Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP Project

“Capacity Building for National and Regional Environmental Information and Knowledge Management PIMS ID: 02020” (2018-2023)

Evaluation Office of the United Nations Environment Programme

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Capacity building for national and regional environmental information and knowledge management
Project no.: PIMS 02020
Date: 12/2024

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The evaluation consultant(s) hopes that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will contribute to the successful implementation of a next phase and to the continuous improvement of similar projects in other countries and regions.

Evaluation Team
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Brief Consultant Biography

Camillo Ponziani is an independent evaluation and management consultant based in Toronto, Canada, with over 20 years of experience in the field of biodiversity conservation, protected area and landscape management, as well as the illegal wildlife trade. As President and Managing Director at Interamna Group Inc., he has successfully bridged strategy and execution, assisting both public and private sector organizations in achieving their business transformation and legacy modernization goals. Camillo's background includes senior management roles within the United Nations system, where he worked with agencies such as UNDP, UNEP and UNOPS, as well as both the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species. His expertise spans the design, management, and evaluation of GEF-financed projects. He has led various business and IT transformation initiatives, demonstrating a unique ability to drive impact across the conservation, healthcare, civil aviation and finance sectors.

Camillo holds a Master of Economics in Environment & Development from The University of Manchester and an Honours Bachelor of Arts with Distinction in Peace & Conflict Studies from the University of Toronto. Camillo's career is marked by his commitment to service excellence, innovation, and leadership in program management and utilization-focused evaluation.

Rick Haier is an independent consultant with over 30 years of experience in developing strategies, conducting complex evaluations, and formulating transformative projects across various sectors. His career is marked by his ability to develop and implement transformative strategies that drive organizational success and innovation on mission-critical initiatives. Rick's expertise includes acting as a subject matter expert for numerous UN project formulations and evaluation engagements. He has contributed to significant international initiatives, such as enhancing climate change adaptation through watershed management in Laos and promoting biodiversity and landscape conservation in Vietnam. His experience extends to complex evaluations, health checks and readiness assessments for various organizations, ensuring impactful strategies and effective working relationships with sponsors, stakeholders, participants and beneficiaries.

Rick also brings extensive corporate IT experience, having served as Managing Director of PwC Canada's Cyber Security Practice and VP and Chief Security Officer at Hydro One and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. His roles involved developing cybersecurity strategies, conducting digital infrastructure assessments, and leading comprehensive security initiatives and posture reviews. Throughout his career, Rick and is accustomed to creating actionable deliverables for all organizational levels, from senior leadership teams to corporate Boards of Directors. His background in leading IT, cybersecurity and corporate strategies and transformation initiatives provides him with unique insights into developing comprehensive strategies, programs, and evaluations.

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 project implemented between July 2018 and December 2023. The project's overall development goal was to strengthen the capacity of countries for making evidence-based decisions by improving their knowledge on the state of the environment at the regional, sub-regional and national levels.

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, and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

Source(s) of Funding by Country: *Ireland, Kuwait, Norway and Sweden*

Source(s) of Funding by Institution Type:

Foundation/NGO	Yes
Private Sector	No
UN Body	Yes
Multilateral Fund	Yes
Environment Fund	Yes

Key words: Information Management, Environmental Monitoring, Data Management, Regional Networking, State of the Environment.

Primary data collection period: June - August 2024

Field mission dates: N/A

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEIN	Africa Environment Information Network (AfricaEIN)
AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
ANA	National Water Agency, Brazil
API	Application Programming Interface
AQUASTAT	FAO's Global Information System on Water and Agriculture
ASAP	Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BfG	German Federal Institute of Hydrology
CAF	Development Bank of Latin America
CAMRE	Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment
CAREC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CCCD	Cross-Cutting Capacity Development programme
CDIB	Capacity Development and Innovation Branch
CEAC	China-ASEAN Environment Cooperation Center
CEDARE	Center for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CSE	Centre de Suivi Ecologique (West and Central Africa)
DG ENV	Directorate-General for Environment
DPSIR	Drivers, Pressures, State, Impact, Response Model of intervention
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Environment Agency
EF	Environment Fund
EfE	Environment for Europe
ESSF	Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework
EWAD	Early Warning and Assessment Division
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FC4S	UNDP Financial Centres for Sustainability
FMO	Financial Management Office
FW	Framework
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCC-Stat	Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf
GEF	Global Environment Facility

GEMS	Governance and Economics Management Support
GEMStat	Global Freshwater Quality Database
GOOS	Global Ocean Observing System
GPCU	Global Programme Co-ordination Unit
GRID	Global Resource Information Database
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HQ	Headquarters
HS	Highly Satisfactory
HU	Highly Unsatisfactory / Highly Unlikely / Highly Unfavourable
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre
ICSD	International Chamber of Sustainable Development
ICT	Information and communications technology
ICWC	Interstate Coordination Water Commission
ICWRGC	International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change
IEA	Integrated Environmental Assessments
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFAS	International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (Eastern Africa)
IGES	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
ILAC	Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IOI	International Ocean Institute
IPMR	Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution
IT	Information Technology
JSF	Jordan Strategy Forum
JTS	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators
KEI	Korea Environment Institute
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LACO	UNEP's Latin America and the Caribbean Office
LAC-REIN	Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Environmental Information Network
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoE	Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan
MOi	Mercator Ocean International
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

MS	Moderately Satisfactory
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MTS	Medium-Term Strategy
NCSE	National Council for Science and the Environment
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEIS	National Environmental Information System
NES	National Environmental Summary
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSoER	National State of Environment Report(ing)
PCA	Project Cooperation Agreement
PIMS	Project Information Management System
POW	Programme of Work
PPP	Project Preparation Proposal
PRC	Project Review Committee
ProDoc	Project Document
PSC	Project Support Cost / Project Steering Committee
RB	Regular Budget
RCP	Regional Collaboratively Platform
REIN	Regional Environmental Information Network
ROA	Regional Office for Africa
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SACEP	South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme
SARDC	Southern Africa Research and Documentation Center (Southern Africa)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDMH	Sustainability Disclosure and Management Hubs
SEI	Stockholm Environment Institute
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information Systems
SG	Secretary General
SIC ICSD	Scientific Information Center
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIDS	Small Island Development State
SoER	State of Environment Report(ing)
SP	Sub-Programme
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SRIF	Safeguard Risk Identification Form
SSFA	Small-Scale Funding Agreements
SSTC	South-South and Triangular Cooperation
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TOC	Theory of Change

TOR	Terms of Reference
UCC	University College Cork, Ireland
UN	United Nations
UN2N	United Nations to United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDA	United Nations Development Account
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environmental Assembly
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNEP WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMTF	United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSIAP	United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Center
WESR - CCA	World Environment Situation Room – Common Country Analysis
WESR	World Environment Situation Room
WGEMA	UN Economic Commission for Europe Working Group on Environment Monitoring and Assessment
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WRI	World Resource Institute
WWAP	World Water Assessment Program
WWQA	World Water Quality Alliance
XB	Extra-budgetary
ZOI	Zoï Environment Network

Project Identification

Table 1: Project summary

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[1] ID:	PIMS ID: 02020 SMA ID: 45694	Grant ID[2] (if applicable):	
UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):	Early Warning and Assessment Division (Science Division at project approval)		
Implementing Partners:	1. Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) 2. Biodiversity International 3. Center for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) 4. Centre de Suivi Ecologique (CSE – West and Central Africa) 5. German Federal Institute of Hydrology (BfG) 6. GRID Arendal and GRID Sioux Falls 7. Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) 8. Institute for Human Health (member of the ICSD IFAS Public Council) 9. Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD -Eastern Africa) 10. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) 11. International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change (ICWRGC) 12. MIT Center for Collective Intelligence, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 13. National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) 14. National Water Agency (ANA), Brazil 15. Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) 16. Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (SIC ICSD) 17. Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission (SIC ICWC) 18. Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) 19. Southern Africa Research and Documentation Center (SARDC - Southern Africa) 20. University College Cork (UCC), Ireland 21. World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) 22. Zoï Environment Network		
Sources of Funding:	*Country[3](ies):* Ireland Kuwait Norway Sweden	*Institution[4] Name/Type:* International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	
Relevant SDG(s):	1, 2, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17.		
MTS (all that apply):	2018-2021, 2022-2025	**UNEP approval date:**	4 July 2018
POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):* **OR**	*POW Direct Outcome:* **Climate stability** 1.1 Policymaking and decision-making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based	**MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):***	*MTS 2025 Outcome:* **Outcome 1B:** Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to

[1] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023.
[2] For example, ID references from EC, IKI, UNDA, Adaptation Fund, GCF.
[3] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[4] Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund; Other.

POW Output(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022)*	analysis and data generation. **Living in harmony with nature** 2.3 Productive land- and seascapes and fresh water are sustainably managed. 2.7 Natural assets are valued, monitored and sustainably managed. 2.9 Institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced and accountability frameworks are strengthened. **Towards a pollution free planet** 3.13 Sound science, data and statistics, analysis, information and knowledge are generated and shared	**OR** **POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022):***	technologies to deliver on the adaptation and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement. **Outcome 2B:** Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks. **Outcome 1C:** State and non-State actors adopt the enhanced transparency framework arrangements under the Paris Agreement. **Outcome 2C:** Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced. **Outcome 3C:** Releases of pollutants to air, water, soil and the ocean are reduced.
	POW Output: 6: National and regional reporting systems based on shared environmental information system principles generating open access to information		*POW Expected Accomplishment:* **SP7 EA(a):** Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action
Sub-programme:	Science Policy	**Programme Coordination Project:**	Science Policy
***Expected* start date:**	July 2018	**Actual start date:**	4 July 2018
***Planned* completion date:**	June 2022	**Actual operational completion date:**	31 December 2023

***Planned* total project budget[5] at approval:**	US $ 12,009,919	**Actual total expenditures reported as of 17 September 2024:**	US $ 13,292,837.49
***Planned* Extra-budgetary Funds[6]:**	Cash: US $ 7,941,271	**Secured Extra-budgetary Funds:**	Cash: US $ 9,120,497 In-kind: US $ 3,866,440
	In-kind: US $ 4,068,648	**Actual Extra-budgetary Funds expenditures reported as of 17 September 2024:**	Cash: US $ 8,340,437
First disbursement:	July 2018	**Planned date of financial closure:**	December 2024
No. of formal project revisions:	1	**Date of last approved project revision:**	17 December 2021
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	7[7]	**Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:**	18 August 2023
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation *(planned date):*	June 2020	**Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):**	November 2021
Terminal Evaluation *(planned date):*	December 2021	**Terminal Evaluation (actual date):**	April 2024
Coverage – Implementing Country(ies):	**Africa:** Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, regional activities open to all countries. **Asia and the Pacific:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal. **Europe:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Eastern neighbourhood countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova	**Coverage – Implementing Region(s):**	Africa Asia and the Pacific Europe Latin America and the Caribbean North America West Asia Global

[5] Total budget may include; Regular Budget, Environment Fund, Extra-Budgetary, including 'softly-earmarked' etc.
[6] Extra-budgetary funds may include co-finance (cash/in-kind)
[7] The existing periodic EWAD Division (formerly Science Division) - Regional Teams call(s) served as the project steering committee.

	and Ukraine) regional activities open to all countries. *Western Balkans* (Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) regional activities open to all countries. **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Belize, and Peru regional activities open to all countries. **North America:** regional activities open to all countries. **West Asia:** Kuwait, regional activities open to all countries. **Global:** Global Environment Monitoring System for freshwater, which relies on a network of national focal points and collaborating focal points.		
Dates of previous project phases:	N/A	**Status of future project phases:**	"*Capacity development for an inclusive science-policy interface using environmental information and knowledge systems at regional and country levels*" project under implementation from January 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project background

1. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) executed the project "*PIMS 02020: Capacity Building for National and Regional Environmental Information and Knowledge Management*" in collaboration with its regional offices and executing partners across Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West Asia. The project was predicated on previous UNEP initiatives under the Environment under Review subprogramme and was the first major project to advance the Science-Policy subprogramme, aiming to bridge the gap between producers/custodians and users of environmental information, thereby enabling policymakers to act on the latest science.

2. The project was designed under the former Science Division - now UNEP's Early Warning and Assessment Division - benefiting from a Project Preparation Proposal (PPP) phase, culminating in an approved project document in June 2018. The project stakeholder involvement and structure were broad and far-reaching, including more than 22 executing partners across five priority regions and covering more than 50 target countries.

3. The objective of the project was to enhance capacities of countries for making evidence-based decisions by improving their knowledge on the state of the environment at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels. This was achieved by enhancing environmental information management, environmental monitoring, and data sharing and by strengthening regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting, and assessments.

4. The project began in July 2018 with an initial planned duration of 48 months, and was later extended by 18 months, bringing the total duration to 66 months, concluding in December 2023. The total budget at project approval was US$ 12,429,381, which included both secured and unsecured cash, as well as in-kind financing. The project was completed as planned in December 2023.

This evaluation

5. Consistent with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and UNEP Evaluation Manual, the Terminal Evaluation commenced several months after the project's operational closure. Given the time elapsed since operational closure in December 2023 and that project staff and most stakeholders have since either turned attention to implementing a successor project or have moved on entirely to other roles, this evaluation serves as an assessment of accountability and to capture lessons learned and objectives based on available data and information from stakeholders still accessible and willing to participate in interviews. Notwithstanding, the evaluation was undertaken to objectively assess the project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.

6. The Terminal Evaluation was conducted between May to August 2024 and covers the entire 66-month project timeline, from July 2018 and its design phase. It 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, its regional offices, and target countries. Lessons have already been gleaned by the project team as an input to the follow-up Project Document.

7. The target audience for the findings of this review is broad and varied: each with a different role during the implementation and ongoing sustainment of the project outcomes,

namely UNEP staff; regional and national stakeholders who collect environmental data and report on the state and trends of the environment (including Ministries of the Environment and National Statistics Offices), regional and national data users such as UN Country Teams and the scientific and academic community. The findings and recommendations within the Terminal Evaluation (TE) report are also likely to be of interest to the UNEP Project Review Committee to help inform and shape future initiatives.

8. The evaluation approach followed a consultative, transparent, and evidence-based review of project activities, outputs, and performance. To ensure coherence and completeness of the analysis, two compatible strategies were employed: (i) change analysis to compare the results indicators over time against targets in the project results framework; and (ii) context-sensitive contribution analysis to determine the contribution the project made to both intended and unintended outcomes. The primary sources of information were document analyses and semi-structured interviews. The primary constraint of the evaluation was the sample size of key informants and under-representation of country-level beneficiaries of the project, due to either their limited availability or willingness to participate in the process. It was not necessary to undertake a field mission as part of this assessment.

9. The Terminal Evaluation aligned with UNEP's Evaluation Policy, Programme Manual, and the Terms of Reference (TOR), assessing a pre-determined list of review criteria: 1) Strategic relevance, 2) Quality of the project design, 3) Nature of external context, 4) Effectiveness, 5) Financial management, 6) Efficiency, 7) Sustainability, 8) Factors affecting the project performance and cross-cutting issues. Each criterion was rated on a 6-level scale.

10. Beyond the evaluation criteria, three strategic evaluation questions were specifically determined for this evaluation, as follows:

- **Q1:** In which ways did the project adapt to the UNEP Delivery Model during project Implementation?
- **Q2:** What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect project's performance?
- **Q3:** In what ways, and to what extent, have the needs and interests of differentiated groups been considered in the implementation and monitoring of the project?

Key findings

11. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNEP (EOU) supervises and quality assures all evaluation processes managed directly by its staff. In the case of this Terminal Evaluation report, the EOU found that the documentary evidence to support the high reported levels of achievement (e.g. Outcome 1 target reported to have been achieved in 141 countries against a target of 74 countries) could not be verified at the levels needed to support a rating at the highest level of performance. As per its standard procedure, the EOU has recorded its validated ratings in blue text throughout the report. In some cases, these have differed from the higher performance ratings that the Evaluation Consultant wished to confer. The Evaluation Consultant rated the overall performance of the project as **'Highly Satisfactory'** and the EOU has validated this as **'Satisfactory'.** These (EOU ratings) are the performance ratings that will be incorporated into UNEP's official performance records and reporting. See Table 21: Summary of Project Findings and Ratings.

12. **Strategic Relevance** has been rated 'Highly Satisfactory' across all sub-elements. The project was designed in response to a 2017 gap analysis report calling for strengthening the science-policy interface. At inception, it integrated with UNEP's Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2018-2021 and was revisited in 2021 for closer alignment with the MTS for 2022-2025 and themes from the UN development system reforms. It aligned with the Programmes of Work

(POW) for the 2018-2019, 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 biennia. Its focus on capacity building and state of environment reports supports UNEP's strategic priority of increasing the number of countries reporting on environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The project contributed to the Environment Under Review subprogramme indicator EA(a) and EA(a)(ii) and to several UNEA resolutions.

13. The project demonstrates strong harmonization with donor and partner priorities, particularly those of the European Commission. A bottom-up and needs-driven model made the project highly relevant to regional, subregional, and national environmental priorities across 50+ target countries. It is also an example of south-south triangular cooperation and aligns with a number of national policies and action-plans, especially on reporting on environmental dimension of sustainable development. The project's design complements existing interventions, such as the GEMS/Water initiative, and maintains coherence with broader environmental efforts across UNEP's regional offices, ensuring a well-integrated approach to enhancing environmental information systems globally. Finally, the project complements a range of ongoing interventions, supports multiple Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) implementations, and thematic subprogrammes on climate action, nature action, and chemicals and pollution action, all of which call for scientific analysis, data generation, and reporting.

14. **Quality of Project Design** has been rated 'Satisfactory'. The project produced a thorough project document in line with UNEP guidelines. Early consultation undertaken found environmental monitoring and data management were cross-cutting issues hindering effective SDG reporting. It concluded there was a need to modernize and develop a national system of environmental monitoring and data collection for global environmental reporting. The Project Document articulates the problem statement and what is needed to address it. It used consultation, clear aims, outcomes, outputs, indicators, targets, and means of verification, all present in the project Logical Framework. The implementation strategy served as a "blueprint" for flexible implementation. The design successfully incorporates the involvement of stakeholders, including gender and minority groups, resulting in extensive participation, support, and ownership during implementation. The area where the design is weaker is its Theory of Change, description of impact pathways, assumptions and risks for each, and an assessment of partner capacities.

15. **Nature of External Context** has been rated 'Moderately Favourable'. It was mostly country-specific and moderately favourable across target countries, per evaluation criteria guidelines. No conflict or natural disaster impacted project implementation. Although there was unanticipated political upheaval in some countries, it did not sufficiently derail the project's results or impact to be an area of concern. The COVID-19 pandemic affected decision making and implementation of activities. The onset of mobility restrictions in each of the regions occurred at different times but these cumulatively made country-level workshops, training events, face-to-face meetings, workshops, and regional coordination meetings impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

16. Overall **Effectiveness** was rated as 'Highly Satisfactory' (EOU rating: Satisfactory). The project's direct outcome and all four corresponding outputs were realized at operational closure. Most outcome-level and output-level targets were not only met, but also exceeded. There was a slight shortfall in Output D, "GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMStat," which missed the target by a factor of one - reaching 134 as opposed to an end-of-project target of 135. However, the achievement statement remains valid. Overall, the project's performance was strong and in line with the Theory of Change, with seasoned and highly capable regional and national leaders driving the implementation effort, supported by the UNEP HQ team in Nairobi.

17. The likelihood of achieving **Impact** is rated 'Highly Likely' (EOU rating: Likely), since most outcomes and outputs were determined by the regions, closely matching their highest priority needs.

18. **Financial Management** is rated as 'Highly Satisfactory'. The evaluators verified that the management of finances adhered to the UNEP guidelines, and no evidence contradicted this. The prompt allocation of funds supported project delivery timelines, with financial monitoring involving the strict management of variances and operational reporting for transparency. The project successfully transitioned and adapted to two different management platforms. During the draft evaluation report stage, additional consultation contributed to improving the completeness and clarity of the financial information. Communication between Project Management Officers and Financial Management Officers was recognized as prompt, efficient, and effective in managing the project's budget, which was distributed over several regions and country delivery teams.

19. The **Efficiency** of project is rated as 'Satisfactory'. The project demonstrated a very high level of efficiency and balanced performance during the initial 48-month project duration and the 18-month extension. The extension is viewed by the evaluators as a positive development in the project's lifecycle, granted primarily to realign the project objectives and outcomes with evolving UNEP strategic priorities and the availability of increased funding. It achieved and exceeded its outcome and nearly all output targets with modest budgets and lean implementation teams distributed across several regions and many countries. The project's leadership leveraged cost effective approaches to achieve or exceed their respective regional and country targets. The extension of the project period from 48 to 66 months was primarily due to securing new funding, realigning the project duration, and aligning the project to evolving UNEP priorities and strategies.

20. **Monitoring and Reporting** are rated as 'Highly Satisfactory' (EOU rating: Moderately Satisfactory). The oversight and reporting system was well-organized to gather critical data regarding project progress, key achievements, and incremental milestones. This system played a significant role in confirming the project's alignment with the Science-Policy subprogramme indicators, anticipated project results, and enabled adjustments when needed. Monthly reporting was introduced in 2021 but proved less effective. Consequently, monthly updates only indicated that efforts were in progress without any substantial outcomes in the reporting interval. Nevertheless, the project management team was immensely diligent and detailed in their reporting, and communication with the coordinating body was notably efficient and prompt. The monitoring and evaluation plan was sufficiently detailed but lacked specific budgeting. The project underwent an in-house mid-term retrospective during the COVID-19 pandemic and an exhaustive PRC review to enable course correction. Mobility restrictions hindered the ability to conduct verification visits and face-to-face meetings.

21. The project's **Sustainability** is deemed 'Likely'. Socio-political, financial, and institutional gauges of sustainability are all favourable. The project's execution and implementation at regional and country levels ensured that the main capacity-building needs of the countries were integrated into the outcomes. The project aimed to establish enduring data collection and reporting mechanisms, such as data storage solutions and digital frameworks, designed for long-term maintenance and scalability. A subsequent project was launched to advance the capacities developed by this initiative and to underscore the continuity of results and impacts.

22. **Factors Affecting Performance** are rated as 'Highly Satisfactory'. Preparation and readiness and Country Ownership and Driven-ness were deemed to be "Satisfactory". Despite a Project Preparation Phase, no inception meeting was convened at the outset, and only loose

and informal discussions took place instead of a Steering Committee. Quality of supervision, stakeholder participation, responsiveness to human rights and gender, environmental social risks and safeguards, and communication and awareness were all deemed to be 'Highly Satisfactory'.

Conclusions

23. Notwithstanding minor shortcomings with respect to the project's intervention logic and results hierarchy, as well as some country-level challenges and political upheaval in some areas, the project succeeded in creating a solid foundation and necessary conditions for knowledge management and environmental reporting. This foundation has created a springboard for follow-up efforts through a successor project currently under implementation and to digitize state of the environment reports already developed. The project achieved significant breakthroughs in addressing country-level capacity gaps culminating in high-quality deliverables and state of the environment reports to improve the science-policy interface.

24. The project deftly navigated changes in UNEP's delivery model during implementation and convincingly stayed the course in embracing a decentralized approach, resulting in a bottom-up needs-driven project that was able to leverage and benefit from the strengths and seasoned management from each region. It adapted well to abrupt and poorly rolled out financial and project management systems.

25. While difficult not to be affected by COVID-19 restrictions given the scope of the project and need for face-to-face meetings to build capacity, the project adapted well to an interim virtual environment, while also benefiting from an 18-month project extension which gradually enabled a transition to normalization and business as usual execution.

26. A wide range of promotional activities have been carried out; nevertheless, communication needs to be a continuous effort to ensure the project sustainability. The accessible knowledge products and training courses are considered to have high potential for expansion to more countries and regions via ongoing UNEP initiatives, platforms and partner projects.

27. GEMS/Water is the only UN initiative supporting countries in reporting on SDG indicator 6.3.2 by developing its methodology in collaboration with national water quality focal points, significantly enhancing national water quality data management. The GEMS/Water data platform, GEMStat, has advanced as a global gateway for water quality data, consolidating efforts to provide open access to comprehensive water quality information. Capacity development courses delivered by the GEMS/Water Capacity Development Center have been successful in building national capacities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where they have played a pivotal role in the development of national water quality monitoring networks. However, the program is constrained by human and financial resources, restricting its ability to expand its impact further.

28. The project successfully addressed the needs of differentiated groups by incorporating gender-disaggregated data and promoting the participation of women and marginalized groups in capacity-building activities. Efforts were made to engage a diverse range of stakeholders from the outset to ensure inclusivity in environmental decision-making. There was close alignment with reporting requirements and interests of parallel projects and no misalignment was found.

29. Regarding the thematically cross-cutting lessons learned component of the Project, the Terminal Evaluation has found country ownership and the political will to apply improvements in data collection and reporting capacity in support of national environmental

assessments as one of most important themes of the project. Cumulatively, the project has demonstrated strong performance across all evaluation criteria. It represents a 'Highly Satisfactory' initiative that has realized its main outcome and created outputs and results with strong impact within each region and in the target countries. (See Table 21: Summary of Project Findings and Ratings).

Lessons Learned

30. The following lessons can be gleaned from the project's implementation:

- ***Lesson 1: A good design often leads to a good implementation.*** There is greater chance for a well-designed project to succeed, which in turn leads to positive project results.
- ***Lesson 2: Readiness is paramount.*** There is tremendous value in a preparatory and readiness phase in project design and development.
- ***Lesson 3: Ensure needs-informed capacity development.*** Proper capacity gap analysis is essential to inform any efforts focused on building capacity.
- ***Lesson 4: Support for data governance.*** The success of environmental governance depends largely on the availability and accessibility of environment-related data and on the abilities of the decision-makers to interpret data adequately.
- ***Lesson 5: Experienced management and subject-matter expertise.*** Skill sets must closely align with the scope of the project.
- ***Lesson 6: Global data sets do not always align with local needs.*** Global coarse-grain datasets, such as those within UNEP Live or the World Environment Situation Room, may not be viewed favourably among stakeholders as a solution for improving data collection, transparency, and environmental reporting at regional and local levels.
- ***Lesson 7: Regions are best positioned to manage workplans and budgets according to local level needs***.
- ***Lesson 8: Flexibility is a necessary management mechanism when implementing a project.*** It allows better responses to beneficiaries' needs and priorities and aligns the implementation of activities more efficiently.
- ***Lesson 9: Complex projects require governance and formal arrangements.*** Complex projects involving multiple divisions and regional offices rarely succeed without formal mechanisms (MoU, UN2UN, PCA, SSFA, or similar).
- ***Lesson 10:*** In some cases, Units in UNEP and within the same Division, compete with each other for unsecured financial resources. This can create an unhealthy dynamic and more should be done to protect a spirit of cooperation.
- ***Lesson 11:*** This area of work consists of incremental projects of similar scope and represents a case where transformation is a lengthy process. This would allow for lessons learned to be included in the design of successive project designs. It would be beneficial if there were a mechanism to allow for lessons to be learned in the later stages of implementation and in time to inform the design of a successive phase. It is noted that Terminal Evaluations, which are intended to assess, ex-post, the performance of projects, can only be launched a maximum of 3 months prior to project operational completion. The learning from evaluations can, therefore, only be incorporated in project inception periods of future projects or through adaptive management.

Recommendations

31. **Recommendation 1:** For future projects, particularly those aiming for long-term transformation, it is recommended to develop a roadmap and an exit strategy before the project's end to ensure the handover and transition of services.

32. **Recommendation 2:** Reforming the environmental monitoring function within a country is complex and non-linear. It is often mixed with political agendas and resistance to change. Experience suggests that such transformation projects would benefit from a longer time horizon from the outset.

33. **Recommendation 3:** While the project successfully established modern environmental monitoring systems, more resources are necessary to consolidate these achievements. Future projects should consider focusing on fewer countries with a larger budget per country to better address capacity needs.

34. **Recommendation 4:** Most project develop one or more knowledge repositories, databases, or other technology platforms. These can be expensive to maintain and may deteriorate quickly once a project concludes. Furthermore, global datasets are not always useful for reporting on local-level environmental issues. There is an enterprise-wide need for a rethink on the utility of new data platforms and technologies, as well as the consolidation of existing ones.

35. **Recommendations 5:** Project revisions should not be subject to the same level of scrutiny by the UNEP Project Review Committee as new project designs. This saps efficiency and diverts financial and human resources away from effective delivery.

36. **Recommendations 6:** The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit should reflect on its monitoring and reporting and seek technical advice from the Evaluation Office on ways to better capture effects such that they can be credibly associated with the defined project's efforts.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project

37. This document presents the report of the Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the UNEP project "PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building for National and Regional Environmental Information and Knowledge Management"", (hereinafter referred to interchangeably as either the "Project" or the "PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project").

38. The Project Review Committee (PRC) issued its clearance report on 19 June 2018 with the original Project Document signed for implementation on 4 July 2018. The PRC was subsequently engaged once again during Revision No. 1 in October 2021 and issued its clearance on 7 December 2021. The total budget at project approval was US$ 12,009,919 which included cash (US$ 5,121,360 secured and US$ 2,819,912 unsecured) and US$ 4,068,648 in in-kind financing.

1.2 Institutional Context

39. The Project was implemented under the Environment Under Review subprogramme of the UNEP Early Warning and Assessment's (formerly Science Division) Capacity Development and Innovation Branch, with the Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit serving as the central coordinating entity. Effective collaboration and support were also provided by dedicated focal points across all UNEP regional offices and by the GEMS/Water initiative. The project had a broad geographic scope, covering five (5) regions including Africa (27 countries), Asia and the Pacific (6 countries), Europe (15 countries), Latin America and the Caribbean (2 countries), and West Asia (1 country)[8]. It targeted a total of 51 countries across these regions, to enhance their capacities for environmental monitoring, information management, and state of environment reporting.

40. The Project is primarily anchored in the Science-Policy subprogramme, with Digital Transformation elements and indirectly contributing to climate action, nature action and chemicals and pollution action subprogrammes. The PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project contributes directly to the Expected Accomplishment EA(a) and EA(a)(ii) in UNEP's Programme of Work POW 2018-2019, 2020-2021 and 2022-2023., which focuses on increasing the number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development through shared environmental information systems.

41. The Project had a diverse range of over 22 regional partners, each playing a critical role in advancing its objectives across regions. The regional environmental networking dimension of the Project also fed directly into the work of regional ministerial environment forums such as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean and the Environment for Europe (EfE) process. Regional partners included:

- In Africa, key implementing partners included the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Centre de Suivi Ecologique (CSE), and the Southern Africa Research and Documentation Center (SARDC), which contributed to strengthening environmental information systems and capacity building;

[8] The evaluators recognize, in consultation with some regional coordination staff, that several of the countries included under UNEP Asia-Pacific Region per the Terminal Evaluation's Terms of Reference, were actually in practice, under the UNEP Europe Region. From this vantage point therefore, the Asia and the Pacific had 6 countries and Europe had 15 countries.

- In the Asia-Pacific region, the project collaborated with partners such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), Korea Environment Institute (KEI), International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), China-ASEAN Environment Cooperation Center (CAEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), and South Pacific Regional Environmental Cooperation, along with UNESCAP/UNSIAP, to enhance regional cooperation and data sharing;
- In Europe, the project worked with the University College Cork-National University of Ireland, the Federal Institute of Hydrology (BfG) in Germany, the International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change, Zoï Environment Network (ZOI), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the European Environment Agency (EEA), ensuring alignment with European environmental standards and frameworks;
- The Latin America and the Caribbean region saw collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) National Water Agency (ANA) in Brazil, supporting the region's environmental monitoring and reporting efforts, as well as the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and the University of Belize.
- In West Asia, the project partnered with the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), the Indian Ocean Commission, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, contributing to regional environmental governance and information management;
- Finally, several global entities and international organizations played a crucial role, including the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations University, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). These global partners provided overarching support, resources, and expertise that were essential to the project's success across all regions.

1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

42. The evaluation aims 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 and its regional offices engaged in the Science-Policy interface subprogramme, as well as with country level executing partners. This evaluation also identifies lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation in the field of data governance, knowledge management and environmental reporting linked to environmental SDGs.

43. The TE was carried out by two independent consultants under the responsibility of the Evaluation Office of UNEP (Nairobi) in close consultation with the former project management team (Nairobi) and guided by the assignment's Terms of Reference (ANNEX VIII: Evaluation TORs (without annexes)), UNEP's Evaluation Policy,[9] and the UNEP Programme Manual[10]. The evaluation started in May 2024 approximately five months after operational closure. As many project staff and essential stakeholders have since either turned attention

[9] https://www.unep.org/resources/other-evaluation-reportsdocuments/evaluation-policy-2016
[10] https://www.unep.org/resources/other-evaluation-reportsdocuments/unep-evaluation-manual

to implementing a successor project or have moved on entirely to other roles, the evaluation was largely an accountability assessment, based on available data and information from stakeholders still accessible and willing to participate in interviews. An overview of the evaluation sources is presented in ANNEX III: People consulted during the Evaluation and in ANNEX IV: KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED.

44. The scope of this evaluation is the project itself, consisting of its four Outputs under a singular Outcome. However, as Output D (GEMS/Water Networks) has already been evaluated in a separate process, additional findings for that Output are also gleaned and incorporated into this TE as secondary data. The TE evaluates implementation during the entire project execution period (from July 2018 to December 2023) and all activities of the project.

45. The project has not been previously evaluated through a mid-term review, synthesis evaluation, or by another agency, making this terminal evaluation the first comprehensive third-party assessment of its performance and impact. To date, the project has completed its first phase, with no additional phases currently anticipated. A stand-alone follow-up project building on the main themes of the Project started implementation in January 2024.

46. The target audience for the evaluation findings are (i) the main implementation branch of the UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division; (ii) regional and national data providing stakeholders and custodians; (iii) national stakeholders responsible for collecting environmental data and information and reporting on states and trends of the environment, including ministries of environment and national statistics offices; (iv) regional and national data users such as United Nations Country Team UNCTs; and (v) the scientific/methodological/analytical/technological community at large. The findings and recommendations within the TE report are also likely to be of interest to the UNEP Project Review Committee (PRC), in helping to inform and shape future projects and initiatives, especially those having to do with information management, reporting and data analytics, by adding to the body of knowledge and learnings of their collective implementation.

2 EVALUATION METHODS

2.1 Evaluation Approach

47. The evaluation took a qualitative approach that involved a balanced, consultative, transparent, and evidence-based review of the Project's outputs and performance to date.

Figure 1: Stages of the terminal evaluation

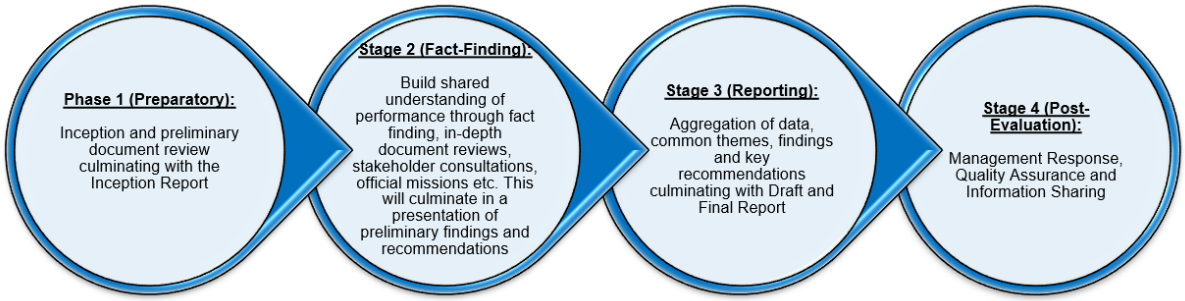
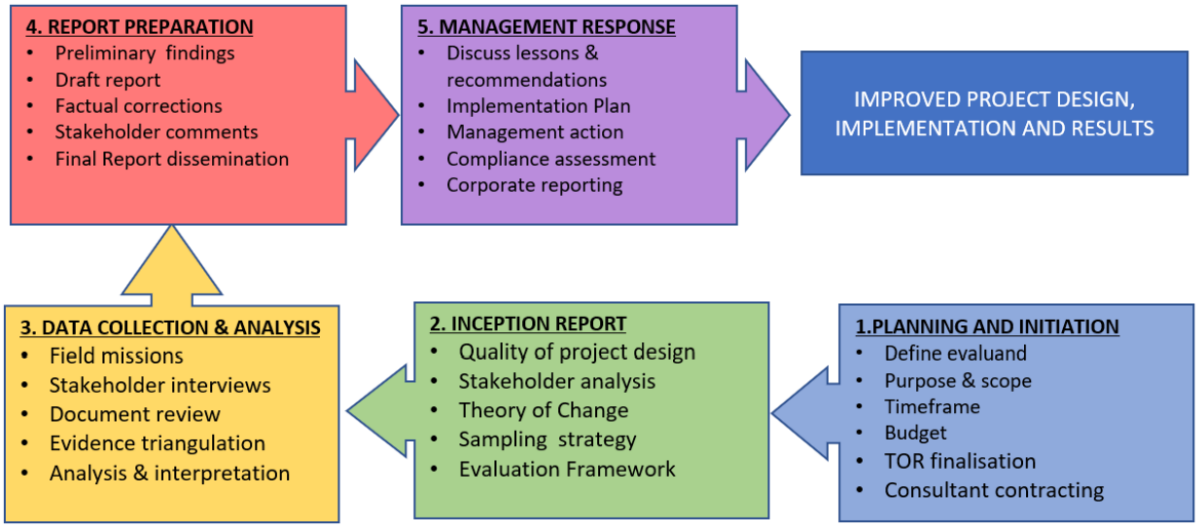


Figure 2: UNEP evaluation process



2.2 Evaluation Methodology

48. This evaluation was conducted using two methods: (i) a desk review of project documentation; (ii) a review of documentation of UNEP policies and programmes, other relevant evaluations, and country documents where available; and (iii) interviews and discussions with key project partners (at global, regional and country levels), participants and beneficiaries. Based on the recommendations of the UNEP Evaluation Office and project management team, the evaluation consultants opted not to incorporate an online survey, which in hindsight, was a prudent suggestion due to difficulties incurred by the evaluators in securing the time and follow-up responses from interviewees. The evaluation also did not include travel to participating Project countries and was entirely conducted in a virtual environment. As the project's objectives included enhancing environmental reporting and knowledge management, the evaluators were able to gauge their thoroughness by conducting desk reviews and sampling, eliminating the need for onsite visits and inspections. This evaluation adopted a participatory and inclusive approach.

49. **Desk Review:** A desk review of documentation was included as part of the evaluation methodology for several key reasons. First, it was explicitly listed in the terms of reference for the evaluation, ensuring that all relevant documents were comprehensively examined to assess project performance, outcomes, and alignment with the stated objectives. The desk review provided an essential foundation for understanding the project's framework, its implementation process, and the context in which it operated.

50. Moreover, the nature of the evaluation was entirely desk-based, meaning that there were few alternative methodologies available for the direct collection of data, such as field visits or face-to-face interviews. In light of these constraints, a desk review was the most viable option to gather the necessary information from various reports, project documents, progress evaluations, and partner feedback. This approach allowed for a thorough analysis of the project's documented achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.

51. Finally, the desk review also ensured consistency across the evaluation by providing a systematic and structured approach to data collection. By relying on official documentation, the evaluation was able to maintain objectivity and accuracy in its findings, reducing potential biases that could arise from more subjective data collection methods. Furthermore, it allowed for the cross-referencing of multiple sources of information, ensuring that conclusions were based on a wide array of evidence rather than individual accounts or perspectives. The evaluators also conducted outreach to two countries to discuss the development of Project outputs and to obtain samples of a relevant Output.

52. Specifically, the TE involved a series of stages with data collection through both primary and secondary sources. The primary data sources were key stakeholders engaged in the project including project team, project partners and beneficiaries. Secondary data was also used to perform the evaluation of the project. Data was collected from a wide range set of documents, including: a) general background literature on data governance and knowledge management containing global and UNEP reports, policies, and documents related to the scope of the Project; b) official materials such as the original and revised project descriptions (Project Document and Supporting Revision No. 1 documentation), ongoing consolidated progress, monitoring and financial reports; c) the in-house Mid-Term Review retrospective report; and finally d) material generated by the project itself, including but not limited a cross-section of state-of-the-environment reports from each region, as well as communications, outreach materials and plans, and project related presentations/publications, websites and media, training and event materials. Due to the volume of material generated by the project across 50+ target countries, the evaluators undertook a spot check of documentation while balancing regional representation.

53. **Key Informant Interviews:** Key informant interviews were included in the evaluation methodology to provide qualitative insights and contextual depth that could not be gleaned solely from the desk review. These interviews were essential for capturing the first-hand experiences of stakeholders involved in the project, including regional and national-level representation, executing partners, and UNEP staff. By engaging directly with those who had hands-on involvement in the project, the evaluation was able to explore the nuances of implementation, challenges faced, and the effectiveness of project strategies that were not always evident in official documentation.

54. Additionally, key informant interviews offered a valuable opportunity to verify and triangulate information gathered through the desk review. This ensured that the evaluation findings were grounded in both documented evidence and the lived experiences of project participants. The interviews also allowed for the collection of feedback on adaptive management practices, regional dynamics, and stakeholder cooperation, all of which were crucial for assessing the project's effectiveness and relevance.

55. Respondents for the key informant interviews were carefully selected based on discussions between the project management team and the UNEP Evaluation Office. This collaborative approach ensured that the interviewees represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders with direct involvement in or knowledge of the project's implementation. The selection process aimed to capture perspectives from various regions, sectors, and levels of responsibility, including national focal points, executing partners, and UNEP staff.

56. The final approach was mutually agreed upon as being appropriate for the terminal evaluation, ensuring that the individuals chosen could provide insights into key areas such as project design, implementation, and outcomes. This method facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the project's impact and effectiveness, allowing the evaluation to incorporate a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. The chosen approach resulted in 25 individuals being involved with an average response rate of 85%.

Table 2: Details of Target Respondents

Target Respondents		**# people involved in project (M/F)**	**# people contacted (M/F)**	**# people responded (M/F)**	**% contacted who responded**	**% people involved who responded**
Project team (those with management responsibilities e.g. PMU)	Implementing agency	17 (11M / 6F)	17 (11M / 6F)	15 (10M / 6F)	88.2%	88.2%
	Executing agency/ies					
	# entities involved in the project	**# entities contacted**	**# people contacted (M/F)**	**# people responded (M/F)**	**% contacted who respondent**	
Project (implementing/ executing) partners *(receiving funds from the project)*	23+	6 (3M / 3F)	6 (3M / 3F)	4 (2M / 2F)	66.6%	17%
Project (collaborating/ contributing[11]) partners *(not receiving funds from the project)*						
Beneficiaries: *Examples:* Duty bearers Gate keepers Direct beneficiaries Indirect beneficiaries Civil society representatives	50+	2 (0M / 2F)	2 (0M / 2F)	2 (0M / 2F)	100%	4%

57. Central to the evaluation was the analysis (and reconstruction) of the Project's Theory of Change. Consultations were held during the evaluation inception phase to arrive at an understanding of how the Project intended to drive change and what contributing conditions ('assumptions' and 'drivers') would need to be in place to support such change. The (reconstructed) Theory of Change, supported by a graphic representation and narrative discussion of the causal pathways, was discussed with key respondents during the data

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

collection phase, and refined as appropriate. The final iteration is presented in this evaluation report.

58. All data collected were analysed and synthesized using content and narrative analyses methods for qualitative information, and simple descriptive statistics for quantitative data. To assist with the generation of lessons and recommendations, all interview notes were scrubbed for anonymity and put through an AI software called Dedoose to (i) first codify them across the evaluation criteria; and subsequently; (ii) to identify common threads and themes between them.

59. The TE adopted a fit-for-purpose phased approach intended to gradually drill deeper and elicit information on project performance at a granular level. The TE was conducted in four stages highlighted in the figure below, with evaluators largely spearheading three of them, namely the inception and planning phase, fact-finding phase, and reporting phase.

2.3 Main Evaluation Criteria and Questions

60. This TE has been carried out using a set of nine evaluation criteria which include: (1) Strategic Relevance; (2) Quality of Project Design; (3) Nature of External Context; (4) Effectiveness (including availability of outputs, achievement of outcomes, and likelihood of impact); (5) Financial Management; (6) Efficiency; (7) Monitoring and Reporting; (8) Sustainability; and (9) Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues (see ANNEX II: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK / MATRIX for more details on each evaluation criterion).

61. All the evaluation criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU) and Nature of External Context is rated from Highly Favourable (HF) to Highly Unfavourable (HU). The ratings against each criterion are 'weighted' to derive the Overall Project Performance Rating. The greatest weight is placed on the achievement of outcomes, followed by dimensions of sustainability.

62. The UNEP Evaluation Office has developed a detailed rubric with descriptions of the main elements required to be demonstrated at each level (i.e. Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory) for each evaluation criterion. The evaluators have considered all the evidence gathered during the evaluation in relation to this matrix to generate evaluation criteria performance ratings.

63. In addition to the nine evaluation criteria outlined above, the TE addresses a number of strategic questions that were formulated in the Terms of Reference. These questions were posed by the UNEP Evaluation Office in conjunction with members of the Project Team. The strategic questions[12] included in the TOR and addressed in this TE are:

- **Q1:** In which ways did the project adapt to the UNEP Delivery Model during project Implementation?
- **Q2:** What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect project's performance?
- **Q3:** In what ways, and to what extent, have the needs and interests of differentiated groups been considered in the implementation and monitoring of the project?

[12] Highlights of the answers to the strategic questions included in the conclusions chapter.

64. Throughout this evaluation process and during the writing of the draft and final evaluation reports, efforts have been made to represent the views of a spectrum of project stakeholders. Specific stakeholders invited for an interview were identified by the project team and selected by the evaluation consultant. Additional stakeholders were identified by both the interviewees and representatives of the UNEP regional offices at the request of the UNEP Evaluation Office. Most interviews were individual, while in few interviews more than one person was present. No specific request was made to the evaluators to engage representatives of indigenous people and local communities, as these were not direct stakeholders or beneficiaries of the project. The list of interviewed stakeholders is included in Annex III.

2.4 Limitations

65. The primary constraint of the evaluation was the sample size of key informants and under-representation of country-level beneficiaries of the project, due to either their limited availability or willingness to participate in an interview given the time that had elapsed since they took part in project activities early in its life, as well as competing priorities. Efforts were made to increase the rate of response, namely by enlisting the support of the former Project Manager on several occasions to follow up on interview requests bilaterally. While this may have slightly restricted the variety of views and perspectives on project implementation and impact, it is not believed to have impacted the soundness of the findings, conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations included in this report. While there was no material limitation to the full carrying out of the evaluation, this risk was foreseen at inception and the impact was an elongated timeline for the fact-finding phase. In several instances the evaluators had to reschedule interviews with some participants more than once due to competing and unanticipated last-minute engagements, and in one specific case a respondent did not show for the agreed interview four times.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

66. This evaluation was carried out in accordance with 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, in some cases holding the consultation in Spanish to accommodate the interviewee.

67. To allow for a maximum of free and open discussion about the Project results and about how it was implemented, the opinions of the people interviewed were disclosed in direct connection with their individual views. Their responses are being treated with full confidentiality and data were collected with respect for ethics. All online interviews were recorded, and other information gathered after prior informed consent from people, all discussions remained anonymous, while stakeholders were made aware that their exact words could be used to illustrate a finding; all information was collected according to relevant UNEG guidelines and UN standards of conduct. The data collected during the evaluation will be handled in accordance with UNEP's data protection policies, ensuring confidentiality and secure storage, and will be used solely for the purpose of the evaluation before being appropriately archived or disposed of following its completion.

3 THE PROJECT

3.1 Context

68. Environmental information can help prevent or minimize emerging environmental challenges by informing policy and planning at different governance levels. Many countries, including those identified in the Project's original design, face difficulties in accessing and using environmental information for reporting and assessment purposes, due to the lack of reliable, timely, accessible, and comparable data and information, and the fragmentation of databases and knowledge portals across different agencies and sectors. There is a demand for technical support and capacity building for environmental information and knowledge management and use at the regional, sub-regional and national levels, as well as for identifying synergies and reducing the reporting burden to multilateral environmental agreements and other bodies.

69. Moreover, environmental information needs to be effectively collected, managed, and shared to support multiple uses at different governance levels, for example, to meet reporting obligations (including reporting on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and to inform decision-making and planning. At regional and sub-regional levels, the establishment of multisectoral and interdisciplinary regional environmental information networks are also instrumental in the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned, streamlining data flows, improving the regional knowledge base of environmental reporting and assessments, and ultimately catalyzing evidence-informed environmental policy-making.

70. There is also a gender dimension to the science-policy interface and the need for accessible, timely, and accurate data. Environmental conditions affect women and men differently, yet there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data to capture these differences. The Global Gender and Environment Outlook 2016 emphasized the critical need for such data, underscoring the importance of an inclusive information framework based on high-quality, disaggregated environmental and socio-economic data.

71. The UNEP Global Environment Monitoring System for freshwater (GEMS/Water) underscores the importance of reliable, quality-assured environmental data by coordinating water quality data from a global network and maintaining the GEMStat database (gemstat.org), the most authoritative and comprehensive global source on freshwater quality. However, GEMStat requires improved data coverage and harmonization with regional water quality reporting systems. GEMS/Water enhances capacity through regional and online training on water quality monitoring, data management, quality assurance, and information sharing, enabling countries to report effectively, including on SDG indicator 6.3.2.

72. The project was intended to strengthen the capacity of countries with respect to making evidence-based decisions by raising their knowledge on the state of the environment at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels. This would be achieved through enhancing environmental information management, environmental monitoring and data sharing, and strengthening regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting, and assessments.

73. The project also sought to address the root causes and to remove the key barriers preventing the development outcome of "enabling Governments and stakeholders to take actions to prevent or respond to adverse environmental impacts on the well-being of people and on the services that different ecosystems provide", and ultimately the desired long-term impact of "informed environmental policy and decision making leading to improved environmental status and trends".

Table 3: Target Countries

Region	Target Countries
Africa (27)	Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia **Note:** regional activities open to all countries.
Asia and the Pacific (6)	Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Vietnam **Note:** regional activities open to all countries.
Europe (15)	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan **Note:** regional activities open to all countries
Latin America and the Caribbean (2)	Belize, Peru **Note:** regional activities open to all countries.
West Asia (1)	Kuwait **Note:** regional activities open to all countries

3.2 Results Framework

74. According to the Project Document developed following Revision No. 1, the Project's **overall objective** is "*to Enhance regional and national capacity for environmental information management, networking and state of the environment reporting and communication*".

75. The Project's **singular outcome** was reformulated to "*Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes*". The outcome is having two indicators and eleven outcome-level milestones.

76. There are **four outputs** that together contribute to the achievement of the outcome stated above.

Output A: **Targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.** Output A has one indicator and nine output-level milestones.

Output B: **Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy action.** Output B has three indicators and 11 output-level milestones.

Output C: **Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established / strengthened and partners.** Output C has two indicators and 11 output-level milestones.

Output D: **GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat.** Output D has three indicators and 11 output-level milestones.

77. The Project structure and results hierarchy was carefully designed to deliver effectively against the Logical Framework, aligning each theme of the PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project with specific Outcomes and Outputs that contribute to the overall goal of enhancing environmental information management, monitoring, and reporting at national and regional levels. The incremental nature of each of the Outputs - organized into several key dimensions of data governance, knowledge management, and reporting - directly supports the achievement of elements of the project's objectives. Furthermore, semi-annual milestones help maintain momentum to deliver products and services that contribute to the corresponding Output.

78. The core outputs are inherently incremental and help to build capacity for environmental information systems and data sharing. These components are aimed at strengthening the maturity curve of target countries over the project's duration to collect, manage, and use environmental data for decision-making. By first laying the foundation by identifying country's underlying needs and then moving on to the technical underpinnings of information management and environmental reporting, the project can then nurture establishing and enhancing national and regional environmental information networks. The project supports the development of state of environment reports, which are critical for informed policy-making and sustainable development. The emphasis on training and technical support ensures that these networks are not only established but are sustainable and capable of evolving to meet future needs.

79. Moreover, there is an ongoing rapid evolution towards dynamic global and regional multi-stakeholder processes, requiring more holistic and inclusive approaches to gathering and sharing environmental data and information, co-creating knowledge for actionable policies, and generating integrated solutions using evidence from real-world situations and on-line communities of practice. UNEP has a key role in promoting the production, dissemination, and use of environment data and information. Through its existing networks with ministries of environment, environmental stakeholders, and experts and with the UN Statistical System, UNEP is well placed—through its competitive advantage—to lead efforts to strengthen national capacities for sharing data to facilitate reporting and assessment processes. UNEP's role as UN Environment Assembly's information and knowledge service provider gives it the mandate to make available and use more up-to-date or near real time information on an on-going, timely, open access, transparent, and neutral basis from various national, regional, and other credible sources in assessments on the state of the environment and in analysis and identification of emerging issues.

3.3 Stakeholders

80. The accompanying table, derived from the Project Document and TE Inception Report, classifies 36 different partners and stakeholders from five key regions into four main categories based on their Influence/Power and interest in the project results. To ensure the effective prioritization of the project's requirements at country and regional levels, as well as its design and implementation, significant input was required from each category of stakeholder to achieve the project's intended results and outputs. Looking forward, these entities will also play a crucial role in sustaining the achievements of the project and in enhancing the quality, management, and reporting of environmental data.

Table 4: Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder Group	Description	Role	Influence	Interest
National Stakeholders	Ministries of Environment and National Statistics Offices	Collecting environmental data, reporting on states and trends, strengthens national and regional sharing experiences	High	High
Regional and National Data Providing Stakeholders	Regional bodies, governments, UN agencies, Civil Society	Significant role in environmental monitoring, research, and assessment, collaboration ensured that the project benefited from a broad spectrum of expertise and resources	High	High
Regional and National Data Users	Governments, UN agencies, civil society, major groups	Users of high-quality environmental data and research to supports their operational and strategic decision making and policy development	Variable – High to Medium	High
Scientific/ Methodological/ Analytical/ Technological Community	Experts, scientists, civil society representatives	Contribution through access to factual data and scientific assessments	Medium	Low

3.4 Project implementation Structure and Partners

81. The Project's key partners encompassed governmental bodies from different regions particularly those related to Ministries of Environment, alongside other pertinent ministries and technical agencies and collaboration with both public and private research institutions, United Nations technical agencies, global organizations, regional financial institutions, non-profits, and media outlets.

82. The Early Warning Assessment (Science Division at Project Approval) was overall accountable for the project. A Project Manager from HQ Science Division in Nairobi oversaw all aspects of the project and worked in collaboration with an FMO at HQ for financial management and the regional offices for the design and implementation of the project outcome and outputs. The project manager reported to the Deputy Director at HQ.

83. The Science Teams/Officers in the Regional Offices for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia were responsible for the delivery of the project in the regions through provision of expertise and advisory services. Regional Offices were also expected to be the main interlocutors with Governments and to lead the partnerships in their respective regions.

84. A Project Steering Committee comprised of the existing periodic Science Division-Regional Teams call were expected to include dedicated sessions to discuss the progress of the project and serve as the project steering committee.

85. Specific to Output D, The GEMS/Water Global Programme Co-ordination Unit oversaw the overall coordination of the UN Environment GEMS/Water Programme and the day-to-day management. It works with Regional Hubs and partners, in collaboration with Regional Offices, on the design of water quality monitoring schemes, capacity development and assessments, as well as providing services to inform policy making and water management.

86. Specific to Output D, Steering Committee for GEMS/Water: The Steering Committee (SC) of the GEMS/Water Programme was expected to provide overall strategic guidance, advice, and direction to the Global Project Coordination Unit based in Nairobi.

Figure 3: Organization of the Project with key project key stakeholders

3.5 Changes in Design During Implementation

87. The project commenced operations in early July 2018. At original design, the Project was planned to be implemented over the course of 48-months, from July 2018 to June 2022. In early 2021, the project team carried out its own internal midpoint review, engaging the Science Division, Regional Offices, and designated Sub-programme Coordinator. Consultations were facilitated through direct engagement with stakeholders at UNEP's Regional Offices. Its purpose was to assess the Project's progress towards objectives, areas of achievement, identify emerging lessons learned and measures for enhancing progress during the remaining period, and to make practical recommendations for possible course correction were appropriate.

88. It was at this juncture the need for a formal Project revision was identified, borne out of a number of compelling factors, primarily to (i) include the incorporation of new funding within the budget; (ii) extend the duration of the project in line with the new mobilized funding[13]; (iii) provide continuation of activity levels in PIMS-Plus; (iv) incorporate digital transformation elements according to evolving UNEP priorities; and (v) align with the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-2025 and POW for the 2022-2023 biennium. In

[13] Per Section 2.2 of the Revision No. 1 memo, the approved budget was US$ 13,785,571 (secured and unsecured allotments), which is approximately at 15% increase from the US$ 12,009,919 budget at original design.

addition, it (vi) took stock of and integrated relevant elements of the Environment under Review Sub Programme evaluation (2020); and (vii) further integrated World Environment Situation Room (WESR) initiatives into regional United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), reflecting the projects adaptability to emerging challenges and strategic alignment with UNEP objectives for sustained environmental impact.

Table 5: Details of project revision(s)

	PRC Clearance Date	UNEP Clearance Date	Completion Date	Planned Secured Budget to (US$)
Original plan in design	19 June 2018	4 July 2018	18 June 2022 (48 months.)	5,121,360
Revision No. 1	7 December 2021	17 December 2021	31 December 2023 (66 months.)	7,268,263

Table 6: Changes to the project's results hierarchy

Results Hierarchy	Project Document 2018	Project Document 2021 (After PRC)
Objective	Enhance regional and national capacity for environmental information management, networking and state of the environment reporting and communication.	No change.
Outcome	Strengthened capacity of countries for making evidence-based decisions due to increased knowledge on the state of the environments at the regional, sub-regional and national level as a result of the use and management of quality environmental information.	Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes.
Output A	Needs, readiness and gaps assessments available for targeted regions and countries to support improvements in data sharing practices, reporting, and assessment processes.	Targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.
Output B	Institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing provided to countries for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy action.	Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy action.
Output C	Establishment /strengthening of regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments.	Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established/strengthened and partners mobilized.
Output D	GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat	No change.

89. The project PSC was not established. Its project functionality was managed internally on an as needed basis by the project management team and representatives from UNEP Regional Offices. The flexibility in the envisaged governance of the project—oversight, guidance by, and reporting to the PSC—is considered a strength of the project design, enabling it to pivot quickly and respond to emerging operational challenges.

90. With a representation initially across 6 regions, the UNEP Regional Office for North America (RONA) was closed in 2021 as part of a broader restructuring effort by UNEP to

streamline operations and reduce costs. The functions of RONA were integrated into other UNEP offices and headquarters. The closure was also part of UNEP's efforts to adapt to changing financial realities and to optimize its resources for greater impact.

91. Phase 1 of the Kuwait country-level pilot, which was implemented early in the Project's lifecycle, was subsequently absorbed into the UNDP-supported Kuwait Environmental Governance Initiative project. This led to additional funds being mobilized for a Phase 2 that resulted in the production of the country's first ever state of the environment report plus other key knowledge products that were a model for the whole region. In Vietnam, there were changes in scope as emphasis shifted from a generic state of the environment report to one focusing more on waste management.

92. The project was implemented, to a greater extent, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project team, regional office staff, and beneficiaries did not highlight that circumstance as particularly impacting the capacity to implement the project as designed, albeit adaptive strategies were employed to ensure the continued implementation of the program's workplan and activities in response to the onset of mobility restrictions at different times across regions. It has been noted that, for example, planned regional gatherings moved to a virtual format; trainings were, to a certain extent, held online and later in the pandemic phase, in a hybrid mode; and, in many cases, report launch events were delayed to align with the easing of restrictions. Some stakeholders mentioned a virtual format allowed for more stakeholders (namely those in less central locations) to participate in the trainings. In the case of Peru, this resulted in a strong uptake of virtual training modules.

3.6 Project Financing

93. According to the project's operational closure report, the project successfully secured a total funding of US$ 14,072,897.14 This funding comprised contributions from donors, the Environment Fund, and in-kind co-financing. The aggregate spending for the project outputs amounted to US$ 13,292,837.49 Below is a detailed breakdown by Output together with the comparison of actual spending against the planned budget. Further details are provided in the Financial Management Section further in this report.

Table 7: Planned, secured and expended financial resources

Funding by Source (USD)	**Planned funding**	**Secured Funding**	**Expended**
Funds from the Environment Fund	217,364	514,923.51	483,124.55
Funds from the Regular Budget			
Extra-budgetary funding (listed per donor):			
Donor A: Norway Funds	2,495,590	1,756,322.22	1,695,757.66
Donor B: EC Funds	1,399,376	1,429, 550.82	1,365,871.01
Donor C: Ireland Funds	991,929	1,204,703.90	994,886.15
Donor D: Kuwait Pilot Activities	251,522	227,538.65	203,064.70
Donor E: IFAD fund's	1,290,112	1,754,984.79	1,569,502.88
Donor F: Somalia UNMTF Africa	551,139	435,073.81	435,125.96
Donor E: JSF	278,596	520,824.72	399,732.72
Donor F: Samoa UNMTF		244,301.41	234,870.87
Donor H: GIZ		52,348.24	49,301.90
Donor I: Sweden Funds		46,926.33	44,190.29
Donor J: Group of Sponsors	511,000	500,000.00	481,492.52
Donor K: Netherlands		34,980.00	34,911.17
Donor L: SIDA		398,018.89	348,605.26
Sub-total: Project Funding	*7,986,628*	*9,120,497.30*	*8,340,437.65*
Co-financing[14] (Cash and in-kind contributions) *All figures as USD*	**Planned contributions**	**Secured contributions**	**Verified contributions**
Co-financing cash contribution (listed by source):			
Sub-total: co-financing contributions			
Co-financing in-kind contribution (listed by source):			
Ireland	338,000	0	0
Germany	187,800	0	0
GEMS/Water Data Centre	1,048,708	1,000,793.01	1,000,793.01
GEMS/Water Regional Hub	300,000	85,166.83	85,166.83
GEMS/Water Capacity Development Centre			
Italy	225,360	0	0
CAF Funds	50,000	0	0
Sub-total: in kind contributions	**2,149,868**	**1,085,959.84**	**1,085,959.84**
Staffing (Total throughout the project) *All figures as Full Time Equivalents*	**Planned posts**	**Filled posts**	-
Environment Fund staff-post costs	2,254,865	2,254,865	2,254,865
Regular Budget staff-post costs	1,565,100	1,565,100	1,565,100
Overheads Trust funds	46,475	46,475	46,475
Total in-kind Staffing	**3,866,440**	**3,866,440**	**3,866,440**
Grand Total	**14,002,936.00**	**14,072,897.14**	**13,292,837.49**

Table 8: Expenditure by Component, Outcome or Output (depending on financial system capabilities)

Component/sub-component/output All figures as USD	**Estimated cost at design**	**Actual Expenditure**	**Expenditure ratio (actual/planned)**
Output A	2,477,082.20	2,255,944.56	91%
Output B	4,308,765.79	4,034,663.27	94%
Output C	900,359.02	799,421.84	89%
Output D	1,434,290.30	1,250,407.98	87%
Grand Total	**9,120,497.30**	**8,340,437.65**	**91%**

[14] Co-financing is understood as funding from a donor to a partner which is not received into UNEP accounts but is used by a UNEP partner or collaborating centre to deliver the results in a UNEP – approved project.

4 THEORY OF CHANGE AT EVALUATION

4.1 Theory of Change Analysis

94. At the time when the Project Document was formulated in between 2017 and June 2018, the Theory of Change (TOC) was only starting to become a requirement in a project's technical design and the maturity level in identifying its primary elements and clear guidance from UNEP were both still evolving. Therefore, the TOC has been largely reconstructed during the evaluation inception phase, leveraging the updated outcomes, outputs, results, and objectives as described in the updated Project Document from Revision No. 1 for alignment. In fact, during the due diligence process undertaken by PRC as part of the revision, there was a request to update the TOC to articulate the drivers, assumptions, and causal pathways. The evaluators have noted that during the process to address PRC comments, however, there was pushback by the project management team on a number of the comments from PRC and the TOC was not updated as requested by the time Revision No. 1 was approved in December 2021.

> *"THE FINDING OF THE ASSESSMENT SHOULD BE INDICATED IN THIS REVISION TO INFORM THE THEORY OF CHANGE, NEW DRIVERS, ASSUMPTIONS AND THE PROJECT'S IMPACT PATHWAYS."*
>
> **- PRC REPORT MEMO REVISION NO. 1 11 OCTOBER 2021**

95. In the Project Document, the Results framework Section 3.2 lists the outcome, outputs, key indicators, baseline, target, as well as more granular milestones as means of verification and assumptions to achieve the Project's overarching objective: to enhance regional and national capacity for environmental information management and networking, as well as state of the environment reporting and communication. Table 9 below, outlines the linkages that exist between the Project outcome and outputs as set out within the original Project Document and compares them with the Reconstructed TOC as proposed by the evaluators.

96. The exercise to create a reconstructed TOC at inception was primarily guided by the need to reflect changes to the wording of the Project Outcome and Outputs resulting from the revision. There were additional areas where the TOC was strengthened to align more closely with best practice. During the main phase of the evaluation, however, and through deeper analysis of the outputs, a greater understanding of the outcome, and consideration of the stakeholder interviews it was considered that this project, in isolation of ongoing broader transformation objectives within UNEP, cannot be evaluated against the likelihood of achievement of multiple intermediate states and impact as is normally the case in a project. Most of the assumptions necessary for the outcome to contribute to an intermediate state are too broad to credibly link the scope of this project's work to the higher-level results intended by the totality of the intervention. Furthermore, its bespoke approach to the needs of 50+ target countries lends itself to multiple intermediate states that are not helpful in this analysis. As such, the intervention logic is more linear and incremental in nature across a continuum of maturity.

97. While the theory of change was found to be, for the most part, well-structured and acceptable during the inception phase of the evaluation, the following areas were flagged where it could be strengthened. This was carried over and has remained consistent during the evaluation phase. The evaluators found the Theory of Change would benefit from:

- A clearer articulation of the current hypothesis of overcoming the problem by explicitly highlighting each impact pathway and not just a description of each output of the project;
- A more comprehensive articulation of the assumptions and risks associated with each impact pathway. This includes detailing potential barriers to data sharing and cooperation among different countries and regions, as well as strategies to mitigate these risks;
- Greater focus on sustainability by outlining specific mechanisms for maintaining capacity building and network activities beyond the project's lifespan. This could involve fostering long-term partnerships with local institutions and securing commitments from national governments to support ongoing data management and reporting efforts. By addressing these areas, the theory of change could provide a more robust framework for achieving lasting and meaningful environmental improvements; and
- Highlighting strategies for to promote/support scaling up, replication and catalysing actions.

98. These elements have collectively been introduced as part of the reconstructed TOC at evaluation, both in the narrative within the sections below and depicted in the accompanying visual diagram in Figure 4 below.

Table 9: Justification for reformulation of results statements

Formulation in original project document(s)	Formulation for Reconstructed TOC at Evaluation Inception (RTOC)	Justification for Reformulation
(LONG LASTING) IMPACT	Ongoing national state-of-the-art environmental reporting informs environmental policy and decision making leading to improved environmen1tal status and trends.	The impact was reformulated to underscore that the vehicle for environmental policy and decision making is the environmental reporting from each target country. It is the national state of the environment report in each country that will be used as a springboard to strengthen the science-policy interface. The word "ongoing" was used to imply a process for repeating the successes of the project on an ongoing basis and not a one-off report.
INTERMEDIATE STATES	Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action.	No change to the wording as the evaluation and interviews have validated this to be a representative intermediate state and the culmination of the project's efforts. Following the data collection, the evaluators' hypothesis on the intermediate state did not change. It was still assumed (and validated through consultation) that when targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, the expected intermediate state was that governments and stakeholders would be in a better position to use quality open environmental data, analyses, and participatory processes to strengthen the science-policy interface. This will enable the generation of evidence-based environmental assessments, identification of emerging issues, and foster policy actions, while equipping countries to better report on their commitments under the SDGs.
PROJECT OUTCOME	Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of	The outcome from Revision No. 1 was used to align the TOC with the latest

Formulation in original project document(s)	Formulation for Reconstructed TOC at Evaluation Inception (RTOC)	Justification for Reformulation
	sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes.	results hierarchy. This outcome statement was carried over from the inception phase to evaluation. No change from the inception report.
OUTPUTS	**a)** Targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.	The outcome from Revision No. 1 was used to align the TOC with the latest results hierarchy. No change from the inception report.
	b) Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy.	The outcome from Revision No. 1 was used to align the TOC with the latest results hierarchy. No change from the inception report.
	c) Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established/strengthened and partners mobilized.	The outcome from Revision No. 1 was used to align the TOC with the latest results hierarchy. No change from the inception report.
	d) GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat.	The outcome from Revision No. 1 was used to align the TOC with the latest results hierarchy. No change from the inception report.

4.2 Causal Pathways, Divers and Assumptions

99. The following six impact pathways identified during the reconstruction of the TOC at inception were still found to be valid for the TOC at evaluation, albeit with some slight modifications:

- **Impact Pathway No. 1:** Strengthening Data Collection and Management. Consistent with the TOC at inception, this impact pathway was still found to be applicable to outputs A, B, and D.
- **Impact Pathway No 2:** Building Institutional and Technical Capacity. This impact pathway was found to be specifically applicable to outputs B and D, as opposed to B, C, and D as originally hypothesized at evaluation inception.
- **Impact Pathway No 3:** Establishing and Strengthening Networks. This impact pathway was found to be primarily applicable to outputs C and D, as opposed to B, C, and D as originally hypothesized at evaluation inception.
- **Impact Pathway No 4:** Enhancing Reporting and Decision-Making. This impact pathway was found to be mainly applicable to outputs C and D as opposed to B, C, and D as originally hypothesized at evaluation inception.
- **Impact Pathway No 5:** Promoting Science-Policy Interface. Consistent with the TOC at inception, this impact pathway was found to be applicable to outputs C and D.
- **Impact Pathway No 6:** Integrating Gender Perspectives. This impact pathway was found to be applicable to outputs A, B, and D, as opposed to A, C, and D as originally hypothesized at evaluation inception.

100. The following three impact pathways originally identified at evaluation inception were found to have bearing on, and be instrumental to, realizing the Project's singular outcome at evaluation:

- **Establishing and Strengthening Networks:** This impact pathway is intended to create and reinforce regional and sub-regional networks for environmental information and knowledge sharing. These networks facilitated the exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and innovations in environmental management, while also helping to harmonize data collection methods and reporting standards across different regions.
- **Enhancing Reporting and Decision-Making:** By improving the quality and accessibility of environmental data, the project supports countries in fulfilling their reporting obligations under various international agreements.
- **Promoting Science-Policy Interface:** The project strengthened the connection between scientific research and policy-making. This involved ensuring that policymakers have access to the latest scientific data and analyses, to inform decisions and create evidence-based policies.

101. The evaluation found that to achieve the Project's main Outcome it was not sufficient to simply achieve the corresponding outputs in isolation with the expectation of a multiplier effect between them. There needed to be a leap to higher-order results at the regional level. This project was therefore designed and implemented to build on the above efforts, with its main focus being on capacity building for environmental information and knowledge management and use at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels. It was envisaged that strengthened capacity and partnerships in the regions and countries resulting from implementing the project would be foundational to meet the objectives of other interventions dependent on regional and country actions to ensure that foundations in data management and reporting translated to reporting obligations on MEAs and on progress against the Sustainable Development Goals in a synergistic manner. It is for this purpose that the Project was linked into the work of regional ministerial environment forums of AMCEN, Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, CAMRE, the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the EfE processes.

102. The assumptions and drivers underpinning the Outcome are equally important for the Project. Regarding the assumptions, it is important to state that without willingness on the part of governments and stakeholders to translate an increased evidence base into policy and planning, capacity building efforts on data management and reporting would remain isolated and fragmented (A1). Consequently, without active country ownership and commitment to national reporting obligations under MEAs and SDGs, it is unlikely that the latest data will permeate the science-policy interface. Therefore, government and other stakeholders will need to be sufficiently incentivized and see the value of using quality data, analyses, and processes to inform decision-making (A2). Furthermore, to sustain results over time, there needs to be continued demand for capacity building for reporting and networking (A3). Finally, without governmental ownership and commitment to finance improvements in capacity over the long-term, the initiative will not be sustained to successive cycles of state of the environment reporting (A4). As far as the drivers are concerned, the key would be linking the project to inter-ministerial processes in each region (D1). There is an overarching risk to the realization of the Project Outcome of insufficient prioritization of environmental data management and reporting, leading to inadequate allocation of resources, both financial and human.

103. Driven by the influence of the drivers, the achievement of the Project Outcome paves the way for advancement toward the singular intermediate state. The intermediate state is characterised by the transition towards the use of quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-

based environmental assessments, identification of emerging issues and fostering of policy action. Countries that are able to generate up-to-date and evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues, and foster policy action are likely to take actions to prevent or respond to adverse environmental impacts on the well-being of people and on the services that different ecosystems provide, as well as keep on top of trends and issues on an ongoing basis. Such a paradigm shift towards more accessible data is expected to inspire and motivate other countries towards similar practices.

104. One of the standout contributions of the Project can be observed through its active involvement and the incremental benefits of Outputs A, B ,and C, as well as D, which intricately contribute to the attainment of the overall project outcome and underpin the pillar of the Science-Policy subprogramme by empowering governments to use information products, with accurate, timely data into policy action and communication outreach, while working collaboratively with different stakeholders and UNCTs.

105. The following two impact pathways originally identified at evaluation inception were found to be key in realizing **Output A**:

- **Strengthening Data Collection and Management of Each Target Country Based on Inherent Needs:** Conducting needs assessments is an essential impact pathway as it identifies the specific capacity gaps and priorities of target countries, ensuring that project interventions are tailored to effectively enhance environmental information systems and contribute to the desired project outcome. The evaluation found that enhancing the capacity of countries to collect, manage, and share environmental data effectively, was not a one-size-fits-all approach. This involved developing and implementing a bespoke program based on the results of needs analyses.
- **Integrating Gender Perspectives:** Output A was found to be an entry point for gender responsive considerations. Country-level needs analyses allowed for the identification and analysis of gender-specific environmental impacts, ensuring that the unique needs and vulnerabilities of both women and men are addressed in environmental policies and decision-making processes. This enabled the Project to develop programs and training to promote the collection and use of disaggregated data to ensure that gender perspectives are considered in environmental decision-making.

106. Underpinning Output A is the assumption that governments of the target countries are committed to improving their environmental data management and reporting systems and are willing to cooperate with UNEP in assessing their needs and implementing recommended interventions (A5). As both generators and custodians of environmental data, it is also important that NGO groups and academia alike are available and interested (A6). Positive results achieved early in the Project are expected to create enthusiasm for achieving the Project goals and are expected to strengthen country ownership (D2). This driver is also reinforced by seasoned UNEP regional office staff that are well-equipped and able to elicit data management and capacity needs across each region (D3) and further anchored by enhancing regional relevance and responsiveness (D4).

107. The following two impact pathways originally identified at evaluation inception were found to be key in realizing **Output B**:

- **Building Institutional and Technical Capacity:** This impact pathway is transformational as it involves providing technical support and training to targeted countries to enhance the target countries' ability to collect, manage, and share environmental data. It also enables ministries and relevant national agencies to effectively report on Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Sustainable Development Goals, and national priorities, thereby improving their capability to produce State of the

Environment Reports and other actionable environmental information products. By fostering data sharing agreements and leveraging resources and expertise from UNEP and its partners, the project strengthens the knowledge base for informed policy actions and enhances environmental governance, ultimately contributing to the long-term resilience and sustainability of natural capital.

- **Integrating Gender Perspectives:** The integration of gender perspectives through the project activities under Output B involves ensuring that the collection, management, and sharing of environmental data by national agencies are gender-sensitive, allowing for the production of environmental statistics and State of the Environment Reports that reflect gender-specific impacts and contributions. By incorporating gender-disaggregated data and fostering inclusive data sharing agreements, the project empowers countries to develop more equitable and informed policy actions, thereby enhancing environmental governance and addressing the distinct needs and roles of both women and men in safeguarding natural resources and promoting sustainability.

108. Assumptions linked to Output B include the availability of skilled trainers to equip stakeholders with the requisite technical skills identified during the needs analyses (A7) reinforced by robust project management, and coordination of training activities within the region in a manner that ensures the optimal use of resources among project partners (A8). It is also assumed that the political and institutional contexts in the target countries will remain stable enough to sufficiently maintain and retain institutional and technical knowledge over time (A9). The driver of data management capacity (D5) in the context of Output B relates to the increasing need for countries to effectively collect, manage, and share high-quality environmental data to meet their reporting obligations under Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals, which in turn enhances their ability to produce informed and actionable environmental policies.

109. The following three impact pathways originally identified at evaluation inception were found to be key in realizing **Output C**:

- **Establishing and Strengthening Networks:** The Project has facilitated the establishment and strengthening of regional and national environmental data networks by providing technical support to countries, particularly in regions where networks are underdeveloped, to build robust institutional frameworks for data exchange and collaboration among key stakeholders.
- **Enhancing Reporting and Decision-Making:** The Project supported countries in meeting their reporting obligations and improving decision-making processes by providing technical assistance to enhance the collection, sharing, and use of environmental data, which informs integrated environmental assessments and policy actions aligned with Sustainable Development Goals and Multilateral Environmental Agreements.
- **Promoting Science-Policy Interface:** The Project has been transformational in promoting the science-policy interface by enabling the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned among regional stakeholders, thereby enhancing the capacity of national focal points to use data and scientific insights in shaping policies and collective actions that address regional and global environmental challenges.

110. The Project's intervention logic dictates a firm dependency between the incremental outputs, such that Output C can only be successfully achieved when the combined Outputs A and B are accomplished. Regarding the assumptions of the former, it is important to highlight that without both national governments and regional ministerial bodies being open to adopting national state of the environment reports as input to decision making process, neither Outcome C nor the Project Outcome can be achieved (A10). It is also assumed that robust knowledge products of state-of-the-art environmental interventions and approaches

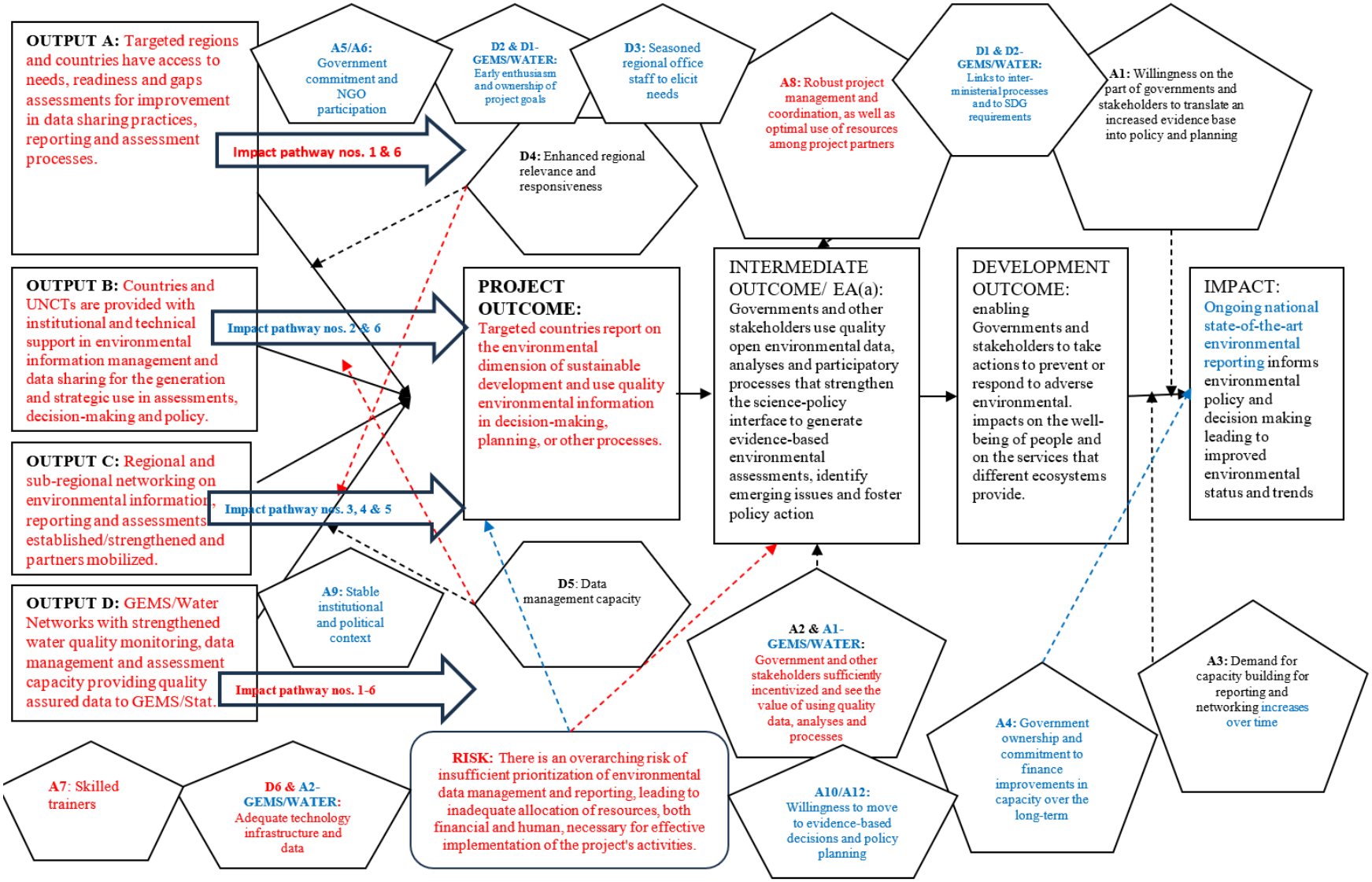
are actively promoted across national and regional networks (A11). Finally, there needs to be willingness from governments to shift to more evidence-based decision making and policy planning, anchored to more easily accessible environmental information and data (A12). Having adequate technology infrastructure also includes access to modern tools and platforms that facilitate the analysis and visualization of data, which are essential for producing integrated environmental assessments and generating predictive models or scenarios. When combined with reliable and high-quality data, this infrastructure allows countries to engage in informed decision-making processes, align with international standards, and respond effectively to emerging environmental challenges (D6).

111. For **Output D**, the original hypothesis that all six impact pathways would apply remains valid as this output as it is essentially a self-contained pillar of the Project that combines the incremental approach of Outputs A-C into one. Equally, most of the assumptions and drivers also apply. The evaluators find it reassuring that their assessment aligns to the findings of the Validated Terminal Evaluation of the GEMS/Water program with respect to the TOC. In that assessment, GEMS/Water was predicated on the assumption of governments willing to share data increasing evidence base and advocate its use in policy (A1-GEMS/WATER); and that governments and institutions commit to improving integrated water resource and ecosystem management with a landscape/nexus focus and embrace technology innovation on data and social process (A2-GEMS/WATER). Likewise, the identified drivers of stakeholder engagement and ownership (D1-GEMS/WATER); and the 2030 Agenda and the SDG obligations (D2-GEMS/WATER) were significant factors in the project's progress towards results.

4.3 Theory of Change Diagram

112. The Theory of Change diagram below is a consolidation of the reconstruction against the original TOC at evaluation inception (in **red** font) and changes made at the evaluation stage (in **blue** font), with original text delineated in standard **black** font.

Figure 4: Theory of Change Diagram at Evaluation



5 EVALUATION FINDINGS

5.1 Strategic Relevance

5.1.1 Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and Strategic Priorities

113. As a leading global environmental authority, UNEP administers and/or provides secretariat functions to **12** global MEAs, **two** Regional Conventions, **seven** Regional Seas and Action Plans and **four** other entities, including IPBES, IPCC, INC on Plastic Pollution and UNSCEAR. UNEP is not only the main driving force in the UN system for activities (including reporting) related these, but it is also the custodian for 26 SDG indicators across goals 6, 8, 12, 15 and 17. The Project is aligned with UNEP strategy to provide technical support to the Parties and its Member States.

114. The core mandate of UNEP is to keep the world environment situation under review and strengthen the interface between science and policymaking across the sustainable development agenda. The Project aligns with UNEP's core mandate through the enabling of environmental data collection and reporting responds to the demand and requests from countries and Member States, focusing on monitoring SDGs. It seizes the opportunity to strengthen the United Nations development system reform through increased access to and use of environmental data and ensuring that the digital revolution helps deliver, not hinder, the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

> *"HIGH-QUALITY, CREDIBLE, OPEN, SHARED, SEX-DISAGGREGATED ENVIRONMENTAL DATA, ASSESSMENTS AND EXPERTISE ARE CRITICAL TO SUPPORTING INTEGRATION EFFORTS ACROSS THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM."*
>
> **- UNEP MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY 2022-2025**

115. The project aligns closely with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2025, particularly emphasizing the foundational Science-Policy subprogramme. By enhancing national and regional capacities for environmental information management, the project directly supports the Science-Policy subprogramme's goal of strengthening the interface between scientific knowledge and policy-making. The Project's focus on improving environmental data collection, analysis, and reporting facilitates informed decision-making and ensures that policies are grounded in robust scientific evidence. Additionally, its efforts to bolster institutional frameworks and governance structures for environmental monitoring and reporting indirectly align with the Environmental Governance subprogramme, which seeks to build effective, transparent, and accountable institutions at all levels. Through these activities, the project contributes to UNEP's overarching objectives of fostering sustainable development and environmental stewardship globally.

116. The Science-Policy subprogramme delivers scientifically credible and unbiased data, information and knowledge and provides policy-relevant analysis and recommendations to catalyze and accelerate solutions and actions for the environment based on continuous global status and trends. The evaluators note that the Project was designed to directly contribute to three out of four of the subprogramme indicators, including (i) increasing the uptake of science for transformative action; and (ii) closing the gap regarding the availability of environmental data for assessing and reviewing progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and fostering synergies among the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. The evaluators have also concluded that, while not designed as such, there is also evidence to suggest the Project marginally contributes to indicator of *digitizing scientific knowledge and democratizing availability while anticipating emerging issues*

through foresight and horizon scanning, via the digital platforms and digital knowledge products made available at international fora.

117. Through information networking and delivering capacity support to countries, the project had concrete outcomes in line with the UNEP's strategic priorities:

- Strengthening of the science-policy interface in the regions, including South-South Cooperation opportunities;
- National and regional capacity development in environmental information management;
- Knowledge base of regional institutions addressing key environmental issues affecting people in the regions;
- Enhanced (tracking of) impact of UNEP's science work (for instance, the Global Environment Outlook, assessment on sand and dust storms) through uptake by regional and national networks and partners;
- Easy access of UNEP to expertise, networks, and partners in the regions to respond to government requests for technical support, engage in (rapid) assessments, engage policymakers, reach out, and help fundraise or sustain activities;
- Capacity increased by countries to base decisions and planning frameworks—such as UNSDCFs[15] —on evidence;
- GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management, and assessment capacity providing quality-assured data.

118. Finally, the Project is well-integrated into the following POW Direct Outcomes, Outputs and Direct Accomplishments.

Table 10: Project alignment with POW direct outcomes, outputs and direct accomplishments

POW Outcome, Output, Expected Accomplishment	Detail
Outcome(s)	<u>*Climate stability*</u> 1.1 Policymaking and decision-making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based analysis and data generation. <u>*Living in harmony with nature*</u> 2.3 Productive land- and seascapes and fresh water are sustainably managed. 2.7 Natural assets are valued, monitored and sustainably managed. 2.9 Institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced and accountability frameworks are strengthened. <u>*Towards a pollution free planet*</u> 3.13 Sound science, data and statistics, analysis, information and knowledge are generated and shared.

[15] It is indeed correct that the project's initiation happened at a time when we had UNDAFs, but when it was later revised, the project moved to UNSDCF, with most of the country-level work being supported in this context.

POW Outcome, Output, Expected Accomplishment	Detail
Output	6: National and regional reporting systems based on shared environmental information system principles generating open access to information
Expected Accomplishment	SP7 EA(a): Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action. SP7 EA(a)(ii): Increase in the number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development through shared environmental information systems with country-level data made discoverable through UNEP.

Rating for Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and Strategic Priorities: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.1.2 Alignment to UNEP/ Donor Strategic Priorities

119. The project is well aligned with UNEP strategic priorities exemplified through relevant United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions that address data management, knowledge management, and environmental reporting, underscoring both UNEP's and its Member States' commitment to improving environmental data management, knowledge management, and reporting to inform and guide policy-making processes.

- **UNEA Resolution 1/4 (2014): Science-Policy Interface.** Emphasizes the importance of strengthening the science-policy interface, including through the development of a knowledge platform to facilitate data sharing and access to information for environmental decision-making.
- **UNEA Resolution 1/7 (2014): Strengthening the Role of the United Nations Environment Programme in Promoting Air Quality.** Calls for the development of improved data and reporting systems to enhance the global understanding of air quality, including the integration of data management systems.
- **UNEA Resolution 2/5 (2016): Delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** Highlights the need for enhanced data collection, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms to track progress towards environmental targets in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **UNEA Resolution 2/10 (2016): Oceans and Seas.** Encourages the improvement of data collection and management related to marine ecosystems, including the establishment of a global data-sharing framework to support environmental reporting and policy-making.
- **UNEA Resolution 4/1 (2019): Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production.** Focuses on the role of data and knowledge management in advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns, with an emphasis on enhancing reporting frameworks and data accessibility.
- **UNEA Resolution 4/23 (2019): Keeping the World Environment Under Review: Enhancing the United Nations Environment Programme Science-Policy Interface and Endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook.** Stresses the need to enhance data management and environmental reporting through the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process, promoting the use of open data and knowledge-sharing platforms.
- **UNEA Resolution 4/24 (2019): Environmentally Sound Management of Waste.** Encourages the development of data collection and reporting systems for waste management, including the promotion of knowledge management practices to support policy development and implementation.

120. The Project is well aligned with UNEP's Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity building, an inter-governmentally agreed framework for strengthening the capacity of governments in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to consistently address their needs, priorities and obligations in the field of the environment. The project fits well within the Bali Strategic Plan's thematic areas (vii) Chemicals, (viii) Waste management, (x) Health and environment, and cross-cutting issues, (ix) Access to scientific and technological information, (x) Facilitating access to and support for environmentally sound technologies and corresponding know-how, and (xi) Education and awareness raising.

121. Furthermore, UNEP's emphasis on South-South Cooperation as a cross-cutting mechanism intended to enhance UNEP's ability to deliver environmental capacity building and technology-support activities in developing countries and regions of the South dovetails with the Project's delivery model. The implementation of the South-South Cooperation initiative is also a tenet of and carried out as part of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building.

122. The Project also supported and helped bring to fruition donors' mandates and priorities with respect to evidence-based planning, reporting, and decision-making on environmental issues:

- The **Government of Norway** has been a strong advocate for enhancing global capacity in environmental data and knowledge management, with a particular focus on initiatives that contribute to sustainable development and climate resilience. Norway's strategic priorities in this area are reflected in its support for several key global initiatives and programs:
    - Through the GEF, Norway supports initiatives that improve the capacity of countries to monitor and report on biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, and other environmental issues. This includes project such as (i) Capacity Building for Access and Benefit Sharing and Conservation and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Plants; (ii) Development of a Plan for Global Monitoring of Human Exposure to and Environmental Concentrations of Mercury; (iii) Strengthening national capacity for implementing the enhanced transparency framework in Belize; (iv) Enhancement of National Capacities for Data Management and Transparency; and (v) Reporting Global Project on Enhancing the Capacity of Countries to Implement the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others. The Government of Norway also contributes to the CBD's efforts on the development of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, of which data, environmental reporting and knowledge are key pillars.
    - Norway has provided financial and technical support to the United Nations Environment Programme's World Environment Situation Room, a global platform that consolidates environmental data and provides access to real-time information on environmental trends. This initiative is crucial for enabling policymakers and stakeholders to make informed decisions based on up-to-date environmental data.
    - Norway has also channelled significant resources through Norfund and the Amazon Fund to support projects in the Amazon region that strengthen environmental monitoring and reporting. These initiatives focus on building local capacities for data management, particularly in tracking deforestation and land use changes, which are critical for sustainable forest management.
    - Norway has funded Global Forest Watch, an online platform that uses satellite data and advanced algorithms to provide near real-time information on forest

cover changes. This initiative enhances transparency and accountability in forest management and provides essential data for environmental reporting and decision-making at the global level.

- The **European Commission** plays a crucial role in advancing environmental data management, knowledge sharing, and reporting both within Europe and globally. The Commission's strategic initiatives aim to enhance the collection, management, and dissemination of environmental data to support informed decision-making and sustainable development. Key initiatives and projects supported by the European Commission which align with the Project's scope include:
    - **Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)**, a collaborative initiative led by the European Commission in partnership with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and EU Member States. It aims to modernize and improve the availability and quality of environmental data across Europe by streamlining data collection, sharing, and reporting processes. Implemented in parallel and in concert with the PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project, SEIS has significantly enhanced the capacity of EU Member States (especially in the Caucasus) and neighbouring countries to manage and report environmental data, aligning with the principles of open data and transparency. The system supports the production of high-quality environmental assessments and reports, which are critical for policy development and public awareness.
    - The **European Environment Agency (EEA)** and **State of Environment Reports (SoER),** established by the European Commission, is responsible for providing independent information on the environment, which is used to inform environmental policy and decision-making. One of the key outputs of the EEA is SoER, which provide comprehensive assessments of environmental trends and conditions across Europe.
    - The **Copernicus Programme**, funded and coordinated by the European Commission, is one of the most ambitious Earth observation programs globally. It provides accurate, timely, and easily accessible information to improve environmental management, understand and mitigate the effects of climate change, and ensure civil security.
    - The **UN Economic Commission for Europe Environment Division** initiated a project in 2017 funded by the UN Development Account (UNDA) with a focus on improving environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus.
    - The **UN Economic Commission for Europe Working Group on Environment Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA)** and **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (JTF)** regularly convene representatives form Ministries of Environment and National Statistics Office to exchange knowledge and lessons learned on issues related to environmental information and reporting.
- The **GEMS/Water Programme** was established in 1978 to collect global water quality data for assessments of status and trends in global inland water quality. In 2014, the GEMS/Water Programme mandate was renewed and strengthened by UNEA Resolution 1/9, and it was restructured with new donors and three main operating centres: a Global Programme Co-ordination Unit (GPCU) in Nairobi, a Data Centre in Germany, hosted by the German Federal Institute of Hydrology (BfG), and a **Capacity Development Centre in Ireland, hosted by University College Cork** supported by the **Government of Ireland**. Regional capacity development activities were supported by

Regional Hubs, such as the **National Water Agency (ANA) in Brazil,** and conducted in close collaboration with UNEP Regional Offices. UNEA-3 in December 2017 further strengthened the mandate of GEMS/Water, through Resolution 3/10, to support countries in water quality monitoring, data quality assurance, data management, and information sharing. Furthermore, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goal 6 on water and sanitation, GEMS/Water was UNEP's operational mechanism for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.3.2 on ambient water quality for which UNEP was the custodian.

- **IFAD** supports capacity building in environmental data management and reporting within rural development projects, promoting initiatives such as the **Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP)** that enhances data collection and knowledge sharing for climate resilience in agriculture.
- The Project aligns with **UNDP's** digital transformation priorities by enhancing the digital infrastructure for environmental reporting, enabling countries to collect, manage, and share environmental data more efficiently. Through the development of national portals and digital platforms for environmental information, the project supports the digitalization of environmental reporting processes, ensuring that accurate and timely data is accessible for informed decision-making and policy development. This alignment with UNDP's focus on leveraging digital tools to improve governance and sustainable development outcomes reinforces the importance of integrating technology into environmental management practices. Per its Digital Strategy 2.0, UNDP supports the green and digital transformation journeys of countries in the following three ways: (i) digital strategy and data policy support to the biodiversity sector; (ii) digital public infrastructure to unlock economic shift and green finance; and (iii) empowerment of local actors to enable data-driven policy and practice. The Project is aligned with the latter enabled by efforts on the ground, digital technologies support the policy and practice shift through data-driven decision-making, natural resource monitoring with novel data such as earth observation or citizen science, automation with artificial intelligence, large-scale community engagement, and knowledge sharing. This includes sourcing and scaling up existing digital solutions especially with a south-south cooperation approach through existing and new mechanisms.
- The **Kuwait "Vision 2035" and the Sustainable Development Goal-based Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP)** are foundational anchor documents for the **Government of Kuwait**. The KNDP (2020–2025) aims to promote the transformation of Kuwait into a regional financial hub through seven key pillars: (a) effective public administration; (b) economic diversification; (c) modern infrastructure; (d) sustainable living environment; (e) high-quality health care; (f) creative human capital; and (g) enhanced global positioning. The Project scope is aligned to pillars "a" and "d", enabled through UNDP and the Kuwait Public Policy Centre.

Rating for Alignment to UNEP /Donor Strategic Priorities: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.1.3 Relevance to Global, Regional, Sub-regional and National Priorities

123. The Project aligns with various MEAs, such as the CBD and UNFCCC. These global agreements emphasize the importance of data-driven decision-making, capacity building, and cooperation among nations to address nascent environmental challenges. The Project's emphasis on enhancing data generation, sharing, and capacity development resonates with the objectives of these MEAs. The Project also contributes to the achievement of several SDGs, particularly Goal 13 (Climate Action), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 15 (Life on Land). By updating SDG indicator frameworks and producing NSoERs, the project aids countries in tracking their progress towards these goals. Additionally, the Project's focus on

strengthening cooperation and governance aligns with the essence of Voluntary National Reviews, where countries share experiences, challenges and progress on implementing SDGs. It is also responsive to country requests and engages with UNCTs to empower national action in addressing triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

124. The Project has strong relevance with regional priorities.

125. In **Africa**, the Project responded to a number of the continent's regional, national and sub-national policy frameworks and priorities, including in the context of South-South Cooperation. Among them is the regional Agenda 2063 adopted by African leaders in 2015. The first ten-year implementation plan covering the period 2014-2023 aimed to fast track and accelerate implementation and provide a big push and breakthroughs for Africa's economic and social transformation. The project also responds to outcomes of various sessions of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. In AMCEN, UNEP has continued to bolster the position of science-policy interface in Africa in line with various outcomes and decisions of previous sessions of AMCEN, as well as its own MTS for 2022-2025. The Project also sought to strengthen the Africa Environment Information Network (AfricaEIN) through, among others, the establishment of and support to country-driven national networks as building blocks for the provision and sharing of data and information, which aimed to put in place a more coherent and coordinated data collection, analysis, sharing and access, including lessening multiple reporting burdens to which countries have an obligation, including to multilateral environmental agreements.

126. In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the Project has responded to the need to strengthen and promote the use of national and regional data and statistics and to intensify the development of environmental integrated assessments mandated by UNEA through its Resolution 2/5, and by the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean through Decisions 1 (ILAC) and 2 from XXI Meeting and, more recently, through Decision 5 from the XXII Meeting. Along these lines the Project has facilitated efforts for the development of a robust and functional data and information framework for Latin America and the Caribbean to support monitoring and the delivery of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda at national and regional level, along with a more timely and innovative approach to conduct NSoERs and to facilitate access and use of environmental information and data through other digital products.

127. With respect to the **West Asia** region, the Project was aligned with the priorities outlined in the Arab Regional Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, formulated by the League of Arab States, which emphasises the need to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution while promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. By enhancing the availability and quality of environmental data and statistics, the project contributed to target countries' ability to meet obligations under MEAs, monitor progress towards VNRs in the context of the SDGs and NDC goals and report transparency on their mitigation and adaptation efforts under the UNFCCC. The Project also fed directly into the work of CAMRE and nurtured the work of two Regional Data Working Groups comprised of governments (environment agencies and statistical bureaus), regional and international agencies serving the region, selected NGOs, regional Fora and intergovernmental bodies.

128. The Project aligns with the regional priorities of the **Asia and the Pacific** region by enhancing the capacity of countries to produce State of Environment reports and comply with their reporting obligations under multilateral environmental agreements and SDGs. By providing technical assistance for environmental monitoring, research, assessment, and reporting, the project supported national and sub-national environmental governance processes, helping countries to better manage their environmental resources and inform policy decisions. Additionally, the project leveraged partnerships with regional and global

entities to strengthen the analytical and technical capacities of countries, ensuring that even those with limited resources can effectively contribute to regional and global environmental reporting efforts.

129. As noted above, the Project was implemented in parallel with the SEIS principles of open access to data throughout **Europe**, through individual country efforts and regional technical support provided by UNECE, UNEP and the EEA. At national level SEIS was observed to be a strategic initiative to modernize environmental information systems, strengthen the knowledge base of environmental assessments and reporting on the state of environment as well as key parts of national efforts towards establishing monitoring systems for the SDGs.

130. At **national level**, the Project was a key mechanism for target countries to not only meet their obligations under MEAs, but also build the requisite foundations for them monitor incremental progress against the SDGs. In alignment with national priorities, the project enhanced the accessibility of reports, environmental summaries, data, statistics, and expertise to UNCTs, aiding in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of UNDAFs and Common Country Strategic Frameworks (UNCCSFs). This ensured that emerging environmental trends and pressures identified through the project could inform Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and UNDAF processes, contributing to the achievement of national development priorities. National project activities were integrated into UNDAF[16] frameworks to maximize their relevance and impact.

131. Notwithstanding, the evaluators undertook a spot check of eight countries (**Africa:** Kenya and Malawi; **Asia and the Pacific:** Vietnam **Europe:** Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Belize and Peru; and **West Asia:** Kuwait) to ensure alignment with national priorities and can attest this was the case, based on a combination of primary data collected during key informant interviews and a review of secondary data.

Rating for Relevance to Global, Regional, Sub-regional and National Priorities: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.1.4 Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence

132. The project seamlessly integrated into the broader framework of UNEP and UN initiatives, embodying the principles of a One UNEP / One UN approach. It strategically collaborated with various UNEP and UN projects, forging meaningful inter-linkages to address global waste management challenges comprehensively. The project strategically aligned its implementation with diverse UNEP and UN projects, including collaborations with United Nations Development Programme, UNESCO, UNESCAP, the regional economic commissions, among others. These collaborations recognized the interconnected nature of environmental issues, fostering a holistic impact that addressed not only capacity development challenges but also contributed to overarching sustainability goals specific to each initiative.

133. Notably, three out of the four indicators within the Science-Policy foundational subprogramme are directly tied to capacity development and therefore inextricably linked to the Project's scope and objectives. This integration extends further into thematic subprogrammes such as climate action, nature action, and chemical and pollution action. These parallel thematic areas, crucial for sustainable development, benefit from the Project's commitment to scientific analysis and data generation, thus fostering stronger and more robust policy outcomes. The Project's scope extends to enabling evidence-based planning and decision-making by regions and countries on critical environmental issues.

[16] Reference made to footnote no. 18.

134. Several complementary activities fed into the project and synergized with regional efforts to enhance the capacities of countries in the Pan-European region for data sharing among Ministries, National Statistics Offices, hydro-meteorological institutes, and other relevant agencies. Under the EU-funded SEIS II project, efforts coincided with building capacity for environmental data sharing and reporting. In fact, the two projects were so much in lockstep that progress reports under SEIS II were leveraged heavily to fulfil requirements under the PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project. Additionally, under the UN Development Account 10th Tranche-funded joint project with the UN Economic Commission for Europe focused on environmental statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. Synergies with other projects and interventions were also noted by the evaluators within the framework of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Working Group on Environment Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (JTF). UNEP's active participation in the annual meetings of both the WGEMA and JTF helped shape agendas and facilitated discussions that advanced the regional deliverables of the Project.

135. GEMS/Water is one of only two UN initiatives with a global focus on monitoring ambient water quality. While most UN, bilateral, and multilateral projects related to freshwater ecosystems concentrate on restoration and conservation efforts, such as those linked to the Ramsar Convention, GEMS/Water stands out by focusing specifically on water quality. Other UN initiatives like FAO's AQUASTAT and UNICEF/WHO's Joint Monitoring Program target water for agriculture and water, sanitation, and health, respectively. The only other UN program with similar objectives is UNESCO's World Water Assessment Program (WWAP), which provides a global overview of freshwater resources and includes a capacity development component on emerging issues like microplastics, pharmaceuticals, and climate change. Despite overlapping themes, there was limited collaboration between WWAP and GEMS/Water. In 2018, UNEP launched the World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and supported by the Swiss government, with the project's inception workshop hosted by WMO. GEMS/Water played a pivotal role in establishing the WWQA, which includes 50 organizations across the public and private sectors, civil society, and UN agencies. The alliance responds to UNEA resolution 3/10, which called for a Worldwide Assessment of Freshwater Quality, a mandate closely aligned with GEMS/Water's objectives.

136. Several ongoing initiatives within the UN system are actively working to improve data management and environmental reporting against the SDGs. UNEP leads the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency, which supports developing countries in meeting the transparency requirements of the Paris Agreement through improved environmental data collection and reporting. Additionally, UNDP, in collaboration with UNEP and other partners, is advancing the Global SDG Indicators Project, aimed at building national capacities for reporting on SDG indicators, particularly those related to environmental sustainability. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) plays a crucial role in coordinating global efforts to standardize and harmonize environmental data through the Environmental Indicators Program, which supports countries in aligning their reporting with global SDG frameworks. Finally, the UN's Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) works to refine and improve the global SDG indicator framework, ensuring that environmental data is accurately reported and used in assessing progress toward the SDGs.

137. Finally, the Project was also highly relevant and complimentary within the GEF-6 permutation of Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) programme, which also started in 2018 as an ongoing flexible mechanism funded by the GEF to address critical capacity issues related to the implementation of MEAs. The scope of the ongoing project is to build on existing mechanisms and structures, addressing national priorities, and using a unique inter-sectoral/inter-ministerial approach. This project is part of a set of projects funded by the GEF

under the "Strategic Approach to Enhance Capacity Building" policy. Many target countries of the PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project also benefited from this project.

Rating for Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence: **Highly Satisfactory**

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

5.2 Quality of Project Design

138. The Project was well designed incorporating information required by UNEP criteria at the time of 2017-2018. Its design was quite extensive in terms of coherence with previous UNEP implemented projects, situation analysis, context, stakeholder identification, implementation arrangement, donor mobilization (action) plan, monitoring plan, and planned activities, including a detailed project work plan.

139. The Project rationale and objectives were based on comprehensive documentation and research grounded in stakeholder consultation. The results hierarchy were illustrated in a basic linear Theory of Changes diagram, as well as the Logic Framework. The Project activities fed into each other between outputs, such as between the activities at the knowledge generation and dissemination. The results were realistically defined for the planned implementation period and relatively modest budget, with the project outcome.

140. The TOC briefly articulated some high-level key drivers and assumptions and how they fed into the project Outcome and Intermediate State. The casual pathways from the project activities to outcome could be understood from the TOC figure in the Project Document, but there was no description of pathways from outcome to impact, nor were there detailed assumptions and drivers for the Outcome or any of the Outputs.

141. The Logical Framework was well-structured, featuring clearly defined outputs baseline and target metrics, and the expected milestones. The milestone-based planning was incremental and sufficiently rolled up to their corresponding Outputs. Sustainability strategies were built into the project design, particularly in engaging institutional and financial commitments to carry forward the project results.

142. The gender and venerable groups aspects were addressed, including a Gender Marker Self- assessment. A wide range of potential risks are addressed and accompanied by credible risk mitigation strategies and actions in Risk Management and Safeguards section of Project Document.

143. The project monitoring plan outlined basic information and assigned responsibility to the project management team, with clearly articulated reporting schedules, in addition to UNEP 6 monthly PIMS reporting obligations. Enhancing this plan with a detailed communication strategy and a comprehensive knowledge management plan could significantly ensure and improve its application effectiveness.

144. The main strengths of the project design include its comprehensive and well-articulated approach to addressing the key challenges in environmental information management. The project effectively integrates stakeholder engagement, including gender and minority groups, ensuring broad participation and buy-in. It aligns well with national, regional, and international environmental priorities and strategic plans, promoting coherence and complementarity with other interventions. Additionally, the Project features a robust knowledge management strategy, leveraging existing networks and data sources to enhance efficiency and sustainability, and has clear, SMART indicators and milestones to track progress and ensure accountability. It is readily apparent that the proponents who designed

the project took special care in aligning its scope to the UNEP MTS and POW, also evidenced in the justification for Revision 1.

145. The main weaknesses of the project design include an incomplete articulation of the impact pathways and causal links within the TOC, and explicit assumptions and risks associated with each impact pathway. Even when primed by PRC during its review of Revision 1, the project management team kept the TOC as is. Additionally, the project design lacks a thorough assessment of partner capacities and does not clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of external partners in relation to their capacities. Project-based risk identification and associated mitigation strategies is another area of design weakness.

146. Some interviewees acknowledged the effort invested in coordination was underestimated, noting that the project originally foresaw a purely coordination role, whereas the UNEP regional offices did a lot of heavy-lifting, with resources for it coming from either extra time or time that was supposed to be devoted to outputs. Concrete examples of such coordination efforts included in-person program meetings up until the pandemic (and afterwards) and multiple efforts to socialize and build political ownership for the project during government turnover.

147. Overall, the Project Document is Satisfactory. Most of the criteria have been rated as Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory, the lowest rating is Moderately Satisfactory for Intended Results and Causality, Partnerships, Financial Planning and Budgeting, and Risk Identification and Social Safeguards. Based on the completed assessment of the project design, the overall score is Satisfactory, with a total score of 5.04.

Table 11: Table of ratings by project design sections and parameters

	SECTION	SELECT RATING	SCORE (1-6)	WEIGHTING	TOTAL (Rating x Weighting/10)
A	Operating Context	Satisfactory	5	**0.4**	**0.2**
B	Project Preparation	Highly Satisfactory	6	**1.2**	**0.72**
C	Strategic Relevance	Highly Satisfactory	6	**0.8**	**0.48**
D	Intended Results and Causality	Moderately Satisfactory	4	**1.6**	**0.64**
E	Logical Framework and Monitoring	Satisfactory	5	**0.8**	**0.4**
F	Governance and Supervision Arrangements	Satisfactory	5	**0.4**	**0.2**
G	Partnerships	Moderately Satisfactory	4	**0.8**	**0.32**
H	Learning, Communication and Outreach	Highly Satisfactory	6	**0.4**	**0.24**
I	Financial Planning / Budgeting	Moderately Satisfactory	4	**0.4**	**0.16**
J	Efficiency	Satisfactory	5	**0.8**	**0.4**
K	Risk identification and Social Safeguards	Moderately Satisfactory	4	**0.8**	**0.32**
L	Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	Highly Satisfactory	6	**1.2**	**0.72**
M	Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps	Highly Satisfactory	6	**0.4**	**0.24**
TOTAL SCORE					**5.04**

1 (Highly Unsatisfactory)	< 1.83	4 (Moderately Satisfactory)	>=3.5 <=4.33
2 (Unsatisfactory)	>= 1.83 < 2.66	5 (Satisfactory)	>4.33 <= 5.16
3 (Moderately Unsatisfactory)	>=2.66 <3.5	6 (Highly Satisfactory)	> 5.16

Rating for Project Design Quality: Satisfactory

5.3 Nature of the External Context

148. During the implementation, the project did not experience any unsurmountable conflicts or political upheavals. The COVID-19 pandemic was the greatest external feature to impact project performance overall. From interviews and information provided in the project documentation, the effects of COVID-19 on the project were mitigated by adapting is workplan and activities and moving to a hybrid delivery model to cope with pandemic-related restrictions. Furthermore, given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic necessitated a flexible financial strategy to meet demands while staying aligned to the program's objectives. The team strived to overcome these issues, ensuring that funds were used effectively to achieve the program's objectives amid the health crisis. The adaptive management actions implemented, namely, carrying out the trainings virtually, at first, and then on a hybrid mode, seemed to have been sufficient to address the challenges. In fact, some stakeholders noted that the online training allowed for a broader participation of beneficiaries.

149. As the Project's delivery model was diversified across several regions and countries, occasional local political events slightly affected projects within those countries but did not have an extensive impact on the project. Some delays in project activities were associated with government structural reforms and personnel turnover. For instance, when the Ministry of Environment in Peru underwent two changes in quick succession it was necessary for the regional team to modify their implementation timelines to allow the new Ministers to become acquainted with the project goals and obtain needed support. In another example a Head of State in one of the Caucasus countries passed away and the Project managed to deliver on its obligations. These issues, for the most part, were mostly anticipated in the project's risk plan, and their negative impact was minimised through project risk mitigation measures.

150. The project reported operational challenges during the preparation phase, including delays in signing off on legal agreements to commence project activities and growing pains in adapting to UMOJA to manage grants. To offset these delays, improved project coordination was implemented with a two-in-a-box model (with one political and one technical resource operating within the UNEP regional office).

151. Otherwise, the nature of the external context was mostly country specific, and it has been determined to be moderately favourable in all countries, as no conflict, natural disaster, or unanticipated political upheaval, occurred impacting project implementation.

Rating for Nature of the External Context: Moderately Favourable

5.4 Effectiveness

152. The Project extended across five regions and encompassed 50+ target countries, necessitating a versatile strategy in defining the desired results and deliverables. This necessity arose from the differing levels of national, regional and country level proficiency in environmental management and knowledge at the Project's inception. Consequently, each country and region had the autonomy to achieve the predefined benchmarks in line with their existing developmental stage and feasible capacity enhancement potential.

153. To effectively manage this "versatile strategy" outlined above, precise and strong targets were established for each of the four output groups. These are detailed in the ProDoc and recapped later in this section. It should be emphasized that due to the diverse and conceptual nature of the outputs, these targets play a critical role in evaluating the achievements of the Outputs and Outcomes. In this assessment, the evaluators give considerable weight to these indicators when establishing the Effectiveness Rating.

154. The review of the project's milestones, outputs, and outcomes was based on various sources, including the results framework from the Project Document, results frameworks in revisions no. 1, progress against these reflected in the semi-annual reports, the summary of outcomes and outputs from the Project Operational Closure Report (December 2023), and information obtained during the Terminal Evaluation (TE) process, including a spot check of deliverables and reports from project partners. The TOC and causal pathways approved in the Project's design were not incorporated into the reporting structure of the Project. The TOC has been reconstructed and presented in Section IV - Theory of Change at TE, elaborating how the Project contributed towards the intended impact from outputs achieved within the framework of the project.

5.4.1 Availability of Outputs

155. The Project met or exceeded most of its projected outputs, surpassing the project targets. However, there was a minor shortfall in Output D "GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat," which fell short by only a factor of one, achieving 134 instead of the intended 135.

156. Output A Objective: To ensure targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.

157. Output A Indicators: Number of countries or regions for which a needs and readiness assessment is available.

158. Output A Results: Exceeding the target of 70 - 101 targeted countries and regions that now boast refined data-sharing practices and streamlined reporting processes, crafted through comprehensive assessments, marking a significant leap forward. Tangible deliverables, including tailored recommendations, serve as practical guides for sustained improvement. The enriched knowledge base derived from the project's findings equips the target groups to navigate evolving challenges in data sharing and reporting. Active participation in capacity-building initiatives has fortified their skills and laid a foundation for continued growth. The regions and countries enter a post-project era were enhanced data practices fuel ongoing collaboration and advancements.

Table 12: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "A"

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT A INDICATOR: Number of countries or regions for which a needs and readiness assessment is available.
Europe	In Europe, data gaps assessment reviews on environmental data and information were produced for seven countries in the region (Armenia, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) leading to the development of respective country roadmaps for SEIS implementation in each country).
Africa	The Project managed to expand its reach and geographical coverage on the continent. In addition to the nine African pilot countries for SEIS-I project, readiness assessments were also done for an additional 9 countries (South Africa, Tanzania, Somalia, Egypt, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Zambia).
Latin America and The Caribbean	In Latin America and The Caribbean, an SSFA has been finalized with the University of Belize to develop a fully-fledged GEO-Belize and related environmental data portal. An SSFA has been signed with the Pontifical University of Peru to enhance country´s capacity in the area of evidence-based policy and decision making with a focus on Pollution and Sustainable Consumption and Production (material flows).

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT A INDICATOR: Number of countries or regions for which a needs and readiness assessment is available.
Asia and the Pacific	Asia Pacific country reports on environmental data monitoring, management, reporting and sharing situation and needs have been finalized for all five target countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal).
West Asia	West Asia region saw a new partnership developed with the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf - also known as the Statistical Centre for the Gulf Cooperation Council which is the official data provider for the GCC countries. Under this partnership, a chapter on Current State of GCC Data and Knowledge will be produced. This chapter will be added to the ongoing project to produce the Environment Outlook for the GCC. Additionally, a preparatory meeting was held in Cairo attended by 10 Arab countries (five from West Asia and five from North Africa) where the way forward for the Second Arab Environment Outlook Report was discussed. This initiative is an excellent platform to exchange knowledge and data within the Arab countries.

159. Output B Objective: Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy action.

160. Output B Indicators-1: Number of technical support missions and national level capacity building workshops undertaken with the support of this project.

161. Output B Results-1: The project has delivered notable achievements in terms of technical support missions and national-level capacity building workshops, surpassing the initial target of 70 with a commendable total of 100. This surpassing of targets directly translates into immediate gains for the target groups involved. Firstly, stakeholders and participants benefitted from increased access to project deliverables, gaining comprehensive insights into environmental sustainability and climate action. The surplus technical support missions ensured broader participation from diverse groups, allowing a more extensive reach in terms of both geography and demographics. Participants in the national-level capacity building workshops experienced enhanced knowledge acquisition, gaining valuable skills and understanding in environmental assessments, reporting, and sustainability measures. The surplus in technical support missions and workshops signifies an amplified impact, fostering a more widespread dissemination of knowledge and expertise within the target groups, ultimately contributing to strengthened environmental capacities at the national level.

Table 13: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "B" indicator 1

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT B Output B Indicators-1: Number of technical support missions and national level capacity building workshops undertaken with the support of this project.
Europe	In Kazakhstan, national level capacity building workshops were held to support the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan (MoE) in the development of an online interactive NSoER for Kazakhstan covering 2018-2019 (based on existing reports and aimed at increasing dissemination of NSoER findings to the public). These capacity building activities took place in parallel with technical support activities to increase the MoE's and its subordinate organisations' capacities to sustainably produce such online interactive reports in the future, and to help develop the normative base for future NSoER production.
Africa	The NEIS design technical workshop brought together senior officials from the government of South Sudan, CEDARE and thematic experts from leading Egyptian Universities and environmental State Agencies to discuss the design methodology for the NEIS and the requisite legal framework necessary to streamline the management,

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT B Output B Indicators-1: Number of technical support missions and national level capacity building workshops undertaken with the support of this project.
	monitoring and reporting requirements of the Rio Conventions and other priority MEAs and SDGs.
Latin America and the Caribbean	**Latin America and the Caribbean**: In El Salvador 2 workshops in coordination with the ministry of environment and other relevant organization to identify existing data and capacity gaps for DRR. **In Peru:** one technical support mission to develop digital publication on • Air and Water Quality; and SDG indicator 12.2.1. • Introductory course (see screenshot below) on environmental statistics developed in cooperation with the Pontifical University of Peru for the Ministry of Environment. • In the words of one beneficiary from Peru on the legacy of the Project "*Since the experiences of the project will remain as an online course, it will also serve as training for other officials if there continue to be changes within the government. We have built in sustainability from the beginning and this was our vision due to political changes in our government.*" 
West Asia	**Jordan**: An MoU and SSFA were signed with JOHUD who will be providing technical assistance to the Data Dissemination Workshop and the SOER Jordan*:* **State of Environment Report:** The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development - JOHUD is in the process of translating and reviewing the SOER manual and the two presentations. Recruitment of an expert is in process. Workshop is being prepared. **SEIS II project:** 24 indicators were complete. Work in progress with the rest of the 20 indicators. Launch will be in 2023. Draft dashboard complete **Kuwait:** State of Environment Report + Dashboard: Kick-off meeting held which was widely covered in national media. Superset training delivered from UNEP GRID Geneva to two staff from UNEP ROWA office to assist and better understand Kuwait's needs. DPSIR indicators prepared. **Lebanon:** GCF Project: GCF concept note being finalized. Stakeholders workshop being organized. Workshop will be followed by production meeting. Meeting with the National Designated Authority (NDA) will also be scheduled.

162. Output B Indicators-2: Number of UNCTs using environmental data, statistics or assessments identified through UNEP decision-making.

163. Output B Results-2: The project significantly exceeded its goal, engaging 34 United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) instead of the targeted 3 in utilizing environmental data, statistics, or assessments from UNEP for decision-making. Immediate gains include broader access to project deliverables, increased participation in receiving services, and enhanced knowledge among UNCTs. This overachievement reflects a more impactful integration of environmental considerations into decision-making processes at the country level, fostering informed and sustainable policies.

Table 14: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "B" indicator 2

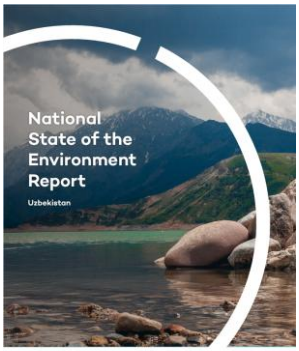
REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT B Output B Indicators-2: Number of UNCTs using environmental data, statistics or assessments identified through UNEP in decision-making
West Asia	The UNEP West Asia Office supported the Ministry of Health and Environment in Iraq in establishing an Environment Information System for Iraq.
Africa	Additional support on the CCAs and UNSDCFs formulation and implementation in the following countries: Egypt, Kenya, Mauritania, Togo, and Uganda. Egypt, Uganda, Seychelles, and Mauritius used UNEP-supported environmental data, statistics, and information to inform the prioritization of policy and programmatic issues in their respective UNSDCF. The UNSDCF is a core instrument for providing a coherent, strategic direction for UN development activities by all UN entities at the country level.
Latin America and The Caribbean	SSFA has been finalised to develop a GEO-Belize and related environmental data portal. **Peru:** SSFA has been produced and will soon be signed by with a local university to enhance the country´s data sharing capacity in evidence-based policy and decision making with a focus on Pollution.
Asia Pacific	**Vietnam:** SSFA signed with Viet Nam Environment Administration to produce/support environmental reporting for SDGs and Multilateral Environmental Agreements in the future, and to develop MONRE's normative base for the relevant environmental reporting.

164. Output B Indicator-3: Number of countries receiving institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and use.

165. Output B Results-3: Exceeding the initial aim of 20 countries, the project provided institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing to 41 countries. National governments and ministries of environment gained immediate benefits, including broader access to project deliverables, increased participation in services, and improved knowledge in environmental information management. This outcome ensures that a larger number of countries are now equipped to make informed decisions, contributing to enhanced global environmental sustainability.

Table 15: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "B" indicator 3

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT B – INDICATOR 3 - Number of countries receiving institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and use
Europe	Two countries in UNEP Europe region (two Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) received institutional and technical support from the project on environmental information management and sharing for the generation of National State of Environment Reports (NSoERs). This support was a key foundational underpinning to enable these countries to create their NsoER. Uzbekistan launched its NSoER (see screenshot below) at the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-14) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals in Samarkand.

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT B – INDICATOR 3 - Number of countries receiving institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and use
	
Asia Pacific	For the GEF funded Pacific regional Inform, major achievements included the successful endorsement of four State of Environment Reports (SOEs) by the governments of Cook Islands, Niue, Solomon Islands and PNG. In 2020, Tonga launched a SoE report on World Environment Day, covering seven thematic areas: Atmosphere and Climate; Inland Water; Land and Planning; Coastal and Marine Environment; Biodiversity; Built Environment; and Culture and Heritage. The SoE report was launched by the country's Prime Minster to the Cabinet.
Africa	A number of countries in the region were trained on Integrated Environmental Assessments (IEA) with a view to strengthening national environmental data, information, and reporting. These support measures considered the UNEP's current resolve to accelerate action on the triple planetary crisis at a time when the world is also grappling with rising shocks. Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zambia are among the countries that benefitted from this support.
Latin America and the Caribbean	Technical support provided to Ecuador, and Costa Rica to enhance their environmental Information systems (or data warehouse) and for data management.
West Asia	Institutional and Technical support provided to four additional countries: Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Iraq

166. Output C Objective: Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established/strengthened and partners mobilized.

167. Output C Indicators-1: Number of regional environmental information network reports including lessons learned launched

168. Output C Results-1: Exceeding the initial aim of 12, the project launched 19 regional environmental information network reports, benefiting national governments and ministries of environment. This accomplishment provides enhanced access to comprehensive regional insights, increased participation in services, and substantial knowledge gains. Ministries of environment now have access to diverse regional experiences, contributing to informed decision-making and improved environmental sustainability practices at both regional and national levels.

Table 16: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "C" indicator 1

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT C – INDICATOR 1 - Number of regional environmental information network reports including lessons learned launched
Africa	One Tool developed on regional environmental information network.
Latin America and the Caribbean	Latin America and the Caribbean: structure and reporting mechanism for a biennial report on the state of the environment of the Forum of Ministers of LAC developed and approved by countries through the REIN. Report to be published systematically starting from upcoming meeting of the Forum of Ministers in Q4 2023/ Q1 2024.
GEMS Ocean	GEMS Ocean: Report on Data challenges that affect ocean governance in the Caribbean is going through publication

169. Output C Indicators-2: Number of partners mobilized for GEMS/Ocean

170. Output C2 Results-2: The project has surpassed the initial goal of six partners, it mobilized 36 partners for GEMS/Ocean. This accomplishment provides further access to project deliverables, increased participation in network, and substantial knowledge gains through a wider collaborative network.

Table 17: Snapshot of cumulative results and achievements with respect to output "C" indicator 2

REGION	KEY ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTING TO OUTPUT C – Indicator 2 - Number of partners mobilized for GEMS/Ocean
Global	The GEMS Ocean Programme mobilized different partners from the Earth Observation and modelling communities working on Ocean and Coastal issues. The following international institutions are now core-partners of the Programme: UNESCO-IOC, G7 FSOI, Regional Seas, Mercator Ocean International (MOI), World Resources Institute (WRI), Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC), GRID-Geneva, GRID-Arendal, International Ocean Institute (IOI) and Future Earth. Expression of Interest received by the partners have been coordinated and collected. Currently the following institutions expressed their interest: the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC), the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC), Mercator Ocean International (MOi), the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), UNEP Global Resource Information Database – Geneva (GRID-Geneva), UNEP Global Resource Information Database -Arendal (GRID-Arendal), the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA), the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UN-DOALOS), Future Earth Coasts (FEC), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the World Resources Institute (WRI). In addition, many Member States have been involved and are willing to engage in the Programme co-design and steering. The following Member States have been involved: Norway, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Singapore, Maldives, Barbados, Mauritius, Ghana, and Fiji. The countries were invited in joining the co-design process of GEMS Ocean to discuss their specific needs and to participate in the UN Ocean Conference Side Event. A similar process of engagement was followed for the Regional Seas (Cartagena Convention, Nairobi Convention, Abidjan Convention and COBSEA).

171. Output D Objective: GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMStat.

172. Output D Indicators-1: Number of Countries for which quality assured data are available either provided directly by countries/regional entities or by other sources to the GEMStat database, including data relevant for SDG indicator.

173. Output D Results-1: GEMStat data due to Covid-19, the project significantly advanced data assurance by collaborating with WMO, JRC, UNESCO, and IAEA. These achievements provide immediate gains, offering access to project deliverables, fostering participation in workshops, and facilitating collaboration in citizen science and water quality monitoring initiatives. The project had a slight shortfall, achieving 134 vs a target of 135.

174. Output D Indicators-2: Number of persons participating in and completing one or more capacity development activities for water quality monitoring that are provided by GEMS/ Water

175. Output D Results-2: Exceeding the initial target of 220, the project engaged 431 men and women in water quality monitoring capacity development activities, offering increased access to project deliverables, broader participation, and substantial knowledge enhancement.

176. Output D Indicators-3: Number of Regional Support Networks and collaboration contributing to GEMS/Water in any appropriate format established.

177. Output D Results-3: With six Regional Support Networks and collaborations, the project supported benefits to policymakers and science institutions in collaboration with WMO, UNESCO, and the JRC on initiatives focusing on various aspects of ambient water quality monitoring and water quality data.

Table 18: Snapshot of cumulative achievements with respect to output "D" indicators 1, 2 & 3

REGION	GEMS WATER OUPUT – ALL INDICATORS
GEMS INDICATOR 1: Number of Countries for which quality assured data are available either provided directly by countries / regional entities or by other sources to the GEMStat database, including data relevant for SDG indicator	By the end of 2023, the number of monitoring locations increased by 31% from 13,233 to 17,432, with an increase of water quality values by 58% from 18,457,504 to 29,212,224. The Target for this indicator was 135 and the project achieved 134 countries.
GEMS INDICATOR 2: Number of persons participating in and completing one or more capacity development activities for water quality monitoring that are provided by GEMS/ Water	By the end of the project, 431 men and women participated in quality monitoring capacity development activities. The initial target for the project was 220. Provided below is a sampling of some of the activities included under this indicator. A range of high-quality capacity development activities: • CPD course intake September 2023, 20 participants completed (12 Female, 8 males). • UCC MSc course completion 2023: 6 students (5 females, 1 male) • UNEP eLearning: 15 completed. • Workshop on Innovations in Water Quality Monitoring, September 2023, 28 participants (12 female, 16 male) • Workshop on Citizen Science, November 2023, 20 participants (6 female, 14 male)

REGION	GEMS WATER OUPUT – ALL INDICATORS
GEMS INDICATOR 3: Number of Regional Support Networks and collaboration contributing to GEMS/Water in any appropriate format established	The GEMS Water Project achieved its target of 6 for this indicator. GEMS/Water continues its collaboration with WMO, UNESCO and the JRC on a series of workshops with a focus on different aspects of ambient water quality monitoring and water quality data. A workshop on innovations in WQ monitoring took place in September 2023. Discussions are ongoing with IAEA on developing a joint performance evaluation exercise for laboratories in 2024.

178. Reference is made to table 21 below for a summary of the project's Results Framework and corresponding evidence.

Table 19: Project Performance against outputs

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target	Performance		
				Value [17]	%	Reason(s) for variance
Output A: Targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.	Number of countries or regions for which a needs and readiness assessment is available	Baseline (June 2018): 10	Target (December 2023): 70	101	144%	• The original target of 21 had already been exceeded by 148%, when target was subsequently revised to 70 at revision. • Consultations noted that since it was the first time a project like this had been implemented, there was no benchmark to gauge the level of engagement. Notwithstanding, consultations suggest the project management team was surprised by the level of engagement, uptake and ownership. • In some regions COVID-19 restrictions allowed for greater reach through virtual as opposed to face-to-face workshops and meetings. • The EOU verified reports of country analyses for two countries (Botswana and South Sudan). However, the report states that these were funded under a GEF project. Partially delivered.
Output B: Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments,	Number of technical support missions and national level capacity building workshops undertaken with the support of this project	Baseline (June 2018): 0	Target (December 2023): 70	100	143%	• An increase in technical support missions led to broader participation across diverse groups, extending both geographically and demographically. This surplus of missions and workshops significantly amplified the project's impact, promoting a wider dissemination of knowledge and expertise among target groups, which ultimately contributed to strengthened environmental capacities at the national level. • The EOU verified reports of two technical mission in Africa. A further five meetings were reported but funded by a GEF project (Kenya, Botswana and South Sudan). Partially delivered.

[17] **Source:** Operational Completion Report

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target	Performance		
				Value [17]	%	Reason(s) for variance
decision-making and policy action.	Number of UNCTs using environmental data, statistics or assessments identified through UNEP in decision-making.	Baseline June 2021: 0	Target December 2023: 3	34[18]	1133%	• The project significantly exceeded its target by 1133%. It did so by only spending 94% of the allocated budget originally estimated at design. • Reasons for the variance are similar to those mentioned above. • The evaluators also recognize the work of the management team of the Regional Offices for finding efficiencies and realizing deeper penetration through sustained efforts with UNCTs. • The EOU verified reports of this output being delivered in 34 countries (Africa Europe LAC and West Asia). Fully delivered.
	Number of countries receiving institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and use.	Baseline June 20201: 0	Target December 2023: 20	41	205%	• The Regional Offices leveraged virtual workshops and technical meetings, especially during the pandemic, and were able to reach a broader audience. This is apparent in the under-utilization of programmed funds. • Again, the evaluators credit the sustained efforts to engage and work with UNCTs to contribute towards this indicator as well. • The EOU was not able to verify this number based on the project's reporting. However, narrative and photographic evidence suggests that there was considerable participation. Fully delivered.
Output C: Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established/strengthened and partners mobilized.	Number of regional environmental information network reports including lessons learned launched.	Baseline (June 2018): 0	Target (December 2023): 12	19	158%	• Careful budget planning allowed the project to launch 19 regional environmental information network reports (as opposed to the originally-planned 12) with the available budget. • The EOU was not able to verify this number based on the project's reporting. Not delivered.
	Number of partners mobilized for GEMS/Ocean	Baseline (December 2021): 0	Target (December 2023): 6	36	600%	• Reason for variance attributed to greater penetration and uptake for project services and technical support than originally anticipated. • The EOU was able to verify 31 partners. Fully delivered.

[18] **Africa:** 1. Benin; 2. Botswana; 3. Cabo Verde; 4. Cameroon; 5. Egypt; 6. Equatorial Guinea; 7. Eswatini; 8. Ethiopia; 9. Gabon; 10. Kenya; 11. Lesotho; 12. Malawi 13.; Mauritania; 14. Mauritius 15. Namibia; 16. Rwanda; 17. Senegal; 18. Seychelles; 19. Sierra Leone; 20. South Sudan; 21. Tanzania; 22. Togo; 23. Uganda; 24. Zimbabwe. **Europe:** 25. Uzbekistan. **Latin America & the Caribbean (LAC):** 26. Costa Rica; 27. Dominican Republic; 28. Ecuador; 29. Belize; 30. Colombia; 31. Paraguay; 32. Trinidad and Tobago **West Asia:** 33. United Arab Emirates (UAE); 34. Jordan

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target	Performance		
				Value [17]	%	Reason(s) for variance
Output D: GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat	Number of Countries/regional entities that are submitting quality assured data to the relaunched GEMStat database, including SDG indicator 6.3.2 reporting.	Baseline (June 2018): 58	Target (December 2023): 135	134	99%	• Interviews suggest it was a challenge to achieve the target due to COVID-19. • GEMS/Water was able to establish collaboration with WMO, JRC, UNESCO, and IAEA, with immediate gains and offering access to a range of citizen science initiatives. • The EOU was able to verify 120 counties submitting quality assured data. Partially delivered
	Number of persons participating in and completing one or more capacity development activities for water quality monitoring that are provided by GEMS/Water.	Baseline (June 2018): 62	Target (December 2023): 220	431	196%	• GEMS/Water also benefited from deeper penetration, engagement and fostering of ownership, as noted for some of the other indicators within the Outputs A-C. • Collectively, the availability of outputs were made possible by utilization of 87% of the programmed budget. • The EOU was not able to verify the number of participants. However, narrative and photographic evidence suggests that there was considerable participation. Fully delivered.
	Number of Regional Support Networks and collaboration contributing to GEMS/Water in any appropriate format established.	Baseline (June 2018): 1	Target (December 2023): 6	6[19]	100%	• No deviation as GEMS/Water did not target additional regions than those planned. • The EOU was able to verify 6. Fully delivered.

Rating for Availability of Outputs: **Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Satisfactory)**

[19] 1. ANA Brasil; 2. JRC; 3. MRC; 4. Southern and Eastern African 6.3.2 Network; 5. WWQA; 6. ICWRGC

5.4.2 Achievement of Project Outcomes

179. Outcome Objective-1: Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes.

180. Outcome Indicators-1: Number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development using improved information sharing arrangements at national level.

181. Outcome Results-1: The project has delivered immediate gains to target groups by ensuring countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development using improved information sharing arrangements at national level. Surpassing the target of 75, to a total of 141 countries have actively used UNEP support to improved information sharing arrangements at national level. This achievement signifies an enhanced collective environmental knowledge base and increased capacity among national and local governments, and other stakeholders. Reference is made to the incremental descriptions in Section 5 (Project Outcomes – Outcome Indicator 1) in each semi-annual progress report on how the result of 141 countries was achieved. This explanation differs by region, by country and by initiative. Results were validated through consultation and spot checks.

182. Outcome Indicators-1B: Number of countries using quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes as a result of project support.

183. Outcome Results-1B: The project has achieved significant milestones for the target groups specially ministries of environment, statistics, forestry, in general environmental national departments. With stakeholders now actively using the project's deliverables, including comprehensive environmental reports and data sets, decision-makers are making more informed choices, implementing sustainable strategies, and managing environmental risks. This achievement has led to an increased knowledge base, improved resource allocation, and better-informed policy development. Public participation has flourished, supported by enhanced capacity and networking opportunities, creating a collaborative environment for sustainable development. In essence, the successful realization of this indicator has translated into tangible and positive transformations in how countries incorporate quality environmental information into their crucial decision-making processes. Again, reference is made to consolidated semi-annual progress reports.

184. Taken together, the evaluators found that the Project convincingly realized its overarching objective of ***enhancing regional and national capacity for environmental information management, networking and state of the environment reporting and communication***, and, created the necessary conditions, technical and capacity underpinnings for **targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes**. Below is the a snapshot of the Project's contribution towards its outcome:

- In **Africa**, UNEP provided extensive technical support and capacity development to strengthen environmental data management and reporting. This included aiding Botswana and Uganda in the advanced stages of peer review for their national State of Environment Reports, and supporting UN Country Teams in South Africa, Somalia, and Egypt in preparing their Common Country Analyses for the UN Sustainable Cooperation Framework. Additionally, UNEP partnered with national institutions and developed digital transformation initiatives, highlighting UNEP's leadership in environmental information management. UNEP also facilitated regional cooperation through internal collaborations with the UNEP Africa Office's Units on Energy and

Resource Efficiency, resulting in the production of key environmental outlook reports and securing funding for new initiatives.

- In the **Asia Pacific** region, the project focused on enhancing data sharing and environmental reporting capabilities through a regional report on lessons learned, based on extensive country reports and responses. UNEP also supported the GEF-funded Pacific Inform project, which achieved significant milestones such as the endorsement of State of Environment Reports by Cook Islands, Niue, Solomon Islands, and PNG. Collaborative efforts extended to virtual training workshops and meetings, which addressed project progress and budget adjustments due to COVID-19. These activities underscored UNEP's ability to adapt to evolving circumstances while maintaining strong regional engagement.
- In **Europe**, UNEP focused on supporting countries in the Caucasus to transform their environmental reporting frameworks and data management systems to a more transparent and cooperative data collection regime. Country data gap assessments and the development of roadmaps for the implementation of the SEIS were conducted in Armenia, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Technical support extended to Uzbekistan in the development of its NSoER, demonstrating UNEP's dedication to building local capacities and advancing sustainable reporting practices.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, UNEP strengthened collaborations with national institutions, ministries of environment, and national statistical offices, despite challenges such as political instability and slow COVID-19 recovery. The Science Unit at the Regional Office executed various activities, including a proposal to develop a digital GEO-Belize and a data portal to advance data collection and sharing capabilities. The SEIS II project in Belize and Peru marked a significant achievement, reinforcing the region’s science-policy interface through the establishment of a formal Scientific Advisory Board of the Forum of Ministers of Environment.
- In **West Asia**, UNEP used the foundations of the Kuwait country pilot as a springboard to facilitate significant progress in environmental reporting and knowledge-sharing efforts. A notable achievement was the partnership with the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) and the subsequent production of a chapter on the Current State of GCC Data and Knowledge. Workshops, MoUs, and SSFAs in countries like Jordan and Kuwait demonstrated UNEP’s proactive approach in providing technical assistance, building capacities, and promoting digital transformation for environmental sustainability.
- The **GEMS/Water** program consolidated the strong progress made over 30 years as the world’s most comprehensive and authoritative source of information on water quality and SDG 6.3.2, by continuing to focus on supporting global water quality monitoring and reporting through the GEMStat data platform, which expanded its coverage with new data submissions from 32 countries. The program engaged with regional entities, such as the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the European Environment Agency, to enhance data acquisition. Despite challenges posed by COVID-19, GEMS/Water successfully transitioned to online training modules, continued to develop the SDG Indicator 6.3.2 Progress Report, and established the GEMS/Water Regional Support Network at the Joint Research Centre. These initiatives underscored UNEP's commitment to capacity development, data modernization, and knowledge sharing in line with its strategic objectives.

Table 20: Performance against outcome-level indicators

RESULTS	Indicators	Baseline	Target	Actual[20]	Evidence
Project Outcome: Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes	Number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development using improved information sharing arrangements at national level	0	75	141	The EOU was able to verify an outcome level uptake in 5 countries and substantive progress in a further 76 countries. Some of the links with this projects' work and uptake were difficult to verify. Partially achieved.
	Number of countries using quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes, as a result of project support.	0	4	12	When reviewing the consolidated reports, the actual target achieved is 12 as opposed to 4. This consists of 1. South Sudan; 2. Uganda; 3. Botswana; 4. Egypt; 5. Senegal; 6. Benin; 7. Equatorial Guinea; 8. Ethiopia; 9. Kenya; 10. Rwanda; 11. Burundi; 12. Malawi Two countries benefited from a targeted action on strengthening National Environmental Information Networks (NEIN) for needs and gaps assessments and data sharing, namely: (a) South Sudan – support entailed a training of data producers on the core indicators for use in environmental reporting. In addition, working groups (consisting of environmental data producers) were established, and provided with protocols to guide data exchanges and quality control; (b) Uganda – focus was given to the strengthening of the country's existing National Environmental Information Networks and decentralization of capacity to sub-national levels (Jan-June 2022 doc). Countries supported to set up national environment information network (NEIN) – including Botswana, Egypt, Senegal, South Sudan, and Uganda, among others. Others supported through NES include Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Jan-June 2023 doc). Countries supported through dedicated National Environment Information Networks (NEINs) and air quality data and information include the following Botswana, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda. Burundi and Malawi were also accorded dedicated support through the Resilient Food Systems interventions, that included components for strengthening national environmental information to bolster evidence-based planning and decision-making (page 10 in Jul-Dec 2023 doc) The EOU accepts the evidence presented by the consultant. Fully achieved.

[20] **Source:** Operational Completion Report

185. Taken together, the project actively engaged ministries of environment, statistics, forestry, and other national environmental departments, facilitating the use of high-quality environmental data in decision-making and planning across various sectors. This culminated in state of the environment reports for: As a result of project support, 12 countries have leveraged this information to make informed decisions and improve environmental governance. Stakeholders are now utilizing deliverables, such as detailed environmental reports and data sets, to guide policies, implement sustainable strategies, and better manage environmental risks, demonstrating the project's tangible impact on national environmental planning and policy frameworks.

186. The project has resulted in Bahrain, Belize, Botswana, Kuwait, Oman, Peru, Qatar, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Uzbekistan and Vietnam now having state of the environment reports (with other countries' reports currently being drafted), with data that is actively being leveraged by respective ministries of environment and statistics to report on international MEA obligations. Furthermore, a further 7 target countries under the project: Armenia, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have developed policy briefs geared towards decision-makers. The policy briefs focused on the following themes (a) Air quality and Energy (including stove/fuel replacement to reduce air pollution); (b) Water (including COVID-19 monitoring in wastewater); (c) Waste (including enhancement of recycling rates through extended producer responsibility); and (d) Biodiversity (including specific actions to implement the biodiversity restoration targets). Moreso, these policy briefs and national state of the environment reports were inputs for regional environmental ministerial bodies and meetings to contribute to decision-making and more informed policy, as well as reporting on MEA obligations and SDG targets.

Reference is made to table 21 below for a summary of the project's Results Framework and corresponding evidence, where agreed with the UNEP Evaluation Office.

Rating for Achievement of Project Outcomes: **Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Satisfactory)**

5.4.3 Likelihood of Impact

187. The likelihood of impact is influenced by the degree to which the changes that are required between project outcomes and impact were achieved at the time of the evaluation. The project's objective was to strengthen the capacity of countries with respect to making evidence-based decisions by raising their knowledge on the state of the environment at the regional, sub-regional and national levels. This would be achieved through enhancing environmental information management, environmental monitoring and data sharing and strengthening regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments.

188. The project achieved or surpassed its projected outcomes and outputs, except for a small deficiency in the GEMS/Water Component (specifically Output D, which is detailed in the aforementioned section). The initiative adopted a comprehensive strategic approach to enhance capacity and broaden understanding of environmental conditions. At the organizational level, it secured commitment and established priorities among a wide array of stakeholders, partners, and donors. It effectively operated on national, sub-regional, and regional tiers, ensuring that the results corresponded with the most pressing needs of the countries involved, thus enhancing the potential for meaningful impacts by providing services that would offer the greatest advantages to these countries. Regarding execution, the implementation of project goals was managed by the regions and countries themselves, further ensuring that the resultant solutions were tailored to meet specific country needs.

189. The project's likelihood of impact closely aligns with its theory of change. By starting with thorough needs assessments, the project was able to craft bespoke capacity-building initiatives, tailored training workshops, and country-specific technical assistance. This approach established a long-term roadmap of country-level needs that the subsequent project continues to leverage. Additionally, the project's investment in enhancing technical, institutional, and professional capacities for data collection, harmonization, and reporting has enabled countries to produce state of the environment reports and policy briefs. In some cases - as in the case of Uzbekistan and Belize for example - it has led to a complete transformation and overhaul of the data management lifecycle and reporting process, with stakeholders embracing more open and transparent data-sharing protocols. Without these foundational outputs, policymakers and ministerial forums would lack crucial inputs for decision-making and reporting on SDG and MEA obligations. The project's far-reaching impact, legacy, and role as a springboard for future initiatives are undeniable, particularly given that it represents the first comprehensive attempt of this kind.

190. The project adopted a comprehensive strategy to enhance capabilities and broaden knowledge, tackling it from the perspectives of people, processes, and technology to increase the chances of creating and sustaining an impact. Activities were concentrated on these three facets which encompassed the following (among others):

- Education, training, conferences, and the exchange of information between regions have heightened levels of knowledge and awareness. Initiatives were undertaken to promote Gender Equality, aiming for balanced involvement between men and women.
- Raising public awareness regarding progress in environmental data and the significance of reporting on the environment.
- The implementation of robust processes for gathering and retaining environmental data enhances the potential for preserving data quality, including its integrity and availability.
- The implementation of digital solutions and the utilization of appropriate technologies (e.g., Portals) enhance the storage, display, and accessibility of data.

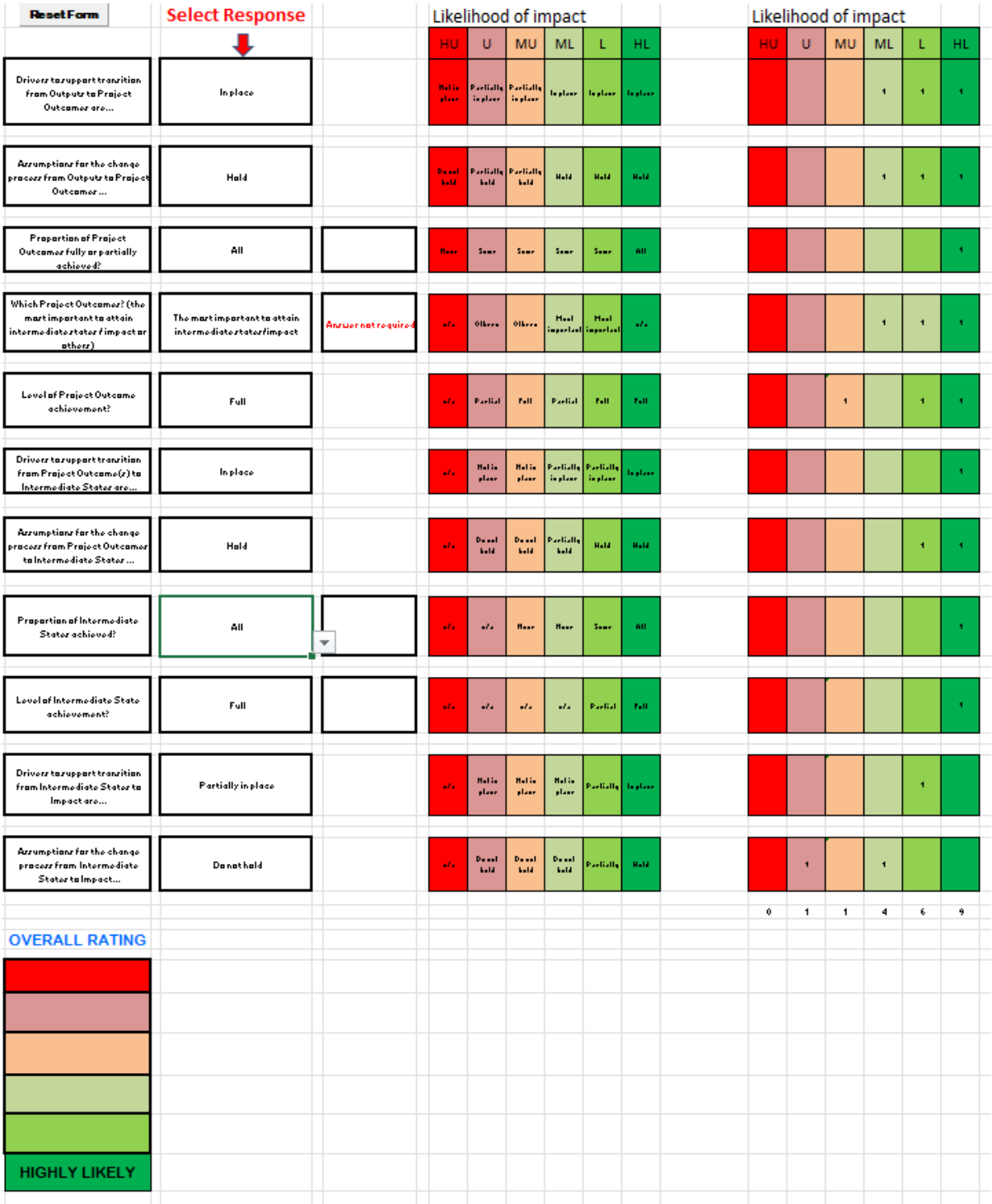
191. Contributing to the project's likelihood of impact, the drivers and assumptions were valid, materialized during implementation and contributed to the realization of the intermediate state, as anticipated at design. Reference is made to the reconstructed Figure 4: Theory of Change Diagram at Evaluation.

192. From the interviews carried out and the documentation examined, there's a clear dedication to maintaining the results and products provided by this project. Consequently, the likelihood of impact is high.

193. Also, using the Achievement of Likelihood of Impact tool provided by the UNEP Evaluation Office, the Project has convincingly established the conditions for highly likelihood of impact.

Rating for Achievement of Likelihood of Impact: **Highly Likely (EOU rating: Likely).**

Figure 5: Likelihood of impact tool results



Rating for Effectiveness: **Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Satisfactory)**

5.5 Financial Management

5.5.1 Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

194. Documentation from the project, financial documents, the final operational project closure report, and discussions with the Financial Management Office (FMO), Project Management Team, and Regional Implementation Teams confirm that a structured reporting

system was used. This included operational project closure reports which contained planned and actual expenditures providing clear financial transparency and accountability. Despite the complexities of managing funds across multiple regional delivery teams while adhering to donor requirements, considerable effort ensured prompt fund disbursement and accurate financial reporting. Moreover, the FMO collaborated diligently and effectively with all relevant stakeholders to maintain adherence to financial policies and practices during the project's lifecycle.

195. Although the project's financial management was complex and required considerable time, there appears to be no indication that it impacted the project's delivery timeframes or effectiveness.

"WE DECIDED TO BUILD THE FOUNDATIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF A LOCALLY-RELEVANT AND SCALABLE DATA WAREHOUSE, USING OPEN-SOURCE TOOLS. EVEN THOUGH THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH BUDGET WE DID IT IN-HOUSE BECAUSE IT WAS IMPORANT TO ESTABLISH THE COUNTRY'S ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION SYSTEM."

"AS IS TYPICAL IN UN PROJECTS, YOU RARELY HAVE ALL THE RESOURCES YOU NEED BUT A COMBINATION OF PASSION, HARD WORK AND A LITTLE BIT OF GOOD LUCK GETS YOU OVER THE FINISH LINE."

"UNEP IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS ARE OFTEN POSSIBLE AND SUCCESSFUL WITH SMALL BUT MIGHTY TEAMS."

"ONE NEEDS TO BE APPRECIATE WHAT WAS ACHIEVED AND HOW TRANSFORMATIONAL THE PROJECT WAS IN SOME COUNTRIES, WITH A RELATIVELY MEAGRE BUDGET PER TARGET COUNTRY."

"WE WERE ALWAYS CONSCIOUS OF THE BUDGET AND TRIED TO MINIMIZE TRAVEL, BUT IN MANY COUNTRIES, NOTHING CAN REPLACE FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL. WE SAW BIG JUMPS IN PROGRESS BECAUSE OF THIS."

- INTERVIEW STATEMENTS RELATED TO EFFICIENCY

196. The project funding model within UNEP, which distinguishes between secured and unsecured funds, is unique within the UN common system, but can lead to disharmony and discourage cooperation and joint planning between different units within the same division, as highlighted by interviewees on three separate occasions.

Rating for Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures: **Satisfactory**

5.5.2 Completeness of Financial Information

197. Most of the key information related to the financial management of the project was available for review. The project's operational closure report included the final financial position at the end of the project. This report was signed off by required stakeholders. The project also included provisions for financial sustainability, planning for future phases and ensuring any remaining funds were allocated to follow-up projects.

198. The transition to the Umoja system, followed by adjustments to the financial reporting frameworks, had considerable effects on project management. This necessitated a great deal of flexibility and diligence on the part of the finance team. Moreover, overseeing sub-allotments was particularly demanding, leading to occasional delays. Nevertheless, the Financial Management Office succeeded in maintaining accurate and current financial records for the project without delay.

Rating for Completeness of Financial Information: **Satisfactory**

5.5.3 Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff

199. The communication and interaction among the Finance department, Project Management staff, and Regional Implementation Teams is rated high satisfactory due to their comprehensive understanding of the financial reporting obligations and procedures. The Fund Management Officer (FMO) demonstrated a keen awareness of project developments and the

timing of financial disbursements, maintaining consistent communication with the project manager and regional implementation teams. Additionally, there was evidence that quality assurance checks were conducted on project and financial status reports. As highlighted by numerous interviewees, one of the key strong points of the project was the cooperative and helpful approach of the FMO in working alongside the project and regional teams, which played a significant role in facilitating financial management reporting and ensuring that financial issues did not hinder project timelines or completion.

200. The project also leveraged limited funds effectively, with significant support from the European Commission, especially in regions with challenging local fundraising. This required transparent and continuous communication between project management staff, the FMO and the European Commission Staff.

Rating for Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff: **Highly Satisfactory**

Rating for Financial Management: Highly Satisfactory

5.6 Efficiency

201. The Project's cost-effectiveness (articulated on pp. 54-55 of the Project Document), is rooted in its strategy of leveraging resources and expertise from other UNEP projects and collaborating with a broad range of global and regional partners. By coordinating with regional processes, such as the Science Asia-Pacific programme and the Africa Environment Information Network, the project maximized synergies and impact while minimizing costs. This approach ensured that project activities were integrated with existing initiatives, enhancing efficiency and avoiding duplication of efforts.

202. Additionally, the project used available UNEP resources, such as the Regional Environment Information Network Conferences, to convene stakeholders and share data, thereby supporting regional and national capacity building in a cost-effective manner. The free and open access to environmental data through platforms like Environment Live, along with strategic collaborations to make relevant data available at no cost, further contributed to the project's cost-efficiency. By dynamically updating assessments and leveraging synergies with other UNEP projects, the project optimized resources to support the production of environmental data and reporting, particularly in relation to the SDGs and Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process.

203. The project demonstrated a reasonable level of efficiency and balanced performance in its implementation, with an incremental extension from 48 to 66 months to accommodate implications from additional funding mobilized with respect to the implementation of and reporting on new activities as a result. As such, the project revision in 2021 was not due to delays but rather to strategic decisions that secured additional funding and allowed stronger alignment of the project with evolving UNEP priorities and strategies. The project’s ability to adjust its duration while still meeting and exceeding its initial outcome and output targets is a testament to its efficient management. The leadership effectively leveraged cost-effective approaches, such as utilizing lean implementation teams spread across multiple regions and countries, which allowed the project to maximize its impact despite operating with modest budgets.

204. Interview evidence highlights that the project operated efficiently within existing institutional roles and mechanisms, enhancing them where necessary without incurring significant additional costs. For example, one project manager noted that the team was able to "stretch every dollar" by integrating project activities into ongoing regional initiatives and by

tapping into existing partnerships, which avoided duplication of efforts and resources. This strategic use of available resources ensured that the project not only stayed within budget but also exceeded many of its regional and country-specific targets. Overall, the project's efficient use of time, resources, and existing institutional frameworks played a critical role in its successful implementation and the achievement of its ambitious goals.

205. The project design underestimated the high transaction costs of coordinating GEMS/Water's complex partner network. The project management structure was significantly reduced from 12 staff members to the current three full-time staff, with minimal participation from key implementing partners like UNEP's regional offices, which limited contributions to maintaining the global network, data sharing, capacity development, and awareness-raising efforts. GEMS/Water dedicated considerable staff time to securing additional funding to complete activities and deliver outputs. While the fund-raising drives have been successful, these efforts diverted precious staff time from focusing on the time-demanding networking, capacity development, data, and outreach packages. Reporting load was also considerable, needing to complete different report formats on a monthly, biannual, and annual basis.

206. The evaluators also became aware through interviews of the significant efforts made by the project and management teams within the regional offices to support ongoing policy making and keep the momentum with respect to the legislative processes, namely in the Pacific islands and in Latin America, to ensure that SoERs were being discussed and approved in the Parliament.

207. The evaluators found no evidence of specific efforts to reduce the carbon footprint, although this happened implicitly through COVID-19. Nonetheless, no evidence has been found either of superfluous plane travelling which would have the greatest impact on the project's carbon footprint.

Rating for Efficiency: **Satisfactory**

5.7 Monitoring and Reporting

5.7.1 Monitoring Design and Budgeting

208. The project document entails a Monitoring Plan (Section 7 from pp. 56-69) and accompanying budget. As one would normally expect, the 'Monitoring Plan and Budget' table includes columns for information on baseline and targets, data sources, data collection methods, frequency and responsible office/staff. The table is not aligned with the project logical framework and was not updated as part of Revision No. 1. It is missing monitoring details at the Outcome level and only covers three out of the four original worded Outputs. For each of the three Outputs included in the Monitoring Plan and Budget table, the baseline and targets, as well as data sources and data collection methods, frequency and responsible office/staff have been mentioned. Due to their binary incremental nature and semi-annual frequency, milestones are not covered within the Monitoring Plan and Budget table.

209. The UNEP Science Division and Regional Offices were jointly responsible for carrying out monitoring of project implementation, with progress of the project and monitoring delegated to the project manager and project team. For activities related to the GEMS/Water Programme, the Global Programme Coordination Unit was to be in charge of monitoring the progress of the Programme and submit progress reports to its donors as per the MoUs and the GEMS/Water Project Steering Committee, which includes key UN-Water partners.

210. The UNEP Science Division and Regional Teams were to also to keep the Project Steering Committee informed and seek guidance from it for project implementation

periodically as deemed necessary. PIMS (and subsequently IPMR module) reporting was planned to be carried out every six months. While a mid-term review (MTR) is mentioned in the Project Document, it is only included in the Knowledge Management section (pg. 49), and not in the corresponding section detailing Evaluations Plans (pg. 67). A Terminal Evaluation (TE, at the end of the project) was foreseen in the Project Document and was to be the responsibility of the UNEP Evaluation Office. The budget allocated for both the MTR and TE was US$ 20,000.00. No budget details for activities in Workplan and Monitoring Plan were included therein.

211. Aside from gaps in coverage across all outcomes and outputs, the Monitoring Plan is sufficiently detailed and includes operational details, such as the methods of data collection. The frequency of data collection is biannual, which aligns with the Monitoring Plan indicators set in the project results framework. This setup is aligned with the UNEP organization-wide monitoring design and architecture, as the UNEP PIMS reporting system ensures six monthly reporting, effectively tracking the project implementation and deviations from planned progress to a certain level. Nowhere in the project results framework or Monitoring Plan table is there a requirement for monthly monitoring, making the monthly reporting introduced during implementation an artificial exercise and inconsistent with its design.

212. The Monitoring Plan is managed at the UNEP Science Division/Regional Office level and lacks sufficient engagement from partners, participating countries, and academic organisations that were engaged in implementation. This deficiency in collaboration could have made measuring project progress challenging, but the reporting was extensive and detailed allowing both the project management team and Regional Offices to draw from these to consolidate results. The Monitoring Plan does include timelines for achieving and monitoring the indicators as part of the targets but were not updated at Revision 1. The timelines for achieving milestones are specified in the project's Logical Framework.

Rating for Monitoring Design and Budgeting: **Moderately Unsatisfactory**

5.7.2 Monitoring of Project Implementation

213. The UNEP Science Division had the main responsibility for carrying out monitoring against the outcome and output level targets, in close consultation with UNEP Regional Office and GEMS/Water staff. The evaluators have noted that the project management team at UNEP HQ was quite lean, consisting of a Project Manager, Project Management Associate and Fund Management Officer. However, based on the decentralized delivery model adopted by the Project, there was sufficient time and bandwidth to dedicate to monitoring and gleaning progress against indicator targets from the regional reports. Besides the monthly and/or bi-annual reports which the UNEP Science Division is supposed to receive from the Regional Offices and GEMS/Water, no other form of monitoring was established.

214. The initial project implementation structure planned to have regular oversight and guidance by the Subprogramme Coordinator, as the first line of defence to ensure coherence, coordination in monitoring and reporting of projects within the subprogramme, and via the Project Steering Committee (PSC) on an intermittent basis. In practice however, a formal PSC was not established, and periodic Science Division-Regional Teams calls were used to assess progress, troubleshoot and triage as necessary. These calls were informal in nature and minutes were not documented or shared with the evaluators.

215. Despite shortcomings with the Monitoring Plan and Budget at design, noted in the section above, the project management team did a solid job on working consultatively with UNEP Regional Office and GEMS/Water staff to stay focused on ensuring that activities and deliverables were rolling up to their corresponding targets in the Project's Logical Framework. The explanations in the semi-annual reports on progress against the outcome and output level

indicators are detailed. The indicators associated with the results framework are deemed SMART. However, the evaluators observed that the baseline values may not have been carefully estimated from the outset. For example, the baselines of several indicators at Revision No. 1 were reduced to "0" such as: (i) the number of countries or regions for which a needs and readiness assessment is available; and (ii) the number of countries/regional entities that are submitting quality assured data to the relaunched GEMStat database, including SDG indicator 6.3.2 reporting. Furthermore, the evaluators found that the bar could have been set higher and targets were not ambitious enough (especially in the context of 50+ target countries and over 22 institutional partners engaged across 5 regions); this sentiment was corroborated by the PRC in its review of Revision No. 1.

"PRODUCING OUR PROGRESS REPORTS EVERY SIX MONTHS WAS RELATIVELY EASY AS WE WERE REPORTING TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON SEIS II AT A MUCH MORE GRANULAR LEVEL OF DETAIL."

"THE CLOSE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE PROJECT REPORTING AND REPORTING TO DONORS WERE COMPLETELY SYNCHRONIZED AND SAVED US A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT."

"MONTHLY REPORTING WAS INTRODUCED AS A REQUIREMENT BY HQ, BUT PROVED TO BE A LOW-VALUE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR THE PROJECT BECAUSE WE HAD TO IDENTIFY ARTIFICIAL MONTHLY MILESTONES IN PIMS WHICH DID NOT REFLECT ACTUAL PROGRESS IN THE REGIONS TO SATISFY MONTHLY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS."

"WE COMPLIED WITH MONTHLY REPORTING BECAUSE WE HAD TO AND NOT BECAUSE IT WAS USEFUL TO US."

- INTERVIEWEE STATEMENTS RELEVANT TO REPORTING

216. The planned MTR was carried out in-house from January to November 2021, with a delay of around one year when considering the original 48-month Project duration prior to the initiation of the revision. This delay of MTR caused by COVID-19 did not negatively disrupt project monitoring.

217. Although not a formal evaluation mechanism, the PRC review conducted alongside the finalization of the internal MTR was notably thorough, bordering on excessive for a project already three years into implementation. The scrutiny applied resembled that of a new project still in the design phase rather than a recalibration for a revision, resulting in extensive back-and-forth communication between the project management team and the PRC, which occasionally created friction. Interviewees noted that the level of detail requested during the review was unexpected, with one stating, "*The scrutiny was as intense as if we were designing a brand-new project.*" However, this rigorous review process also pushed the project to be more ambitious with its targets and helped refine its strategic direction. Together, the internal MTR and the PRC review provided valuable external perspectives that contributed to critical course corrections, ultimately strengthening the project's alignment with UNEP's evolving priorities and enhancing its overall effectiveness.

Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation: **Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Moderately Satisfactory)**

5.7.3 Project Reporting

218. The Project's reporting consisted of: (i) a final report documenting its PPP phase; (ii) semi-annual reporting every six months; (iii) monthly reporting (introduced in April 2021 until April 2023); (iv) PIMS / IPMR reporting; and (v) an operational closure report. The evaluators found that, generally, there was a robust reporting framework in place and the Project managed to create a highly participatory and consultative environment through its reporting process.

219. The project's semi-annual reporting cadence was rigorous and highly detailed, ensuring that project progress, challenges, and achievements were systematically documented and communicated. Interviewees noted that the detailed reports provided an in-depth view of the project's implementation status, including financial updates, outputs achieved, and adjustments made to align with evolving priorities. One project team member highlighted that the detailed reporting process was crucial for maintaining transparency and accountability, stating that "*the level of scrutiny and documentation required was higher than in other projects, but it helped keep everyone aligned and focused on targets.*" The reports not only tracked the implementation against planned activities but also captured lessons learned and areas needing attention, which were instrumental in guiding ongoing and future project decisions. This meticulous approach to semi-annual reporting ensured that stakeholders were well-informed and that the project could quickly adapt to any emerging issues or opportunities. Implementing partners were responsible for sending their country-level reports to their respective UNEP Regional Office and to the UNEP Science Division for consolidation, as per their respective Agreements. This oversight and reporting system was well organized to gather important data regarding project progress, key achievements and incremental milestones. It played a significant role in confirming the project's alignment with anticipated results and in implementing adjustments when needed. The evaluators have noted that for one reporting period—July to December 2020—the semi-annual report was missing due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

220. The introduction of monthly reporting in April 2021 by UNEP HQ aimed to enhance oversight and responsiveness but proved less effective due to the nature of project tasks, which often required more than a month to initiate and complete. As noted by one interviewee, "*monthly updates often felt repetitive because many activities were still in progress, and there wasn't enough time to see tangible results between reports*." This resulted in reports that frequently highlighted ongoing efforts without showing significant outcomes. Despite these challenges, the project management team remained highly supportive, with one participant emphasizing that "*communication with the coordinating body was efficient and prompt, making it easier to address any arising issues quickly*". Monthly reporting also proved to be somewhat of an administrative burden with the project team having to identify artificial milestones for inclusion in the PIMS reporting system that did not match or align to incremental semi-annual milestones in the Project's Logical Framework. The evaluators noted gaps in monthly reporting with at least four reports missing between April 2021 to April 2023.

221. The operational closure report was of high quality, providing a comprehensive and succinct retrospective of the project's achievements. It effectively highlighted the key outcomes and successes of the project, clearly outlining how initial objectives were met or exceeded. The report stands out for its clarity and organization, making it easy to follow the trajectory of the project from inception to completion. It offered a balanced view of the project's impact, showcasing detailed insights into the various components and demonstrating the overall value of the project in enhancing environmental information management. This thorough and well-structured approach helped underscore the project's significant contributions and lessons learned, solidifying its legacy within UNEP's portfolio and contributions to the subprogramme.

222. PIMS reporting was carried out over six months as required by UNEP. No report abstracted from the UNEP's new IPMR system was provided for the evaluators. Reporting to donors was, for the most part, carried out on an annual basis and leveraged material already produced by the Project. Financial reports were also provided to the donors on an annual basis and the Project is currently undergoing financial closure with the final financial closure report expected no later than 12 months following operational closure (by December 2024). Overall, the TE acknowledges that reporting was conducted as planned and required; however, there is some potential for streamlining the quality of project reporting as there is an overload of

information therein, with poor traceability and follow-up between action items across reporting.

Rating for Project Reporting: **Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Satisfactory)**

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Highly Satisfactory (EOU rating: Moderately Satisfactory)

5.8 Sustainability

223. The project closure report outlines a brief transition strategy as a key measure to maintain the lasting impact and influence of the capabilities put into practice at both country and regional levels. This strategy encompasses crucial components such as defining roles and responsibilities, enhancing capacity, managing the transfer period, overseeing progress, establishing a communication plan, and producing documentation to preserve the project's legacy. Provided below is an overview of the main pillars of the transition strategy.

- A phased handing over period allows a gradual transfer of responsibilities, with ongoing monitoring ensuring the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, capacity building, and understanding project intricacies. A transparent communication strategy includes regular updates and interactive sessions.
- Training programs for capacity building are in line with UNEP's goals, enabling stakeholders to sustain project efforts effectively and efficiently. Detailed materials like manuals and reports act as lasting resources, conforming to technical standards on waste management.
- Stakeholders, from governmental bodies to local communities, have well-defined roles for a smooth transition. The plan fosters long-term engagement with stakeholders beyond the transition, cultivating partnerships and collaborations, with a focus on empowering local communities. Adaptable strategies address emerging environmental challenges, ensuring the project's lasting impact.
- Results handed over include national state of environment reports, copyrights, environmental platforms, environmental information systems, while regional outlooks become a reference for stakeholders collaborating with UNEP.
- Successful collaborations serve as a foundation for future partnerships. Adaptable strategies acknowledge the dynamic nature of environmental challenges, allowing stakeholders to respond effectively and ensuring a cohesive and integrated approach to environmental capacity development, aligning with UNEP's technical expertise and guidelines, and contributing to the outcome sustainability.

224. The transition strategy has been approached in a manner that includes socio-political, financial and institutional sustainability.

5.8.1 Socio-political Sustainability

225. From a combination of interviews and document reviews, the evaluators determined that the sustainability of project outcomes has a moderate degree of dependency on social/political factors. The ongoing commitment from numerous stakeholders and partners that were integral to the success of the project will be required to help ensure its ongoing sustainment and adaptability to evolving environmental landscapes. Ongoing commitment from the government bodies related to the Ministry of the Environment and other relevant ministries and technical agencies are required to ensure human resource capacity and funding is in place to support ongoing collection and creation of key country level environmental reports and knowledge sharing, education and public awareness activities. Technical expertise and funding will also be required to maintain currency of the digital

solutions that have been developed to support capacity building and environmental information management.

226. In considering the wide range of regions and countries involved in the project, data from interviews suggests that the country-led, collaborative methodology has secured stakeholder engagement. However, the degree of government buy-in at senior levels seems to be uneven across different countries. Such variations in engagement, given the differing capacities among these countries, are expected, but they will need to be monitored to ensure continued support in those nations where commitment may not be at the adequate level. Furthermore, the evaluators found that the convening function of UNEP, especially at its regional offices, and the high-level of subject-matter expertise of the management team were a galvanizing force to bring efforts together and to work through thorny political issues. In the absence of this condition, it is difficult to gauge whether socio-political sustainability will endure.

227. At the operational level, the results of the project are mainstreamed in the ongoing work-related responsibilities of the stakeholders involved. Data collection and reporting mechanisms exist within each institution involved in the project.

Rating for Socio-political Sustainability: **Moderately Likely**

5.8.2 Financial Sustainability

228. The project's long-term financial planning included provisions for sustainability by planning for future phases and allocating any remaining funds to follow-up initiatives. This proactive approach ensured effective management of financial resources over time, exemplified by ongoing funding from the European Commission to sustain project outcomes. Additionally, a new project has been launched to build on and enhance the functionalities established in the current phase, underscoring a continued commitment to capacity development and environmental information management.

229. Beyond donor commitments, the financial sustainability of the project's outcomes is reinforced by the fact that several governments are independently developing spinoff projects funded through national budgets. This development is a testament to the project's value proposition and signals a high level of local investment in sustaining and scaling these initiatives. By integrating project outcomes into their national agendas and funding streams, governments demonstrate both confidence in the project's benefits and a strong likelihood that these initiatives will endure independently, further embedding environmental information management practices at the national level.

Rating for Financial Sustainability: **Likely**

5.8.3 Institutional Sustainability

230. The project's impact on institutional frameworks and governance indicates a positive outlook for sustainability. The integration of the project design and execution model across the UNEP Science Division and its partners, government bodies across the regions and countries, particularly those related to the Ministry of the Environment and the collaborations with public and private research institutions and academia help to ensure a solid foundation for sustaining the project from an institutional perspective. The project established strong working relationships and aligned with the priorities of the European Commission. This partnership is expected to persist into the future, offering robust support for the project's sustainability.

231. Institutional sustainability for the project's activities is secured by the capabilities developed during the project's execution, the application of education and awareness campaigns, and the establishment of policy and institutional frameworks within the projects delivery approach and transition plan. There is a potential risk - albeit unavoidable - with maintaining capacities at the institutional level, highlighted by staff turnover in some governments (i.e., Peru and Vietnam, among others). This has prompted a future effort to focus on institutional-based capacity building, such as creating a capacity building manual and to institutionalize training modules to ensure new staff can seamlessly integrate into implementation.

Rating for Institutional Sustainability: **Likely**

Rating for Sustainability (Likelihood): Moderately Likely

5.9 Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

5.9.1 Preparation and Readiness

232. Recognizing the extensive and varied aspects of capacity building and enhancing environmental information management, UNEP approved a 12-month project preparation proposal phase in 2017. This phase aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the national and regional contexts, which would precede the formulation of a complete project proposal. The primary objectives of this preparation phase were to:

- Map existing information networks and collaborators in each of the regions as the foundation of national and regional environmental information networks, including South-South Cooperation opportunities.
- Identify the most effective regional networking modalities in each region and establish an effective response mechanism to countries. The latter would not be limited to the provision of UNEP technical assistance but also consider South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Kuwait served as pilot of this approach to identify capacity gaps and support countries in evidence-based planning and reporting for amongst others multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
- Develop a flexible mechanism to be able to respond to country requests for capacity development in environmental information networking and reporting, and piloted in Kuwait.
- Integrate the experiences gained in: (i) 20 countries under the European Commission funded work on SEIS; (ii) lessons from the existing Africa Environmental Information Network; and (iii) experiences from the GEMS/Water initiative, into the full project document.
- Establish regional baselines with regard to existing networks, key stakeholders, potential partners and country priorities.
- Identify environmental, economic and social safeguards, as well as gender-responsive considerations needed in the full project.
- To flush out the workplan and budget for funding secured for this project.
- Trigger the development a full project proposal with an original six regional components.

233. While there was no formal inception workshop to kick-off the Project, the following steps were taken by the project team to establish and mobilise the project across stakeholders, partners and at the regional and country level in the final stages of project design and during the early initiation to ensure the Project started on the right footing:

- The project team collaborated with stakeholders, partners, and donors across national, regional, and sub-regional levels to develop and propose a comprehensive budget, which was later approved as part of the ProDoc. An FMO was appointed to oversee the financial management of the project, ensuring that the necessary governance and financial management processes were implemented and made operational.
- Through widespread consultation and cooperation with regions and countries, outcomes and outputs were identified and supported by a comprehensive set of target indicators. These indicators were employed to monitor and evaluate progress throughout the Project's duration. The outcome, outputs, and target indicators were included and approved in the ProDoc. These components provided the foundation for project monitoring and regular progress reporting.
- An extensive stakeholder analysis was conducted at the outset of the project, categorizing groups by their impact on the project's outcomes and outputs. This analysis allowed the project team to optimize their work by aligning their efforts with the specific needs of each stakeholder group. This information was included in the ProDoc.
- Gender and Environmental and Social Safeguards sessions were held in each region to ensure readiness prior to the start of the Project.

234. The Project undertook the necessary due diligence to anticipate risks (Section 8 of the Project Document), undertook both a comprehensive Environmental, Social and Economic review and Safeguards Checklist resulting in a "low" risk in the screening results. Similarly, gender readiness workshops were undertaken alongside a Gender Marker Self-Assessment to identify and integrate practical actions around gender in corresponding activities (pp. 27-28 and Annex G).

235. The project team was assembled with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each leadership role within the project. Project governance was instituted at every level of the project organization, from individual countries to regions, and up to UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. An informal PSC (as envisioned in the Project Document) was established within the project's governance structure; however, this committee functioned as monthly meetings where updates on project progress, financials, risks, and issues were provided and managed. In line with governance practices, the Deputy Director, UNEP Science Division reviewed and approved the project progress reports and both the Project Manager or Deputy Director escalated as necessary.

236. Regional and country implementation teams were for the most part already in place, and when they were not, were assigned and mobilized in a timely manner to meet delivery timeframes.

237. Proof of secured funds were included in the Project Document (Annex B) and a range of legal agreements were also included in the Project Document (Annex F), identified and put in place to operationalize funding arrangements through different modalities—these included UN2UN, MOUs, SFAs and SSFAs between appropriate partners, agencies and various councils.

238. No evidence was found regarding lack of preparedness and readiness to start project implementation.

Rating for Preparation and Readiness: **Satisfactory**

5.9.2 Quality of Project Management and Supervision

239. The project was managed by a dedicated team based at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, supported by regional and country-level project managers accountable for delivering outputs within their respective areas. In most regions, the management team included both a political focal point, responsible for liaising with governments and ensuring that national priorities were integrated into project agreements, and a technical focal point, who oversaw day-to-day operations and reporting. This structure allowed the project to remain responsive to country-specific needs, ensuring that local conditions and priorities were appropriately addressed in Memoranda of Understanding and contractual agreements.

240. UNEP's oversight of the project included a comprehensive monitoring plan embedded in the ProDoc, which established detailed metrics and data collection schedules to facilitate regular project supervision. The project management team adhered to UNEP's procedures, conducting frequent monitoring activities to track progress, review donor commitments, and ensure financial accountability through coordinated financial reviews led by the Division Director and Fund Management Officer. These reviews and ongoing progress assessments helped maintain a steady focus on project targets, with adaptive adjustments made when necessary to refine the approach based on lessons learned during implementation. An interviewee highlighted that "*the financial reviews and adjustments were essential in ensuring we stayed on track, even when faced with evolving challenges.*" The Project used adaptive management practices by adjusting reporting requirements when required and keeping communication channels open across the regional and country implementation teams to tackle challenges and ensure ongoing progress. It also internalized the importance of an MTR and proceeded to organize one in-house to aid in course-correction. The project management team sought to reorient the Project to UNEP's updated MTS 2022-2025, ensured alignment with emerging digital transformation priorities and accommodated many comments from the PRC review during the Revision No. 1 process, even if meant diverting attention and resources away from execution.

"THE PROJECT WAS CHARACTERIZED BY A HIGH DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY AND DEEP TRUST BETWEEN UNEP HQ STAFF AND THOSE AT UNEP REGIONAL OFFICES."

"WE REALLY APPRECIATED THAT HQ STAFF RECOGNIZED US AS SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTS AND LET US GO ABOUT IMPLEMENTING OUR ACTIVITIES IN THE WAY WE KNEW HOW WITH LITTLE INTERFERENCE."

"IT WOULD BE HARD TO FIND ANOTHER PROJECT THAT WAS MORE BOTTOM-UP AND NEEDS-DRIVEN THAN THE 716.1 CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT."

- INTERVIEWEE STATEMENT RELEVANT TO QUALITY OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

241. The management approach was marked by adaptive practices, particularly in responding to the evolving needs of regional teams and the constraints they faced. For example, the project adapted its reporting requirements as needed, recognizing that standard reporting intervals did not always align with the realities of implementation timelines. One regional manager noted, "*We were able to adjust our reports to better reflect what was actually happening on the ground, rather than sticking to a rigid schedule that didn't capture our progress.*" Open communication channels across regions and countries were maintained to address challenges quickly and to facilitate ongoing collaboration among all project partners, demonstrating a strong commitment to problem-solving and flexibility in execution. Mobility restrictions during the pandemic hindered the ability to conduct verification missions and trainings but the Project pivoted quickly to a virtual environment and then to a hybrid one when COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were eased. Flexibility should not be equated here with complacency. The evaluators have cross-referenced that on at least three occasions escalations were made when needed to course correct when country partners fell behind, were delayed in signing contractual agreements or did not deliver as scheduled.

242. The absence of a formal Project Steering Committee resulted in some key decisions being made on an informal basis, often without formal documentation or minutes. Considering the project's long-term transformational vision, its incremental approach, and its alignment with all Science-Policy subprogramme indicators, a more structured steering process would have better aligned with good practice. An interviewee reflected, "The absence of formal structures didn't hinder our progress; if anything, it allowed us to be more agile." Overall, the UNEP team provided strong leadership and technical support, ensuring that the project adapted to changing contexts and continued to deliver impactful results across multiple regions. However, despite these gaps, the existing informal arrangement was sufficient for this project iteration.

5.9.2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:

243. The Implementing Agency was the UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division (Science Division at project approval). The Science Division was overall accountable for the delivery of the outcomes and outputs within the required timeframes and budget.

244. The Science Division established the overarching project structure, framework, governance and leadership oversight requirements in collaboration with regional and country level leadership. The ongoing reporting and management of the project was a collective and collaborative effort across UNEP, UNCTs, and regional implementation teams.

245. During the project a major change was made to the management of the project when UNEP overall, transitioned from a centralized delivery model to a decentralized model and this project transitioned to align to the overall UNEP model. The direct accountability for the delivery of the project shifted to regional and country implementation teams with UNEP Science Division providing overall oversight to the project. While this transition changed the nature of the work individual people and their role performed, the environment of collaboration and commitment between UNEP HQ project team and the regional and country teams remained intact which was one of the key contributors to this successful project.

Rating for UNEP/Implementing Agency: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.9.2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:

246. The quality of the Partner/Executing Agency was marked by the effective collaboration and coordination of a vast network of over 100 executing partners, including national governments, academic institutions, a range of UN agencies, and regional stakeholders. Despite the complexity of managing such a diverse group, the project effectively harnessed the strengths and local expertise of each partner to achieve its outputs. One interviewee noted, "*The success of this project hinged on our ability to tap into the local knowledge and networks of our executing partners, who were instrumental in driving country-level activities.*" This collaborative approach ensured that country-specific needs were met, allowing the project to adapt swiftly to on-ground

IN PERU, THE PROJECT'S COLLABORATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMA WAS CRUCIAL, ESPECIALLY AMID A POLITICALLY VOLATILE PERIOD THAT SAW MULTIPLE CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP. DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES, THE PROJECT SUCCESSFULLY SUPPORTED THE PRODUCTION OF KEY OUTPUTS, INCLUDING A COMPREHENSIVE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT AND TWO SPINOFF PUBLICATIONS FOCUSED ON AIR AND WATER QUALITY. THESE OUTPUTS WERE CRITICAL IN PROVIDING UPDATED ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION THAT HAD NOT BEEN REPORTED SINCE 2014 AND INCLUDED HIGHLY VISUAL SUMMARIES DESIGNED TO INFORM POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING AT BOTH NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS. THE PROJECT'S EFFORTS ALSO EXTENDED TO TRAINING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ACROSS 17 AFFILIATED AGENCIES, ENHANCING THEIR CAPACITY TO USE ENVIRONMENTAL DATA IN GOVERNANCE.

- CASE STUDY: PERU

realities and maintain high levels of engagement. The executing partners' dedication and responsiveness were critical in navigating challenges, implementing project activities efficiently, and ultimately contributing to the broader objectives of enhancing environmental data management and reporting across multiple regions.

Rating for Partner/Executing Agency: **Satisfactory**

Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision: **Highly Satisfactory**

IN BELIZE, THE PROJECT COLLABORATED WITH THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND THE UNIVERSITY OF BELIZE TO BUILD NATIONAL CAPACITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL DATA MANAGEMENT. A SIGNIFICANT OUTCOME WAS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVED HOW ENVIRONMENTAL DATA IS STORED AND ACCESSED, ENABLING BELIZE TO ACCURATELY REPORT ON SDG 6.3.2 RELATED TO WATER QUALITY. THE COLLABORATION ALSO INVOLVED PRODUCING A STATE OF ENVIRONMENT REPORT TAILORED TO LOCAL NEEDS, LEVERAGING THE GEO FRAMEWORK TO PROJECT FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL SCENARIOS AND IDENTIFY DATA GAPS CRITICAL TO PRESERVING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES. THIS PARTNERSHIP NOT ONLY STRENGTHENED BELIZE'S ABILITY TO MONITOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS BUT ALSO ESTABLISHED A FOUNDATIONAL DATA INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WILL SUPPORT CONTINUED ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE EFFORTS IN THE FUTURE.

- CASE STUDY: BELIZE

IN UZBEKISTAN, THE PROJECT WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE TO PRODUCE THE NATIONAL STATE OF ENVIRONMENT REPORT, MARKING A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT AS THE FIRST STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT IN 13 YEARS. THE PROJECT FACILITATED COLLABORATION BETWEEN NATIONAL EXPERTS ACROSS FIELDS LIKE WASTE MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE, ENHANCING METHODOLOGIES AND TRANSPARENCY IN ENVIRONMENTAL DATA SHARING. THIS COOPERATION HELPED UZBEKISTAN TRANSITION TOWARDS A MORE OPEN POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL DATA, IMPROVING THE CAPACITY OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS AND INFORMING GOVERNMENT DECISIONS. THIS LEVEL OF COOPERATION WOULD HAVE BEEN UNHEARD OF 20 YEARS AGO.

- CASE STUDY: UZBEKISTAN

5.9.3 Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

247. Not only did the evaluators uncover evidence of strong stakeholder engagement and cooperation during both the PPP and project formulation phase, but this also carried over to the delivery of project activities during the implementation phase. Throughout implementation, stakeholders played an active role, frequently engaging with the project management team to adjust the scope of activities to better align with their interests and national priorities. One interviewee highlighted that "*countries and regional partners were not just passive participants; they were vocal about what they needed and constantly shaped the project's trajectory,*" demonstrating a dynamic and responsive approach to stakeholder cooperation.

248. The active participation of stakeholders was particularly notable at the country level, where ministries, national statistics offices, and regional bodies frequently provided input that influenced the adaptation and refinement of project activities. This ongoing dialogue allowed the project to remain relevant and responsive to local needs, fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders. For example, requests from specific countries to focus on certain thematic areas, such as water quality or environmental data digitization, were accommodated, enhancing the project's impact and alignment with national priorities. This collaborative approach ensured that the project's outputs were not only technically sound but also practically applicable to the policy-making processes in each participating country.

249. Cooperation was further strengthened through the project's network of executing partners, which included over 100 entities across various sectors and regions. The project's ability to mobilize such a diverse group of stakeholders and maintain effective communication channels was a key factor in its success. Regular stakeholder meetings, workshops, and training sessions provided platforms for exchanging knowledge, addressing challenges, and refining project activities. One stakeholder noted, "The workshops were crucial for us; they provided not just technical training but also an opportunity to connect with others facing

similar challenges." This facilitated cross-learning and helped build a robust community of practice around environmental data management and reporting.

250. Overall, the project's emphasis on stakeholder participation and cooperation was instrumental in its successful execution. By actively engaging stakeholders in the delivery of activities and adapting to their feedback, the project was able to remain relevant and impactful, aligning closely with the evolving needs and priorities of its diverse partners. This collaborative spirit was a hallmark of the project's approach, reinforcing its capacity to drive meaningful change in environmental governance and data management across multiple regions.

251. After the COVID-19 pandemic, most of public sensitization events, trainings and campaigns took place online. This allowed the project to reach out a larger audience and helped increase the participation in campaigns and events.

Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.9.4 Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

252. The Project design considered gender equality, but coverage of the needs of vulnerable groups was rather limited (this was more a function of the Project's scope than a shortcoming). The ProDoc included a complementary activity through facilitated workshops aimed at promoting gender balance in investment and lending decision-making processes, but beyond ensuring balanced gender participation in activities and collecting gender-disaggregated data for indicators, there was little evidence of specific, consequential actions addressing gender issues. Notably, the ProDoc lacked explicit references to indigenous people and made no specific provisions for engaging or considering the unique needs of these communities. Similarly, there were no references to poverty or to the poor, reflecting the project's limited scope in integrating marginalized and vulnerable groups. While interviewees from both genders did not report any gender-related issues, and no evidence of gender bias was found in the project's implementation or the evaluation process, the overall approach to gender and vulnerable groups remained neutral, but nonetheless met expectations.

Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.9.5 Environmental and Social Safeguards

253. The project document includes the 'Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note,' which assessed the project as low risk, reflecting minimal anticipated adverse environmental or social impacts. According to the project management team, the project's activities were largely focused on data management, capacity building, and reporting, which inherently posed low environmental and social risks. The project's safeguards were deemed sufficient given its scope, with no significant negative impacts reported or observed during implementation, confirming that the risk assessment and management strategies were appropriate and effectively aligned with UNEP's environmental and social safeguards framework.

Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards: **Highly Satisfactory**

5.9.6 Country Ownership and Driven-ness Ready for Review

254. From the outset, the project was structured to align its outcomes and outputs with the highest priority needs of the regions and countries involved. Moreover, the responsibility for executing the project was entrusted to the regions and countries. This strategy cultivated ownership and dedication at the country level, which help to ensure solutions were customised and appropriately scaled to each country's capacity, while also being sustainable within their capabilities.

255. At the country level, small project teams were responsible for driving the delivery and implementation of solutions that achieved the project's overall outcomes and objectives. The dedication and persistence of local country teams enabled them to overcome implementation hurdles and obstacles to meet project deadlines. The interviews with project team members revealed that some country teams exceeded their project plans and deliverables by providing additional capabilities that advanced their countries in capacity building and environmental information management.

256. The success of the project was intricately tied to the collaborative efforts with various stakeholders. The primary partners included governments across different regions, with a focus on Ministries of Environment, as well as other relevant ministries and technical agencies. Additionally, partnerships with public and private research centres, UN technical agencies, international organizations, regional banks, non-governmental organizations, and media outlets played a crucial role in shaping the project's outcomes. Given the varying levels of proficiency among the numerous countries participating in the project, these stakeholders supported and enabled the local country implementation teams to deliver to the overall project expectations.

257. UNEP's strategy for the project was highly collaborative, fostering an environment that welcomed and responded to requests from countries and regions. By actively involving UNCTs, the project strengthened national initiatives across several cross-cutting programs and priorities of the UNEP.

Rating for Country Ownership and Driven-ness: **Satisfactory**

5.9.7 Communication and Public Awareness

"I REALLY FELT LIKE I WAS CONNECTED TO THE BROADER PICTURE AND PART OF A GLOBAL PROJECT."

"THE REGIONAL OFFICE TEAM REALLY HELPED US NAVIGATE DIFFICULT COMMUNICATION ISSUES BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OUR ACADEMIC INSTITUTION. WE WOULD HAVE BEEN AT A STANDSTILL WITHOUT THEM."

- INTERVIEWEE STATEMENT RELEVANT TO COMMUNICATION

258. The project's internal communications were generally effective, with regular updates and open channels between UNEP headquarters, regional offices, and country-level teams. Coordination was facilitated by a decentralized structure where regional project managers and focal points maintained ongoing dialogues with local partners and stakeholders. This approach allowed the project to remain responsive to the evolving needs and challenges on the ground. However, some interviewees noted that the frequent back-and-forth on revisions and reporting requirements could have been streamlined to reduce administrative burden and improve efficiency. One interviewee highlighted, "Communication was fluid, but the volume of reports and revisions sometimes felt excessive," indicating a need for a more balanced approach.

259. External communications were similarly robust, focusing on engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, UN Country Teams, civil society, and regional organizations. The project used workshops, training sessions, and digital platforms to disseminate information and build capacity for environmental data management and reporting. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the project adapted by transitioning to virtual formats, ensuring continued stakeholder engagement. While the project succeeded in maintaining visibility and relevance across regions, there were opportunities to further enhance the coherence and alignment of messaging, particularly regarding the integration of digital transformation initiatives and aligning regional priorities with global environmental goals.

Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: **Highly Satisfactory**

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues: Highly Satisfactory

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

260. Despite some minor gaps in the project's intervention logic and results hierarchy, as well as challenges posed by political instability in certain countries, the project succeeded in establishing a robust foundation for environmental knowledge management and reporting. This foundation is vital for sustaining environmental data collection and analysis efforts. The project's success in addressing capacity gaps at the country level resulted in high-quality outputs, such as state of the environment reports, which significantly enhanced the science-policy interface. These achievements set the stage for further initiatives, including a successor project aimed at digitizing existing state of the environment reports, thereby extending the impact of the original project.

261. The project demonstrated strong adaptive management capabilities by effectively navigating the changes in UNEP's delivery model during implementation. Embracing a decentralized, bottom-up, needs-driven approach allowed the project to benefit from the unique strengths and experienced management within each region. This approach facilitated regional ownership and tailored interventions that were highly responsive to local needs. Additionally, the project managed the transition to new financial and project management systems despite the challenges of abrupt changes and initial poor rollout, ensuring smooth continuation of its activities.

262. **Strategic Question: What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect the project's performance?** The Project was inevitably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding, the project demonstrated resilience and adaptability in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted the face-to-face meetings and hands-on capacity-building activities central to its operations. The project management team quickly pivoted to virtual platforms, organizing online training sessions, meetings, and workshops to maintain progress and continuity. Although the initial shift to remote engagement slowed some activities, it also provided opportunities to innovate with digital content delivery and broaden the project's reach. The 18-month project extension further allowed a gradual return to in-person engagements, enabling the project to regain momentum and normalize operations. This flexibility in adopting a blended approach not only minimized disruptions but also likely enhanced the project's sustainability by integrating digital tools and methods into its ongoing work, ultimately helping achieve the intended outcomes and deliverables.

263. The PIMS ID: 02020 Capacity Building project engaged in various promotional activities to raise awareness and share its knowledge products and outcomes. However, maintaining project visibility and relevance requires continuous communication efforts. The accessible knowledge products and training courses developed through the project hold significant potential for further expansion to additional countries and regions. Leveraging ongoing UNEP initiatives, platforms, and partner projects could further enhance the project's sustainability and broaden its impact.

264. GEMS/Water remains the only UN initiative specifically supporting countries in reporting on SDG indicator 6.3.2. By collaborating closely with national water quality focal points, it has moved from strength to strength to consolidate a robust methodology for water quality data management and reporting. The GEMStat data platform has emerged as a global gateway for water quality information, consolidating efforts to make data accessible and comprehensive. Capacity-building courses, particularly those delivered in Sub-Saharan Africa, have been instrumental in establishing national water quality monitoring networks. Still, the

initiative's growth potential is hampered by a small but mighty team and financial resources, constraining its ability to further expand its impact.

265. **Strategic Question: In what ways, and to what extent, have the needs and interests of differentiated groups been considered in the implementation and monitoring of the project?** The Project demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity by addressing the needs of differentiated groups, including women and marginalized communities, in its design and implementation, particularly in capacity-building activities and environmental reporting processes. This was evident in the use of gender-disaggregated data and the promotion of inclusive participation in capacity-building activities. By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders from the outset, the project ensured that environmental decision-making processes were inclusive and representative. Furthermore, the project was closely aligned with parallel initiatives, avoiding any misalignment and fostering synergy among different efforts. However, while the project sought to be inclusive, the extent to which it effectively engaged other marginalized groups, such as indigenous populations or those living with disabilities, was less evident. The Project's alignment with national policies and the interests of local stakeholders ensured that activities were relevant to different contexts. Still, the lack of specific mechanisms targeting vulnerable communities and the absence of a dedicated focus on indigenous rights indicate areas for improvement. Overall, the project demonstrated a reasonable effort to consider differentiated needs, but there remains scope for deeper engagement with a broader range of marginalized groups in future interventions.

266. The Terminal Evaluation identified country ownership and political will as critical factors driving improvements in environmental data collection and reporting capacity. The project's success hinged on these elements, which were essential for supporting national environmental assessments.

267. The project also serves as a compelling case study on how strong project management, coupled with excellent rapport and collaboration with UNEP regional offices staffed with highly competent subject matter experts, can deliver and exceed project expectations, even with a relatively modest budget. By leveraging the expertise and local knowledge of regional teams, the project was able to navigate complex challenges, adapt to evolving needs, and implement cost-effective strategies that maximized impact across diverse geographies. This effective partnership and synergy between the central project management team and the regional offices not only ensured that the core objectives were met but also allowed the project to go beyond its initial scope, achieving higher-than-anticipated outcomes and setting a strong foundation for future initiatives.

268. **Strategic Question: In which ways did the project adapt to changes in the UNEP delivery model during project implementation?** During implementation, the Project adeptly adapted to changes in UNEP's delivery model, which emphasized a more centralized approach. By staying the course towards a regionally driven approach, the project successfully maintained a bottom-up, needs-driven model, allowing regional offices to take on more significant roles in managing work plans and budgets according to local needs and contexts. This approach empowered regional teams, leveraging their on-the-ground expertise to tailor interventions effectively and meet the specific demands of their respective regions. The project management team in Nairobi provided overarching coordination while allowing flexibility for regions to implement activities in a manner that best suited their unique circumstances. This adaptability not only maintained project relevance amidst changing internal dynamics but also enhanced the project's impact through strengthened regional ownership and more efficient decision-making processes.

269. Overall, the project demonstrated strong performance across all evaluation criteria, achieving its main outcomes and producing impactful outputs and results in each region and target country. The initiative is considered 'Highly Satisfactory' for its effective realization of objectives and substantial contributions to the global environmental agenda.

Table 21: Summary of Project Findings and Ratings[21]

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
Strategic Relevance		**HS**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**
1. Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and Strategic Priorities	The project aligns strongly with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-2025 and its Programmes of Work (POW) by enhancing environmental data collection, analysis, and reporting, thereby supporting UNEP's foundational Science-Policy subprogramme and Environmental Governance subprogramme. It responds directly to UNEP's mandate of keeping the global environment under review and strengthening the science-policy interface, particularly by helping countries monitor SDGs and providing technical support for environmental reporting and information management. Furthermore, the project contributes to UNEP's strategic priorities by fostering South-South cooperation, increasing the capacity of regional and national institutions for environmental monitoring, and enhancing UNEP's ability to engage with regional networks and partners to respond to government needs.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS

[21] Most criteria will be rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated, also on a six-point scale, from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU) and Nature of External Context is rated from Highly Favourable (HF) to Highly Unfavourable (HU).

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
2. Alignment to UNEP Donor/GEF/Partner strategic priorities	The project aligns with UNEP's strategic priorities outlined in several UNEA resolutions that emphasize the need for robust data management, knowledge sharing, and environmental reporting to support informed decision-making. It is also aligned with the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building, which focuses on capacity building in developing countries for environmental governance and data access. The project supported donor priorities such as Norway's emphasis on global environmental data management and the European Commission's initiatives like SEIS. It also aligned with UNDP's digital transformation priorities by enhancing digital infrastructure for environmental reporting and integrating technology into environmental management. This ensured a coordinated approach to advancing sustainable development goals and regional development plans, like Kuwait's Vision 2035.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
3. Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities	The project demonstrated strong alignment with global, regional, sub-regional, and national environmental priorities. At the global level, it supports MEAs such as the CBD and UNFCCC, focusing on data-driven decision-making, capacity building, and cooperation. Regionally, it aligned with initiatives like Africa's Agenda 2063, Latin America and the Caribbean's Forum of Ministers of Environment Decisions, the Arab Regional Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, and SEIS principles in Europe, addressing region-specific environmental governance and capacity needs. Nationally, the project provided targeted support to countries for environmental reporting and monitoring, aligning with national priorities and the UNDAF frameworks to foster sustainable development.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
4. Complementarity with existing interventions/ Coherence	The project effectively complemented existing UNEP and UN initiatives by aligning with the One UNEP/One UN approach and collaborating with key partners like UNDP, UNESCO, and regional economic commissions. This integration supported comprehensive environmental capacity development, data management, and reporting, enhancing evidence-based decision-making at regional and national levels. The project aligned with UNEP's Science-Policy subprogramme and thematic areas such as climate action and pollution control, leveraging synergies with regional initiatives like SEIS II and UNECE projects. It also supported global efforts like GEMS/Water and the World Water Quality Alliance, enhancing global environmental data quality and accessibility. The project's alignment with the GEF-6 CCCD programme further addressed critical capacity needs for implementing MEAs.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
Quality of Project Design	The project's design was well-structured, incorporating a thorough problem statement, clear objectives, outcomes, outputs, and indicators, as well as a detailed implementation strategy that acted as a blueprint for flexible execution. Early consultations identified key gaps in environmental monitoring and data management, leading to a strong alignment with UNEP's guidelines and stakeholder needs. However, the design was weaker in articulating the Theory of Change, particularly regarding the clarity of impact pathways, assumptions, and risks.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
Nature of External Context	The project operated in a moderately favourable external context, with country-specific factors such as political instability and the global COVID-19 pandemic affecting implementation. While no major conflicts or natural disasters disrupted progress, the pandemic imposed significant mobility restrictions that hindered face-to-face capacity-building activities and regional coordination meetings. Despite these challenges, the project adapted by shifting to virtual formats, which helped maintain momentum, but the external context's unpredictability required continuous adaptation to ensure alignment with project objectives.	**MF**	The rating is validated.	MF
Effectiveness		**HS**	Following validation of the ratings of the sub criteria and applying the "Weightings Table for Evaluation Criteria Ratings" the EOU has validated the rating as "**Satisfactory".**	**S**
1. Availability of outputs	The project successfully delivered against outputs A, B, C and D, including state of environment reports, data-sharing platforms, and capacity-building workshops, not only exceeding the initial targets at original design but also more aggressive targets set at Revision No. 1. These outputs were produced across multiple regions and were tailored to address specific national and regional needs, demonstrating effective coordination and resource utilization.	**HS**	The EOU has validated the rating as "**Satisfactory"** on account of lack of concrete evidence to support achievement of targets for some indicators. The validated rating is in line with guidance contained in the UNEP Evaluation Office Evaluation Criteria Rating Matrix.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
2. Achievement of project outcomes	The project achieved its singular outcome by significantly enhancing countries' capacities for environmental data management, reporting, and decision-making. It strengthened the science-policy interface and supported countries in meeting their environmental reporting obligations under the SDGs and MEAs.	**HS**	The EOU has validated the rating as **Satisfactory** on account of lack of concrete evidence to support achievement of the targets for one of the two Outcome indicators [Number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development using improved information sharing arrangements at national level]. The evaluation report uses data from the results framework in the Project Completion Report which indicates 141 countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development using improved information sharing arrangements at national level. However, there is no concrete evidence in the 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports (which form Annex XVII of the Project Completion Report) to support the number of countries reported. This data is also missing in both PIMS and IPMR. The validated rating is in line with guidance contained in the UNEP Evaluation Office Evaluation Criteria Rating Matrix.	S
3. Likelihood of impact	The likelihood of achieving long-term impact is highly likely per the UNEP Evaluation Office tool, as the project laid strong foundations for sustained environmental monitoring and reporting practices. By embedding capacity-building and governance structures within national institutions and fostering regional cooperation, the project has created favourable conditions for ongoing improvements in environmental governance and informed policy-making.	**HL**	When the validated ratings for 'Availability of Outputs' and 'Achievement of Project Outcomes' are applied to the 'Likelihood of Impact Matrix' the rating changes to 'Likely'.	L

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
Financial Management		**HS**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**
1. Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures	The project adhered well to UNEP's financial policies and procedures, ensuring compliance in managing and disbursing funds across multiple regions and countries. All financial activities followed UNEP's standard operating guidelines, and there were no significant deviations reported during the project's lifecycle.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S
2. Completeness of project financial information	The project maintained comprehensive financial records, with regular financial reviews conducted to ensure transparency and accountability. Financial information was generally complete, although additional consultations during the draft evaluation report phase helped to clarify and improve the completeness of some financial data.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	There was effective and prompt communication between project management officers in the regions and finance management officer, which facilitated efficient budget management and helped address financial variances swiftly. There were few occasions where funds arrived late, but this was largely due to administrative delays required to follow financial protocol and UNEP's financial policies and procedures. This strong coordination was essential in managing budgets that were distributed across several regions and country delivery teams, ensuring smooth project implementation.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
Efficiency	The project was efficiently implemented, achieving and even exceeding its outcome and nearly all output targets within the allocated budget and timeframe, despite a revision. The leadership employed cost-effective approaches, leveraging lean implementation teams across multiple regions and countries. The project period extension from 48 to 66 months was strategically used to secure new funding, realign the project duration, and adapt to evolving UNEP priorities.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
Monitoring and Reporting		**S**	With adjustment of the ratings of the sub criteria and applying the "Weightings Table for Evaluation Criteria Ratings" the overall rating of the criterion is validated as "**Moderately Satisfactory".**	**MS**
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	The Project's Monitoring Plan included comprehensive details on baseline and target indicators, data sources, collection methods, frequency, and responsible parties but was not fully aligned with the logical framework and was missing outcome-level details and coverage for one of the four outputs. Monitoring responsibilities were shared between UNEP Science Division, Regional Offices, and the Global Programme Coordination Unit for GEMS/Water-related activities, with biannual reporting set up through the UNEP PIMS system. Although the plan lacked partner engagement and specific budget allocations for monitoring activities, the extensive and detailed reporting allowed effective consolidation of results and tracking of progress, even amid challenges such as COVID-19.	**MU**	The rating is validated.	MU
2. Monitoring of project implementation	The UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division was responsible for monitoring the project's outcomes and outputs, working closely with UNEP Regional Offices and GEMS/Water staff. The decentralized delivery model allowed the lean project management team to effectively track progress through regional reports, although no formal Project Steering Committee was established and periodic progress calls were informal without documented minutes. Despite initial shortcomings in the Monitoring Plan, the team maintained a strong focus on aligning activities and deliverables with the project's logical framework, while the mid-term review and rigorous PRC review helped refine targets and improve strategic alignment.	**HS**	The EOU has validated the rating as **Moderately Satisfactory** on account of project performance data on "availability of outputs" and "achievement of project outcomes" not having been monitored in a systematic manner and at the required level of detail or consistency. The validated rating is in line with guidance contained in the UNEP Evaluation Office Evaluation Criteria Rating Matrix.	MS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
3. Project reporting	The project's reporting framework was comprehensive, involving semi-annual, monthly, and PIMS/IPMR reports, as well as a final PPP phase report and an operational closure report. Semi-annual reporting was highly detailed and effective in tracking progress, challenges, and achievements, while the introduction of monthly reporting in 2021 was less effective due to the nature of project tasks and was often repetitive. The operational closure report was particularly well-regarded for its clarity and organization, providing a strong summary of the project's outcomes and contributions to UNEP's portfolio.	**HS**	The EOU has adjusted the rating to **Satisfactory** on account of data gaps in project reporting on "availability of outputs" and "achievement of project outcomes". Whereas reporting was regular and detailed there were challenges around attribution and work/ results from other interventions is reported. The validated rating is in line with guidance contained in the UNEP Evaluation Office Evaluation Criteria Rating Matrix.	S
Sustainability		**ML**	**The rating is validated.**	**ML**
1. Socio-political sustainability	The socio-political sustainability of the project's outcomes largely depends on the continued commitment of stakeholders, particularly government bodies, ministries, and technical agencies involved in environmental management. While the country-led, collaborative approach has generally secured stakeholder engagement, there is variation in the level of government buy-in across different countries, which could impact sustained support and effectiveness. The role of UNEP's regional offices and the expertise of the management team have been crucial in navigating political challenges, suggesting that continued UNEP involvement is vital for sustaining socio-political momentum.	**ML**	The rating is validated.	**ML**

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
2. Financial sustainability	The Project incorporated long-term financial planning strategies to ensure sustainability, including provisions for follow-up phases and effectively managing remaining funds to support future projects. Securing ongoing funding from the European Commission has further reinforced the project's financial sustainability, ensuring continued support for its outcomes. Additionally, a subsequent project is already in progress, building on the established foundations and demonstrating a commitment to continuous capacity development and environmental information management.	**L**	The rating is validated.	**L**
3. Institutional sustainability	The Project's design and execution model, which integrated UNEP's Early Warning and Assessment Division, regional offices, national government bodies, public and private research institutions, and academia, laid a strong foundation for institutional sustainability. The project successfully established robust working relationships and aligned with European Commission priorities, fostering a supportive environment for future sustainability efforts. However, challenges such as staff turnover in some countries indicate a need for institutional-based capacity building, including the development of manuals and institutionalized training modules to ensure continuity and capacity retention.	**L**	The rating is validated.	**L**
Factors Affecting Performance		**HS**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
1. Preparation and readiness	The Project demonstrated strong preparation and readiness by undertaking a 12-month preparation phase to understand the national and regional contexts, map existing information networks, and establish effective regional networking modalities. This phase also included identifying capacity gaps, piloting approaches (such as in Kuwait), integrating lessons from existing initiatives, and setting regional baselines to inform the full project proposal. The project team collaborated closely with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive budget, conducted stakeholder analyses, and ensured gender and environmental safeguards were in place, reflecting a robust foundation for project initiation and implementation. Additionally, financial management, governance practices, and readiness workshops were conducted to ensure effective project delivery.	**S**	The rating is validated.	**S**
2. Quality of project management and supervision		**HS**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	The UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division served as the Implementing Agency, overseeing the delivery of project outcomes and outputs within the required timeframes and budget. The Division set up the project structure, governance, and leadership oversight in collaboration with regional and country teams, fostering a collaborative approach to project management. During implementation, UNEP transitioned from a centralized to a decentralized delivery model, shifting accountability to regional and country teams while maintaining strong oversight and collaboration from the Science Division, which was key to the project's success.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	The Partner/Executing Agency demonstrated strong collaboration and coordination across a network of over 100 executing partners, including national governments, academic institutions, UN agencies, and regional stakeholders. The project effectively leveraged the local expertise and networks of these partners to achieve its outputs and respond to country-specific needs, ensuring adaptability to on-ground realities. This collaborative approach, characterized by high engagement and responsiveness from executing partners, was pivotal in efficiently implementing project activities and advancing environmental data management and reporting objectives across regions.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	The Project demonstrated very strong stakeholder participation and cooperation from its inception through its implementation phases. Stakeholders were highly engaged and played an active role in shaping project activities to align with national and regional priorities, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring the project's relevance. The project also leveraged a diverse network of over 100 executing partners across sectors and regions, facilitating effective communication, cross-learning, and collaboration, which were critical to its success. The shift to virtual platforms after the COVID-19 pandemic further expanded outreach and participation, enhancing the project's overall impact.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	The Project design included considerations for gender equality, primarily through workshops aimed at promoting gender balance in decision-making processes and ensuring balanced gender participation in activities, as well as collecting gender-disaggregated data. However, there was limited evidence of specific actions targeting vulnerable groups or indigenous communities, as the project's scope did not explicitly include these considerations. While no gender-related issues or biases were reported during the evaluation, the project's approach to human rights and gender equity remained neutral, meeting basic expectations without substantial focus on these areas.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
5. Environmental and social safeguards	The Project was assessed as low risk in its 'Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note,' given its focus on data management, capacity building, and reporting, which posed minimal environmental or social risks. The safeguards in place were appropriate for the project's scope, with no significant negative impacts reported, demonstrating effective alignment with UNEP's environmental and social safeguards framework.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	The Project was designed to align closely with the highest priority needs of participating regions and countries, fostering strong country ownership and commitment to its outcomes and outputs. Small, dedicated project teams at the country level were pivotal in driving the implementation of tailored solutions, overcoming obstacles, and often exceeding planned deliverables to enhance capacity building and environmental information management. The project's success was also bolstered by a collaborative approach involving diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, research centers, and international organizations, ensuring local implementation was well-supported and aligned with UNEP's strategic priorities.	**S**	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation	EOU Validated Rating
7. Communication and public awareness	Internal communications were effective, characterized by regular updates and open dialogue among UNEP headquarters, regional offices, and country-level teams. This decentralized approach facilitated responsiveness to local needs, though some stakeholders noted that the high volume of reporting and revisions could have been streamlined to enhance efficiency. Externally, the project maintained robust engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders through workshops, training sessions, and digital platforms, successfully adapting to virtual formats during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these efforts kept the project visible and relevant, there were opportunities to better align messaging on digital transformation initiatives and regional priorities with broader global environmental goals.	**HS**	The rating is validated.	HS
Overall Project Performance Rating		**HS**	Upon validation of the ratings of the criteria and sub criteria by EOU and applying the "Weightings Table for Evaluation Criteria Ratings" the overall rating of the project is validated as "**Satisfactory".**	**S**

6.2 Lessons learned

270. Recognizing that the project management team and regional offices have already distilled its own lessons about the project which have fed into its successor initiative, the evaluators nonetheless the following additional lessons as a result of the engagement that could be considered at a later juncture when the follow-up project undergoes its MTR and/or a revision.

Lesson Learned #1: A good design often leads to good implementation.	
Context/ comment:	The importance of a robust project design cannot be overstated. When a project is well-structured with clearly defined objectives, a logical framework, and a detailed implementation strategy, it is more likely to achieve successful outcomes. A strong design sets a solid foundation for all project activities, providing a roadmap that guides implementation, enhances stakeholder alignment, and facilitates the monitoring and evaluation of progress. As seen in this project, the meticulous design phase ensured that all components were interconnected, aligned with UNEP's strategic priorities, and responsive to the needs of the participating countries. This ultimately contributed to positive results and high levels of achievement against the project's objectives.

Lesson Learned #2: Readiness is paramount.	
Context/ comment:	The value of a comprehensive preparatory and readiness phase cannot be underestimated in project design and development. This phase ensures that all necessary conditions are met before the commencement of full-scale activities. It allows for the identification and mitigation of potential risks, the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities, and the engagement of key stakeholders. In this project, the absence of an initial inception meeting and a dedicated Project Steering Committee at the outset led to some gaps in coordination and communication. A preparatory phase would have enabled smoother start-up operations, aligning all parties more effectively and setting the stage for cohesive and efficient implementation.

Lesson Learned #3: Ensure needs-informed capacity development.	
Context/ comment:	A proper capacity gap analysis is crucial for informing targeted capacity development efforts. Understanding the specific needs and gaps of participating countries allows for more effective training, resource allocation, and support activities. The project's success in building capacity in environmental data management was largely due to its needs-based approach, which tailored interventions to the specific requirements of each region and country. This lesson highlights that a one-size-fits-all approach is less effective; instead, nuanced and localized strategies based on thorough needs assessments are key to achieving meaningful capacity building.

Lesson Learned #4:	**Support for data governance.**
Context/comment:	Environmental governance is heavily reliant on the availability, accessibility, and quality of data. For decision-makers to formulate sound policies, they need access to reliable and up-to-date environmental data and must have the skills to interpret this data effectively. The project underscored the importance of strengthening data governance frameworks to support environmental reporting and assessment processes. By fostering better data management practices and building the capacities of national and regional institutions, the project demonstrated how robust data governance can lead to more informed environmental decision-making and policy formulation.

Lesson Learned #5: Experienced management and subject-matter expertise.	
Context/ comment:	Having the right skill sets within the project management team is essential for successful implementation. Managers and staff should not only have strong leadership and coordination skills but also possess subject-matter expertise aligned with the project's thematic areas. The project benefited from seasoned professionals with deep knowledge of environmental data management and reporting, which greatly facilitated smooth project execution and problem-solving. This lesson emphasizes the need to recruit or assign staff with relevant experience and technical knowledge to ensure efficient project management and achievement of objectives.

Lesson Learned #6: Global data sets do not always align with local needs.	
Context/ comment:	While global datasets, such as those within UNEP Live or the World Environment Situation Room, provide valuable broad-scale information, they may not be immediately applicable or relevant to local and regional contexts. The project revealed that stakeholders often prefer data solutions tailored to their specific needs and conditions. For meaningful impact at the local level, data collection, transparency, and environmental reporting must reflect local realities and priorities. This lesson calls for a more localized approach to data management, ensuring that global initiatives are flexible enough to adapt to regional and national requirements.

Lesson Learned #7: Regions are best positioned to manage workplans and budgets according to local-level needs.	
Context/ comment:	The decentralized approach of allowing regional offices to manage workplans and budgets proved effective for this project. Regional teams are more attuned to local contexts, challenges, and stakeholder dynamics, making them well-suited to adapt project activities to meet specific needs. This flexibility enabled better alignment with local priorities and a more efficient use of resources, reinforcing the importance of regional autonomy in project management. This lesson suggests that similar projects would benefit from granting regional offices more control over implementation to enhance relevance and responsiveness to local conditions.

Lesson Learned #8: Flexibility is a necessary management mechanism when implementing a project.	
Context/ comment:	The decentralized approach of allowing regional offices to manage workplans and budgets proved effective for this project. Regional teams are more attuned to local contexts, challenges, and stakeholder dynamics, making them well-suited to adapt project activities to meet specific needs. This flexibility enabled better alignment with local priorities and a more efficient use of resources, reinforcing the importance of regional autonomy in project management. This lesson suggests that similar projects would benefit from granting regional offices more control over implementation to enhance relevance and responsiveness to local conditions.

Lesson Learned #9: Complex projects require governance and formal arrangements.	
Context/ comment:	Projects involving multiple divisions, regional offices, and a wide array of stakeholders are inherently complex and require structured governance mechanisms to ensure clarity, accountability, and coherence in implementation. The absence of a formal Project Steering Committee in this project highlighted the challenges that can arise when informal arrangements are relied upon to make significant decisions. Establishing formal agreements such as MoUs, UN-to-UN agreements, or other similar arrangements could provide a clearer framework for roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. This lesson emphasizes that proper governance structures are critical to managing the complexity and ensuring coordinated and efficient implementation across all involved parties.

Lesson Learned #10: Resource mobilization, if not well managed, can create unhealthy competition	
Context/ comment:	In some cases, Units in UNEP and within the same Division, compete with each other for unsecured financial resources. This can create an unhealthy dynamic and more should be done to protect a spirit of cooperation.

Lesson Learned #11: Multiple opportunities exist for learning beyond project evaluations	
Context/comment:	This area of work consists of incremental projects of similar scope and represents a case where transformation is a lengthy process. This would allow for lessons learned to be included in the design of successive project designs. It would be beneficial if there were a mechanism to allow for lessons to be learned in the later stages of implementation and in time to inform the design of a successive phase. It is noted that Terminal Evaluations, which are intended to assess, ex-post, the performance of projects, can only be launched a maximum of 3 months prior to project operational completion. The learning from evaluations can, therefore, only be incorporated in project inception periods of future projects or through adaptive management.

6.3 Recommendations

Recommendation #1:	For future projects aiming for long-term transformation, it is crucial to develop a clear roadmap and exit strategy well before the project's conclusion to ensure a smooth handover and transition of services. This recommendation emphasizes the need for a structured approach to project closure, where continuity of services and sustainability of outcomes are prioritized. By outlining the steps for transitioning responsibilities to local stakeholders or follow-up initiatives, the roadmap can help avoid service disruption and ensure that the benefits of the project are sustained beyond its lifespan.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	While transition was covered briefly in the operational report, there ought to be a stand-alone exit strategy that is the culmination of conversations, meetings and workshops to institutionalize the products and services coming out of the Project.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project Level
Responsibility:	UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division / Project Management Team
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Next 2-3 years to start at the same time the successor project completes its MTR.

271. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: Section 5.8 Sustainability

Recommendation #2:	Transforming environmental monitoring functions within a country is a complex, non-linear process, often entangled with political agendas and resistance to change. To address these challenges, it is recommended that such projects adopt a longer time horizon from the outset. This approach allows for greater flexibility to manage political dynamics, build trust, and incrementally achieve the desired transformation. A longer timeline would enable deeper capacity building, stronger stakeholder engagement, and more effective policy influence, enhancing the likelihood of achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Findings from evaluations at the global level have highlighted that mainstreaming and transformation projects require longer time horizons and one needs to factor in the difficult task of aligning on the vision of the project within national governments.
Priority Level:	Important for mainstreaming and transformation type projects

Type of Recommendation	Project Level
Responsibility:	UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division / Project Management Team for future designs
Proposed implementation time-frame:	At project design once the discussions on a follow up to the successor project commence.

272. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: Section 5.2 Quality of Project Design

Recommendation #3:	Although the project successfully established foundational elements for modern environmental monitoring systems, it is evident that more resources are needed to consolidate these achievements. For future projects, UNEP and its partners should consider focusing on fewer countries with a larger budget allocation per country. This strategy would better address specific capacity needs and allow for a more tailored, impactful approach to supporting national environmental monitoring and reporting systems, ensuring that the necessary infrastructure and capabilities are fully developed and maintained.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The available budget was not aligned to address the problem was trying to solve and could only skim the surface of what is needed at the national level. This was corroborated by multiple interviews.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project Level
Responsibility:	UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division / Project Management Team for future designs
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Next 4 years once the discussions on a follow up to the successor project commence.

273. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: Section 5.2 Quality of Project Design

Recommendation #4:	Many projects create knowledge repositories, databases, or technology platforms that can be costly to maintain and may quickly become obsolete after the project ends. Additionally, global datasets often lack the granularity needed for local-level environmental reporting. UNEP should undertake an enterprise-wide review of the utility and sustainability of new data platforms and technologies, with a focus on consolidating existing ones. This would prevent duplication of efforts, reduce costs, and ensure that platforms remain relevant and useful for end-users. In order to reduce costs, organizations — large and small — need to continuously improve the way they capture, share and deliver their intellectual capital across departments, units, sectors and functions, at headquarters and in the field. Such improvement does not happen systematically and everywhere across not only UNEP, but also the United Nations system as a whole. Some organizations still seem unable to extract themselves from costly functional silos and, instead, tolerate expensive duplications and reinventions of the wheel. The proliferation of uncoordinated or difficult to access repositories has often had a negative impact on staff's and decision makers' ability to find relevant content quickly as well as on the overall cost of content. The evaluators consider that data and knowledge management shifts the emphasis from the creation of vast repositories to the valorisation of tacit knowledge that may be lost when staff members leave an organization, either for personal reasons or due to retirement. The awareness and personal attitude of staff with regard to how

	knowledge is handled is crucial, irrespective of the existence of specifically designed knowledge management policies.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The evaluators have seen too many portals, platforms and data repositories spring up as part of a project and this is not sustainable or cost efficient from a data management and knowledge management perspective. This has also been corroborated by several interviews and the fact that global datasets are not useful to reporting on locally or regionally specific environmental issues.
Priority Level:	important
Type of Recommendation	Project Level
Responsibility:	UNEP wide
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Start conversations within the next 6 months at senior. management level on how streamline the number of portals and instil an organization-wide policy therein.

274. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: Section 5.8 Sustainability

Recommendation #5:	The UNEP Project Review Committee (PRC) should differentiate its level of scrutiny between new project designs and project revisions. Applying the same rigorous review process to both can be inefficient and unnecessarily consume financial and human resources that could be better spent on actual project delivery. Streamlining the review process for revisions would enhance efficiency and allow for more focused and effective project implementation.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The evaluators found that the review by PRC at Revision No. 1 was excessive and unrealistic for a project that had already been in implementation for three years. It approximated the level of scrutiny of a project undergoing design and diverted scarce resources away from delivery and created unnecessary friction. This was corroborated by at least three interviews. The issue was more linked to a habit of using consultants that did not know anything about the project and needed to earn their keep in the words of several interviewees.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for improvement
Type of Recommendation	UNEP wide
Responsibility:	Programme Coherence & Assurance Unit, Policy & Programme Division
Proposed implementation time-frame:	At UNEP's discretion to initiate next steps.

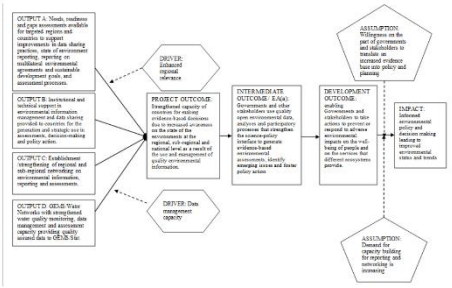
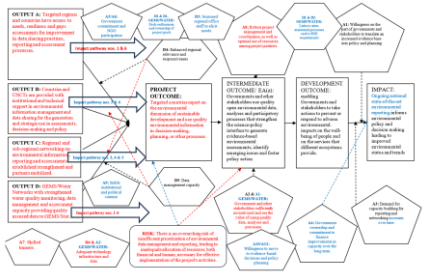
275. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: 3.5 Changes in design during implementation.

Recommendation #6:	The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit should reflect on its monitoring and reporting and seek technical advice from the Evaluation Office on ways to better capture effects such that they can be credibly associated with the defined project's efforts.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Project monitoring and reporting covered other interventions / projects and attributed results from other interventions to the evaluand. In some instances, there was a weak link between what was reported and the expected results.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project Level
Responsibility:	Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit
Proposed implementation time-frame:	6 months

276. Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions: 5.7.3 Project Reporting.

ANNEX I: RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Response to stakeholder comments received but not (fully) accepted by the evaluator(s), where appropriate

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
Table 9: Justification for reformulation of results statements	The re-formulated impact statement is similar to the outcome statement i.e. "targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development" would happen through the state of environment report mentioned in the re-formulated outcome statement. The impact statement should follow from the intermediate state statement i.e. what happens when governments and stakeholders use quality environmental data? The original ToC offers good pointers.	The evaluators disagree here. The original ToC does not offer good pointers because it wasn't even updated to reflect the updated wording of the Outputs and Outcome, and no updated ToC accompanied the revision documentation in December 2021. Per analysis at evaluation inception, it is quite basic and linear. Per figure 4, the evaluators have layered in a fair bit of nuance to strengthen it and include elements of best practice. **Original**  **VS. Reformulated** 	

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
		The Intermediate state is highlighted that "***Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action.***" See additional text in the row articulating the intermediate state and in para 104.	
Effectiveness	Please provide an analysis for the variance. Why were targets exceeded for most outputs (as summarised below). **Target Actual %** Indicator 1 70 101 144% Indicator 2 70 100 143% Indicator 3 3 34 1133% Indicator 4 20 41 205% Indicator 5 12 19 158% Indicator 6 6 36 600% Indicator 7 135 134 99% Indicator 8 220 431 196% Indicator 9 6 6 100% What explains the variance? Could it be that the targets set were unrealistic or not ambitious enough? A good place to	It was not within the evaluators' role to assess whether the outcomes and outputs set by the project team, HQ, regions, and countries were overly ambitious or unrealistic; these targets were established and approved by UNEP Leadership and other donors and stakeholders, and we accepted them as given. Our task was to evaluate the extent to which these targets were achieved, to the extent possible considering the methodology, tools and timeframe for the terminal evaluation. The evaluators reviewed three years of progress reports, interviewed the core project team, and conducted independent sampling in a few countries to validate the results, as well as spot checks within progress reports. Emphasis was also placed on the Operational Closure Report, signed off as the "official book of record" for achieved outcomes and outputs. Our goal was not to verify with 100% certainty that all 100+ countries met their specific targets; rather, we sampled and conducted a desk review. Validating each country's progress in detail would have expanded the scope, timeframe, and budget significantly. Additionally, each country had substantial autonomy and flexibility in developing their approach to reporting against the required indicators, so it was not a one-size-fits-all approach.	The Evaluation Office considers the analysis and evaluation of evidence presented to an evaluator to be at the core of good evaluation practice. Such analysis would include the suitability of the indicators used, the quality of data presented, verification of the data using scientific methods and an analysis of the level of ambition as presented in the targets among others.

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
	start is to compare the targets with the resources available for the project.	Understanding the specifics of each country's achievements would have been both complex and time-intensive. Most importantly, the evaluators did not find any evidence that would suggest the targets were NOT met, based on spot checks and sampling. It is also worth noting that in December 2021 targets were increased (in some cases in excess of 300%) and still met by operational closure.	
Availability of Outputs	Please include all these countries in the table below. Were you able to verify this even for a sample? Please include evidence for achievement of this output. Please use hyperlinks where the evidence is available online.	Not even the operational closure report contains a consolidated list of 101 targeted countries. Notwithstanding, the evaluators validated information based on progress reports and clicked on links where available, while also taking stock of pictures from workshops. Reference is made to all semi-annual progress reports stitched together by the evaluators to assist in the analysis and the evaluators reviewed information in Section 4.1 (Outcome A) of each progress report. Furthermore, the means by which data-sharing practices were strengthened differed by region and by country; no one-size-fits all approach was taken. Table 16 takes a regional approach with standout highlights, spot checks and sampling undertaken as part of the TE and is not intended articulate how each of the 101 target countries achieved the end-of-project target. See additional sentence added to para 160.	The evidence presented in the main body of the report has gaps as summarised in Table 21: Summary of Project Findings and Ratings. The rating has been validated as "Satisfactory".
#159	Please include the UNCTs in the table below. Were you able to verify this claim? Please present evidence.	Reference is made to the responses provided to the previous comments on the approach used and extent to which the evaluators can verify the achievement of this target, given the TE's methodology and limitations therein. Reference is made to the additional sentence in para 167.	

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
#164	Please include the countries in the table below. Were you able to verify this claim? Please present evidence.	Reference is made to the responses provided to the previous comments on the approach used and extent to which the evaluators can verify the achievement of this target, given the TE's methodology and limitations therein. Reference is made to the additional sentence in para 170.	
#168	Please include the networks in the table below. Were you able to verify this claim? Please present evidence.	Reference is made to the responses provided to the previous comments on the approach used and extent to which the evaluators can verify the achievement of this target, given the TE's methodology and limitations therein. Reference is made to the additional sentence in para 174.	
#172	Please include the list of the countries in a table/footnote. Were you able to verify this claim? Please present evidence.	Reference is made to the responses provided to the previous comments on the approach used and extent to which the evaluators can verify the achievement of this target, given the TE's methodology and limitations therein. Reference is made to the additional sentence in para 185.	
#175	Please disaggregate by sex and region.	Source data was not disaggregated for the cumulative target result, sex disaggregation provided for some trainings but not all.	
#172	Please include the list of the countries in a table/footnote. Were you able to verify this claim? Please present evidence.	Reference is made to the incremental descriptions in Section 5 (Project Outcomes – Outcome Indicator 1) in each semi-annual progress report on how the result of 141 countries was achieved. This explanation differs by region, by country and by initiative. Results were validated through consultation and spot checks.	
#183	How did the project perform in relation to the target (4)? From the evidence presented below, I can't seem to find the expected behavior change i.e. countries using environmental information for decision making.	I'm sorry, but to document how each of the 141 countries are using improved quality environmental data (largely driven via improved frameworks and technical assistance and culminating with state of the environment reports), each in their own unique and individualized way, would require a report unto itself. Reference is made to the methodology and limitations therein, including the use of spot checks and sampling. This was also supported by	

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
		consultations, with no evidence to support the results were not achieved and that cumulatively, 141 countries have actively utilized UNEP support to improved information sharing arrangements at national level.	
5.4.1. Availability of Outputs #184	Please present specific evidence of this uptake. This would also contribute to the indicator target.	Reference is made to both the snapshot of achievements along with Section 5 of each consolidated progress report since.	
5.4.2. Achievement of Project Outcomes #180	There is no evidence to support this rating. Please provide evidence for the expected behaviour change i.e. countries using environmental information for decision making.	The project actively engaged ministries of environment, statistics, forestry, and other national environmental departments, facilitating the use of high-quality environmental data in decision-making and planning across various sectors. This culminated in state of the environment reports for: As a result of project support, 12 countries have leveraged this information to make informed decisions and improve environmental governance. Stakeholders are now utilizing deliverables, such as detailed environmental reports and data sets, to guide policies, implement sustainable strategies, and better manage environmental risks, demonstrating the project's tangible impact on national environmental planning and policy frameworks. The project has resulted in Bahrain, Belize, Botswana, Kuwait, Oman, Peru, Qatar, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Uzbekistan and Vietnam now having state of the environment reports with data that is actively being leveraged by ministries of environment and statistics to report on international MEA obligations. Furthermore, a further 7 target countries under the project: Armenia, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The policy briefs focused on the following themes (a) Air quality and Energy (including stove/fuel replacement to reduce air pollution); (b) Water (including COVID-19 monitoring in wastewater);(c)	The evidence presented in the main body of the report has gaps as summarised in Table 21: Summary of Project Findings and Ratings. The rating has been validated as “Satisfactory”.

Section / Paragraph	Stakeholder comment	Evaluator(s) Response	UNEP Evaluation Office Response
		Waste (including enhancement of recycling rates through extended producer responsibility); and (d) Biodiversity (including specific actions to implement the biodiversity restoration targets). Moreso, these policy briefs and national state of the environment reports were inputs for regional environmental ministerial bodies and meetings to contribute to decision-making and more informed policy, as well as reporting on MEA obligations and SDG targets. No change. Evidence justifies a rating of Highly Satisfactory.	
5.4.2. Achievement of Project Outcomes #182	There isn't sufficient evidence to support the rating. Please review the section to include an analysis of the likelihood of impact guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC while interrogating whether the drivers and assumptions held.	The project's impact at myriad levels, legacy and springboard for follow-up initiatives is unequivocal and undeniable, especially considering it is the first time that such a comprehensive endeavour was attempted. See additional text.	
Rating for responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality	This rating is inconsistent with the evidence above. Based on the evidence presented, the appropriate rating would be “Moderately Satisfactory”.	Evaluators stand by this rating. The type of project did not lend itself to human rights and gender to the extent a biodiversity or community development project would. Due diligence was conducted at design and where possible the project ensured data was disaggregated and collected by sex, efforts were made to keep track of this for training and workshops and in some countries, the elderly were also included.	
Rating for Communication and Public Awareness	The evidence provided doesn’t support the rating. Please refer to the Criterion Rating Description matrix. Based on the evidence provided, the appropriate rating would be “Moderately Satisfactory”.	Please have a look at the stitched together consolidated semi-annual reports and all the advocacy and awareness raising events. Evaluators stand by statements and rating.	

ANNEX II: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK / MATRIX

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
A. Strategic Relevance The extent to which the activity is suited to priorities/policies of target groups, recipient and donor	• Extent to which the project is suited to the priorities and policies of the donors, implementing regions/countries and the target beneficiaries. • What evidence is present to suggest that the project activities are helping to elevate issues around national and regional environmental information and knowledge management. • Relevance in relation to UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies at the time of project approval. • What evidence is available that the project is relevant to Global, Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities. • Complementarity with Relevant Existing Interventions/Coherence. • What evidence is present to suggest that the project has increased support for investment in and visibility national and	• How well do you think the project aligns with the strategic priorities of UNEP and its funding partners? • In what ways does the project address the specific needs and priorities of the target groups identified during the project design phase? • Do interventions address specific environmental concerns and needs? • Can you provide examples of how the project complements or enhances other ongoing or planned initiatives within the same sector or region? • How effectively has the project responded to changes in the external environment (e.g., policy shifts, emerging environmental challenges) since its inception? • What steps were taken to ensure that the project remained relevant and adaptive to the evolving needs and priorities of stakeholders throughout its implementation? • Do you see clear linkages with the Project's stated goals • Is the project relevant to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries, as well as for vulnerable groups including women? • How are they being consulted in the project implementation? • To what extent is the project is in line with country-level strategic plans and the SDGs? • Are their linkages (collaborations; complementarity/redundancy) with other GEF interventions and non-GEF initiatives? **Gender:** • How have different needs and priorities of men and women been taken into account in reaching the global environmental benefits to which the UNEP is dedicated? • To what extent have results been relevant to women?	• Review of MTS 2018-2021 and corresponding Programme of Work. • Review of MTS 2022-2025 and corresponding Programme of Work. • Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building and South-South Cooperation. • Strategic Priorities and Plans of donor countries. • Adoption of environmental reporting standards and tools; • Interim progress reports, mid-term evaluations and project revisions.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
	regional environmental information, reporting and knowledge management globally?			
B. Quality of Project Design Assess how well a project's design incorporates stakeholder input, human rights, gender equality, and appropriate indicators, ensuring it is logically structured and adequately resourced to achieve its objectives.	• Stakeholders' participation and cooperation. • Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality.	• How effectively did the project design incorporate the input and participation of key stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable groups? • Did persons who would potentially be affected by the project have an opportunity to provide input to its design and strategy? • In what ways did the project design address human rights and gender equality, and how were these considerations integrated into the project's logical framework? • How well-defined and appropriate were the project indicators for tracking progress and measuring outcomes? Were these indicators adjusted or refined during implementation? • Can you describe the strengths and weaknesses of the project design in terms of its ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges or changes in context? • What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of the project's design? • How adequate were the resources allocated for monitoring and evaluation activities in the project design, and how did this impact the project's overall implementation and performance? • How did the project design ensure coherence and synergy with other related initiatives and programs in the region or sector, and what mechanisms were put in place to avoid duplication of efforts? • How well did the project design anticipate and plan for potential risks and challenges, and how effective were the mitigation strategies in addressing these issues during implementation?	• Project Document. • Project preparation documentation. • Stakeholder consultation records. • M&E frameworks and products.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations. • Targeted workshop.
C. Nature of External Context The project's external operating context (considering the	• The impact of external factors such as political stability, natural disasters, or economic conditions on project	• How did external factors such as political stability, natural disasters, or economic conditions impact the project's implementation and outcomes?	• **Contextual Analysis Reports:** detailed information on the political, economic, and environmental conditions in	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
prevalence of conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval)	implementation and outcomes. • How the project adapted to significant external events or changes during its implementation. • The influence of the external operating context on the project's efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.	• Can you describe any significant external factors (e.g., political, environmental, or economic conditions) that influenced the project's performance, both positively and negatively? • Can you describe any significant external events or changes that occurred during the project period and how the project team responded to these challenges? • How did the prevalence of conflict or social unrest in the project area affect project activities and the achievement of project objectives? • In what ways did the project adapt to changes in the external environment to maintain its relevance and effectiveness, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic? • How did the project's external operating context influence the efficiency and sustainability of project results? Can you provide specific examples? • In which ways did the project adapt to changes in the UNEP delivery model during project implementation?	the project area during the implementation period. • **Project Progress Reports:** specifically sections on challenges faced due to external factors and how these were managed. • **Stakeholder Interviews:** Interviews with project staff, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders can provide firsthand accounts of how external conditions affected the project. • **Media and News Reports:** news articles and media coverage can offer insights into significant external events (e.g., natural disasters, political upheaval) that occurred during the project period. • **Monitoring and Evaluation Reports:** may include assessments of how external factors influenced project performance and adaptations made in response.	
D. Effectiveness Assess effectiveness across three components: delivery of outputs, achievement of direct	• What evidence is present to suggest that the project activities have helped elevate national and regional protocols for environmental	• Have all outputs been delivered when they were supposed to? • Is the quality of outputs to the expected level? • Are outputs being actively leveraged by stakeholders? • Are marginalized actors effectively engaged as identified in the social safeguards assessment?	• Review of project progress reports. • Review of annual planning targets against achievement of milestones. • Undertaking interviews, group discussions and	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations;

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
outcomes and likelihood impacts	information and knowledge management. • The extent to which the project achieved its stated objectives and expected outcomes. • The key factors that contributed to or hindered the achievement of these objectives. • How well the project adapted to unforeseen challenges or changes during implementation to maintain its effectiveness. • What were the salient risks in the delivery of project outcomes by beneficiary countries and how were they supported to ensure results were achieved during the project's operational lifecycle.	• To what extent did the project achieve its stated objectives and expected outcome(s)? Can you provide specific examples of successful outcome(s)? • How effectively were the project's activities and outputs delivered in relation to the planned timeline and milestones? • What were the key factors that contributed to the success or failure of the project in achieving its goals? • How well did the project adapt to unforeseen challenges or changes during implementation, and how did these adaptations impact the overall effectiveness of the project? • Can you describe any significant barriers or obstacles encountered during the project, and how were these addressed to achieve the intended results? • What barriers existed during implementation which prevented the project from achieving its full scope and objective? • What do you think the main legacy of the project has been? • Do you think the project activities were rolled out in accordance with the planned timeframe? If yes, how; if no, why? • As a stakeholder to this project, how satisfied are you with the project results? • What factors contributed to achieving or not achieving the intended outcomes? Were the assumptions made out the outset of the project hold true? If not, why? • What are some environmental issues that you think the project is not addressing? Why? • What innovations has the project developed? • What are the strengths of the project? What are the weaknesses? • What strong project opportunities lie ahead for such projects in the future? • **Gender:** Was gender mainstreaming an explicit requirement in all job descriptions, job responsibilities, and terms of reference for the project implementation, studies, consulting work, and training? • **Gender:** Were gender-disaggregated targets set and were gender-disaggregated indicators used?	consultations with key stakeholders.	• Workshop / working session.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
E. Financial Management Completeness of financial information and communication between finance staff - UNEP and site level implementers	• To what extent was the burn rate aligned to delivery of key milestones? • Was the rate of spend consistent with proposed work plans and delivery of outputs? If not, what are the reasons for any observed deviations? • Has co-financing materialized and when needed? • To what extent did annual work planning factor in co-financing? • Was any reallocation of funds/adaptive management been the relevant and adequately justified? • Have financial reporting and/or auditing requirements been met?	• How well did the project adhere to UNEP's financial policies and procedures throughout its implementation? • Please elaborate how changes to execution modalities or centralization / decentralization decisions impacted the project's financial management and performance? • Can you describe the completeness and accuracy of the financial information available during the project, and were there any issues with financial documentation? • How effective was the communication between financial management and project management staff in ensuring proper financial oversight and execution? • To what extent were the project's expenditures aligned with the approved budget, and were there any significant deviations or reallocations? • Explain how the process to secure non-committed funds impacted the project? • Were there any financial management challenges that affected the timely delivery or quality of project outputs, and if so, how were they addressed? • Where there any deviations from adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures and if so, what was the justification? • Was financial management of this project in line with your experience in other UNEP-led projects?	• Review of progress reports, financial reports, budget revisions • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.
F. Efficiency Cost-effectiveness and timeliness	• Did synergies and dovetailing of efforts result in efficiencies and amplification of results? • Have interventions achieved results in a cost-effective manner? • Where planned activities delivered in line with expected timeframes? If not, were the reasons for delays sufficiently	• How effectively did the project convert its inputs (funds, resources, and time) into the desired outputs and outcomes? • Do you feel that this project delivered best value for money at the lowest possible cost? • Can you provide examples of measures taken to ensure cost-effectiveness and minimize expenditures while achieving project results? • How well did the project adhere to its planned timeline, and what were the main factors influencing any delays or extensions, revisions?	• Review of progress reports, financial reports, relevant correspondence. • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
	documented, justified and their implications managed? • What collaboration has occurred between components to leverage additional resources, if any?	• In what ways did the project leverage existing institutions, partnerships, and synergies to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts? • Were there any specific instances where stronger project management could have improved timeliness and efficiency, and how were these issues addressed during the project? • Looking at the methodology (ies) introduced by the project, do you think it is easily adoptable to all country contexts in all regions? • What can you say about the overall quality of management of the project? Do you think it is in line with best practice? • To what extent were project funds delivered in a timely manner? • Have the project management body and partners been sufficiently active in guiding and responding to issues? • Were the targeted activities and interventions implemented in a timely manner? How is fund disbursed during activities implementation?		
G. Monitoring and Reporting Monitoring design and implementation	• Did the Monitoring Plan in the Project Document facilitate timely tracking of results and progress? • Is there a clear division of monitoring responsibilities? • Were project indicators consistent, useful, relevant, SMART? • Why were changes not made to project results framework and indicators at inception? • Are baseline data and indicators available? • Are activities and outputs recorded and assessed	• How comprehensive and effective was the project's monitoring plan in tracking progress against SMART results, including gender, marginalization, or vulnerability disaggregation? • Were the project indicators relevant and appropriate for measuring progress, and how were they tracked and reported throughout the project's implementation? • How well did the monitoring system facilitate timely tracking of results and progress towards project objectives, and what were the main challenges encountered? • Can you describe the quality and usefulness of the information generated by the monitoring system, and how it was used to adapt and improve project execution and outcomes? • To what extent did the project meet its reporting commitments to UNEP and donors, and how effectively were the effects on disaggregated groups communicated in these reports? • In what ways was the internal Mid-Term Review useful and not so useful? • Was appropriate and timely monitoring and evaluation mechanism put in place at the beginning of the project?	• Review of ProDoc Results Framework, targets and indicators, work plans. • Assess monitoring plan quality. • Undertaking interviews and consultations. • Workshop results to review Results Framework and Theory of Change.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations. • Workshop / working session to review Logical Framework.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
	against targets and indicators? • Did the Project Steering Committee provide strategic and technical guidance and were these recorded? • Were any necessary corrective actions proposed and adopted in a timely manner? • Were adaptive management mechanisms in place and used to expedite implementation?	• Were there joint monitoring and evaluation of planned results?		
H. Sustainability Key conditions and factors that influence persistence of achieved outcomes	• Measures taken to ensure the continuation of project benefits and outcomes after project completion. • The capacity and commitment of local stakeholders and institutions to sustain project activities. • Strategies for securing long-term funding or resources to support sustained impacts.	• What measures were taken to ensure the sustainability of project outcomes after the project's completion? • How has the project built the capacity of local stakeholders and institutions to sustain the benefits and continue the activities initiated by the project? • Can you describe any strategies or mechanisms implemented to secure long-term funding or resources for sustaining the project's impacts? • How have environmental, social, and economic factors been considered to enhance the long-term sustainability of the project's results? • What are the main risks to the sustainability of the project's outcomes, and how have these risks been addressed or mitigated? • What are the financial risks that may jeopardize the sustainability of the project outputs? • Why hasn't an exit / transition strategy been developed? • What's next for the project now that it has closed operations? Are there any follow-up initiatives in the pipeline being incubated?	• Validation of processes and business continuity plans • Verification of budget allocation • MoUs and/or SLAs established • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
G. Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance				
Preparation and Readiness	• Level of readiness during project formulation and at inception. • Were 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	• Were challenges to or constraints in project design identified during initial project stages? If so, how were these addressed? • To what extent has the Project design and implementation been informed from previous reviews • Are any changes to project design through adaptive management responses justified and documented? • How were stakeholder groups engaged in the project? • Was a capacity analysis partners carried out? • Were any "readiness" activities carried out if capacity gaps were identified? • What preparatory / readiness activities were undertaken during the inception phase?	• Review of project design documents, results framework and budget • Review of relevant correspondence and recording of any required approvals • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.
Quality of Project Implementation and Execution	• The quality of project management and supervision, including adaptive management practices.	• Overall, what is your impression of the management of the project? • Did UNEP and executing organizations provided the expected leadership (technical and managerial support) to project stakeholders? • Did executing organisations adopt risk management strategies, problem-solving approaches and adaptive management? • To what extent has the Project responded to risks and shortcomings noted in progress reporting? • In what ways did the project management and supervision quality affect the project's execution and outcomes? • What lessons and good/worst practices are learned/achieved from the project design, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms that can be considered in the design and implementation of similar projects?	• Review of relevant correspondence and recording of any required approvals • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.
Stakeholder participation and cooperation	• The level of stakeholder participation and cooperation, including engagement with	• Were communications among project partners effective? • Were any formal communication protocols applied? • Were project outputs and learning experiences shared? • Was technical expertise shared and were co-implementing teams mentored?	• Review of relevant correspondence and recording of any required approvals	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
	marginalized and vulnerable groups.	• What processes are in place to indicate the broad range of stakeholders are kept abreast of Project progress, developments and achievements? • How did stakeholder participation and cooperation impact the project's performance, and what were the key factors influencing their engagement?	• Undertaking interviews and consultations.	
Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity	• The project's responsiveness to human rights, gender equality, and other cross-cutting issues.	• Were gender related challenges adequately addressed in project implementation? • Were other potentially marginalised groups adequately engaged? • Is there a gender action plan and is it being consulted regularly? • Were the impacts of potential inequalities related to investments in social and economic development, and especially natural resource management on women, youth and indigenous people assessed and responded to? • What social safeguards are in place and are risks being regularly monitored? • How did the project address human rights and gender equality, and what were the results of these efforts on overall project performance? • How well did the project incorporate considerations for vulnerable and marginalized groups, and what impact did this have on the project's effectiveness and sustainability? • How have women/men, girls/boys as well as vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities benefited from the project activities? • To what extent has the project benefited women, enhanced their participation?	• Review of project policies and practices relevant to potentially excluded groups. • Undertaking interviews and consultations. • Review of possible gender-related challenges met by the project	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.
Environmental and Social Safeguards	• Confirm whether UNEP requirements were met to: review risk ratings on a regular basis; monitor project implementation for possible safeguard issues; respond (where	• Did the project develop, implement and monitor an environmental and safeguards plan? • In what ways did environmental and social safeguards apply or didn't apply to the Project?	• Review of relevant correspondence and recording of any required approvals • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

Evaluation Criteria/Sub-criteria	Areas and Issues to be Addressed	Key Informant Interview Questions	Main Data Sources	Methods
	relevant) to safeguard issues through risk avoidance, minimization, mitigation or offsetting and report on the implementation of safeguard management measures taken.			
Country ownership and drivenness	• Degree of country ownership during implementation.	• Have mechanisms for the selection and engagement of local communities and beneficiaries been appropriate and effective? • Have mechanisms for the engagement of government agencies, civil society and the private sector been appropriate and effective?	• Review of relevant correspondence and recording of any required approvals • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.
Communication and public awareness	• 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.	• Were communication channels and networks 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, are these sustainable post-project? • Was there a public awareness strategy aimed to disseminate project impact and learning? • How comprehensive is the KM strategy? • Is the public awareness strategy targeting the correct audiences, and is content relevant to the project's goals?	• Review of communication strategies and materials • Undertaking interviews and consultations.	• Desk study. • Key information interviews and stakeholder consultations.

ANNEX III: PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE EVALUATION

Organisation	Name	Office	Role in the project	Gender
UNEP	Jochem Zoetelief	Early Warning and Assessment Division	Project Manager	M
	Ayda Villalobos-Castro	Early Warning and Assessment Division	Project Management Associate	F
	Nada Matta	Early Warning and Assessment Division	FMO – Financial Management Office	F
	Fatou Ndoye	Africa Regional Office, previously, North America Regional Office	Deputy, Regional Director	F
	Charles Sebukeera	Africa Regional Office	Regional Science - Policy Coordinator	M
	Liana Archaia	Africa Regional Office	Associate Administrative Officer	F
	Harrison Simotwo	Africa Regional Office	Consultant	M
	Francesco Gaetani	Latin America and The Caribbean Regional Office	Regional Science - Policy Coordinator	M
	Jinhua Zhang	Asia and The Pacific Regional Office	Regional Science - Policy Coordinator	M
	Matt Billow	Europe Regional Office	Senior Coordination Officer	M
	Tomas Marques	Europe Regional Office	Regional Science - Policy Coordinator	M
	Javier Neme	Latin America and The Caribbean Regional Office	Programme Management Officer	M
	Stuart Warner	GEMS/Water	Water Quality Specialist	M
	Yara El Habre	West Asia Regional Office	Programme Management Assistant	F
	Edoardo Zandri	Former Early Warning and Assessment Division	Former Chief, Scientific Assessment Branch	M
	Jason Jabbour	Office of the Chief Scientist	Senior Programme Coordinator	M
	Panvirush Vittayapraphakul	Asia and The Pacific Regional Office	Programme Management Assistant	F
	Killian Christ	GEMS/Water Global Programme Coordination Unit	Programme Management Officer	M
UNEP-CMS	Abdelmenam Mohamed	Former West Asia Regional Office	Former Regional Science - Policy Coordinator	M
UNEP CBD Secretariat	Kristina Taboulchanas	Monitoring and Reporting Unit	Head / Programme Management Officer	F
UNEP CBD Secretariat	Claire Parois	Monitoring and Reporting Unit	Programme Management Associate	F
Ministry of Ecology	Bobur Makhmudov	Environmental Protection and Climate Change Division, Republic of Uzbekistan	Chief Specialist	M
Pontifical Catholic University of Peru	Ana Sabogal Dunin Borkowski	Faculty of Environment and Development	Director	F
University of Belize	Cecy Castillo	Faculty of Science and Technology	Lecturer	F
Kuwait Environment	Ms. Dalal F. Al-Ajmi	Environmental Assessment & Monitoring Section	Head / Project Manager	F
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnam	Ms. Dang Thuy Linh	The Pollution Control Department	Senior Official	F

ANNEX IV: KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project planning and reporting documents

- A6 – Project Preparation Proposal, 2017
- A6 – Project Preparation Proposal Closure Report, 2018
- Project Document, 2018
- Project Document, 2021 (After PRC)
- Semi Annual Project Progress Reports 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023
- Monthly Reports April 2021-April 2023
- Revision No. 1, 2021
- Revision No. 1 – Revised Budget, 2021
- PRC Report Memo, 2021
- Operational Closure Report 2024
- Project Budget

Project outputs – Overall

- Belize Environment Outlook – GEO Belize 2024
- Uzbekistan National State of the Environment Report
- Tonga State of Environment Report
- Kuwait State of Environment Report
- Peru Introduction to Environmental Statistics Course
- Environmental Assessment Report, Vietnam

Project outputs work package A:

- 2023 Rwanda 2-day meeting - “Strengthening sound science to accelerate actions to address the triple planetary crisis: climate change, loss of nature and biodiversity, and pollution and waste”
- 2023 Africa – National Environment Summaries prepared for Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Sudan.
- 2023 Asia Pacific - Readiness and gaps assessments for Early Warning Systems and climate services for Maldives, Azerbaijan
- 2023 West Asia - Saudi Arabia: Second meeting of the editorial team for the preparation of the state of the environment report in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting discussed the data gaps faced by the authors and a way forward was agreed.
- 2023 West Asia - Kuwait: Authors meeting held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the meeting discussed the draft chapters and identify data gaps to be addressed in the next phase.

Project outputs work package B:

- 2023 Latin America and The Caribbean**:** One technical support mission for the drafting of the annotated outline of GEO-Belize and the initial design of the Environmental Data Portal.
    - Peru **-** One technical support mission in Peru to advance with the production of the Spin-Off publication on Material Footprint (SDG indicator 12.2.1).
    - Belize **-** Two workshops organized in Belize for the development of the contents and structure of the GEO-Belize.
    - Peru **–** Two workshops undertook in Peru for the presentation of the national of the Environment and elated Spin-off publications focusing on Pollution and material Footprint.
- 2023 Africa - Egypt, Uganda, Seychelles, and Mauritius used UNEP-supported environmental data, statistics, and information to inform the prioritization of policy and programmatic issues in their respective UNSDCF.
- 2022-2023 - Europe: Two Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan received institutional and technical support from the project on environmental information management and sharing for the generation of National State of Environment Reports (NSoERs)
- 2022 West Asia: Support provided to Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Iraq.

Project outputs work package C:

- 2023 - Latin America and The Caribbean: REIN membership completed. 16 countries submitted their nomination for Principals and Alternate representatives. Funds mobilized to set up a REIN virtual meeting ahead of the Forum to nominate members of the REIN Executive Committee and coordinators of the working groups.
- 2022 - The GEMS Ocean Programme mobilized different partners from the Earth Observation and modelling communities working on Ocean and Coastal issues. The following international institutions are now core-partners of the Programme: UNESCO-IOC, G7 FSOI, Regional Seas, Mercator Ocean International (MOi), World Resources Institute (WRI), Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC), GRID-Geneva, GRID-Arendal, International Ocean Institute (IOI) and Future Earth.
- 2021 - Africa: A tool has been developed to strengthen of regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments. Dubbed the WESR-CCA (World Environment Situation Room – Common Country Analysis) https://wesr.unep.org/, the tool is aimed at being used as a proof of concept, with resources currently being mobilized to support its full deployment. Its APIs (Application Programming Interface) for the Africa Region are linked to those of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (https://ecastats.uneca.org/africaundata) being a key partner in the region.
- 2021 - GEMS/Ocean during the reporting period formally developed a partnership with UNEP WCMC (UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre).
- 2021 - Africa: One report with regional contributions made on "Measuring Progress: Environment and the SDGs" published in May 2021, and made available here: https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/measuring-progress-environment-and-sdgs
- 2021 - West Asia: Organized the first ever regional digital transformation conference for environmental sustainability for the Arab Region.

Project outputs work package D:

- 2023 - In 2023, the number of monitoring locations increased by 31% from 13,233 to 17,432, with an increase of water quality values by 58% from 18,457,504 to 29,212,224.
- 2023 - 126 countries are submitting data to GEMstat either through SDG reporting or Water Quality data sharing.
- 2022 - CPD course intake Sep. 2022, 11 participants completed (6 Female, 5 male); UNEP eLearning 10 completed (5 female, 5 male).
  13 MSc students have completed and passed the MSc programme.
- 2022 - Training in Fiji took place from 22 – 24 Aug 2022 with 13 participants successfully trained
- 2021 During the reporting period the second Data Drive was concluded. A total of 89 countries successfully contributed to SDG indicator 6.3.2 reporting (>100% more than in the 1st data drive 2017). The indicator report will be released in August at the Stockholm World Water Week.
- GEMStat
- Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment of Groundwater Report

Previous evaluations

- Internal Mid-Point Review of Project PIMS ID: 02020 – 2021

Reference documents

- GEMS Water – 2022 – Validated Terminal Review
- Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP-GEF Project “Building National and Regional Capacity to Implement MEAs by Strengthening Planning, and State of Environment Assessment and Reporting in the Pacific Islands”
- Bali Strategic Plan for Technology and Capacity Building
- UNDP Digital Strategy 2.0
- Government of Norway Strategic Priorities for Global Environmental Reporting
- Global Environmental Outlook 6
- Plan for Global Environmental Outlook 7
- UNEP Frontiers Report
- SEIS-II Project Document
- Project Document for “Capacity development for an inclusive science-policy interface using environmental information and knowledge systems at regional and country levels”.

ANNEX V: FINANCIAL MANGEMENT

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures:		**HS**	**HS**
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence[22] to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		Yes/No	**No**
2. Completeness of project financial information[23]:			
Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below)		**HS:HU**	**HS**
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes/No or N/A	**Yes**: Sufficient Detail Provided in Project Document and Operational Closure Report
B.	Revisions to the budget	Yes/No	**Yes**: In 2021, project received an extension – primary reason(s) – ***securing new funding***, alignment of project duration and aligning project to evolving UNEP Priorities
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes/No or N/A	**Yes**: SSFAs. PCAs, UN2UN and other agreements put in place to operationalize arrangements across Partners
D.	Proof of fund transfers	Yes/No or N/A	**Yes**: FMO worked with regional/country teams to streamline movement of funds.
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	Yes/No or N/A	**N/A**
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/No or N/A	**Yes:** Strong and proactive financial management processes in place to monitor project expenditures, prepare detailed and summary reporting
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)*	Yes/No or N/A	**N/A**
H.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):	Yes/No or N/A	**N/A**
3. Communication between finance and project management staff		**HS:HU**	**S**
Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status.		HS:HU	**HS**
Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done.		HS:HU	**HS**
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager.		HS:HU	**HS**
Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports.		HS:HU	**HS**
Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the review process		HS:HU	**HS**
Overall rating			**HS**

[22] If the evaluation raises concerns over adherence with policies or standard procedures, a recommendation maybe given to cover the topic in an upcoming audit, or similar financial oversight exercise.
[23] See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference

ANNEX VI: WEIGHTINGS TABLE FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA RATINGS

Evaluation criteria	Rating	Score	Weight	Weighted Score
Strategic Relevance (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Highly Satisfactory**	**6.00**	6	0.4
Alignment to UNEP's MTS, POW and strategic priorities	Highly Satisfactory	6	0.5	
Alignment to Donor/Partner strategic priorities	Highly Satisfactory	6	0.5	
Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national issues and needs	Highly Satisfactory	6	2.5	
Complementarity with existing interventions	Highly Satisfactory	6	2.5	
Quality of Project Design	Satisfactory	5	4	0.2
Nature of External Context	Moderately Favourable			
Effectiveness (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Highly Satisfactory**	**6.00**	45	2.7
Availability of outputs	Highly Satisfactory	6	5	
Achievement of project outcomes	Highly Satisfactory	6	30	
Likelihood of impact	Highly Likely	6	10	
Financial Management (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Highly Satisfactory**	**5.33**	5	0.3
Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures	Satisfactory	5		
Completeness of project financial information	Satisfactory	5		
Communication between finance and project management staff	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Efficiency	Satisfactory	5	10	0.5
Monitoring and Reporting (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Satisfactory**	**5.00**	5	0.3
Monitoring design and budgeting	Moderately Unsatisfactory	3		
Monitoring of project implementation	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Project reporting	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Sustainability (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Moderately Likely**	4.00	20	0.8
Socio-political sustainability	Moderately Likely	4		
Financial sustainability	Likely	5		
Institutional sustainability	Likely	5		
Factors Affecting Performance (select the ratings for sub-categories)	**Highly Satisfactory**	**5.61**	5	0.3
Preparation and readiness	Satisfactory	5		
Quality of project management and supervision	Highly Satisfactory	5.50		
UNEP/Implementing Agency: (select the ratings for sub-categories)	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Partner/Executing Agency: (select the ratings for sub-categories)	Satisfactory	5		
Stakeholder participation and cooperation	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Environmental and social safeguards	Highly Satisfactory	6		
Country ownership and driven-ness	Satisfactory	5		
Communication and public awareness	Highly Satisfactory	6		
			100	**5.36**
			Highly Satisfactory	

ANNEX VII: BRIEF CV OF THE EVALUATOR(S)

Name	Camillo Ponziani
Profession	International Consultant
Nationality	Canadian
Country experience	• Europe: Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Turkey • Africa: Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Mauritania, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda • Americas: Canada • Asia: Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Viet Nam • Oceania: Federated States of Micronesia, Palau
Education	• MA (ECON) Environment and Development, The University of Manchester • BA (Hons) Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Toronto

Short biography

Camillo Ponziani is an independent evaluation and management consultant based in Toronto, Canada, with over 20 years of experience in the field of biodiversity conservation, protected area and landscape management, as well as the illegal wildlife trade. As President and Managing Director at Interamna Group Inc., he has successfully bridged strategy and execution, assisting both public and private sector organizations in achieving their business transformation and legacy modernization goals. Camillo's background includes senior management roles within the United Nations system, where he worked with agencies such as UNDP, UNEP and UNOPS, as well as both the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species. His expertise spans the design, management, and evaluation of GEF-financed projects. He has led various business and IT transformation initiatives, demonstrating a unique ability to drive impact across the conservation, healthcare, civil aviation and finance sectors.

Camillo holds a Master of Economics in Environment & Development from The University of Manchester and an Honours Bachelor of Arts with Distinction in Peace & Conflict Studies from the University of Toronto. Camillo's career is marked by his commitment to service excellence, innovation, and leadership in program management and utilization-focused evaluation.

Key specialties and capabilities cover:

- Evaluation
- Protected Area Management
- Illegal Wildlife Trade
- Landscape / Wildlife Conservation
- Program and Project Management Professional
- IT Legacy Replacement

Selected assignments and experiences

- Available upon request

Name	Rick Haier
Profession	International Consultant
Nationality	Canadian
Country experience	• Americas: Canada, United States of America • Asia: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Viet Nam
Education	• MA (ECON) Environment and Development, The University of Manchester • BA (Hons) Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Toronto

Short biography

Rick Haier is an independent consultant with over 30 years of experience in developing strategies, conducting complex evaluations, and formulating transformative projects across various sectors. His career is marked by his ability to develop and implement transformative strategies that drive organizational success and innovation on mission-critical initiatives. Rick's expertise includes acting as a subject matter expert for numerous UN project formulations and evaluation engagements. He has contributed to significant international initiatives, such as enhancing climate change adaptation through watershed management in Laos and promoting biodiversity and landscape conservation in Vietnam. His experience extends to complex evaluations, health checks and readiness assessments for various organizations, ensuring impactful strategies and effective working relationships with sponsors, stakeholders, participants and beneficiaries.

Rick also brings extensive corporate IT experience, having served as Managing Director of PwC Canada's Cyber Security Practice and VP and Chief Security Officer at Hydro One and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. His roles involved developing cybersecurity strategies, conducting digital infrastructure assessments, and leading comprehensive security initiatives and posture reviews. Throughout his career, Rick and is accustomed to creating actionable deliverables for all organizational levels, from senior leadership teams to corporate Boards of Directors. His background in leading IT, cybersecurity and corporate strategies and transformation initiatives provides him with unique insights into developing comprehensive strategies, programs, and evaluations.

Key specialties and capabilities cover:

- Evaluation
- Climate Change Adaptation
- Integrated Water Resources Management
- Nature Based Solutions
- Corporate Strategy
- IT Transformation Strategy
- Cybersecurity
- Data Governance and Management
- Business Intelligence and Analytics
- IT Legacy Replacement

Selected assignments and experiences

Available upon request

ANNEX VIII: EVALUATION TORS (WITHOUT ANNEXES)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP project

Capacity Building for National and Regional Environmental Information and Knowledge Management PIMS ID: 02020

SECTION 1: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

1. Project General Information

Table 1: Project Summary

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[24] ID:	PIMS ID: 02020, SMA ID: 45694	**Grant ID[25] (if applicable):**	
UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):	Early Warning and Assessment (Science Division at project approval)		
Implementing Partners:	23. Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) 24. Biodiversity International 25. Center for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) 26. Centre de Suivi Ecologique (CSE – West and Central Africa) 27. Federal Institute of Hydrology, Germany 28. GRID Arendal and GRID Sioux Falls 29. Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) 30. Institute for Human Health (member of the ICSD IFAS Public Council) 31. Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD -Eastern Africa) 32. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) 33. International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change (ICWRGC) 34. MIT Center for Collective Intelligence, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 35. National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) 36. National Water Agency (ANA), Brazil 37. Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) 38. Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (SIC ICSD) 39. Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission (SIC ICWC) 40. Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) 41. Southern Africa Research and Documentation Center (SARDC -Southern Africa) 42. University College Cork (UCC), Ireland 43. World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) 44. Zoï Environment Network		
Sources of Funding:	***Country[26](ies):*** Ireland Kuwait Norway Sweden	***Institution[27] Name/Type:*** International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	
Relevant SDG(s):	1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.		
MTS (all that apply):	MTS 2018-2021, 2022-2025	**UNEP approval date:**	4 July 2018

[24] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023.
[25] For example, ID references from EC, IKI, UNDA, Adaptation Fund, GCF.
[26] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[27] Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund; Other.

<table>
<tr><td>UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[24] ID:</td><td>PIMS ID: 02020, SMA ID: 45694</td><td colspan="2">Grant ID[25] (if applicable):</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved from 2022):

OR

POW Output(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022)</td><td>POW Direct Outcome:

Climate stability
1.1 Policymaking and decision-making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based analysis and data generation.

Living in harmony with nature
2.3 Productive land- and seascapes and fresh water are sustainably managed.
2.7 Natural assets are valued, monitored and sustainably managed.
2.9 Institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced and accountability frameworks are strengthened.

Towards a pollution free planet
3.13 Sound science, data and statistics, analysis, information and knowledge are generated and shared.</td><td>MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved from 2022):

OR</td><td>MTS 2025 Outcome:</td></tr>
<tr><td>POW Output:

6: National and regional reporting systems based on shared environmental information system principles generating open access to information</td><td>POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022):</td><td>POW Expected Accomplishment:

SP7 EA(a): Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sub-programme:</td><td>Foundational Science Policy</td><td>Programme Coordination Project:</td><td>Under the Science-Policy Programme of Work</td></tr>
<tr><td>Expected start date:</td><td>July 2018</td><td>Actual start date:</td><td>04 Jul 2018</td></tr>
<tr><td>Planned completion date:</td><td>June 2022</td><td>Actual operational completion date:</td><td>31 December 2023</td></tr>
<tr><td>Planned total project budget[28] at approval:</td><td>US $ 12,009,919</td><td>Actual total expenditures reported as of [date]:</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Planned Extra-budgetary Funds[29]:</td><td>Cash: US $ 7,941,271</td><td>Secured Extra-budgetary Funds:</td><td>Cash: US $

In-kind: US $</td></tr>
</table>

[28] Total budget may include; Regular Budget, Environment Fund, Extra-Budgetary, including 'softly-earmarked' etc.
[29] Extra-budgetary funds may include co-finance (cash/in-kind)

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[24] ID:	PIMS ID: 02020, SMA ID: 45694	**Grant ID[25] (if applicable):**	
	In-kind: US $ 4,048,648	**Actual Extra-budgetary Funds expenditures reported as of [date]:**	*Cash:* US $
First disbursement:		**Planned date of financial closure:**	*Estimated 1 year after operational completion.*
No. of formal project revisions:	1	**Date of last approved project revision:**	17 December 2021
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	7[30]	**Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:**	August 18, 2023
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation *(planned date):*	June 2020	**Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):**	November 2021
Terminal Evaluation *(planned date):*	December 2021	**Terminal Evaluation (actual date):**	January 2024
Coverage – Implementing Country(ies):	**Africa:** Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, regional activities open to all countries. **Asia and the Pacific:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal,, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Eastern neighbourhood countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) regional activities open to all countries. **Europe:** Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) regional activities open to all countries. **Latin America and the Caribbean:** regional activities open to all countries. **North America:** regional activities open to all countries. **West Asia:** Kuwait, regional activities open to all countries. **Global:** Global Environment Monitoring System for freshwater, which relies on a network of national focal points and collaborating focal points.	**Coverage – Implementing Region(s):**	Africa Asia and the Pacific Europe Latin America and the Caribbean North America West Asia Global

[30] The existing periodic EWAD Division (formerly Science) - Regional Teams call were expected to include dedicated sessions to discuss the progress of the project and serve as the project steering committee.

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[24] ID:	PIMS ID: 02020, SMA ID: 45694	**Grant ID[25] (if applicable):**	
Dates of previous project phases:		**Status of future project phases:**	

2. Project Rationale

Emerging environmental challenges can be minimized and even prevented by providing decision makers with timely, accurate and comprehensive environmental information, allowing emerging problems to be addressed prior to possible large-scale adverse impacts.

Environmental information needs to be effectively collected, managed and shared to support multiple uses at different governance levels, for example to meet reporting obligations (including reporting on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and to inform decision-making and planning.

At the regional and particularly at the country level, the development and use of numerous databases and knowledge portals that are poorly connected and difficult to find (e.g. because they are located in different Ministries/government agencies, not shared nor linked to any centralized repository) has become an obstacle in making environmental information readily accessible for reporting and assessment, both at national and regional/global levels. Combined with the lack of reliable, timely, accessible and comparable data and information, reporting obligations and assessments become a burden and countries are unable to effectively support decision-making. In fact, very few countries, especially developing countries, have been able to report to multilateral environmental agreements as well as to national and regional bodies, limiting Ministries and other relevant agencies to effectively support policy action and decision making.

After consultations with Governments there is a clear need for strengthening the knowledge base of integrated environmental assessments, reporting on the state of environment by linking relevant data and information, simultaneously making it easily available and accessible in line with shared environmental information system principles for planning and policy making. Feedback from countries also indicates that the reporting burden to multilateral environmental agreements as well as to national and regional bodies is enormous and often further exacerbated due to the shortage of human resources and sub-optimal institutional structures for sharing data at national level.

The above situation has persisted despite United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) efforts in tracking progress towards global goals and targets; the timely delivery of integrated environmental assessments such as the Global Environment Outlook series, thematic assessments, identification of emerging issues and online access to data and knowledge on open global platforms such as Environment Live and its World Environment Situation Room (https://environmentlive.unep.org/).

Consultations with governments have shown that there is a need for strengthening the knowledge base for planning and decision-making related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Many countries have requested technical support for the collection, management, analysis and use of environmental data and information. Reporting obligations of countries have expanded significantly and therefore the identification of synergies can streamline and reduce workload required for information gathering and reporting. In addition, by promoting disaggregated data, a gender perspective can be integrated from the early stages. At regional and sub-regional levels, the establishment of multisectoral and interdisciplinary regional environmental information networks can be instrumental in the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned, streamlining data flows, improving the regional knowledge base of environmental reporting and assessments, and ultimately catalyze evidence-informed environmental policymaking.

This project was therefore designed and implemented to build on the above efforts with its main focus being on capacity building for environmental information and knowledge management and use at the regional, sub-regional and national levels. It was envisaged that strengthened capacity and partnerships in the regions and countries resulting from implementing the project would be foundational to meet the objectives of other interventions dependent on regional and country actions, such as Outreach on the Global Environment Outlook, feeding country data into the Environment Live knowledge platform and monitoring and reporting on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and Sustainable Development Goals in a synergistic manner.

The regional environmental networking component of the project would also feed directly into the work of regional ministerial environment forums such as the African Ministerial Conference on the

Environment (AMCEN), the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean and the Environment for Europe (EfE) process.

3. Project Results Framework

The project results framework is anchored on one outcome and four outputs as outlined below and detailed in *Error! Reference source not found.*.

Project Objective: Enhance regional and national capacity for environmental information management, networking and state of the environment reporting and communication.

Project Outcome: Targeted countries report on the environmental dimension of sustainable development and use quality environmental information in decision-making, planning, or other processes.

Project Outputs

- **A.** Targeted regions and countries have access to needs, readiness and gaps assessments for improvement in data sharing practices, reporting and assessment processes.
- **B.** Countries and UNCTs are provided with institutional and technical support in environmental information management and data sharing for the generation and strategic use in assessments, decision-making and policy action.
- **C.** Regional and sub-regional networking on environmental information, reporting and assessments established/strengthened and partners mobilized.
- **D.** GEMS/Water Networks with strengthened water quality monitoring, data management and assessment capacity providing quality assured data to GEMS/Stat.

4. Executing Arrangements

The governance arrangements for the project included multiple actors whose roles and responsibilities are described below:

Project Manager: Providing overall coordination of the project and facilitating the sharing of experiences and lessons learned and coordinating progress and financial reporting.

Regional Offices: The Science Teams/Officers in the Regional Offices for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia were responsible for the delivery of the project in the regions through provision of expertise and advisory services. Regional Offices were also expected to be the main interlocutors with Governments and also to lead the partnerships in their respective regions.

Fund Management Officer: The Fund Management Officer was responsible for monitoring and certifying expenditures; advising the Project Manager on administrative issues; alerting the Project Manager of financial risks anticipated or faced; initiating budget revision, reconciling expenditures, reviewing expenditure reports of implementing partners and facilitating cash transfers.

Project Team Member: Project team members on the other hand were responsible for planning, monitoring and managing specific outputs; taking responsibility for monitoring progress and use of resources; reporting, identifying and advising the Project Manager on any issues and risks associated with their responsible work area; proposing corrective actions or revision within project boundaries.

Supervisor (Deputy Director, Science Division): The Deputy Director, Science Division was responsible for guiding Project Managers on project feasibility and providing timely and adequate feedback; advising Project Managers on coordination with other relevant UN Environment projects; ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in project delivery; resolving conflicts and approving any changes within the authorities; identifying and dealing with implementation problems on both administrative and technical/substantive issues, including political judgments.

Subprogramme Coordinator: The sub programme coordinator was tasked with ensuring coherence, coordination in monitoring and reporting of projects within Subprogramme, and highlighting relevant issues to the responsible supervisor; assessing the project's contribution towards overall delivery and achievement of PoW outputs and Expected Accomplishments.

Project Steering Committee: the existing periodic Science Division-Regional Teams call were expected to include dedicated sessions to discuss the progress of the project and serve as the project steering committee.

GEMS/Water Global Programme Coordination Unit: The Global Programme Co-ordination Unit was in charge of the overall coordination of the UN Environment GEMS/Water Programme and the day-to-day management. The GCPU liaises with, maintains and expands the network of GEMS/Water National and Collaborating Focal Points. It works with Regional Hubs and partners, in collaboration with Regional Offices, on the design of water quality monitoring schemes, capacity development and assessments as well as providing services to inform policy making and water management.

Steering Committee for GEMS/Water: The Steering Committee (SC) of the GEMS/Water Programme was expected to provide overall strategic guidance, advice and direction to the Global Project Coordination Unit based in Nairobi. It offers guidance on how best to synergize with other and complementary programmes/activities and assists in soliciting wide support for implementation as well as partnerships in order to build stronger networks of collaborators. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from Donor Governments and UN agencies which also work in water related areas and have a mutual interest in GEMS/Water. Key executing partners, i.e. those hosting GEMS/Water components, representatives of Regional Hubs and the GEMS/Water Global Programme Co-ordination Unit, participate as ex-officio members. The SC meets physically at least once every year and is chaired by designated staff member from UN Environment.

Figure 1: Project Implementation Structure

5. Project Cost and Financing

The total budget at project approval was US$12,429,381 which included cash (US$5,121,360 secured and US$2,819,912 unsecured) and US$4,488,110 in in-kind financing is summarised in Table 2: Total Project Budget below.

Table 2: Total Project Budget

Type of Funding	Source of Funding	Details	Total
Cash	Extrabudgetary Funding	Secured Norway Funds	$312,523
		Secured EC Funds	$470,237
		Kuwait Pilot Activities	$712,389
		Secured "Government of Ireland" Funds	$1,562,849
		Secured "IFAD" Funds	$1,553,097
		Secured UNDP Funds (Africa)	$510,264
		Total Secured	**$5,121,360**
		Unsecured Environment Funds	$50,000
		Unsecured Norway Funds	$1,000,000
		Unsecured XB funding	$2,000,000
		Total Unsecured	**$2,819,912**
	Total XB Funding		**$7,941,271**
In-Kind	Environment Fund post costs		$1,247,785
	Regular Budget post costs		$922,530
	Overhead Trust fund post costs		$26,425
	Other (XB)		$473,200
	Government of Germany	GEMS/Water Data Centre	$1,048,708
	ANA, Brazil	GEMS/Water Regional Hub	$300,000
	University of College Cork	GEMS/Water Capacity Development Centre	$419,462
	CAF Funds		$50,000
	Total In-Kind Budget		**$4,488,110**
Total Budget			**$12,429,381**

6. Implementation Issues

Due to the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the planned project mid-term review was not conducted and instead a "internal midpoint review" was conducted to assess the project progress towards objectives, identify lessons learnt and areas of improvement for the remaining period.

One project revision was also undertaken to: incorporate new financing with the resultant revision of the results framework and to extend the completion date of the project from June 2022 to December 2023. The revision was also undertaken to align the project with the new UNEP Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025 and Programme of Work (PoW), align it with the UN reform and include and extend new initiatives.

Finally, during project implementation, there were changes in the UNEP delivery model and subsequent changes in the roles and reporting lines of the regional offices.

SECTION 2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

7. Objective of the Evaluation

In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy[31] and the UNEP Programme Manual[32], 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 and

[31] https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/policies-and-strategies
[32] https://wecollaborate.unep.org

target countries. 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 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 address the **strategic questions** listed below. These are questions of interest to UNEP and to which the project is believed to be able to make a substantive contribution:

(a) In which ways did the project adapt to changes in the UNEP delivery model during project implementation?

(b) What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect the project's performance?

(c) In what ways, and to what extent, have the needs and interests of differentiated groups been considered in the implementation and monitoring of the project?

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 Strategy33 (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[34] (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/Partner Strategic Priorities

Donor strategic priorities will vary across interventions. 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) or national or sub-national development plans, poverty reduction strategies or Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) plans or regional agreements etc. Within 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[35]

An assessment will be made of how well the project, either at design stage or during the project inception or mobilization[36], 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

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[33] 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

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

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

36 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.

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[37] 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[38]). 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[39]

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 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.

37 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.

38 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.

39 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)

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

Preparation and readiness

Quality of project management and supervision[40]

ii. Achievement of Project Outcomes[41]

The achievement of project outcomes is assessed as performance against the project outcomes as defined in the reconstructed[42] 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.

The Evaluation will consider the extent to which the project has played a catalytic role[43] or has promoted scaling up and/or replication as part of its Theory of Change (either explicitly as in a project with a demonstration 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.

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40 'Project management and supervision' refers to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments.

41 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)

42 All submitted UNEP project documents are required to present a Theory of Change. 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.

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

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 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.

Focussing 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[44] with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. to increase project efficiency.

44 Complementarity with other interventions during project design, inception or mobilization is considered under Strategic Relevance above.

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.

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[45] 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.

iii. Project Reporting

UNEP has a centralised Integrated Planning, Management, and Reporting (IPMR) solution 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. 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)

45 SMART refers to results that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented. Indicators help to make results measurable.

H. Sustainability

Sustainability[46] 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.

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. Even where future funding has been secured, the question still remains as to whether the project outcomes are financially sustainable.

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.

Factors affecting this criterion may include:

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

46 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)

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, it may refer to the project management performance of an implementing partner 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/Implementing Agency; 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; 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 implementing partner(s). 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.

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[47].

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.

Note that the project's effect on equality (i.e. promoting human rights, gender equality and inclusion of those living with disabilities and/or belonging to marginalised/vulnerable groups) should be included within the TOC as a general driver or assumption where there is no dedicated result within the results framework. If an explicit commitment on this topic is made within the project document then the driver/assumption should also be specific to the described intentions.

v. Environmental and Social Safeguards

[47] The Evaluation Office notes that Gender Equality was first introduced in the 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

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[48] 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.

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 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 gender 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.

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, inter alia.

[48] 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 design since 2011.

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 etc.;

Mid-Term Review of the project;

(b) **Interviews** (individual or in group) with:

UNEP Project Manager (PM);

Project management team;

UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO);

Project partners, including [Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Biodiversity International, Center for Environment and Development for Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), Centre de Suivi Ecologique (CSE – West and Central Africa), Federal Institute of Hydrology, Germany, GRID Arendal and GRID Sioux Falls, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Institute for Human Health (member of the ICSD IFAS Public Council), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD - Eastern Africa), International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), International Centre for Water Resources and Global Change (ICWRGC), MIT Center for Collective Intelligence - Massachusetts Institute of Technology, National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE), National Water Agency (ANA - Brazil), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (SIC ICSD), Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission (SIC ICWC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Southern Africa Research and Documentation Center (SARDC -Southern Africa), University College Cork (UCC- Ireland), World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Zoï Environment Network.];

Sub-Programme Coordinators;

Relevant resource persons;

Representatives from civil society and specialist groups (such as women's, farmers and trade associations etc).

(c) **Field visits** [not required]

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: 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 **Evaluation Brief** (a 2-page overview of the evaluand and evaluation findings) for wider dissemination through the UNEP website may be required. This will be discussed 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 Project Manager/Implementing Partner, 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 Consultant(s) and the internal consistency of the report, the Evaluation Manager will provide an assessment of the ratings in the final Main 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 Project 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 Consultant will work under the overall responsibility of the Evaluation Office represented by an Evaluation Manager Stephen Baguma, in consultation with the UNEP Project Manager Jochem Zoetelief, Fund Management Officer Nada Matta and the Sub-programme Coordinators of the Science Policy Sub-programme. The consultant will liaise with the Evaluation Manager on any procedural and methodological matters related to the Evaluation, including travel. It is, however, each consultants' 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 Project 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 six (6) months [March 2024 to August 2024] 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 eight (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 environmental science-policy 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 and proficiency in /knowledge of French is desirable. Working knowledge of the UN system and specifically the work of UNEP is an added advantage. The work will be home-based with no 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. The consultant will ensure that all evaluation criteria and questions are adequately covered.

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 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	February 2024
Inception Report	March 2024
E-based interviews, surveys etc.	April 2024
PowerPoint/presentation on preliminary findings and recommendations	May 2024
Draft report to Evaluation Manager (and Peer Reviewer)	June 2024
Draft Report shared with UNEP Project Manager and team	July 2024
Draft Report shared with wider group of stakeholders	July 2024
Final Report	August 2024
Final Report shared with all respondents	August 2024

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:

Table 4 Schedule of Payment for the Evaluation Consultant/Principal Evaluator

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[49].

[49] This may include contract cancellation in-line with prevailing UN Secretariat rules.

ANNEX IX: QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluand Title: Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP Project: Capacity building for national and regional environmental information and knowledge management PIMS ID: 02020" (2018-2023).

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: The executive summary is a well written and stands and concise summary of the main evaluation report.	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: The evaluation report properly situates the evaluand within the institutional context in sufficient detail and includes a concise statement of the evaluation purpose and intended audience for the evaluation findings.	6
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.). 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	Final report: The evaluation report describes in sufficient detail the evaluation methods, limitations and ethical considerations. The report would have benefitted from similar detail on how data was analysed and triangulated and measures taken to increase the response rate for direct beneficiaries (countries targeted by the evaluand).	4

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
either generalised to 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?		
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: This section of the report provides a good summary of the project description covering the problem being addressed, its root causes, consequences and proposed solutions (result framework). The report also describes the project implementation structure, stakeholders, changes in project design and project financing.	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*[50] 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*	Final report: The ToC at Evaluation built on the existing ToC and made improvements to the logic and is well presented both in text and diagrammatic forms.	5

[50] 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*.

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
may have changed, the results 'goal posts' have not been 'moved'. Check that the project's effect on equality (i.e. promoting human rights, gender equality and inclusion of those living with disabilities and/or belonging to marginalised/vulnerable groups) has been included within the TOC as a general driver or assumption where there was no dedicated result within the results framework. If an explicit commitment on this topic was made within the project document, then the driver/assumption should also be specific to the described intentions.		
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[51]), 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) and Programme of Work (POW) ii. Alignment to Donor/GEF Strategic Priorities iii. Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities iv. Complementarity with Existing Interventions	Final report: The evaluation report presents a good analysis of the relevance of the evaluand to the UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies. The report also presents a good analysis of the evaluand's relevance to donor and regional priorities and its complementarity with existing interventions.	5
B. Quality of Project Design To what extent are the strength and weaknesses of the project design effectively summarized?	Final report: The evaluation report presents a balanced critique of the quality of project design highlighting both strengths and weaknesses in equal measure.	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[52]), and how they affected performance, should be described.	Final report: The final report identifies presents an analysis of the implementation context by highlighting the negative externalities to the project implementation, their impact and how they were mitigated.	6
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	Final report: The report presents a detailed analysis of project effectiveness in terms of delivery of project outputs and achievement of	4

[51] 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.

[52] 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.

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
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.	project outcomes. However, the analysis of availability of project outputs and achievement of outcomes was based on a weak evidence base. The analysis relied on one data source (project completion report) and therefore an opportunity to triangulate this data with other sources such as project annual report, review of project deliverables and review of data from UNEP project management systems (PIMS and IPMR) was missed. As noted in the validated ratings of this criterion by the EOU, the reported data in these different sources was inconsistent.	
(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: The report presents a logical analysis of the likelihood of project impact based on the ToC. However, the analysis of could have benefited from testing the assumptions and a better articulation of the actors involved in the change process and their roles.	4
E. Financial Management This section should contain an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under financial management and include a completed 'financial management' table. 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	Final report: The report presents a good analysis of project financial management. This included an assessment of adherence of the project to UNEP financial policies and procedures, completeness of financial information and communication between financial and project management staff.	6
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: The evaluation report presents a detailed analysis of the evaluand's attempts or the lack of in terms of efficiency.	5

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
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)*	The report presents an analysis of the monitoring and reporting arrangements for the project. The analysis would have benefitted from a critique of the data collection and analysis methods, tools, frequency of collection and data quality used for project reporting. As noted, the EOU found inconsistencies in the reported data.	4
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: The evaluation report presents a well-reasoned analysis of project sustainability using the three dimensions of socio-political, financial and institutional Sustainability.	5
I. Factors Affecting Performance These factors are <u>not</u> 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[53] • Stakeholder participation and co-operation • Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity • Environmental and social safeguards • Country ownership and driven-ness • Communication and public awareness	Final report: The evaluation report presents a well-reasoned analysis of the factors affecting project performance in sufficient breadth and depth.	5
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations **i. Quality of the conclusions:** The key strategic questions should be clearly and succinctly addressed within the conclusions section. 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.	The report presents clear responses to the strategic questions while highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses of the project. Human rights and gender dimensions are also included in the analysis.	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	Final report: The report presents lessons learned from both positive and negative events rooted in real project experiences. The	5

[53] 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.

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
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.	lessons also have broad application beyond the evaluand.	
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: The recommendations are based on project in project implementation and on risks to sustainability of project results. The report also includes recommendations targeting the next phase of the project that was already ongoing at the time of the evaluation. However, an opportunity to include a recommendation on strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions was missed considering the limited integration of gender and human rights in the design and implementation of the project.	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: The report is complete, follows Evaluation Office guidelines and includes all required sections and annexes.	6
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: The report is well written and the formatted following UNEP guidelines.	6
OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING	**Satisfactory**	5.05

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.