environment USD 3,500,000 (cash) USD 4,500,000 (in-kind)	Ministry of Tourism and Environment USD 8,000,000 (final co-finance reporting does not quantify in-kind versus cash)

[97] Compliance with financial systems is not assessed specifically in the evaluation. Nevertheless, if the evaluation identifies gaps in the financial data, or raises other concerns of a compliance nature, a recommendation should be given to cover the topic in an upcoming audit, or similar financial oversight exercise.
[98] While this figure was reported on, there was no evidence to show the cash expenditures.
[99] While this figure was reported on, there was no evidence to show the cash expenditures.
[100] While this figure was reported on, there was no evidence to show the cash expenditures.

Committed	Actual
Kolonja Municipality USD 20,000 (cash) USD 450,000 (in-kind)	Kolonka Municipality USD 470,000 (final co-finance reporting does not quantify in-kind versus cash)
Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration USD 750,000 (in-kind)	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development USD 600,000
Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, Agricultural University of Tirana USD 100,000 (in-kind)	Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, Agricultural University of Tirana USD 180,000
Faculty of Forest Sciences, Agricultural University of Tirana USD 100,000 (in-kind)	USD 170,000
Total: USD 9,670,000	**Total: USD 9,670,000**

ANNEX IV. LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Documents reviewed for the SLM Albania Project Terminal Evaluation include:

- Evaluation Terms of Reference
- GEF MSP CEO Endorsement Request and Annexes
- GEF Submission and Review Documentation
- Project PIRs
- Final Project Report
- All project agreements and amendments thereof
- Quarterly Progress Reports
- Initial Budget Plans, Budget Revision
- Financial Reporting, including co-financing and all expenditure reports
- Partner progress reports and financial reporting (URI)
- All component-related outputs
- Project Exit Strategy
- Steering Committee written reports and minutes
- Outreach and Communications materials
- Training reporting
- No-cost extension requests and approval documentation
- Additional email communications requested for verification and triangulations

ANNEX V. GEF PORTAL - SLM ALBANIA TE INPUT

The following table contains text to be uploaded to the GEF Portal. **<u>It will be drawn from the Evaluation Report, either as copied or summarised text.</u>** In each case, references should be provided for the paragraphs and pages of the report from which the responses have been copied or summarised.

Question: What was the performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets? (For projects approved prior to GEF-7[101], these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided[102]).
Response: *(Might be drawn from Monitoring and Reporting section)* The LD-PMAT tool was used (as it was a GEF-6 project) which covered core indicators related to LD1-ecosystem services in production landscapes (i) land area under effective agricultural, rangeland and pastoral mgmt practices = 240 ha (relating to pilot sites) LD3 - SLM in wider landscapes (integrated management) (ii) application of INRM practices in the wider landscape = 21,288 ha This was not entirely achieved - steps were made to understand the LD situation better by mapping these areas, but the evaluator would not say that the area is under INRM. The extent (and validity of the numbers given) to which this was actually achieved is discussed in paragraphs 111, 142, 143 and 252.
Question: What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program as evolved from the time of the MTR? *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*
Response: *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)* The project made an excellent effort to engage all the relevant stakeholders and enhance partnerships through project activities. It did this most notably and effectively by providing a link to the newly established NFA with Kolonja Municipality, which will likely be modelled and replicated to other municipalities. The project was very flexible and responsive to partner requests. However, as already mentioned in sections above, in an attempt to please as many partners as possible resulted in the limiting of its own direction and results attainment and sustainability. The level of engagement at community level, although in this regard the project depended on the Kolonja Municipality, went in a direction that was not planned (i.e. the 50 households). This should be picked apart to better understand and learn from. Government turnover meant that some institutions were broken down (e.g. Forest Policy) and some new ones were created (e.g. National Forest Agency). The project did well to take advantage of these changes.

[101] The GEF is currently operating under the seventh replenishment period of the GEF Trust Fund covering the period July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2022. The GEF Portal Reporting Guide for FY20 Reporting Process indicates that GEF-6 projects that have yet to map existing indicators to GEF-7 Core Indicators need to do so at MTR stage or (if already there) at the time of the TE. .(i.e. not GEF projects approved before GEF-6)

[102] This is not applicable for Enabling Activities

See paragraphs 224-226, 31-33, 34, 37.
Question: What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas? *(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)*
Response: *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)* The project did not really have gender-specific indicators. However, it made demonstrated efforts to include and enhance the role of women in the following ways: - On March 26, 2021 a workshop on "Gender Perspectives in Sustainable Forest and Land Management" was organized in Kolonja. COVID-19 restrictions were observed during the workshop limiting the number of participants to 9 (8 women and 1 man). Some of the conclusions of the workshop reached through discussions and exercises organized during the day were: 1) need for trainings related to sustainable land and forest management, protection of the quality of agricultural crops, marketing and increasing women's entry into markets; 2) need for flexible training based on mobile training centres, that can be easily approached by women; 3) need for new guarantee schemes, with a defined target of female beneficiaries in the village; 4) need for Increased advertising on different schemes and by promoting special programs on local radio and television stations. - the involvement of women groups in various events including through supporting the women of Kolonja Womens' Group in selling their agri-products at various outreach events held in Erseke - inviting the lead of the Kolonja Women's Group to the Austria training (although this was perhaps not appropriate given that the participant did not find it relevant to them). See paragraphs 228-231.
Question: What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. *(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)*
Response: *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)* While the project focused on environmental and social health through healing forest ecosystems, there are some things to note that might be of relevance. The kind of rehabilitation activities and planning were anthropocentric, meaning that they serve the use of humans only and do not necessarily prioritise the forest ecosystem in a holistic manner (e.g. planting of pine trees and black locust, for instance, which are not strictly indigenous to the area even if historically relevant). Planting but without actually taking into consideration and dealing with root causes and drivers of degradation will always on be symptomatic fixes, and dealing with rehabilitation and not restoration will also not enhance ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change. This said, the environmental and social safeguards of the project are still a value add over what was there before the project, I.e. business-as-usual.

The environmental and social screening of the project was done at design phase and did not find any high risks, the evaluator agrees with this assessment.

See paragraphs 233-237.

Question: What were the challenges and outcomes regarding the project's completed Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions? *(This should be based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

Response: *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)*

Communication and outreach was integrated into component 1 through capacity development, as well as through an output dedicated to communication and awareness. This will not be repeated here as it is already covered under the Availability of Outputs under Effectiveness.

The project had a communications strategy and had some good, practical outreach campaigns for various target groups (university students - including through an SLM-related forestry course, school children - through planting and essay competitions, politicians, Kolonja public, women resource users, farmers, etc) on strategic awareness days. It also had a project communications office nested in the Kolonja Municipality (including an updated website by the municipality), a one-stop shop for SLM information.

A total of six awareness raising activities were held over the five years, usually taking place during International Forest Day, World Environment Day, or World Soil Day. At these events, tree planting took place, presentations were held, environmental movies were shown, essay competitions were held.103

Project briefs and pamphlets, social media, and a promotional video was developed and shared throughout the project and housed in the office described in the paragraph below.

The last activity of this output was to establish a local platform/communication office for organizing informative and interactive workshops for sharing of information and experiences. This local office was established in 2019 within the Municipality of Kolonja which hosted all awareness materials, reports and analyses. The municipality updated its website, and social media was utilized to share promotional materials. Towards the end of the project, there was a change in staff and the person who was running the office and would have likely continued sustaining the communications aspects left, and there was not an effective replacement, meaning that the office/platform likely ended with the project.

See paragraphs 104-107; 242-244

Question: What are the main findings of the evaluation?

Response:

This project was **<u>timely in that it came as a request from Government</u>** during a time when deforestation and land degradation was threatening ecosystems and livelihoods of people and was being prioritised in terms of the country plans (e.g. NAP) and the country's accession into the EU.

[103] These included: World Environment Day 5 June 2018, World Soil Day 5 December 2018, World Forest Day 18 March 2019 on which the Mayor of Kolonja attended and 300 chestnuts were planted near Erseke, World Soil Day 5 December 2020, International Forest Day 18 March 2021 where the women's workshop took place and thereafter the same women planted 300 trees (*Acacia spp* and *Pinus negra spp)*. In addition, the project also was showcased through the International Congress for Soil Conservation 26-28 September 2019.

However, the concept of LD and SLM was/is new to the country and not on the radar in relation to more embedded ecosystem health concepts like biodiversity conservation and protected areas. The project, the first of its kind in Albania, **has certainly set up some foundational steps for which the country can build its LD strategy from, at least with regard to forest and pasture ecosystems.**

The project was convoluted and ambitious in that it set out to do multiple things focusing on agriculture and forestry. The MTR focused it a bit, but ultimately, an **overall lack of direction and strategy led it to underachieve in terms of the reconstructed Theory of Change.** While it can be argued that it achieved substantial delivery when compared to a relatively small GEF budget, the co-financing, which was large (>9 million USD) should have reflected greater ambition and commitment from the country in terms of the TOC.

The project did well in **engaging stakeholders and responding to country priority and demand during implementation, but this was one of the reasons for the limited direction and more strategic adaptiveness**.

Partnerships through the project laid a strong foundation for further work, particularly through t**he involvement of the National Forest Agency** which was established late in the implementation of the project but brought benefits in terms of enhancing the quality of deliverables such as the sub-legal acts, enhancing platforms for partnership and embedding some sustainability and ownership institutionally. The partnership with the Agricultural University of Tirana, as well as local (academic) expertise at Kolonja, provided valuable contributions and probably will sustain in the supporting of activities through continued communications.

The **ownership and communications within MoTE was complicated by a change in championship early on from the technical level to the political level which may have raised the profile and power, but ultimately did little to really embed and champion project results within the project.** The project will need to work (through the closing meeting) to bring the technical champions forward in a way that these results can be driven by the MoTE.

While the project **developed some good quality deliverables for component 1, particularly in supporting the implementation of the Forest Law, the uptake of the key contributions** (sub-legal acts, and the SLM handbook on mainstreaming SLM into country strategies) has not gone as planned (so far, see above point). The grazing mechanism is likely to be enforced in Kolonja, but there was no evidence to suggest the LD indicators were in use at the time of the evaluation.

The project achieved well in its capacity development, especially the TOT models and knowledge decentralisation. Its outreach, especially targeting students and school children, was a strong contribution to SLM for the country.

The project also put **much effort into the engagement and empowerment of women in the project activitie**s, did its best to identify gender disaggregated issues related to the project objectives at an early stage in the project and consider effective participation and inclusion during the entire implementation lifetime of the project.

The site rehabilitation plan was a good compromise between what was to be achieved through the project plan, and what was ultimately feasible to do with the budget, capacity and left over time. **What the project ended up with was a better understanding of LD pressures on the land through the mapping of LD across 21,288 ha of forests and pastureland in Kolonja, and a plan to implement rehabilitation and SLM/SFM across 120 ha of the most degraded sites, and actual rehabilitation of ~9 ha of land (of which more than half failed).** However, this compromise meant that the contribution, in terms of global benefit for LD, was insignificant when talking of any real land degradation reduction on the ground. What was supposed to be one of the key activities of the project, became its weakest contribution. While the commitment to implement the plan in terms of more rehabilitation is there (from the Kolonja Municipality and support by NFA, through demonstrated evidence of more funding support of e.g. 2,000 additional pine trees), very basic maintenance of existing rehabilitated sites was not done causing the failure of these sites. A lesson here should be learnt in terms of prioritising the servicing of rehabilitated sites and dealing with actual drivers of degradation before planting more trees (which is the equivalent of superficially and symptomatically dealing with a chronic problem).

Building on the point above, **there was a lack of direction in how to really deal with land degradation - the root drivers/causes (e.g. illegal logging, forest use).** Bringing in communities to discuss this openly through co-solving and co-creating, setting up demonstration sites of sustainable use, SLM demo sites of small ha farms, setting up cooperatives, linking these demo sites to market incentives under the thematic areas of e.g. agro-eco-tourism and nature-based tourism could have had some potential in dealing with such drivers. Implementing the rehabilitation plan in a way that deals with these drivers and also includes servicing/protecting actual rehabilitated sites before starting new ones would go a long way in sustaining project results.

This all said, the project did lay some foundational steps toward thinking about SLM in the context of forests and pastureland and this has moved the conversation and action forward towards the TOC impact, even if it has not moved it as far as the project would have liked.

Sustainability of project results will depend strongly on the efficacy of the closing meeting, and a recommendation is made to this effect.

LDN does not seem to be high on the agenda for the country. When asked about this, as already mentioned, the evaluator was told that the development of targets was waiting on the finalisation of the agricultural strategy. This is a strange sequence as the evaluator would have thought that LD indicators should inform agricultural strategy, and not the other way around (agricultural productivity depends on healthy land).

Thinking about nesting LDN within economic arguments, such as economic valuation of healthy forests (to nature based tourism, for instance, among other benefits) and within the framing of biodiversity conservation and climate change vis nature-based solutions, would probably be a more strategic leverage point to prioritise and get action done in terms of LDN.

See paragraphs 245-259

ANNEX VI. EVALUATION TORS (WITHOUT ANNEXES)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF project

Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) in Albania through Integrated Restoration of Ecosystems (GEF ID 9477)

Section 1: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

1. Project General Information

Table 11: Project Summary

GEF Project ID:	9477		
Implementing Agency:	UNEP	**Executing Agencies:**	UNEP Regional Office for Europe
Relevant SDG(s) and indicator(s):	SDG 15, target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally		
GEF Core Indicator Targets (identify these for projects approved prior to GEF-7[104])	**??**		
Sub-programme:	Environmental Governance	**Expected Accomplishment(s):**	**??**
UNEP approval date:	**??**	**Programme of Work Output(s):**	PoW 2019-2020
GEF approval date:	21 June 2017	**Project type:**	MSP
GEF Operational Programme #:	GEF-6	**Focal Area(s):**	Land Degradation
		GEF Strategic Priority:	LD-1: Agro-ecological Intensification LD-3: Scaling up SLM through the Landscape Approach
***Expected* start date:**	**??**	**Actual start date:**	23 October, 2017
***Planned* operational completion date:**	31 July 2020	**Actual operational completion date:**	31 December 2021
***Planned* project budget at approval:**	USD 10,537,580	**Actual total expenditures reported as of 31 Dec 2021:**	USD 799,803
GEF grant allocation:	USD 867,580	**GEF grant expenditures reported as of 30 June 2021**	USD 746,462
Project Preparation Grant - GEF financing:	USD 45,662	**Project Preparation Grant - co-financing:**	N/A

[104] *This does not apply for Enabling Activities*

***Expected* Medium-Size Project co-financing:**	USD 9,670,000 (USD cash; USD in-kind)	**Secured Medium-Size Project co-financing:**	USD 9,670,000
Date of first disbursement:	1 December, 2018	**Planned date of financial closure:**	December 2022
No. of formal project revisions:	??	**Date of last approved project revision:**	??
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	??	**Date of last/next Steering Committee meeting:**	Last: ?? Next: ??
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation *(planned date):*	27 May 2020	**Mid-term Review (actual date):**	??
Terminal Evaluation *(planned date):*	27 February 2022	**Terminal Evaluation (actual date):**	June – Oct 2022
Coverage - Country(ies):	Albania	**Coverage - Region(s):**	Europe
Dates of previous project phases:	??	**Status of future project phases:**	??

2. Project Rationale

1. Albania's dependency on the agriculture and forestry sectors for social and economic development, combined with the on-going degradation of fundamental ecosystem services in agricultural, pasture and forest lands, demonstrate the crucial importance of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) for the country. Despite the economic and environmental importance of soil resources for the country, Albania's challenges related to soil management have largely been neglected for years, with serious repercussions on soil quality. The predominant forms of soil erosion include: surface erosion, coastal erosion, riverbank erosion, transportation of silt and impoverishment of soil fertility, with soil losses estimated to be at an average of 16.4 t/ha annually (2010). Other land quality challenges include: salinization, 'acid soils', soil compaction and loss of soil organic matter. Albania is among the most affected countries in Europe in terms of the extent and intensity of land degradation, and economic losses stemming from the effects of erosion and compaction of arable land amount to USD 138.2 million per year or about 5.5% of agricultural GDP.

2. Land degradation is a significant threat to Albania's socio-economic and environmental well-being, and the project was designed to support the widespread adoption of SLM activities in the country by supporting integrated landscape management planning that balances development needs and environmental services, strengthening and harmonising legal and policy frameworks for land and resource management, building capacity and coordination frameworks to undertake SLM practices, and increasing public awareness on land degradation threats. At the site level, the project aimed to demonstrate integrated land use planning and ecosystem restoration approaches that further promote SLM goals in order to showcase these practices for wider replication. Through these activities, the project intended to address the key elements of land degradation including in particular deforestation, improper soil management and inappropriate crop management and so expected to reduce the negative impacts of land degradation, including extensive soil erosion and landslides.

3. Several legal and institutional changes, including a law in 2015 on Territorial Reform, brought new environmental and agricultural challenges to the municipal level. The institutional landscape is multi-layered while the legislation at the central and local (municipal) levels is typically not harmonized. Albania's national decentralization strategy is reported to have transferred most responsibilities for forest management to local governments, without yet providing increased staffing and staff training, legislation to support local government management, and budget and resource allocations to municipalities. Resource managers at the local level were identified as having extremely limited experience, knowledge, resources and capacity in applying sustainable land management practices.

4. The lack of opportunities in most rural communities and subsequent out migration has changed the age structure, and thus the level of experience, of farm holders throughout the country: 33% of farmers over 65 years old; 6.5% of farm managers are women while the gender roles associate control/acess to agricultural assets and decision making with men. Albanian women are nearly twice as likely as men to be employed as contributing family workers, i.e. in informal employment or vulnerable jobs, and women spend significantly more time than men in unpaid work. Around 50% of employed women are engaged in agricultural activities. Wthin this context the project was expected to address the different needs and priorities of women and men through *'moving away from long-standing debates about gender equality in access to land towards the mainstreaming of gender issues to achieve more gender-equitable participation in the processes and institutions that underlie all decision-making about land'* (CEO Endorsement, 2017).

3. Project Results Framework

4. The project's objective was presented as *'strengthening capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and promoting sustainable land management (SLM) practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration'* (CEO Endorsement, 2017). The goal of the project is give as *'to enhance Albania's institutional and legislative environment to effectively mitigate the causes and negative impacts of land degradation through SLM practices'* (PIR, 2021).

5. Despite being approved in 2017, the project documents do not contain a Theory of Change (TOC). This means that the TOC will need to be reconstructed during the evaluation process.

7. The project was delivered through two components with associated outcomes as follows:

Table 12: Results statements (PIR, 2021)

Component 1: Strengthened legal and institutional framework and capacity building for SLM	
Outcome 1.1:	**Shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors through**
Outputs	1.1.1. SLM approaches mainstreamed into revised legal framework and land management planning processes
	1.1.2. Strengthened SLM initiatives, while engaging with local communities, and manage information flows and implementation of policies in the local level
Component 2: Demonstrating and Scaling-up of SLM Best Practices	
Outcome 1.2:	**Capacities and support for sustainable land management strengthened**
Outputs	1.2.1 Relevant national and municipal resource managers capacitated in land use planning, SLM practices, ecosystem restoration, and use of economic instruments

4. Executing Arrangements

8. UNEP is the Implementing Agency for this project. The work was managed within the GEF Biodiversity Unit, which is part of the Biodiversity and Land Branch of the Ecosystems Division. UNEP's Regional Office for Europe (ROE) is the executing agency of the project while the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) is the main national partner and Kolonja Municipality the local partner. The project is also working closely with other national partners such as the Urban Research Institute (URI), the Faculty of Forestry Sciences in the Agricultural University of Tirana, and the National Forest Agency.

5. Project Cost and Financing

Table 13: Project Financing at Design (CEO Endorsement, June 2016)

Item	GEF Financing	Co-Financing	TOTAL
Component 1: Strengthened legal and institutional framework and capacity building for SLM	**USD 250,000**	**USD 3,190,000**	**USD 3,440,000**

Component 2: Demonstrating and Scaling-up of SLM Best Practices	**USD 538,709**	**USD 5,600,000**	**USD 6,138,709**
Total Project Costs	**USD 788,709**	**USD 8,790,000**	**USD 9,578,709** (Project Management Costs: 78,781 + 880,000)

6. Implementation Issues

9. The project **did/did not** carry out a Mid Term Review.

10. The original implementation period was extended by 18 months from 31 July 2020 to 31 Dec 2021.

Section 2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

7. Objective of the Evaluation

In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy[105] and the UNEP Programme Manual[106], the Terminal Evaluation is undertaken at operational completion of the project to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The Evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, GEF and the main project partners, inlcudin NEPAD. Therefore, the Evaluation will identify lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation, especially where a second phase of the project is being considered. Recommendations relevant to the whole house may also be identified during the evaluation process.

8. Key Evaluation Principles

Evaluation findings and judgements will be based on **sound evidence and analysis**, clearly documented in the Evaluation Report. Information will be triangulated (i.e. verified from different sources) as far as possible, and when verification is not possible, the single source will be mentioned (whilst anonymity is still protected). Analysis leading to evaluative judgements should always be clearly spelled out.

The "Why?" Question. As this is a Terminal Evaluation and a follow-up project is likely [or similar interventions are envisaged for the future], particular attention will be given to learning from the experience. Therefore, the "*why?*" question should be at the front of the consultants' minds all through the evaluation exercise and is supported by the use of a theory of change approach. This means that the consultant(s) needs to go beyond the assessment of "*what*" the project performance was and make a serious effort to provide a deeper understanding of "*why*" the performance was as it was (i.e. what contributed to the achievement of the project's results). This should provide the basis for the lessons that can be drawn from the project.

Attribution, Contribution and Credible Association: In order to *attribute* any outcomes and impacts to a project intervention, one needs to consider the difference between what has happened with, and what would have happened without, the project (i.e. take account of changes over time and between contexts in order to isolate the effects of an intervention). This requires appropriate baseline data and the identification of a relevant counterfactual, both of which are frequently not available for evaluations. Establishing the *contribution* made by a project in a complex change process relies heavily on prior intentionality (e.g. approved project design documentation, logical framework) and the articulation of causality (e.g. narrative and/or illustration of the Theory of Change). Robust evidence that a project was delivered as designed and that the expected causal pathways developed supports claims of contribution and this is strengthened where an alternative theory of change can be excluded. A *credible association* between the implementation of a project and observed positive

105 https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/policies-and-strategies

106 https://wecollaborate.unep.org

effects can be made where a strong causal narrative, although not explicitly articulated, can be inferred by the chronological sequence of events, active involvement of key actors and engagement in critical processes.

Communicating evaluation results. A key aim of the Evaluation is to encourage reflection and learning by UNEP staff and key project stakeholders. The consultant(s) should consider how reflection and learning can be promoted, both through the evaluation process and in the communication of evaluation findings and key lessons. Clear and concise writing is required on all evaluation deliverables. Draft and final versions of the Main Evaluation Report will be shared with key stakeholders by the Evaluation Manager. There may, however, be several intended audiences, each with different interests and needs regarding the report. The consultant(s) will plan with the Evaluation Manager which audiences to target and the easiest and clearest way to communicate the key evaluation findings and lessons to them. This may include some, or all, of the following; a webinar, conference calls with relevant stakeholders, the preparation of an Evaluation Brief or interactive presentation.

9. Key Strategic Questions

In addition to the evaluation criteria outlined in Section 10 below, the Evaluation will contribute to addressing the **strategic questions** listed in the first box below. These are questions of interest to UNEP and to which the project is believed to be able to make a substantive contribution. Also included, further down, are <u>five questions that are required when reporting in the GEF Portal and these must be addressed in the TE.</u>

The first set of questions outlined in the box below are intended to support a review of UNEP's portfolio of Sustainable Land Management projects. As this project (GEF 5822) is part of this SLM Portfolio, the evaluation consultant will be expected to: read a 30pg background document on UNEP's SLM work to-date; discuss these questions in a short online meeting; review/contribute to a draft SLM Portfolio TOC; collect data against these questions during the project evaluation and review/contribute to a draft SLM Portfolio brief (both in writing and during a half-day online meeting).

Q1. To what extent, and in what ways, has this project worked in a complementary/coherent manner with other identified SLM projects reaching operational completion in the same year?

a) Do the project teams know about each other and do they share information/learning?

b) Do the participants have any opportunities to share learning?

Q2. To what extent, and in what ways, are project teams (UNEP and Executing Agencies) aware of working within a common technical framework (e.g. do staff/partners think that UNEP is providing common guidance on technical approaches, applying common results formulation or measurement etc)

Q3. In what ways does the design of this project contribute to a common TOC on SLM (a proposed portfolio TOC will be provided during the inception phase of this project evaluation)? Further details on the possible elements/nature of the contribution will be provided (e.g. innovation, transformation effect, potential for substantive global and/or institutional contribution etc).

Q4. Has this project contributed to any efficiencies/economies of scale stemming from UNEP managing several projects on a similar topic? (E.g. have project designs been more efficient or of higher quality due to expertise within the UNEP GEF Focal Unit on Biodiversity and Land Degradation? Have partnership been able to develop at a more mature level? Have common measures of results been developed? Etc)

<u>Address the questions required for the GEF Portal in the appropriate parts of the report and provide a summary of the findings in the Conclusions section of the report:</u>

(a) Under **Monitoring and Reporting/Monitoring of Project Implementation**:

What was the performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets? (For projects approved prior to GEF-7, these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided[107]).

(b) Under **Factors Affecting Performance/Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation**:

What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program as evolved from the time of the MTR? *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

(c) Under **Factors Affecting Performance/Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality**:

[107] *This is not applicable for Enabling Activities*

What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas? *(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)*

(d) Under **Factors Affecting Performance/Environmental and Social Safeguards**:

What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. *(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)*

(e) Under **Factors Affecting Performance/Communication and Public Awareness**:

What were the challenges and outcomes regarding the project's completed Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions? *(This should be based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

10. Evaluation Criteria

All evaluation criteria will be rated on a six-point scale. Sections A-I below, outline the scope of the criteria. A weightings table in excel format will be provided by the Evaluation Manager to support the determination of an overall project rating. The set of evaluation criteria are grouped in nine categories: (A) Strategic Relevance; (B) Quality of Project Design; (C) Nature of External Context; (D) Effectiveness, which comprises assessments of the availability of outputs, achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact; (E) Financial Management; (F) Efficiency; (G) Monitoring and Reporting; (H) Sustainability; and (I) Factors Affecting Project Performance. The Evaluation Consultant(s) can propose other evaluation criteria as deemed appropriate.

A. Strategic Relevance

The Evaluation will assess the extent to which the activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the donors, implementing regions/countries and the target beneficiaries. The Evaluation will include an assessment of the project's relevance in relation to UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies at the time of project approval. Under strategic relevance an assessment of the complementarity of the project with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups will be made. This criterion comprises four elements:

i. Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy[108] (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities

The Evaluation should assess the project's alignment with the MTS and POW under which the project was approved and include, in its narrative, reflections on the scale and scope of any contributions made to the planned results reflected in the relevant MTS and POW. UNEP strategic priorities include the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building[109] (BSP) and South-South Cooperation (S-SC). The BSP relates to the capacity of governments to: comply with international agreements and obligations at the national level; promote, facilitate and finance environmentally sound technologies and to strengthen frameworks for developing coherent international environmental policies. S-SC is regarded as the exchange of resources, technology and knowledge between developing countries.

ii. Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partner Strategic Priorities

Donor, including GEF, strategic priorities will vary across interventions. GEF priorities are specified in published programming priorities and focal area strategies. The Evaluation will assess the extent to which the project is suited to, or responding to, donor priorities. In some cases, alignment with donor priorities may be a fundamental part of project design and grant approval processes while in others, for example, instances of 'softly-earmarked' funding, such alignment may be more of an assumption that should be assessed.

iii. Relevance to Global, Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities

The Evaluation will assess the alignment of the project with global priorities such as the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The extent to which the intervention is suited, or responding to, the stated environmental concerns and needs of the countries, sub-regions or regions where it is being implemented will be considered. Examples may include: UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), national or sub-national development plans, poverty reduction strategies or Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) plans or regional agreements etc. Within

[108] *UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) is a document that guides UNEP's programme planning over a four-year period. It identifies UNEP's thematic priorities, known as Sub-programmes (SP), and sets out the desired outcomes, known as Expected Accomplishments (EAs), of the Sub-programmes. https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/our-evaluation-approach/un-environment-documents*

[109] *http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction/about/bsp.htm*

this section consideration will be given to whether the needs of all beneficiary groups are being met and reflects the current policy priority to leave no one behind.

iv. Complementarity with Relevant Existing Interventions/Coherence[110]

An assessment will be made of how well the project, either at design stage or during the project inception or mobilization[111], took account of ongoing and planned initiatives (under the same sub-programme, other UNEP sub-programmes, or being implemented by other agencies within the same country, sector or institution) that address similar needs of the same target groups. The Evaluation will consider if the project team, in collaboration with Regional Offices and Sub-Programme Coordinators, made efforts to ensure their own intervention was complementary to other interventions, optimized any synergies and avoided duplication of effort. Examples may include UNDAFs or One UN programming. Linkages with other interventions should be described and instances where UNEP's comparative advantage has been particularly well applied should be highlighted.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Stakeholders' participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality
- Country ownership and driven-ness

B. Quality of Project Design

The quality of project design is assessed using an agreed template during the evaluation inception phase, ratings are attributed to identified criteria and an overall Project Design Quality rating is established. The complete Project Design Quality template should be annexed in the Evaluation Inception Report. Later, the overall Project Design Quality rating[112] should be entered in the final evaluation ratings table (as item B) in the Main Evaluation Report and a summary of the project's strengths and weaknesses at design stage should be included within the body of the report.

Factors affecting this criterion may include (at the design stage):

- Stakeholders participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality

C. Nature of External Context

At evaluation inception stage a rating is established for the project's external operating context (considering the prevalence of conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval[113]). This rating is entered in the final evaluation ratings table as item C. Where a project has been rated as facing either an Unfavourable or Highly Unfavourable external operating context, and/or a negative external event has occurred during project implementation, the ratings for Effectiveness, Efficiency and/or Sustainability may be increased at the discretion of the Evaluation Consultant and Evaluation Manager together. A justification for such an increase must be given.

D. Effectiveness

i. Availability of Outputs[114]

The Evaluation will assess the project's success in producing the programmed outputs and making them available to the intended beneficiaries as well as its success in achieving milestones as per the project design document (ProDoc). Any *formal* modifications/revisions made during project implementation will be considered part of the project design. Where the project outputs are inappropriately or inaccurately stated in the ProDoc, reformulations may be necessary in the reconstruction of the Theory of Change (TOC). In such cases a table should be provided showing the original and the reformulation of the outputs for transparency. The availability of outputs will be assessed in terms of both quantity and quality, and the assessment will consider their ownership

[110] This sub-category is consistent with the new criterion of 'Coherence' introduced by the OECD-DAC in 2019.

[111] A project's inception or mobilization period is understood as the time between project approval and first disbursement. Complementarity during project implementation is considered under Efficiency, see below.

[112] In some instances, based on data collected during the evaluation process, the assessment of the project's design quality may change from Inception Report to Main Evaluation Report.

[113] Note that 'political upheaval' does not include regular national election cycles, but unanticipated unrest or prolonged disruption. The potential delays or changes in political support that are often associated with the regular national election cycle should be part of the project's design and addressed through adaptive management by the project team. From March 2020 this should include the effects of COVID-19.

[114] Outputs are the availability (for intended beneficiaries/users) of new products and services and/or gains in knowledge, abilities and awareness of individuals or within institutions (UNEP, 2019)

by, and usefulness to, intended beneficiaries and the timeliness of their provision. It is noted that emphasis is placed on the performance of those outputs that are most important to achieve outcomes. The Evaluation will briefly explain the reasons behind the success or shortcomings of the project in delivering its programmed outputs and meeting expected quality standards.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Preparation and readiness
- Quality of project management and supervision[115]

ii. Achievement of Project Outcomes[116]

The achievement of project outcomes is assessed as performance against the project outcomes as defined in the reconstructed[117] Theory of Change. These are outcomes that are intended to be achieved by the end of the project timeframe and within the project's resource envelope. Emphasis is placed on the achievement of project outcomes that are most important for attaining intermediate states. As with outputs, a table can be used where substantive amendments to the formulation of project outcomes is necessary to allow for an assessment of performance. The Evaluation should report evidence of attribution between UNEP's intervention and the project outcomes. In cases of normative work or where several actors are collaborating to achieve common outcomes, evidence of the nature and magnitude of UNEP's 'substantive contribution' should be included and/or 'credible association' established between project efforts and the project outcomes realised.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Quality of project management and supervision
- Stakeholders' participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality
- Communication and public awareness

iii. Likelihood of Impact

Based on the articulation of long-lasting effects in the reconstructed TOC *(i.e. from project outcomes, via intermediate states, to impact),* the Evaluation will assess the likelihood of the intended, positive impacts becoming a reality. Project objectives or goals should be incorporated in the TOC, possibly as intermediate states or long-lasting impacts. The Evaluation Office's approach to the use of TOC in project evaluations is outlined in a guidance note available and is supported by an excel-based flow chart, 'Likelihood of Impact Assessment Decision Tree'. Essentially the approach follows a 'likelihood tree' from project outcomes to impacts, taking account of whether the assumptions and drivers identified in the reconstructed TOC held. Any unintended positive effects should also be identified and their causal linkages to the intended impact described.

The Evaluation will also consider the likelihood that the intervention may lead, or contribute to, unintended negative effects (e.g. will vulnerable groups such as those living with disabilities and/or women and children, be disproportionally affected by the project?). Some of these potential negative effects may have been identified in the project design as risks or as part of the analysis of Environmental and Social Safeguards.

1. The Evaluation will consider the extent to which the project has played a catalytic role[118] or has promoted scaling up and/or replication as part of its Theory of Change (either explicitly as in a project with a demonstration

[115] *In some cases 'project management and supervision' will refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments while in others, specifically for GEF funded projects, it will refer to the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping provided by UNEP.*

[116] *Outcomes are the use (i.e. uptake, adoption, application) of an output by intended beneficiaries, observed as changes in institutions or behavior, attitude or condition (UNEP, 2019)*

[117] *All submitted UNEP project documents are required to present a Theory of Change with all submitted project designs. The level of 'reconstruction' needed during an evaluation will depend on the quality of this initial TOC, the time that has lapsed between project design and implementation (which may be related to securing and disbursing funds) and the level of any formal changes made to the project design.*

[118] *The terms catalytic effect, scaling up and replication are inter-related and generally refer to extending the coverage or magnitude of the effects of a project. Catalytic effect is associated with triggering additional actions that are not directly funded by the project – these effects can be both concrete or less tangible, can be intentionally caused by the project or implied in the design and reflected in the TOC drivers, or can be unintentional and can rely on funding from another source or have no financial requirements. Scaling up and Replication require more intentionality for projects, or individual components and approaches, to be reproduced in other similar contexts. Scaling up suggests a substantive increase in the number of new beneficiaries reached/involved and may require adapted delivery mechanisms while Replication suggests the repetition of an approach or component at a similar scale but among different beneficiaries. Even with highly technical work, where scaling up or replication*

component or implicitly as expressed in the drivers required to move to outcome levels) and as factors that are likely to contribute to greater or long-lasting impact.

Ultimately UNEP and all its partners aim to bring about benefits to the environment and human well-being. Few projects are likely to have impact statements that reflect such long-lasting or broad-based changes. However, the Evaluation will assess the likelihood of the project to make a substantive contribution to the long-lasting changes represented by the Sustainable Development Goals and/or the intermediate-level results reflected in UNEP's Expected Accomplishments and the strategic priorities of funding partner(s).

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Quality of Project Management and Supervision (including adaptive management)
- Stakeholders participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality
- Country ownership and driven-ness
- Communication and public awareness

E. Financial Management

Financial management will be assessed under three themes: *adherence* to UNEP's financial policies and procedures, *completeness* of financial information and *communication* between financial and project management staff. The Evaluation will establish the actual spend across the life of the project of funds secured from all donors. This expenditure will be reported, where possible, at output/component level and will be compared with the approved budget. The Evaluation will verify the application of proper financial management standards and adherence to UNEP's financial management policies. Any financial management issues that have affected the timely delivery of the project or the quality of its performance will be highlighted. The Evaluation will record where standard financial documentation is missing, inaccurate, incomplete or unavailable in a timely manner. The Evaluation will assess the level of communication between the Project/Task Manager and the Fund Management Officer as it relates to the effective delivery of the planned project and the needs of a responsive, adaptive management approach.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Preparation and readiness
- Quality of project management and supervision

F. Efficiency

Under the efficiency criterion the Evaluation will assess the extent to which the project delivered maximum results from the given resources. This will include an assessment of the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of project execution.

Focusing on the translation of inputs into outputs, cost-effectiveness is the extent to which an intervention has achieved, or is expected to achieve, its results at the lowest possible cost. Timeliness refers to whether planned activities were delivered according to expected timeframes as well as whether events were sequenced efficiently. The Evaluation will also assess to what extent any project extension could have been avoided through stronger project management and identify any negative impacts caused by project delays or extensions. The Evaluation will describe any cost or time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe and consider whether the project was implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternative interventions or approaches.

The Evaluation will give special attention to efforts made by the project teams during project implementation to make use of/build upon pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies and complementarities[119] with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. to increase project efficiency.

The factors underpinning the need for any project extensions will also be explored and discussed. As management or project support costs cannot be increased in cases of 'no cost extensions', such extensions represent an increase in unstated costs to implementing parties.

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involves working with a new community, some consideration of the new context should take place and adjustments made as necessary.

[119] *Complementarity with other interventions during project design, inception or mobilization is considered under Strategic Relevance above.*

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Preparation and readiness (e.g. timeliness)
- Quality of project management and supervision
- Stakeholders participation and cooperation

G. Monitoring and Reporting

The Evaluation will assess monitoring and reporting across three sub-categories: monitoring design and budgeting, monitoring implementation and project reporting.

i. Monitoring Design and Budgeting

Each project should be supported by a sound monitoring plan that is designed to track progress against SMART[120] results towards the provision of the project's outputs and achievement of project outcomes, including at a level disaggregated by gender, marginalisation or vulnerability, including those living with disabilities.. In particular, the Evaluation will assess the relevance and appropriateness of the project indicators as well as the methods used for tracking progress against them as part of conscious results-based management. The Evaluation will assess the quality of the design of the monitoring plan as well as the funds allocated for its implementation. The adequacy of resources for Mid-Term and Terminal Evaluation/Review should be discussed if applicable.

ii. Monitoring of Project Implementation

The Evaluation will assess whether the monitoring system was operational and facilitated the timely tracking of results and progress towards projects objectives throughout the project implementation period. This assessment will include consideration of whether the project gathered relevant and good quality baseline data that is accurately and appropriately documented. This should include monitoring the representation and participation of disaggregated groups (including gendered, marginalised or vulnerable groups, such as those living with disabilities) in project activities. It will also consider the quality of the information generated by the monitoring system during project implementation and how it was used to adapt and improve project execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability. The Evaluation should confirm that funds allocated for monitoring were used to support this activity.

The performance at project completion against Core Indicator Targets should be reviewed. For projects approved under GEF-6, these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided.

iii. Project Reporting

UNEP has a centralised project information management system (Anubis) in which project managers upload six-monthly progress reports against agreed project milestones. This information will be provided to the Evaluation Consultant(s) by the Evaluation Manager. Some projects have additional requirements to report regularly to funding partners, which will be supplied by the project team (e.g. the Project Implementation Reviews and Tracking Tool for GEF-funded projects). The Evaluation will assess the extent to which both UNEP and donor reporting commitments have been fulfilled. Consideration will be given as to whether reporting has been carried out with respect to the effects of the initiative on disaggregated groups.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

- Quality of project management and supervision
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality (e.g disaggregated indicators and data)

H. Sustainability

Sustainability[121] is understood as the probability of the benefits derived from the achievement of project outcomes being maintained and developed after the close of the intervention. The Evaluation will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to undermine or contribute to the endurance of achieved project outcomes (i.e. 'assumptions' and 'drivers'). Some factors of sustainability may be embedded in the project design and implementation approaches while others may be contextual circumstances or conditions that evolve over the life of the intervention. Where applicable an assessment of bio-physical factors that may affect the sustainability of project outcomes may also be included.

[120] *SMART refers to results that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented. Indicators help to make results measurable.*

[121] *As used here, 'sustainability' means the long-lasting maintenance of outcomes and consequent impacts, whether environmental or not. This is distinct from the concept of sustainability in the terms 'environmental sustainability' or 'sustainable development', which imply 'not living beyond our means' or 'not diminishing global environmental benefits' (GEF STAP Paper, 2019, Achieving More Enduring Outcomes from GEF Investment)*

i. Socio-political Sustainability

The Evaluation will assess the extent to which social or political factors support the continuation and further development of the benefits derived from project outcomes. It will consider the level of ownership, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders to take the project achievements forwards. In particular the Evaluation will consider whether individual capacity development efforts are likely to be sustained.

ii. Financial Sustainability

Some project outcomes, once achieved, do not require further financial inputs, e.g. the adoption of a revised policy. However, in order to derive a benefit from this outcome further management action may still be needed e.g. to undertake actions to enforce the policy. Other project outcomes may be dependent on a continuous flow of action that needs to be resourced for them to be maintained, e.g. continuation of a new natural resource management approach. The Evaluation will assess the extent to which project outcomes are dependent on future funding for the benefits they bring to be sustained. Secured future funding is only relevant to financial sustainability where a project's outcomes have been extended into a future project phase. <u>Even where future funding has been secured, the question still remains as to whether the project outcomes are financially sustainable.</u>

iii. Institutional Sustainability

The Evaluation will assess the extent to which the sustainability of project outcomes (especially those relating to policies and laws) is dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance. It will consider whether institutional achievements such as governance structures and processes, policies, sub-regional agreements, legal and accountability frameworks etc. are robust enough to continue delivering the benefits associated with the project outcomes after project closure. In particular, the Evaluation will consider whether institutional capacity development efforts are likely to be sustained.

<u>Factors affecting this criterion may include:</u>

- Stakeholders participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality (e.g. where interventions are not inclusive, their sustainability may be undermined)
- Communication and public awareness
- Country ownership and driven-ness

I. Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

(These factors are rated in the ratings table but are discussed within the Main Evaluation Report as cross-cutting themes as appropriate under the other evaluation criteria, above. If these issues have not been addressed under the evaluation criteria above, then independent summaries of their status within the evaluated project should be given.)

i. Preparation and Readiness

This criterion focuses on the inception or mobilisation stage of the project (i.e. the time between project approval and first disbursement). The Evaluation will assess whether appropriate measures were taken to either address weaknesses in the project design or respond to changes that took place between project approval, the securing of funds and project mobilisation. In particular the Evaluation will consider the nature and quality of engagement with stakeholder groups by the project team, the confirmation of partner capacity and development of partnership agreements as well as initial staffing and financing arrangements. *(Project preparation is included in the template for the assessment of Project Design Quality).*

ii. Quality of Project Management and Supervision

In some cases 'project management and supervision' may refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments while in others, specifically for GEF funded projects[122], it may refer to the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping and supervision provided by UNEP. The performance of parties playing different roles should be discussed and a rating provided for both types of supervision (UNEP/Partner/Executing Agency) and the overall rating for this sub-category established as a simple average of the two.

The Evaluation will assess the effectiveness of project management with regard to: providing leadership towards achieving the planned outcomes; managing team structures; maintaining productive partner relationships (including Steering Groups etc.); maintaining project relevance within changing external and strategic contexts;

[122] *For GEF funded projects, a rating will be provided for the Project Management and Supervision of each of the Implementing and Executing Agencies. The two ratings will be aggregated to provided an overall rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision*

communication and collaboration with UNEP colleagues; risk management; use of problem-solving; project adaptation and overall project execution. Evidence of adaptive management should be highlighted.

iii. Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation

Here the term 'stakeholder' should be considered in a broad sense, encompassing all project partners, duty bearers with a role in delivering project outputs and target users of project outputs and any other collaborating agents external to UNEP and the Executing Agency. The assessment will consider the quality and effectiveness of all forms of communication and consultation with stakeholders throughout the project life and the support given to maximise collaboration and coherence between various stakeholders, including sharing plans, pooling resources and exchanging learning and expertise. The inclusion and participation of all differentiated groups, including gender groups should be considered.

The progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program occurring since the MTR should be reviewed. *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*.

iv. Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

The Evaluation will ascertain to what extent the project has applied the UN Common Understanding on the human rights-based approach (HRBA) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Within this human rights context the Evaluation will assess to what extent the intervention adheres to UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment[123].

In particular the Evaluation will consider to what extent project implementation and monitoring have taken into consideration: (i) possible inequalities (especially those related to gender) in access to, and the control over, natural resources; (ii) specific vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups (especially women, youth and children and those living with disabilities) to environmental degradation or disasters; and (iii) the role of disadvantaged groups (especially those related to gender) in mitigating or adapting to environmental changes and engaging in environmental protection and rehabilitation.

The completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas should be reviewed. (This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent).

v. Environmental and Social Safeguards

UNEP projects address environmental and social safeguards primarily through the process of environmental and social screening at the project approval stage, risk assessment and management (avoidance, minimization, mitigation or, in exceptional cases, offsetting) of potential environmental and social risks and impacts associated with project and programme activities. The Evaluation will confirm whether UNEP requirements[124] were met to: *review* risk ratings on a regular basis; *monitor* project implementation for possible safeguard issues; *respond* (where relevant) to safeguard issues through risk avoidance, minimization, mitigation or offsetting and r*eport* on the implementation of safeguard management measures taken. UNEP requirements for proposed projects to be screened for any safeguarding issues; for sound environmental and social risk assessments to be conducted and initial risk ratings to be assigned are evaluated above under Quality of Project Design).

The Evaluation will also consider the extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint.

Implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval should be reviewed, the risk classifications verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant should be shared with the Task Manager.

vi. Country Ownership and Driven-ness

The Evaluation will assess the quality and degree of engagement of government / public sector agencies in the project. While there is some overlap between Country Ownership and Institutional Sustainability, this criterion focuses primarily on the forward momentum of the intended projects results, i.e. either a) moving forwards from outputs to project outcomes or b) moving forward from project outcomes towards intermediate states. The

[123]The Evaluation Office notes that Gender Equality was first introduced in the UNEP Project Review Committee Checklist in 2010 and, therefore, provides a criterion rating on gender for projects approved from 2010 onwards. Equally, it is noted that policy documents, operational guidelines and other capacity building efforts have only been developed since then and have evolved over time. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7655/-Gender_equality_and_the_environment_Policy_and_strategy-2015Gender_equality_and_the_environment_policy_and_strategy.pdf.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

[124] For the review of project concepts and proposals, the Safeguard Risk Identification Form (SRIF) was introduced in 2019 and replaced the Environmental, Social and Economic Review note (ESERN), which had been in place since 2016. In GEF projects safeguards have been considered in project designs since 2011.

Evaluation will consider the engagement not only of those directly involved in project execution and those participating in technical or leadership groups, but also those official representatives whose cooperation is needed for change to be embedded in their respective institutions and offices (e.g. representatives from multiple sectors or relevant ministries beyond Ministry of Environment). This factor is concerned with the level of ownership generated by the project over outputs and outcomes and that is necessary for long-lasting impact to be realised. Ownership should extend to all gendered and marginalised groups.

vii. Communication and Public Awareness

The Evaluation will assess the effectiveness of: a) communication of learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups arising from the project during its life and b) public awareness activities that were undertaken during the implementation of the project to influence attitudes or shape behaviour among wider communities and civil society at large. The Evaluation should consider whether existing communication channels and networks were used effectively, including meeting the differentiated needs of gendered or marginalised groups, and whether any feedback channels were established. Where knowledge sharing platforms have been established under a project the Evaluation will comment on the sustainability of the communication channel under either socio-political, institutional or financial sustainability, as appropriate.

The project's completed Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions should be reviewed. This should be based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval.

Section 3. EVALUATION APPROACH, METHODS AND DELIVERABLES

The Terminal Evaluation will be an in-depth evaluation using a participatory approach whereby key stakeholders are kept informed and consulted throughout the evaluation process. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods will be used as appropriate to determine project achievements against the expected outputs, outcomes and impacts. It is highly recommended that the consultant(s) maintains close communication with the project team and promotes information exchange throughout the Evaluation implementation phase in order to increase their (and other stakeholder) ownership of the evaluation findings. Where applicable, the consultant(s) will provide a geo-referenced map that demarcates the area covered by the project and, where possible, provide geo-reference photographs of key intervention sites (e.g. sites of habitat rehabilitation and protection, pollution treatment infrastructure, etc.)

The findings of the Evaluation will be based on the following:

(a) A **desk review** of:

- Relevant background documentation;
- Project design documents (including minutes of the project design review meeting at approval); Annual Work Plans and Budgets or equivalent, revisions to the project (Project Document Supplement), the logical framework and its budget;
- Project reports such as six-monthly progress and financial reports, progress reports from collaborating partners, meeting minutes, relevant correspondence and including the Project Implementation Reviews and Tracking Tool etc.;
- Project deliverables: [TM to list notable items];
- Mid-Term Review or Mid-Term Evaluation of the project *(where appropriate);*
- Evaluations/reviews of similar projects *(where appropriate).*

(b) **Interviews** (individual or in group) with: (TM to complete)

- UNEP Task Manager (TM); (CHECK FOR PREVIOUS TMS)
- Project management team, including the Project Manager within the Executing Agency, where appropiate;
- UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO);
- Portfolio Manager and Sub-Programme Coordinator, where appropriate;
- Project partners, including [list];
- Relevant resource persons;
- Representatives from civil society and specialist groups (such as women's, farmers and trade associations etc).

(c) **Surveys** [provide details, where appropriate]

(d) **Field visits** [provide details, where appropriate]

(e) Other data collection tools [provide details, where appropriate]

11. Evaluation Deliverables and Review Procedures

The Evaluation Team will prepare:

- **Inception Report:** (see Annex 1 for a list of all templates, tables and guidance notes) containing an assessment of project design quality, a draft reconstructed Theory of Change of the project, project stakeholder analysis, evaluation framework and a tentative evaluation schedule.
- **Preliminary Findings Note:** typically in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, the sharing of preliminary findings is intended to support the participation of the project team, act as a means to ensure all information sources have been accessed and provide an opportunity to verify emerging findings. In the case of highly strategic project/portfolio evaluations or evaluations with an Evaluation Reference Group, the preliminary findings may be presented as a word document for review and comment.
- **Draft and Final Evaluation Report:** containing an executive summary that can act as a stand-alone document; detailed analysis of the evaluation findings organised by evaluation criteria and supported with evidence; lessons learned and recommendations and an annotated ratings table.

An **SLM Portfolio Brief** will be prepared to bring together key findings across a number of UNEP projects addressing SLM and reaching operational completion over a period o3-4 years (2019 – 2022). This will be prepared for wider dissemination throughout UNEP. This final details of this Brief, and the contribution to be made by this project evaluation process, will be agreed with the Evaluation Manager no later than during the finalization of the Inception Report.

Review of the Draft Evaluation Report. The Evaluation Consultant(s) will submit a draft report to the Evaluation Manager and revise the draft in response to their comments and suggestions. Once a draft of adequate quality has been peer-reviewed and accepted, the Evaluation Manager will share the cleared draft report with the Task Manager and Project Manager, who will alert the Evaluation Manager in case the report contains any blatant factual errors. The Evaluation Manager will then forward the revised draft report (corrected by the Evaluation Consultant(s) where necessary) to other project stakeholders, for their review and comments. Stakeholders may provide feedback on any errors of fact and may highlight the significance of such errors in any conclusions as well as providing feedback on the proposed recommendations and lessons. Any comments or responses to draft reports will be sent to the Evaluation Manager for consolidation. The Evaluation Manager will provide all comments to the Evaluation Consultant(s) for consideration in preparing the final report, along with guidance on areas of contradiction or issues requiring an institutional response.

Based on a careful review of the evidence collated by the Evaluation Consultants and the internal consistency of the report, the Evaluation Manager will provide an assessment of the ratings in the final evaluation report. Where there are differences of opinion between the evaluator and the Evaluation Manager on project ratings, both viewpoints will be clearly presented in the final report. The Evaluation Office ratings will be considered the final ratings for the project.

The Evaluation Manager will prepare a **quality assessment** of the first draft of the Main Evaluation Report, which acts as a tool for providing structured feedback to the Evaluation Consultant(s). The quality of the final report will be assessed and rated against the criteria specified in template listed in Annex 1 and this assessment will be appended to the Final Evaluation Report.

At the end of the evaluation process, the Evaluation Office will prepare a **Recommendations Implementation Plan** in the format of a table, to be completed and updated at regular intervals by the Task Manager. The Evaluation Office will track compliance against this plan on a six-monthly basis for a maximum of 12 months.

12. The Evaluation Consultant

For this Evaluation, the Evaluation Team will consist of an Evaluation Consultant who will work under the overall responsibility of the Evaluation Office represented by an Evaluation Manager, **Janet Wildish**, in consultation with the UNEP Task Manager, **Ersin Esen**, Fund Management Office, **George Saddimbah**, and the Sub-programme Coordinator of the Environmental Governance Sub-programme, **Yassin Ahmed**. The consultant will liaise with the Evaluation Manager on any procedural and methodological matters related to the Evaluation, including travel. It is, however, each consultant's individual responsibility (where applicable) to arrange for their visas and immunizations as well as to plan meetings with stakeholders, organize online surveys, obtain documentary evidence and any other logistical matters related to the assignment. The UNEP Task Manager and project team will, where possible, provide logistical support (introductions, meetings etc.) allowing the consultants to conduct the Evaluation as efficiently and independently as possible.

The Evaluation Consultant will be hired over a period of 6 months (May 2022 to 31 Oct 2022) and should have the following: a university degree in environmental sciences, international development or other relevant political or social sciences area is required and an advanced degree in the same areas is desirable; a minimum of 8 years of technical / evaluation experience is required, preferably including evaluating large, regional or global programmes and using a Theory of Change approach; and a good/broad understanding of Sustainable Land Management is desired. English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. For this consultancy, fluency in oral and written English is a requirement. Working knowledge of the UN system and specifically the work of UNEP is an added advantage. The work will be home-based with possible field visits.

The Evaluation Consultant will be responsible, in close consultation with the Evaluation Office of UNEP for overall management of the Evaluation and timely provision of its outputs, described above in Section 11 Evaluation Deliverables, above. The consultant will ensure together that all evaluation criteria and questions are adequately covered.

FOR SINGLE CONSULTANTS

In close consultation with the Evaluation Manager, the Evaluation Consultant will be responsible for the overall management of the Evaluation and timely provision of its outputs, data collection and analysis and report-writing. More specifically:

Inception phase of the Evaluation, including:

- preliminary desk review and introductory interviews with project staff;
- draft the reconstructed Theory of Change of the project;
- prepare the evaluation framework;
- develop the desk review and interview protocols;
- draft the survey protocols (if relevant);
- develop and present criteria for country and/or site selection for the evaluation mission;
- plan the evaluation schedule;
- prepare the Inception Report, incorporating comments until approved by the Evaluation Manager

Data collection and analysis phase of the Evaluation, including:

- conduct further desk review and in-depth interviews with project implementing and executing agencies, project partners and project stakeholders;
- (where appropriate and agreed) conduct an evaluation mission(s) to selected countries, visit the project locations, interview project partners and stakeholders, including a good representation of local communities. Ensure independence of the Evaluation and confidentiality of evaluation interviews.
- regularly report back to the Evaluation Manager on progress and inform of any possible problems or issues encountered and;
- keep the Project/Task Manager informed of the evaluation progress.

Reporting phase, including:

- draft the Main Evaluation Report, ensuring that the evaluation report is complete, coherent and consistent with the Evaluation Manager guidelines both in substance and style;
- liaise with the Evaluation Manager on comments received and finalize the Main Evaluation Report, ensuring that comments are taken into account until approved by the Evaluation Manager
- prepare a Response to Comments annex for the main report, listing those comments not accepted by the Evaluation Consultant and indicating the reason for the rejection; and
- (where agreed with the Evaluation Manager) prepare an Evaluation Brief (2-page summary of the evaluand and the key evaluation findings and lessons)

Managing relations, including:

- maintain a positive relationship with evaluation stakeholders, ensuring that the evaluation process is as participatory as possible but at the same time maintains its independence;
- communicate in a timely manner with the Evaluation Manager on any issues requiring its attention and intervention.

13. Schedule of the Evaluation

The table below presents the tentative schedule for the Evaluation.

Table 3. Tentative schedule for the Evaluation

Milestone	Tentative Dates
Evaluation Initiation Meeting	
Inception Report	
Evaluation Mission (where appropriate and feasible)	
E-based interviews, surveys etc.	
PowerPoint/presentation on preliminary findings and recommendations	
Draft report to Evaluation Manager (and Peer Reviewer)	
Draft Report shared with UNEP Project Manager and team	
Draft Report shared with wider group of stakeholders	
Final Report	
Final Report shared with all respondents	

14. Contractual Arrangements

Evaluation Consultants will be selected and recruited by the Evaluation Office of UNEP under an individual Special Service Agreement (SSA) on a "fees only" basis (see below). By signing the service contract with UNEP /UNON, the consultant(s) certify that they have not been associated with the design and implementation of the project in any way which may jeopardize their independence and impartiality towards project achievements and project partner performance. In addition, they will not have any future interests (within six months after completion of the contract) with the project's executing or implementing units. All consultants are required to sign the Code of Conduct Agreement Form.

Fees will be paid on an instalment basis, paid on acceptance by the Evaluation Manager of expected key deliverables. The schedule of payment is as follows:

Schedule of Payment for the Evaluation Consultant:

Deliverable	Percentage Payment
Approved Inception Report (as per annex document #9)	30%
Approved Draft Main Evaluation Report (as per annex document #10)	30%
Approved Final Main Evaluation Report	40%

Fees only contracts: Where applicable, air tickets will be purchased by UNEP and 75% of the Daily Subsistence Allowance for each authorised travel mission will be paid up front. Local in-country travel will only be reimbursed where agreed in advance with the Evaluation Manager and on the production of acceptable receipts. Terminal expenses and residual DSA entitlements (25%) will be paid after mission completion.

The consultants may be provided with access to UNEP's information management systems (e.g PIMS, Anubis, Sharepoint etc) and if such access is granted, the consultants agree not to disclose information from that system to third parties beyond information required for, and included in, the evaluation report.

In case the consultants are not able to provide the deliverables in accordance with these guidelines, and in line with the expected quality standards by the UNEP Evaluation Office, payment may be withheld at the discretion of the Director of the Evaluation Office until the consultants have improved the deliverables to meet UNEP's quality standards.

If the consultant(s) fail to submit a satisfactory final product to UNEP in a timely manner, i.e. before the end date of their contract, the Evaluation Office reserves the right to employ additional human resources to finalize the report, and to reduce the consultants' fees by an amount equal to the additional costs borne by the Evaluation Office to bring the report up to standard.

ANNEX VII. QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE TERMINAL REVIEW REPORT

Terminal Evaluation of "Promoting Sustainable Land Management in Albania Through Integrated Restoration Ecosystems (SLM Albania)" (GEF ID: 9477)

All UNEP evaluations are subject to a quality assessment by the Evaluation Office. This is an assessment of the quality of the evaluation product (i.e. evaluation report) and is dependent on more than just the consultant's efforts and skills.

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
Substantive Report Quality Criteria		
Quality of the Executive Summary: The Summary should be able to stand alone as an accurate summary of the main evaluation product. It should include a concise overview of the evaluation object; clear summary of the evaluation objectives and scope; overall evaluation rating of the project and key features of performance (strengths and weaknesses) against exceptional criteria (plus reference to where the evaluation ratings table can be found within the report); summary of the main findings of the exercise, including a synthesis of main conclusions (which include a summary response to key strategic evaluation questions), lessons learned and recommendations.	Final report: A concise and detailed section covering all elements.	5.5
I. Introduction A brief introduction should be given identifying, where possible and relevant, the following: institutional context of the project (sub-programme, Division, regions/countries where implemented) and coverage of the evaluation; date of PRC approval and project document signature); results frameworks to which it contributes (e.g. Expected Accomplishment in POW); project duration and start/end dates; number of project phases (where appropriate); implementing partners; total secured budget and whether the project has been evaluated in the past (e.g. mid-term, part of a synthesis evaluation, evaluated by another agency etc.) Consider the extent to which the introduction includes a concise statement of the purpose of the evaluation and the key intended audience for the findings?	Final report: All elements provided.	5.5
II. Evaluation Methods A data collection section should include: a description of evaluation methods and information sources used, including the number and type of respondents; justification for methods used (e.g. qualitative/ quantitative; electronic/face-to-face); any selection criteria used to identify respondents, case studies or sites/countries visited; strategies used to increase stakeholder engagement and consultation; details of how data were verified (e.g. triangulation, review by stakeholders etc.). Efforts to include the voices of different groups, e.g. vulnerable, gender, marginalised etc) should be described. Methods to ensure that potentially excluded groups (excluded by gender, vulnerability or marginalisation) are reached and their experiences captured effectively, should be made explicit in this section. The methods used to analyse data (e.g. scoring; coding; thematic analysis etc.) should be described. It should also address evaluation limitations such as: low or imbalanced response rates across different groups; gaps in documentation; extent to which findings can be either generalised to	Final report: A complete section including table describing respondents and rationale for site selections.	5.5

wider evaluation questions or constraints on aggregation/disaggregation; any potential or apparent biases; language barriers and ways they were overcome. Ethics and human rights issues should be highlighted including: how anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and strategies used to include the views of marginalised or potentially disadvantaged groups and/or divergent views. Is there an ethics statement? E.g. *'Throughout the evaluation process and in the compilation of the Final Evaluation Report efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups. All efforts to provide respondents with anonymity have been made.*		
III. The Project This section should include: • *Context:* Overview of the main issue that the project is trying to address, its root causes and consequences on the environment and human well-being (i.e. synopsis of the problem and situational analyses). • *Results framework*: Summary of the project's results hierarchy as stated in the ProDoc (or as officially revised) • *Stakeholders:* Description of groups of targeted stakeholders organised according to relevant common characteristics • *Project implementation structure and partners:* A description of the implementation structure with diagram and a list of key project partners • *Changes in design during implementation:* Any key events that affected the project's scope or parameters should be described in brief in chronological order • *Project financing:* Completed tables of: (a) budget at design and expenditure by components (b) planned and actual sources of funding/co-financing	Final report: Detailed section covering all elements.	5.5
IV. Theory of Change The *TOC at Evaluation* should be presented clearly in both diagrammatic and narrative forms. Clear articulation of each major causal pathway is expected, (starting from outputs to long term impact), including explanations of all drivers and assumptions as well as the expected roles of key actors. This section should include a description of how the *TOC at Evaluation*[125] was designed (who was involved etc.) and applied to the context of the project? Where the project results as stated in the project design documents (or formal revisions of the project design) are not an accurate reflection of the project's intentions or do not follow UNEP's definitions of different results levels, project results may need to be re-phrased or reformulated. In such cases, a summary of the project's results hierarchy should be presented for: a) the results as stated in the approved/revised Prodoc logframe/TOC and b) as formulated in the *TOC at Evaluation. The two results hierarchies should be presented as a two-column table to show clearly that, although wording and placement may have changed, the results 'goal posts' have not been 'moved'.* This table may have initially been presented in the Inception Report and should appear somewhere in the Main Review report.	Final report: Good narrative section discussing the causal pathways and appropriate diagram.	5.5

[125] During the Inception Phase of the evaluation process a *TOC at Evaluation Inception* is created based on the information contained in the approved project documents (these may include either logical framework or a TOC or narrative descriptions), formal revisions and annual reports etc. During the evaluation process this TOC is revised based on changes made during project intervention and becomes the *TOC at Evaluation*.

V. Key Findings **A. Strategic relevance:** This section should include an assessment of the project's relevance in relation to UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies at the time of project approval. An assessment of the complementarity of the project at design (or during inception/mobilisation[126]), with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups should be included. Consider the extent to which all four elements have been addressed: i. Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities ii. Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities iii. Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities iv. Complementarity with Existing Interventions	Final report: All elements covered well.	5.5
B. Quality of Project Design To what extent are the strength and weaknesses of the project design effectively summarized?	Final report: Appropriate summary of strengths and weaknesses at design.	5.5
C. Nature of the External Context For projects where this is appropriate, key external features of the project's implementing context that limited the project's performance (e.g. conflict, natural disaster, political upheaval[127]), and how they affected performance, should be described.	Final report: Appropriate background.	5.5
D. Effectiveness **(i) Outputs and Project Outcomes:** How well does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the a) availability of outputs, and b) achievement of project outcomes? How convincing is the discussion of attribution and contribution, as well as the constraints to attributing effects to the intervention? The effects of the intervention on differentiated groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation, should be discussed explicitly.	Final report: Clear, detailed and useful sections detailing performance at output and outcome levels.	5.5
(ii) Likelihood of Impact: How well does the report present an integrated analysis, guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC, of all evidence relating to likelihood of impact? How well are change processes explained and the roles of key actors, as well as drivers and assumptions, explicitly discussed? Any unintended negative effects of the project should be discussed under Effectiveness, especially negative effects on disadvantaged groups.	Final report: Adequate discussion.	5
E. Financial Management This section should contain an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under financial management and include a completed 'financial management' table.	Final report: All elements covered, including table as annex.	5.5

[126] A project's inception or mobilization period is understood as the time between project approval and first disbursement. Complementarity during project implementation is considered under Efficiency, see below.

[127] Note that 'political upheaval' does not include regular national election cycles, but unanticipated unrest or prolonged disruption. The potential delays or changes in political support that are often associated with the regular national election cycle should be part of the project's design and addressed through adaptive management of the project team.

Consider how well the report addresses the following: • *Adherence* to UNEP's financial policies and procedures • *completeness* of financial information, including the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used • *communication* between financial and project management staff		
F. Efficiency To what extent, and how well, does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of efficiency under the primary categories of cost-effectiveness and timeliness including: • Implications of delays and no cost extensions • Time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe • Discussion of making use during project implementation of/building on pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. • The extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint.	Final report: Good discussion.	5.5
G. Monitoring and Reporting How well does the report assess: • Monitoring design and budgeting *(including SMART results with measurable indicators, resources for MTE/R etc.)* • Monitoring of project implementation *(including use of monitoring data for adaptive management)* • Project reporting *(e.g. PIMS and donor reports)*	Final report: All elements covered.	5
H. Sustainability How well does the evaluation identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to undermine or contribute to the persistence of achieved project outcomes including: • Socio-political Sustainability • Financial Sustainability • Institutional Sustainability	Final report: Good discussion.	5.5
I. Factors Affecting Performance These factors are not discussed in stand-alone sections but are **integrated in criteria A-H as appropriate**. Note that these are described in the Evaluation Criteria Ratings Matrix. To what extent, and how well, does the evaluation report cover the following cross-cutting themes: • Preparation and readiness • Quality of project management and supervision[128] • Stakeholder participation and co-operation • Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	Final report: All elements adequately covered.	5

[128] In some cases 'project management and supervision' will refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments while in others, specifically for GEF funded projects, it will refer to the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping provided by UNEP. This includes providing the answers to the questions on Core Indicator Targets, stakeholder engagement, gender responsiveness, safeguards and knowledge management, required for the GEF portal.

• Environmental and social safeguards • Country ownership and driven-ness • Communication and public awareness		
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations **i) Quality of the conclusions:** The key strategic questions should be **clearly** and succinctly addressed within the conclusions section. This includes providing the answers to the questions on Core Indicator Targets, stakeholder engagement, gender responsiveness, safeguards and knowledge management, required for the GEF portal. It is expected that the conclusions will highlight the main strengths and weaknesses of the project and connect them in a compelling story line. Human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention (e.g. how these dimensions were considered, addressed or impacted on) should be discussed explicitly. Conclusions, as well as lessons and recommendations, should be consistent with the evidence presented in the main body of the report.	Final report: Readable conclusions and completed performance ratings table.	5.5
ii) Quality and utility of the lessons: Both positive and negative lessons are expected and duplication with recommendations should be avoided. Based on explicit evaluation findings, lessons should be rooted in real project experiences or derived from problems encountered and mistakes made that should be avoided in the future. Lessons are intended to be adopted any time they are deemed to be relevant in the future and must have the potential for wider application (replication and generalization) and use and should briefly describe the context from which they are derived and those contexts in which they may be useful.	Final report: Useful lessons	5.5
iii) Quality and utility of the recommendations: To what extent are the recommendations proposals for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting the project or the sustainability of its results? They should be feasible to implement within the timeframe and resources available (including local capacities) and specific in terms of who would do what and when. At least one recommendation relating to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions, should be given. Recommendations should represent a measurable performance target in order that the Evaluation Office can monitor and assess compliance with the recommendations. In cases where the recommendation is addressed to a third party, compliance can only be monitored and assessed where a contractual/legal agreement remains in place. Without such an agreement, the recommendation should be formulated to say that UNEP project staff should pass on the recommendation to the relevant third party in an effective or substantive manner. The effective transmission by UNEP of the recommendation will then be monitored for compliance. Where a new project phase is already under discussion or in preparation with the same third party, a recommendation can be made to address the issue in the next phase.	Final report: Appropriate recommendations, endorsed by project stakeholders.	5.5
VII. Report Structure and Presentation Quality		
i) Structure and completeness of the report: To what extent does the report follow the Evaluation Office guidelines? Are all requested Annexes included and complete?	Final report: All guidelines followed and annexes complete.	5.5

ii) **Quality of writing and formatting:** Consider whether the report is well written (clear English language and grammar) with language that is adequate in quality and tone for an official document? Do visual aids, such as maps and graphs convey key information? Does the report follow Evaluation Office formatting guidelines?	Final report: A good report, much appreciated by the Evaluation Office and project team.	5
OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING		**5**

A number rating 1-6 is used for each criterion: Highly Satisfactory = 6, Satisfactory = 5, Moderately Satisfactory = 4, Moderately Unsatisfactory = 3, Unsatisfactory = 2, Highly Unsatisfactory = 1. The overall quality of the evaluation report is calculated by taking the mean score of all rated quality criteria.

At the end of the evaluation, compliance of the evaluation process against the agreed standard procedures is assessed, based on the table below. *All questions with negative compliance must be explained further in the table below.*

Evaluation Process Quality Criteria	**Compliance**	
	Yes	**No**
Independence:		
1. Were the Terms of Reference drafted and finalised by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
2. Were possible conflicts of interest of proposed Evaluation Consultant(s) appraised and addressed in the final selection?	**Y**	
3. Was the final selection of the Evaluation Consultant(s) made by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
4. Was the evaluator contracted directly by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
5. Was the Evaluation Consultant given direct access to identified external stakeholders in order to adequately present and discuss the findings, as appropriate?	**Y**	
6. Did the Evaluation Consultant raise any concerns about being unable to work freely and without interference or undue pressure from project staff or the Evaluation Office?		**N**
7. If Yes to Q6: Were these concerns resolved to the mutual satisfaction of both the Evaluation Consultant and the Evaluation Manager?	**N/A**	
Financial Management:		
8. Was the evaluation budget approved at project design available for the evaluation?	**Y**	
9. Was the final evaluation budget agreed and approved by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
10. Were the agreed evaluation funds readily available to support the payment of the evaluation contract throughout the payment process?	**Y**	
Timeliness:		
11. If a Terminal Evaluation: Was the evaluation initiated within the period of six months before or after project operational completion? Or, if a Mid Term Evaluation: Was the evaluation initiated within a six-month period prior to the project's mid-point?	**N**	
12. Were all deadlines set in the Terms of Reference respected, as far as unforeseen circumstances allowed?	**Y**	
13. Was the inception report delivered and reviewed/approved prior to commencing any travel?	**Y**	
Project's engagement and support:		
14. Did the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and identified project stakeholders provide comments on the evaluation Terms of Reference?	**Y**	

15. Did the project make available all required/requested documents?	**Y**	
16. Did the project make all financial information (and audit reports if applicable) available in a timely manner and to an acceptable level of completeness?	**Y**	
17. Was adequate support provided by the project to the evaluator(s) in planning and conducting evaluation missions?	**Y**	
18. Was close communication between the Evaluation Consultant, Evaluation Office and project team maintained throughout the evaluation?	**Y**	
19. Were evaluation findings, lessons and recommendations adequately discussed with the project team for ownership to be established?	**Y**	
20. Did the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and any identified project stakeholders provide comments on the draft evaluation report?	**Y**	
Quality assurance:		
21. Were the evaluation Terms of Reference, including the key evaluation questions, peer-reviewed?	**Y**	
22. Was the TOC in the inception report peer-reviewed?	**Y**	
23. Was the quality of the draft/cleared report checked by the Evaluation Manager and Peer Reviewer prior to dissemination to stakeholders for comments?	**Y**	
24. Did the Evaluation Office complete an assessment of the quality of both the draft and final reports?	**Y**	
Transparency:		
25. Was the draft evaluation report sent directly by the Evaluation Consultant to the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
26. Did the Evaluation Manager disseminate (or authorize dissemination) of the cleared draft report to the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and other key internal personnel (including the Reference Group where appropriate) to solicit formal comments?	**Y**	
27. Did the Evaluation Manager disseminate (or authorize dissemination) appropriate drafts of the report to identified external stakeholders, including key partners and funders, to solicit formal comments?	**Y**	
28. Were all stakeholder comments to the draft evaluation report sent directly to the Evaluation Office	**Y**	
29. Did the Evaluation Consultant(s) respond adequately to all factual corrections and comments?	**Y**	
30. Did the Evaluation Office share substantive comments and Evaluation Consultant responses with those who commented, as appropriate?	**Y**	

Provide comments / explanations / mitigating circumstances below for any non-compliant process issues.

Process Criterion Number	**Evaluation Office Comments**

ANNEX VIII. JUSTIFICATION FOR REFORMULATION OF PROJECT RESULTS STATEMENTS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TOC

Table 14. Justification for Reformulation of Results Statements for the purpose of the reconstruction of the TOC to guide the Terminal Evaluation of the SLM Albania Project (outcomes and outputs were left as is)

	Original TOC (Source: Annex P of Project Design Documentation, 2017)	Reconstructed TOC	Justification for Change
Impact(s)	*Impact and Enhanced Status of GEBs:* Increased knowledge of SLM best practices Raised awareness on SLM best practices Raised awareness on mainstreaming gender into SLM Contribution to achievement of targets under SDG 15 Adoption of SLM practices that will reduce land degradation and secure ecosystem services over an area covering at least 21,288 ha Reduced soil erosion, reduced risk of land degradation, and improved land and soil health Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in productive landscapes Improved vegetative cover (natural & cultivated cover such as forest, shrubs, herbaceous, incl. crops) Reduction in CO_2 emissions and increase in carbon stock	*Long-lasting project impact:* Forest and pasture ecosystems across 20,000 ha functioning towards improved productivity and health (improved vegetative cover, reduction in CO_2 emission and increase in carbon stuck) Rehabilitation efforts/SLM initiatives spreading to other parts of country towards LDN target *Long-term impact:* Improved forest and pasture ecosystem health in Albania, LDN target achieved and maintained	Some of the original impact statements are already stated as project outcomes, slight rewording of others to simplify and concretize for purpose of evaluation
Intermediate states	Local and national stakeholder are familiar with SLM policy Mainstreaming and governance improvement in terms of land management SLM priorities to be integrated in multi-sectoral strategies and plans identified Relevant legislative framework on land management is revised to fit SLM approaches Local level resource managers and users are capacitated to apply SLM approaches in Kolonja Municipality 5 Integrated land use plans developed Degraded areas in Mollas, Qender Erseke and Qender Leskovik are restored with SLM demonstrations	Relevant decision-makers at local and national level increasingly integrate SLM into decision-making, including using adequate legal and economic instruments for increased land health Local level resource managers and users apply SLM approaches across Kolonja Municipality National level resource managers are able to develop programmers to support SLM nation-wide (spread beyond Kolonja)	Intermediate states needed to be tightened and better articulated Those that were considered supportive to the causal pathways were kept (with slight rewording/tightening), some that were not, were deleted, e.g. "5 integrated land use plans developed "is one of the outputs, so is "degraded areas in …are restored with SLM demonstrations"
Assumptions	Mandates of institutions, including departments and sectors, are clear	Process of adoption of revised legal framework within timeframe of project	Some assumptions in original TOC should actually be drivers (e.g. role of stakeholders

	Original TOC (Source: Annex P of Project Design Documentation, 2017)	Reconstructed TOC	Justification for Change
	Roles of stakeholders in the execution of the project are clear Knowledge about modern technologies and technical approaches is sufficient Overgrazing controlled at the rehabilitated land	Commitment to adopting a new grazing system, LD monitoring, improved forest mngmt plans (partly a driver) Land use plans and SLM pilots drive take up and adoption across 20,000 ha (within timeframe of project) Mandates of institutions, including departments and sectors, are clear (in part can be controlled through project as is part of activities, so in part a driver) Increased capacity leads to action	in execution of project), others are actually part of the outputs (e.g. grazing mechanism to prevent overgrazing, knowledge about technical approaches)
Drivers	None	Roles of stakeholders in the execution of the project are clear Training is relevant and appropriate to needs and project results achievement, the “right” stakeholders are involved, gender empowered Roles of stakeholders in the execution of the project are clear Strong coordination between similar projects and initiatives (in part an assumption as part of this is not under control of project) Improved gender equality in decision-making re SLM (in part an assumption as part of this not under control of project)	Some assumptions were moved to drivers, new drivers developed for purpose of evaluation

ANNEX X: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The strategic questions set out in the evaluation TOR are highlighted (orange shading).

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
Criterion A: Strategic Relevance		
A.1. Alignment to MTS and POW 1. Were the project objectives and outcomes consistent with UNEP's Medium Term Strategy, its Sub-programmes and Expected Accomplishments, as well as the PoWs? What were the linkages?	Fit to UNEP mandate – qualitative Alignment and continuation to MTS and PoWs (2014-15, check also 2016-17,2017-18) – qualitative, possible indicators in PIMS	Comparison of ProDoc and annual reports with UNEP MTS and PoWs, PIMS, interview with Task Manager
A.2. Alignment to Donor/Strategic Priorities 2. Was the project aligned to GEF FAs and Strategic Areas?	Level of alignment GEF	Comparison of ProDoc and annual reports (possibly interview with Project Manager, UNEP Divisions)
A.3. Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities 3. Did the project respond to the environmental concerns and needs of the countries?	Descriptive input on match, evidence of stakeholders' participation and cooperation; ownership	GEF case project manager interviews, assessment of ownership
A.4. Complementarity with existing interventions 4. To what extent did the project take account of ongoing and planned initiatives (under the same sub-programme, other UNEP sub-programmes, GEF projects in other countries) that address similar needs of the same target groups.	Evidence of appropriate actions (discussions, adaptation of strategies, collaboration etc)	Review of project documents, interviews with partners
5. Were cross cutting issues including human rights and gender equality adequately considered in project design and implementation?	Qualitative	Project documents, interviews / questionnaires with country level and other internal/ extremal stakeholders, project products (studies, guidelines)

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
6. What is the contribution of this project for the common aims of the UNCCD and UNFCCC to identify and promote best practices for the maintenance and buildup of soil organic matter (which contributes to land degradation neutrality and carbon sequestration)? (linked to relevance)	Qualitative	Interviews with project partners, possible interviews with UNCCD and UNFCCC Sec
Criterion B. Quality of Project Design	See quality of design matrix attached – Annex A	
Criterion C. Nature of External Context		
7. Did the political, environmental, social or institutional context change during the project implementation and how did the project adapt to this? (related to COVID-19, but not exclusively)	Descriptive; potential to measure effect in months of delay	Interviews with key project partners
Criterion D. Effectiveness		
D1. Availability of Outputs		
Availability of outputs 8. Was the project successful in producing its programmed outputs and milestones as per the ProDoc and workplan, as well as its usefulness and timeliness?	Logframe indicators	PIMs, annual reporting, final project report, as well as interview with project leaders and partners
9. What were the reasons behind any failures/successes of the project in producing its different outputs?	Consider preparation and readiness; quality of project management and supervision, external context	Interviews with all project partners involved in implementation
10. Were stakeholders appropriately involved in producing programmed outputs?	Stakeholder participation and cooperation	Interviews with cross section of internal and external stakeholders (particularly GEF Agencies and GEF project managers – those involved in training)
D2. Achievement of Project Outcomes		
11. To what extent has the project achieved the enhancement of capacity of GEF project managers and selected GEF agency personnel to monitor carbon and climate co-benefits from SLM projects (Outcome 1)?	Logframe indicators	PIMS reporting, interviews

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
12. To what extent are SLM projects using combined tools sets to identify appropriate C practices? What is the added value of the linkage between the CBP tools and the WOCAT Questionnaire on SLM Technologies for (a) GEF projects (b) other projects (c) stakeholder groups at different scales, and how is it perceived? (Outcome 2)?	Logframe indicators	PIMS reporting, discussions with partner implementers and Steering Committee members,
13. To what extent have GEF and other SLM project managers enhanced their understanding of the wide range of tools available – are they able to choose which ones suit their needs? (Outcome 3)?	Qualitative, Logframe indicators	Survey of training, interviews with project partner implementers
D3. Achievement of likelihood of impact To what extent has the project allowed for effective mainstreaming of carbon monitoring into the greater programmatic implementation of GEF projects and more widely beyond GEF, in general, the Global Agenda 2030? (related to impact)	Consideration of Theory of Change including assumptions and drivers: • Stakeholders participation and cooperation • Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity • Country ownership and driven-ness • Communication and public awareness • Catalytic role and replication	Interviews project team, partners,
E. Financial Management		
E.1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures 14. How did the financial reporting and management adhere to the policies and procedures of UNEP? 15. The evaluation will also address the two areas identified in the TOR (**E.2. completeness of financial information; E.3. communication between financial and project management staff**)	Descriptive with reference to norms as benchmarks	Interviews with Task Manager, FMO, Starfish Review of contracts /agreement Financial reports

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
16. Were there any aspects of financial management that affected project performance?	Descriptive, with reference to timing	Interviews with Task Manager/FMO Interviews with Implementing Partners Review of income
F. Efficiency		
17. To what extent did the project build on existing institutions, lessons of other initiatives and ongoing projects (how well did the project align to the greater programmatic approach i.e. follow on from previous projects)?	Descriptive	Background documentation, partner interviews
18. To what extent did the project leverage efforts of partners and of possible champions towards achievement of its outcomes, impact and sustainability	Qualitative	Interviews with partners, Technical Steering Committee
19. What have been the main reasons for delay/changes in implementation, if any? What lessons can be learnt from this? To what extent did the delays have an impact on the delivery of project outcomes?	Comparison of actual and planned deliverables timing	Interviews with Project implementers, Members of Steering Committee Review of documentation related to extensions
20. Were financial means sufficient to deliver planned project outputs?	Review of income and expenditure relative to original budget	Review of income and expenditure relative to original budget
21. Were available human resources (skills, number) sufficient to deliver planned project outputs in a timely manner?	Review of staffing arrangements relative to original plans and to actual requirements	Review of staffing arrangements relative to original plans and to actual requirements (check with UNEP and CSU)
G. Monitoring and Reporting		
1. Project reporting		
22. To what extent have UNEP reporting requirements been fulfilled	Comparison of actual reporting to requirements	Availability of reporting
2. Monitoring Design and Budgeting		

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
23. What tools and procedures are in place for project monitoring?	Availability of logframe, PIMS, workplans, roles of oversight bodies	Availability of monitoring tools, interviews with Project Team
3. Monitoring Implementation		
24. How has monitoring been conducted, and how have results been used to adapt implementation approach?	Review of monitoring practice Review of oversight arrangements	Availability of monitoring results, project team interviews, Steering Committee
H. Sustainability		
H.1. Socio-political sustainability		
25. Are there any social or political factors that may influence positively or negatively the sustenance of project results and progress towards impact?	Qualitative	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers
26. Is the level of ownership by GEF sufficient to allow for the project results to be sustained?	Qualitative	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers, particularly GEF
27. Are there sufficient government and other stakeholder awareness, interests, commitment and incentives to mainstream carbon monitoring?	Qualitative	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers
H.2. Financial sustainability		
28. To what extent are the continuation of project results (direct outcomes) and the eventual impact of the project dependent on financial resources?	Qualitative	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers
29. What is the likelihood that adequate financial resources will be or will become available to use capacities built by the project?	Qualitative, possible data on onward funding	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers
H.3. Institutional sustainability		
30. To what extent is the sustainability of the results and onward progress towards impact dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance?	Qualitative	Interviews with Steering Committee, key agencies, project implementers

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
I. Factors Affecting Project Performance (x-cutting in narrative of above)		
I.1. Preparation and readiness (included in design)		
I.2. Quality of Project Management and Supervision		
31. Was leadership and (adaptive) direction towards achieving planned outcomes sufficient in the project? (includes Steering Committee)	Qualitative, adaptation mechanism	Interviews with all project implementers
32. What adjustments, if any, were made to the project as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to what extent did the adjustments allow the project to effectively respond to the new priorities that emerged in relation to COVID-19? How did the adjustments affect the achievement of the project's expected results? (related to risk, particularly for learning for future projects which will be faced with more and more global risk factors).	Qualitative, adaptation mechanism	Interviews with all project implementers
I.3. Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation		
33. What has been the degree and effectiveness of partnership collaboration with stakeholders? What are the opportunities to engage with more stakeholders?	Participation and involvement, ownership, qualitative	Interviews with all project implementers
I.4. Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity		
34. Were cross cutting issues including human rights and gender equality adequately considered in project design and implementation?		
I.4. Communication and Public Awareness		
35. What was the level of learning and sharing among project partners?	Qualitative	Interviews with project implementers
36. What public awareness activities took place, and how effective were they in supporting the realization (and further sustaining) of project results?	Level of events, event impact	Interviews with project implementers
I.5. Environmental and social safeguards		

Main Evaluation Criteria / Questions	Evaluation Indicators	Means of Verification
37. To what extent did the project adhere to the environmental and social safeguards laid out in UNEP policy?		
I.6. Country ownership and drivenness/championship		
38. To what extent has the project created opportunities for particular individuals or institutions (champions) to catalyse change (without which the project would not have achieved its results)?	Level of national and global leadership	Interviews
39. Did the projects successfully test carbon monitoring? Are other national-level projects taking on the tools as a result of project intervention?	Level of success in testing in 4 case studies	Interviews
40. Are there lessons and experience coming out of the project that are replicated and scaled up? What are the factors that may influence replication and scaling up of project experience and lessons?	Qualitative	Interviews