Validated Terminal Review of the UNEP-GEF Project

'Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health in Sri Lanka' (GEF ID 9409)

2019 – 2024

UNEP Ecosystems Division

Validation date: September 2026

This report has been prepared by an external consultant as part of a Terminal Review, which is a management-led process to assess performance at the project's operational completion. The UNEP Evaluation Office provides templates and tools to support the review process and provides a formal assessment of the quality of the Review report, which is provided within this report's annexed material. In addition, the Evaluation Office formally validates the report by ensuring that the performance judgments made are consistent with evidence presented in the Review report and in-line with the performance standards set out for independent evaluations. As such the project performance ratings presented in the Review report may be adjusted by the Evaluation Office. The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Member States or the UN Environment Programme Senior Management.

AI tools (ChatGPT) were used to transcribe some interviews and for executive summary. The consultant has reviewed the AI-generated content and takes full responsibility for its accuracy and application.

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Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health in Sri Lanka
GEF ID: 9409
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The reviewer would like to express his gratitude to all persons met and who contributed to this review, as listed in Annex III.

The reviewer would like to thank the project team and in particular Mr. Ajith Silva (National Project Manager, SACEP), Mr. Dharshana Kumara (Ministry of Environment), and Dr. Danny Hunter (Lead Technical Adviser, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT) for their contribution, coordination, and collaboration throughout the review process. The reviewer would also like to thank the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) representative, all the sectoral focal points, university partners, and local community members for their time and openness in discussing both the constraints and achievements of this project.

Thanks are extended to Kavita Sharma (UNEP Task Manager), Rachel Kagiri (UNEP Fund Management Officer) and Arshad Hussain (Overall FMO) for their continuous support and guidance.

The review consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will contribute to the successful finalisation of the current project, the formulation of a next phase, and to the continuous improvement of similar integrated landscape and eco-health projects in other countries and regions.

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With over 25 years of experience in environmental and biodiversity fields, Vincent LEFEBVRE has developed extensive expertise in the evaluation of climate change policies, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development projects. His work includes over 15 years of involvement in climate change initiatives, particularly within the UNFCCC frameworks, focusing on the development and assessment of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Paris Agreement transparency frameworks, and the implementation of climate mitigation strategies. He has contributed to the advancement of climate change Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems, including greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories, projections, and climate action data analysis.

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Review consultant
Vincent Lefebvre

ABOUT THE REVIEW

Joint Review: No

Report Language(s): English.

Review Type: Terminal Review

Brief Description: This report is a management-led Terminal Review of a UNEP/GEF project implemented between 2019 and 2024. The project's overall goal was to mainstream biodiversity using an integrated sustainable land management approach to ensure development, health, and environmental co-benefits in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it aimed to strengthen the restoration and sustainable management of selected Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) to enhance ecosystem services, protect biodiversity, and improve local food security, well-being, and eco-health. The review 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 review has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF and the relevant agencies of the project's participating country

Key words[1]**:** Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS), Sustainable Land Management (SLM), Agrobiodiversity, Ecosystem Health, Eco-Health Nexus, Landscape Restoration, Sri Lanka, Mainstreaming Biodiversity, Food Security, Ecosystem Services

Source(s) of Funding by Country: GEF funding and co-financing from the Government of Sri Lanka (Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment/Ministry of Environment, Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture), as well as the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT

Source(s) of Funding by Institution Type:

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

Primary data collection period: February – March 2026

Field mission dates: remote only

[1] Please provide maximum five key words, which are not already in the project title.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABD	Agrobiodiversity
AGRES	Agricultural Research Symposium
BD	Biodiversity
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CEO	Chief Executive Officer (GEF)
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CKDu	Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Etiology
CoP / COP	Community of Practice / Conference of the Parties
DAD	Department of Agrarian Development
DoA / DOA	Department of Agriculture
DPSIR	Driving forces, Pressures, States, Impacts, Responses (Framework)
DS / DSD	Divisional Secretariat / District Secretariat
DWC	Department of Wildlife Conservation
EA	Executing Agency / Expected Accomplishment (UNEP)
EOU	Evaluation Office of UNEP
ESERN	Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note
ESS	Environmental and Social Safeguards
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FD	Forestry Department
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMO	Fund Management Officer (UNEP)
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GEB	Global Environment Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEM	Gender Equality Marker
GIAHS	Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPMU	Global Project Management Unit
GTT	GEF Tracking Tool
HLP	Healthy Landscapes Project
HYPR / HYR	Half-Yearly Progress Report
ICEN	International Conference on Ecohealth Nexus
ILM / ICSLM	Integrated Landscape Management / Integrated Sustainable Cascade Landscape Management
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
ITR	Internal Technical Report
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KII	Key Informant Interview
LADA	Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands
LD	Land Degradation
LoA	Letter of Agreement
LUPPD	Land Use Policy Planning Department (or Division)
LUS	Land Use System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MASL	Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka
MMA&ND	Ministry of Mahaweli, Agriculture & National Development
MoE / MMDE	Ministry of Environment / Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment
MTR / MTE	Mid-Term Review / Mid-Term Evaluation
MTS	Medium-Term Strategy (UNEP)
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

NCE	No-Cost Extension
NPM	National Project Manager
NRMC	Natural Resources Management Centre
NSC / PSC	National Steering Committee / Project Steering Committee
PCA	Project Cooperation Agreement
PDOA	Provincial Department of Agriculture
PIR	Project Implementation Review (or Report)
POW	Programme of Work (UNEP)
ProDoc	Project Document
QM	Questionnaire for Mapping
RTOC	Reconstructed Theory of Change
RUSL	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka
SACEP	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMA	Sub-programme Monitoring & Assessment (UNEP)
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TE / TR	Terminal Evaluation / Terminal Review
ToC / TOC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
VTCS	Village Tank Cascade Systems
WUSL	Wayamba University of Sri Lanka

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

<table>
<tr><td>GEF Project ID/SMA ID[2]:</td><td colspan="3">GEF ID: 9409; SMA ID: 34679</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Type of GEF Project:</td><td>Child: N</td><td>Global Coordinating Project:</td><td>N</td></tr>
<tr><td>If yes, provide GEF Programme[3] ID:</td><td>Medium-Size Project or Full-Size Project:</td><td>MSP</td></tr>
<tr><td>UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):</td><td>UN Environment Programme
Ecosystems Division, Biodiversity and Land Branch,
GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit</td><td>Executing Agency: (indicate if internally executed):</td><td>Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sources of Funding (Co-finance):</td><td colspan="2">Country[4](ies):
Sri Lanka</td><td>Institution[5] Name/Type:
Government: Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Agriculture, and Department of Agriculture.
NGO: South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), and Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT</td></tr>
<tr><td>Relevant SDG(s):</td><td colspan="3">Goal 2: Zero hunger

Target 2.1: by 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

Target 2.2: by 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

Target 2.3: by 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

Target 2.4: by 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

Goal 3: Good health and well-being

Target 3d: strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks</td></tr>
</table>

[2] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023. Previously, it was referred to as a PIMS ID number.
[3] GEF Programme refers to 'Parent' project.
[4] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[5] Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund.

	Goal 5: **Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls** Target 5.a: undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. Target 5.c: adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels **Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all** Target 6.4: By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity. Target 6.5: By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. Target 6.6: By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes. Target 6.b: Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management **Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss** Target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally. Target 15.3: By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world. Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species. Target 15.9: By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts		
MTS (at approval):	UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2018–2021, Sub-programme 3 "Healthy and productive ecosystems"		
POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference[6] *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):* **OR** POW Output(s) number/reference[66] *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022)*	*EA (a) – ecosystems health and productivity institutionalised*	MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference [66] *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):* **OR** POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference [66] *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022):*	*MTS 2022–2025, Subprogramme "Nature Action", PoW indicators (iii) and (iv), Outcome 2A and 2B*
	POW Output:		*POW Expected Accomplishment:*
Sub-programme:	Sub-programme 3 – Healthy and productive ecosystems	Programme Coordination Project (if relevant):	*N/A*
UNEP approval date:	2019.03.22	GEF approval date:	2018.04.29

[6] For these items do not include full text; only enter the number or reference.

GEF Operational Programme/Cycle # (e.g. GEF-7):	GEF-6		GEF Strategic Priority (e.g. BD4):	BD-3, Program 7 – agrobiodiversity in production systems; LD-3, Program 4 – sustainable land management in wider landscapes
Focal Area(s):	Biodiversity, Land Degradation			
Expected start date[7]:	2018.04.30		Actual start date:[8]	2019.04.01
Planned completion date[17]:	2024.06.30		Actual operational completion date:	2024.06.30
Planned project budget at approval:	*GEF grant allocation: 2,000,000*			
	Expected co-financing: USD 9,047,865 *Cash: 3,620,665* *In-kind: 5,427,200*			
	Total planned budget: *11,047,865*			
Actual expenditures reported (cash only):	GEF grant expenditures reported as of 30 June 2024: 1,853,400			
	Actual co-financing 2024.06.30: 13,354,341 Grants: 4,719,721 In-kind : 8,634,620			
	Total actual expenditures reported as of 2024.12.31: 15,207,741			
No. of formal project revisions:	N/A		Date of last approved project revision:	N/A
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	4		Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:	2023.09.26
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation[9] *(required or not required):*	UNEP requirement:	Y	Mid-term Review/ Evaluation actual date:	2022.09.19
	GEF requirement:	Y		
Terminal Review *(planned date):*	2024.12.31		Terminal Review actual date:	2026.03.31
Coverage - Country(ies):	Sri Lanka		Coverage - Region(s):	South-Asia
Dates of previous project phases:	N/A		Status of future project phases:	N/A

Table 1 Project Identification Table

[7] Expected/planned dates are listed in the Project Document (ProDoc).
[8] Actual start date is the date of the last signature on the PCA or ICA.
[9] UNEP projects of four or more years duration require an MTR unless there is an exceptional circumstance. See the *Evaluation in the Project Cycle* section in the Evaluation Office's operational manual. Donor requirements may vary and should be considered in conjunction with UNEP's requirements.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project background

1. The Healthy Landscapes project was implemented in Sri Lanka with USD 2,000,000 in funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and USD 13,354,341 in actual co-financing from the Government of Sri Lanka and other partners. Executed between 1 April 2019 and 30 June 2024, the intervention was geographically concentrated in the dry zone of the Anuradhapura District.

2. The project targeted the restoration of ancient Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS), a highly sophisticated, interconnected network of small-to-large reservoirs that has traditionally provided water for agriculture, domestic use, and local ecosystems. The rationale for the intervention was to address severe land degradation, biodiversity loss, and the emergence of life-threatening health issues, particularly Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu). Over the years, these vital water ecosystems have significantly deteriorated due to deforestation, sedimentation, agricultural encroachment, and escalating climate change impacts like prolonged droughts. Furthermore, an overreliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides has severely degraded the land and polluted local water sources, a factor strongly linked to the alarming rise of CKDu in these rural farming communities.

3. The project's overall objective was to mainstream biodiversity using an integrated sustainable land management approach to ensure development, health, and environmental co-benefits. To achieve this, the project aimed to revitalize these cascade landscapes by combining physical tank rehabilitation with the promotion of biodiversity-rich, sustainable agroecological practices and eco-health approaches.

This Review

4. The Terminal Review (TR) sought to evaluate the project's performance across relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, and to determine the sustainability of its actual and potential impacts. Assessed against nine standard UNEP criteria using a six-point rating scale, the review served two primary purposes: ensuring accountability to the GEF and UNEP and generating evidence-based learning to inform future eco-health and integrated landscape initiatives.

5. Methodologically, the review employed a mixed-methods approach emphasizing qualitative inquiry. Conducted entirely remotely between February and March 2026 due to ongoing disaster-relief operations and severe flooding in Sri Lanka, the review relied on virtual, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including UNEP, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, SACEP, government agencies, and academic partners. This primary data was cross-checked with a comprehensive document review encompassing Project Implementation Reviews, technical deliverables, and digital evidence. Data analysis was structured around a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) to assess the project's causal pathways from technical outputs to institutional outcomes

6. A significant limitation was the inability to conduct in-country field visits due to ongoing disaster-relief operations. Because the review was conducted entirely remotely, access to final beneficiaries was severely restricted, as all consultations had to be carried out by phone or WhatsApp. This phone-based approach made it practically impossible to directly engage with non-English-speaking grassroots farmers and other local community members who could not be easily reached or facilitated without in-person translation. This gap in direct community representation was mitigated by heavily triangulating the available remote interview data with extensive secondary sources, including socio-

economic baseline assessments, field surveys, and digital evidence provided by the project partners

Key findings and performance ratings

7. The project has demonstrated Highly Satisfactory performance in Strategic Relevance and Factors Affecting Performance, and Satisfactory performance in Effectiveness regarding the delivery of both physical restorations and knowledge products. It transformed abstract concepts of cascade ecology into operational field models, revitalizing the Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) despite a highly challenging external context. Key technical achievements include:

    - Adaptive management: the project recovered from macroeconomic shocks, hyperinflation, and COVID-19 lockdowns by subcontracting local financial and administrative execution to the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). This partnership bypassed national treasury bottlenecks (specifically Budget Circular No/05 2020) and maintained field-level liquidity.
    - Ecological restoration and SLM: adapting to material cost increases by formally downscaling targets, the project restored 5 tanks and partially restored 2. It adopted sustainable land management (SLM) practices across 2,000 hectares and established community-managed solar electric fences, mitigating human-elephant conflict.
    - Community rights and gender empowerment: despite design-stage gaps in explicit gender budgeting, the project retrofitted gender-responsive measures to provide economic empowerment. It established women-led 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlets and supported maize cash-crops, generating LKR 25 million in dividends for rural women's farmer groups.
    - Institutional integration: the project avoided creating parallel administrative structures by embedding participatory landscape planning into District and Divisional Agriculture Committees. Furthermore, it institutionalized knowledge by integrating cascade ecology short courses into the academic curriculum of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL).

8. Areas that would benefit from further attention are overall Sustainability and Financial Sustainability, which were rated as Unlikely and Moderately Unlikely respectively. Things to improve include:

    - The Policy "Informational Trap": while the project generated 18 technical policy briefs, a cascade restoration sourcebook, and a scholarly book, it closed without a formalized exit strategy for legal ratification. Consequently, these products serve as informational guidelines rather than binding national legislation or official government strategies, limiting policy effectiveness.
    - The "Eco-Health" Disconnect: despite featuring "Ecosystem Health" in its title and aiming to address the root causes of the local Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu) crisis, direct medical interventions and specific health metrics were limited. Health linkages were addressed indirectly through nutrition camps and reduced agrochemical use, leaving a gap in proving direct health impacts.
    - Heavy Infrastructure Dependency: the financial sustainability of macro-level cascade restoration is constrained by the high capital costs of civil works. Without a national master plan and dedicated infrastructure finance, future large-scale tank renovations remain reliant on external donor funding, making long-term financial autonomy unlikely.

Table 2: Summary of project ratings

Criterion	Rating
Strategic Relevance	**Highly Satisfactory**
Quality of Project Design	**Moderately Satisfactory**
Nature of External Context	**Highly Unfavourable**
Effectiveness	**Satisfactory**
Financial Management	**Satisfactory**
Efficiency	**Moderately Satisfactory**
Monitoring and Reporting	**Satisfactory**
Sustainability	**Unlikely**
Factors Affecting Performance	**Highly Satisfactory**
Overall Project Performance Rating	**Satisfactory**

Conclusions

9. Overall, the project performed at a **Satisfactory level**, successfully transforming abstract concepts of cascade ecology into operational field models. The main achievements included the physical restoration of five Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS), the adoption of sustainable land management across 2,000 hectares, and the economic empowerment of rural women through traditional food outlets. Additionally, the project generated an impressive volume of knowledge products, establishing a formal Community of Practice for cascade ecology. These successes were largely driven by exceptional adaptive management; during severe macroeconomic crises and hyperinflation, the project formally downscaled its physical targets and delegated financial execution to the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the financial performance.

10. However, comparative weaknesses remain. The financial sustainability of large-scale infrastructure restoration is Unlikely, as it heavily depends on unsecured external donor funding. Furthermore, the project lacked a formalized exit strategy to convert its technical policy briefs into binding national legislation. Finally, despite its "Eco-Health" title, direct medical interventions and concrete health metrics regarding Chronic Kidney Disease were conspicuously limited, relying mostly on indirect nutritional support.

11. Strategic Question 1 - demonstration of an integrated, agroecological approach: the project successfully demonstrated this approach at pilot scales by restoring five tanks, adopting sustainable land management across 2,000 hectares, establishing 200 agrobiodiversity home gardens, and proving that biodiversity-based practices generate direct economic returns via ecotourism and food outlets.

12. Strategic Question 2 - influence on policy, institutional coordination, and capacity: Coordination and capacity improved by embedding landscape planning into local committees and integrating courses into university curricula. However, policy influence remains partial, as the 18 produced policy briefs still await formal endorsement into binding national legislation.

13. Strategic Question 3 - linkages between biodiversity, agriculture, and health: the project linked biodiversity and agriculture through sustainable land management, crop diversification, and tank restorations. However, direct medical interventions addressing the root causes of local health crises (CKDu) were limited, primarily addressed indirectly through nutrition camps.

14. Strategic Question 4 - factors enabling or constraining achievements: subcontracting execution to SACEP bypassed treasury bottlenecks, enabling project delivery. Conversely,

macroeconomic crises and COVID-19 constrained physical achievements by inflating costs. Future scaling remains constrained by the lack of a formalized legislative exit strategy

Lessons Learned

15. *Lesson 1* - strategic delegation of financial execution in crisis contexts: subcontracting to regional entities (SACEP) influenced the effectiveness and efficiency of financial disbursement, sustaining fund flows and field-level delivery during the macroeconomic crisis.
16. *Lesson 2* - institutional integration over parallel structures: embedding landscape planning into existing local governance (Divisional Agriculture Committees) improved inter-departmental collaboration. However, active participation requires a dedicated facilitation plan once project funding ends.
17. *Lesson 3* - adjusting physical targets to mitigate macroeconomic shocks: halving the physical restoration targets maintained financial viability against hyperinflation and allowed remaining resources to shift toward policy and market deliverables.
18. *Lesson 4* - retrofitting human rights and gender equality for direct economic empowerment: despite lacking design-stage gender budgeting, adaptive management added economic incentives (ex. women-led 'Hela Bojun' food outlets) that successfully protected economic rights, empowered rural women, and generated direct financial returns.
19. *Lesson 5* - policy influence requires formal legislative exit strategies: generating technical knowledge (such as policy briefs) is insufficient without a roadmap. Without a formal exit strategy, these outputs remain informational guidelines rather than binding national legislation.
20. *Lesson 6* - anchoring technical knowledge in academic curricula: embedding short courses into Rajarata University's curriculum institutionalizes capacity-building for future practitioners, establishing a knowledge base that outlasts government turnover.
21. *Lesson 7* - indirect vs. direct interventions in "Eco-Health" projects: despite the "Ecosystem Health" focus, the project lacked direct medical interventions for CKDu. Future eco-health projects must include specific health indicators and partner with the medical sector at the design stage.
22. *Lesson 8* - precision farming as a catalyst for eco-health and youth engagement: integrating smart agriculture (e.g., smart irrigation, drones) optimizes agrochemical use, reduces health risks from runoff, and makes farming more attractive to younger generations.

Recommendations

23. *Recommendation 1*: The UNEP Task Manager and Executing Agencies should integrate health indicators and partner directly with the health sector when designing future "Eco-Health" project phases.
24. *Recommendation 2*: The UNEP Task Manager, Executing Agencies, and Ministry of Environment (MoE) should formulate a GEF-9 project proposal that scales the eco-health approach to new cascade sites, secures infrastructure finance, integrates health metrics, and includes climate-smart agriculture and precision farming.
25. *Recommendation 3*: Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats should create a financing and facilitation plan to sustain local agricultural platforms and the academic Community of Practice (CoP).

26. *Recommendation 4*: UNEP Project Design Units and Executing Agencies must include comprehensive human rights and gender analyses, gender-disaggregated indicators, and specific budgets for inclusive, gender-responsive actions in the design phase of all future projects.
27. *Recommendation 5*: The Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture should formally endorse the project's policy briefs and integrate them into national legislation or official government strategies.
28. *Recommendation 6*: The Ministry of Environment should secure dedicated climate or infrastructure finance to fund civil works for future macro-level cascade restorations.
29. *Recommendation 7*: The Ministry of Environment, Department of Agrarian Development (DAD), and Ministry of Agriculture should draft a national master plan and policy framework for VTCS rehabilitation within the next 12 months.

Validation

The Evaluation Office of UNEP (EOU) notes that the area of targeted land was 20,000 ha at CEO Endorsement, comprising 10,000 ha directly targeted land and 10,000 ha expected to be indirectly affected by the end-of-project. Following the Mid Term Review, the figure of 10,000 ha of directly targeted land was reduced to 2,000 ha and the potential for another 10,000 ha indirectly affected, dropped. This 80% reduction in the target was only mentioned in the 2023 PIR under minor-amendments revision history, while the EOU interprets this as a major amendment. The target was replaced, without explanation, so that the project report reads as 'on track' against the reduced target of 2,000 ha with no explicit mention that it had been reduced to 10,000 ha. The EOU advises that reductions of this magnitude be treated, in future, as major amendments and policy requirements followed.

The report has been subject to an independent validation exercise performed by UNEP's Evaluation Office. The performance ratings for the UNEP/GEF project, 'Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health in Sri Lanka (GEF ID: 9409)', set out in the Conclusions and Recommendations section, have been adjusted slightly as a result. The overall project performance is validated at the **'Satisfactory'** level. Moreover, the Evaluation Office has found the overall quality of the report to be 'Satisfactory' (see Annex XII).

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context

Intervention context

30. The Healthy Landscapes Project addresses the condition of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) in Sri Lanka's dry zone. These interconnected wetland landscapes provide water for agriculture, domestic use, and local ecosystems. However, biodiversity and ecosystem service provision have steadily declined. Root causes include population growth, agricultural expansion, and land-use modifications, leading to deforestation and encroachment into surrounding micro-land uses. Furthermore, local agricultural practices rely heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
31. The documented consequences on the environment include land degradation, soil erosion, water pollution, agricultural encroachment into forested land and the siltation of tanks, which lowers their water storage capacity. The fragmentation of habitats has also been linked to human-wildlife conflict, including interactions with elephants. Regarding human well-being, the simplification of agricultural landscapes corresponds with a nutrition transition, marked by a reduction in traditional crop diversity and an increase in the consumption of processed foods. Additionally, the application of agrochemicals is often mentioned as a potential contributing factor to Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu) among local farming communities.
32. The project is implemented in Sri Lanka, focusing on the Anuradhapura District, specifically within the Palugaswewa and Thirappane Divisional Secretariats.
33. During its implementation, the project encountered severe external delays related to the 2019 Easter attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and national economic and political instability involving inflation and fuel shortages.
34. The proposed project sites were the following:

Figure 1 - Horiwila Village Tank Cascade Systems (showing the Palugaswewa – Bellankadawala double VTCS complex)

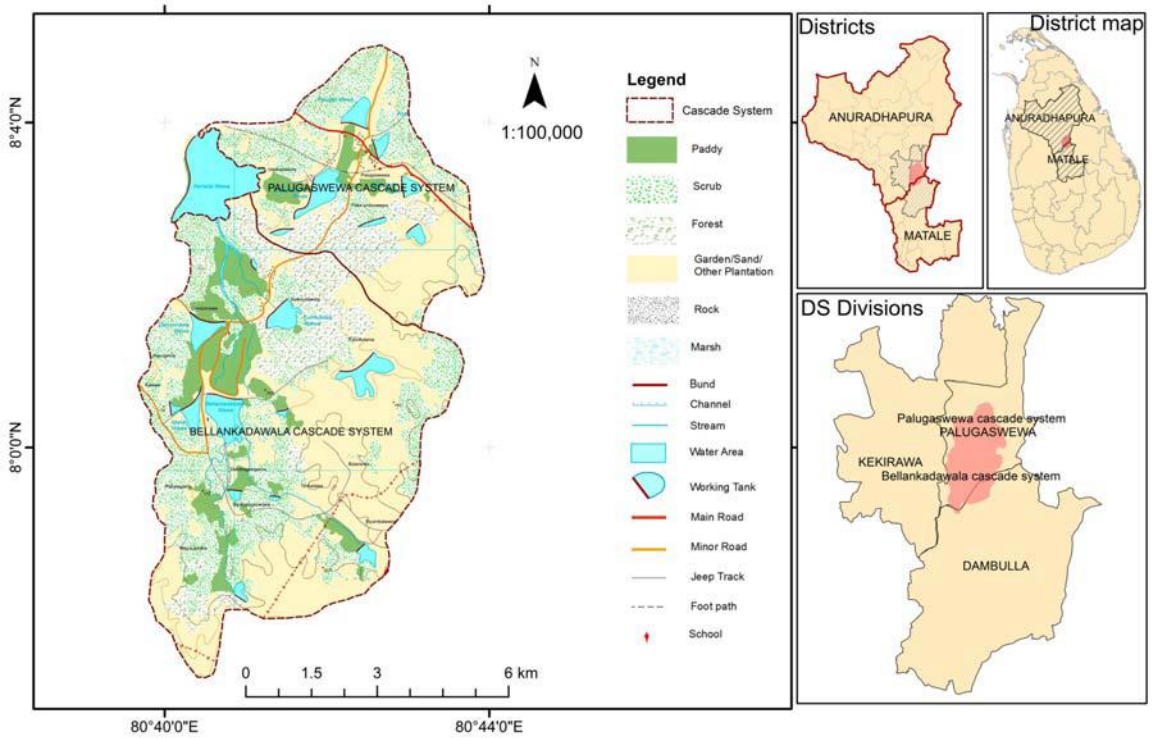
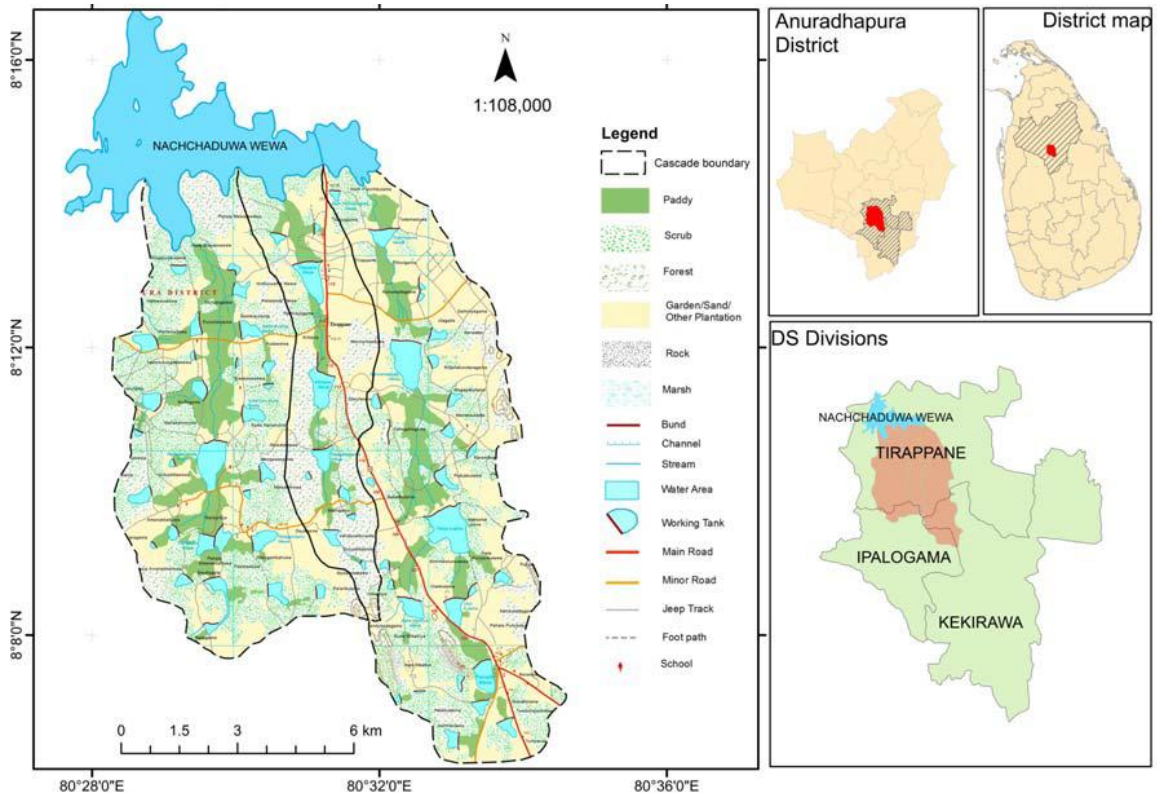


Figure 2 - Nachchaduwa Village Tank Cascade Systems (showing the Mahakanumulla – Thirappane – Ulagalle triple VTCS complex)



Institution context

35. The project was implemented under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Ecosystems Division. The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT served as the Executing Agency. National partners included the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment (acting as the National Executing Agency), the Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Department of Agriculture, and the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), which was designated to host the Project Management Unit.

36. The project was approved by the GEF CEO on 30 April 2018. The Project Document was signed by UNEP on 22 March 2019 and by Bioversity International on 1 April 2019.

37. The project contributes to the UNEP Nature Action Sub-programme. It aligns with Expected Accomplishment (EA) 3(a): "The health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sectoral and transboundary collaboration frameworks".

38. Originally designed with a 36-month duration, the project commenced on 1 April 2019 with a planned completion date of 31 March 2022. Following extensions, the actual operational completion date was 30 June 2024. This was a medium-sized project with no prior or future phases indicated.

39. The total secured budget included a GEF grant allocation of US 2,000,000. The final reported co−financing leveraged by the end of the project reached US 13,354,341.

40. The project underwent an independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) between July and August 2022. Based on the MTR findings, the project's scope was modified, which included reducing the number of targeted pilot sites from five to two and a reduced number of targeted infrastructures rehabilitations.

B. Results Framework

41. The project results hierarchy is structured around the central objective of "mainstreaming biodiversity using an integrated sustainable land management approach to ensure, development, health and environmental co-benefits". At the project design and start-up phase, the structure was organized into five components to deliver against this results framework:

    - **Component 1: implementation of biodiversity-based options that improve sustainable landscape management in socio-ecological sensitive areas**.

      This component delivers Outcome 1 by supporting ground-level interventions. Its purpose is to map socio-ecological system properties, restore physical and ecological components of selected Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS), implement biodiversity-based agroecological practices, and mainstream the goods and services of VTCS ecosystems.

    - **Component 2: strengthened institutions, policies and integrated landscape planning of village tank cascade systems (VTCS) in socio-ecological sensitive areas:**

      The component supports Outcome 2 by creating an enabling environment. Its purpose is to build capacity among partner institutions, review and recommend revisions to relevant national policies, and develop participatory landscape management planning platforms at district and local levels.

    - **Component 3: partnerships, awareness raising and capacity building for better sustainable integrated landscape management in support of improved ecosystem services and eco-health outcomes:**

This component delivers Outcome 3 by establishing and explaining the concept of cascade ecology through symposia and other knowledge products, and mainstreaming this knowledge among national extension services, research institutions, universities, and policymakers.

- **Component 4: knowledge, information management and monitoring and evaluation:**

  It delivers Outcome 4 by operating a gender-sensitive project monitoring system and systematizing project-related best practices, lessons learned, and knowledge products for dissemination to various stakeholder groups.

- **Component 5: Project Management:**

  The role of this component is to facilitate the delivery of the overall results framework through administrative oversight, project coordination, budgeting and accounting, work planning, and the operation of the Project Steering Committee.

Table 3: Summary of project's latest approved results framework[10]

	Results Statement
Project objective	Mainstreaming biodiversity using an integrated sustainable land management approach to ensure, development, health and environmental co-benefits
Impact	Restored and sustainably managed VTCS cascade landscapes with mainstreamed agrobiodiversity, maintaining ecosystem functions/services (soil and water quality, reduced chemical pollution, reduced human–wildlife conflict) and contributing to improved livelihoods, food and nutrition security, as well as human health and wellbeing in Sri Lanka's dry zone
Intermediate state	**IS 1:** capacity, knowledge and networks functioning. **IS 2:** sustained practice change at farm/cascade level. **IS 3:** enabling environment and institutionalisation initiated. **IS 4:** early signs of ecosystem service improvement in restored VTCS.
Project outcome	**Outcome 1:** sustainable landscape management approaches in support of improved ecosystem services and ecohealth outcomes adopted in prominent socio-ecologically sensitive areas of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS). **Outcome 2:** improved enabling environment for sustainable integrated landscape planning, management and monitoring of ecohealth outcomes. **Outcome 3:** improved evidence base, capacity and awareness on biodiversity-agriculture-ecohealth linkages in cascade landscapes. **Outcome 4:** project implementation based on results-based management and application of project lessons learned in future operations facilitated.

[10] source: ProDoc & CEO Endorsement and MTR

	Results Statement
Outputs	**1.1:** Socio-ecological and biophysical system properties mapped and defined in two Project landscapes. **1.2:** Physical and ecological components of selected VTCSs restored as pilot models. **1.3:** Biodiversity-based agroecological and sustainable integrated land management practices implemented in the two selected VTCS pilot schemes. **1.4:** Goods, services and functions of VTCS ecosystems identified and mainstreamed. **2.1:** Awareness raising and capacity building of key partner institutions, local organizations and communities in participatory integrated landscape management planning of VTCS for improved ecohealth outcomes. **2.2:** Relevant national policies and legislation for enabling environment for the sustainable integrated landscape management reviewed and revisions recommended to the Government. **2.3:** Participatory sustainable integrated landscape management planning and coordination platforms developed at district and local level. **3.1:** Concept of Cascade Ecology established through workshops, symposia and other knowledge products. **3.2:** Knowledge mainstreamed to national extension, research institutions, including universities, and policy makers and other stakeholders on cascade ecology and landscape management, ecosystem services and ecohealth approaches. **4.1:** Gender sensitive project monitoring system operating and providing systematic information on progress in reaching expected outcomes and targets. **4.2:** Project-related best practices, knowledge products and lessons learned systematized and published for a variety of audiences and stakeholder groups

42. Following the MTR, the results framework was adjusted to reflect the reduced implementation timeframe and available budget, focusing efforts on a consolidated scope to ensure deliverability, with the following modifications:

43. Several original outputs were merged or deleted to streamline execution. Original Output 1.2, focusing on community familiarization, was integrated into other capacity-building activities. Under Component 2, separate outputs for policy reviews and landscape planning guidelines were consolidated into unified synthesis documents.

44. In Components 3 and 4, original commitments to produce multiple technical bulletins, guidelines, and training manuals were streamlined into a more concise set of deliverables, specifically a single sourcebook, a set of policy briefs, and a scholarly book.

C. Project Implementation Structure and Partners

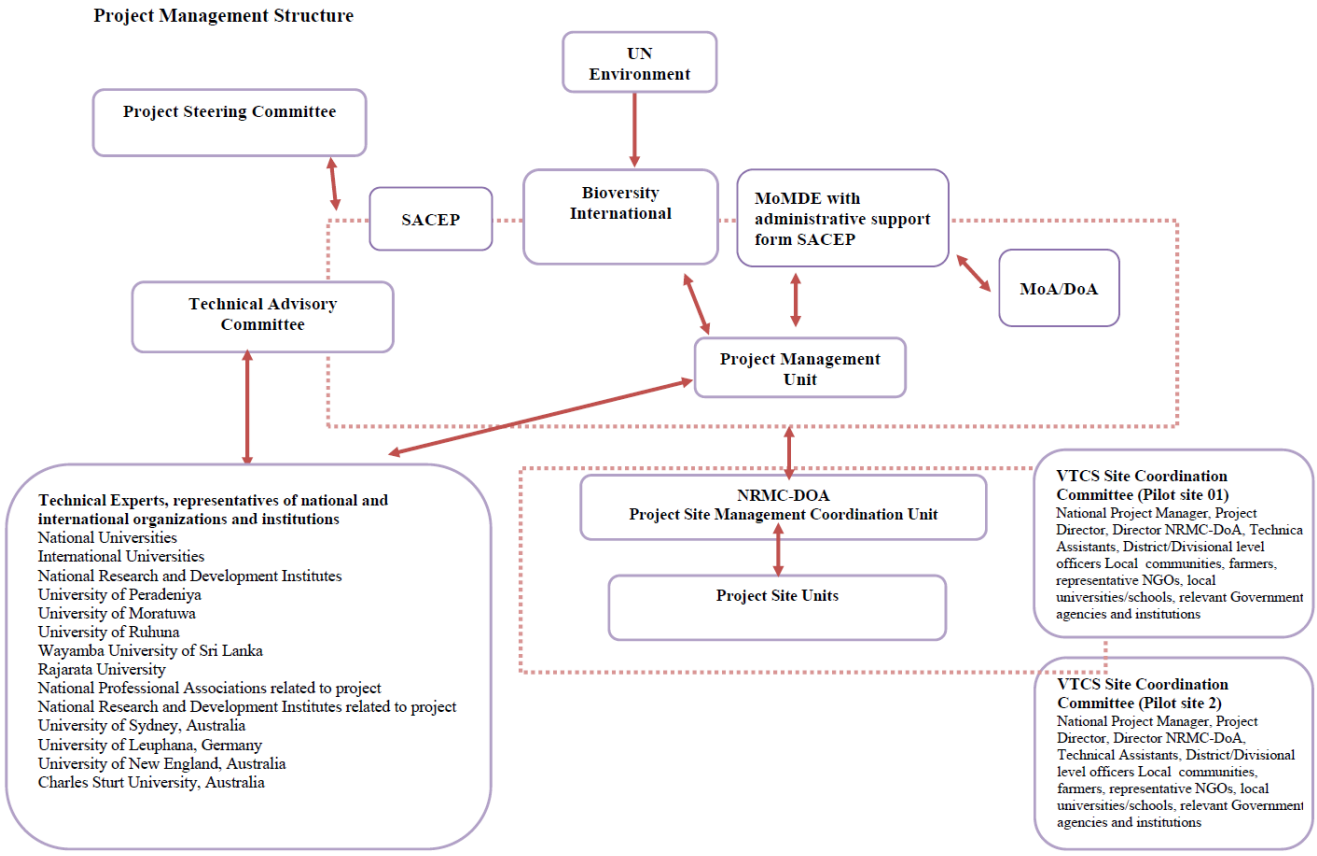
45. The project implementation structure involved multiple organizational levels, comprising an Implementing Agency, Executing Agencies as well as national and local partners. The UNEP Ecosystems Division served as the GEF Implementing Agency, providing oversight, supervision, and technical guidance.

46. The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT functioned as the Lead Executing Agency, responsible for overall project management, coordination, technical leadership, and the management of GEF funds. The Ministry of Environment (formerly the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment) acted as the National Executing Agency, ensuring policy alignment and national coordination.

47. To facilitate local administrative processes and financial management, the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) was appointed as the national executing partner and Local Service Provider. SACEP hosted the Project Management Unit (PMU), which consisted of the National Project Manager and support staff responsible for day-to-day operations.

48. The project governance structure included a Project Steering Committee (PSC) chaired by the Ministry of Environment for general oversight and interagency coordination, and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) providing scientific and technical guidance. At the field level, Project Site Coordination Committees (PSCC) were established to facilitate implementation and stakeholder cooperation in the pilot landscapes

Figure 3: Organigram of the project with key project stakeholders



49. Key Project Partners and Roles

Partner	Role in Project Delivery
Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka (MASL)	Provided guidance on institutional arrangements and the management of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS).
Department of Agriculture (DoA) & Natural Resources Management Centre (NRMC)	Delivered extension services, conducted farmer training, implemented sustainable land management (SLM) and agrobiodiversity practices, and coordinated the PSCCs.
Department of Agrarian Development (DAD)	Executed civil engineering works, restored tank headworks, and implemented soil conservation activities.
Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) & Forest Department (FD)	Managed forest reserves in catchments and implemented measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict, including the establishment of mobile electric fences.

Local Authorities (District & Divisional Secretariats)	Facilitated local activities, mobilized beneficiaries, and integrated project objectives into divisional agricultural committees.
Universities (e.g., Rajarata University, Univ. of Peradeniya)	Contributed to baseline surveys, applied research, and the development of curricula and short courses on cascade ecology.

D. Stakeholders

50. The project engaged various stakeholder groups categorized by their roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the restoration and management of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS).

- Implementing and executing agencies: UNEP and the Alliance of Bioversity International/CIAT provided project oversight, technical leadership, and management.
- Government partners: national entities, including the Ministry of Environment, the Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, and the Department of Agriculture, were responsible for policy alignment, irrigation governance, and land-use planning. Local authorities, such as District and Divisional Secretariats, provided logistical coordination and mobilized beneficiaries at the community level.
- Academic partners: universities and research institutions were engaged to develop curricula on cascade ecology, contribute scientific knowledge, and provide applied research support.
- Direct beneficiaries and key change agents: farmers, community groups, and participants in agrobiodiversity home gardens served as the primary target groups and change agents for the on-the-ground adoption of sustainable land management and agroecological practices.
- Under-represented and marginalized Groups: women's groups, youth, and vulnerable populations were targeted for participation in livelihood diversification, value chain development, and home garden initiatives.

51. See also Table 4 for a detailed analysis of the key stakeholders.

Table 4: Stakeholders' review

Stakeholder	Stakeholder Type	Role in the Project	Power over / Interest in the Project
UNEP (Ecosystems Division, GEF Unit)	Implementing Agency	Oversight, supervision, reporting to GEF, technical guidance	High power / High interest
Alliance Bioversity International –CIAT)	Executing Agency	Project management, coordination, technical leadership, M&E, implementation of activities	High power / High interest
Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka (MASL)	Government Partner	Management of VTCS landscapes, coordination of field activities, restoration and water management	High power / High interest
Department of Agriculture (DoA)	Government Partner	ABD and SLM technical guidance, extension services, farmer training	Medium–High power / High interest
Ministry of Environment (MoE / MMA&ND)	Government Partner	Policy alignment, environmental governance, national coordination	High power / Medium interest

Stakeholder	Stakeholder Type	Role in the Project	Power over / Interest in the Project
Local Authorities (District & Divisional Secretariats)	Local Government	Local facilitation, beneficiary mobilisation, logistical coordination	Medium power / High interest
Farmers, ABD home garden participants, community groups	Direct Beneficiaries	Adoption of SLM and ABD practices, participation in training and restoration activities	Low power / Very high interest
Women's groups, vulnerable groups, youth groups	Marginalised or under-represented groups	Participation in ABD, home gardens, value chains, livelihood diversification	Low power / High interest
Universities & Research Institutions	Academic Partners	Curriculum development (cascade ecology, eco-health), applied research, technical support	Medium power / Medium interest
SACEP	Regional Organisation	Knowledge exchange, regional policy connections	Low–Medium power / Medium interest
Technical service providers & NGOs	External Support Actors	Capacity building, facilitation, training, outreach	Low power / High interest
Indirect Beneficiaries (household members, community residents)	Community Stakeholders	Secondary beneficiaries of improved ecosystem services, health and livelihood outcomes	Low power / Medium interest

E. Changes in Design during Implementation

52. The project underwent several modifications to its scope and parameters due to external factors and implementation challenges:

- Initial delays (2019-2021): implementation was initially slowed down if not stopped all completely, by delays in finalizing the grant agreement and appointing the National Project Manager. This was followed by mobility restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and national political and economic instability.
- Change in implementation arrangements (July 2021): to address implementation barriers, SACEP was engaged as the Local Service Provider to host the Project Management Unit and manage financial disbursements.
- Mid-Term Review and target revisions (December 2022): following the MTR, the project scope was revised to align with the remaining timeframe and budget. The number of targeted pilot cascade landscapes was reduced from five to two. The target for agricultural lands under sustainable management was decreased from 10,000 hectares to 2,000 hectares, and the number of targeted farming households was reduced to 200. These formal revisions were approved by the PSC on 16 December 2022.
- Extensions: the project received a formal no-cost extension (NCE), which moved back the completion date to September 2024 to allow for the completion of project activities. An additional minor 3-month extension established the actual operational completion date as 30 June 2024.
- Additional funding: the project leveraged additional co-financing through partnerships, such as the CGIAR FRESH initiative, ultimately exceeding the original co-financing expectations.

F. Project Financing

53. Initial budget and financing structure: the project was approved with a total planned budget of USD 11,047,865. This package was structured around a GEF Trust Fund grant of USD 2,000,000 (18% of the budget) and a substantial co-financing commitment of USD 9,047,865 (82%). The co-financing strategy was initially designed as a hybrid model, combining anticipated cash contributions totalling USD 3,305,876 with in-kind contributions estimated at USD 5,741,989. These commitments were pledged by government partners that included the Ministry of Environment, the Mahaweli Authority, and the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as executing agencies (SACEP and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT), signalling a collaborative framework to invest in sustainable landscape management from the outset.

54. Financial execution modality and disbursements: monitoring and compliance were managed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, acting as the primary Executing Agency. The project's first cash advance of USD 300,000 was disbursed by UNEP on 3 September 2019, well within the nine-month threshold following project approval. To adhere to internal fiduciary standards, subsequent disbursements to the field required an 80% expenditure threshold of the previous tranche. Faced with a national regulatory hurdle (Budget Circular No/05 2020) that prohibited the establishment of a Project Management Unit (PMU) within the Ministry of Environment, the project adaptively subcontracted local financial execution to SACEP. This strategic adjustment meant funds flowed directly from Bioversity to SACEP, bypassing rigid national treasury bottlenecks. SACEP then managed direct payments to contractors and consultants. This established a flexible financial modality and ensured continuous liquidity for field-level procurement during times of severe national crisis.

55. Budget revisions and the impact of inflation: the national macroeconomic crisis and resulting hyperinflation severely impacted the project's financial outlook, in particular, the capital costs of infrastructure. Cost estimates for tank restorations provided by the Department of Agrarian Development exceeded initial projections several times. Consequently, the project underwent formal budget revisions alongside two No-Cost Extensions (NCEs) totalling 21 months. These revisions provided line-by-line justifications for reallocating funds to accommodate the skyrocketed costs of physical tank works, increased salaries for field staff coordination, and inflated travel expenses, while ensuring the total USD 2,000,000 GEF grant ceiling was not exceeded. To maintain financial efficiency and continuous field liquidity, supplementary reporting was introduced to expedite subsequent fund tranches.

56. Financial performance and co-financing realisation: The final actual co-financing mobilized significantly exceeded the planned targets, reaching over 147% of the original expectation. The project reported actual co-financing of USD 13,354,341, which exceeded the originally planned USD 9,047,865 target by approximately USD 4.3 million. This substantial increase was achieved because the project successfully leveraged additional funds from concurrent initiatives, notably through the CGIAR Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Sustainable and Healthy Diets (FRESH) initiative. Furthermore, a large portion of the increased in-kind co-financing during the latter half of the project came from the Ministry of Public Works and other line agencies, which leveraged public works items, machinery, and significant staff time to support the on-the-ground restoration activities.

Table 5: Co-financing table

Co-financing (Type/Source)	UNEP own Financing (US$1,000)		Government (US$1,000)		Other (US$1,000)		Total (US$1,000)		Total Disbursed (US$1,000)
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
– Grants			3,272.8	4,677.7	33.1	42.1	3,305.9	4,719.8	
– Loans									
– Credits									
– Equity investments									
– In-kind support			5,427.2	8,340.8	314.8	293.8	5,742.0	8,634.6	
– Other (*) -									
Totals			**8,700.0**	**13,018.5**	**347.9**	**335.9**	**9,047.9**	**13,354.3**	

Actual GEF Expenditures

UNEP Budget lines	Descrption	Actual Expenditure 2019	Actual Expenditure 2020	Actual Expenditure 2021	Actual Expenditure 2022	Actual Expenditure 2023	Actual Expenditure 2024	Total
1199	Staff and other personnel costs	15,603.00	43,610.00	65,877.00	4,216.00	35,795.00	59,489.00	224,590.00
1299	Staff and other personnel costs	14,860.00	41,792.00	42,521.00	8,144.00	10,332.00	36,787.00	154,436.00
1399	Staff and other personnel costs	8,080.00	14,518.00	31,433.00	- 3,809.00	8,963.00	46,822.00	106,007.00
1699	Travel	2,108.00	-	11,600.00	- 730.00	39,766.00	21,325.00	74,069.00
2199	Transfers and Grants to Counterparts	-	62,202.00	266,178.00	- 151,907.00	473,925.00	315,098.00	965,496.00
2299	Transfers and Grants to Counterparts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2399	Transfers and Grants to Counterparts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3299	Travel	-	11,550.00	4,000.00	- 901.00	18,890.00	29,084.00	62,623.00
3399	Travel	10,989.00	5,379.00	12,000.00	- 7,505.00	54,902.00	30,625.00	106,390.00
4199	Supplies, Commodities, Materials	-	-	10,000.00	- 8,124.00	2,378.00	3,769.00	8,023.00
4299	Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture	-	-	50,000.00	- 39,245.00	1,095.00	27,682.00	39,532.00
4399	General operating and other direct costs	-	-	6,000.00	- 1,915.00	6,034.00	1,406.00	11,525.00
5199	General operating and other direct costs	-	-	5,500.00	- 3,304.00	3,129.00	606.00	5,931.00
5299	General operating and other direct costs	-	-	3,480.00	4,987.00	39,852.00	41,440.00	89,759.00
5399	General operating and other direct costs	-	-	3,728.00	- 2,208.00	127.00	14,344.00	15,991.00
5599	General operating and other direct costs	-	10,000.00		21,716.00	3,800.00		35,516.00
Total		**51,640.00**	**189,051.00**	**512,317.00**	**- 180,585.00**	**698,988.00**	**628,477.00**	**1,899,888.00**

II. REVIEW METHODS

A. UNEP's review approach

57. In line with UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme and Project Management Manual, the review was undertaken at operational completion of the project to assess performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The review 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.

58. The main target audiences for the review findings are UNEP, Government institutions, academic and research partners, civil society and the private sector, and indigenous and local communities.

59. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and Programme Manual, the review applies nine standard review criteria: (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: Review Framework).

60. Most review 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.

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

62. In addition to the 9 review criteria outlined above, the review 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.

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

64. This review adopted a participatory approach, consulting with project team members, partners and beneficiaries at several stages throughout the process. Central to the review was the analysis (and reconstruction) of the project's Theory of Change. Consultations were held during the review inception phase to arrive at a nuanced 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 further with respondents during the data collection phase, and refined as appropriate. The final iteration of the Theory of Change is presented in this final review report and has been used throughout the review process.

B. Data Collection

Primary data sources

65. Primary data collection relied on a qualitative, remote approach. Due to ongoing disaster-relief operations, no in-country mission to Sri Lanka took place, and the review was conducted entirely remotely through semi-structured interviews. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across all key stakeholder groups.

66. These groups included staff from UNEP, the PMU, key executing and implementing partners (notably the Ministry of Environment, the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme [SACEP], the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, the Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, and the Department of Agriculture), local civil servants, academic partners, and community representatives, including farmers.

67. Data collection tools consisted of tailored interview guides for different stakeholder groups and a document review grid. Because physical site visits were not possible, the verification of field-level interventions relied on documentation only (partner reports). Data verification was achieved through triangulation, systematically cross-checking information across the different stakeholder groups and available documentation.

Table 6: Review respondents and field visits

Stakeholders - Individuals			**A. Total number involved (M/F)**	**B. Planned number to contact (M/F)**	**Sample size (% B/A)[11]**
Project Team	**Project Team**	Implementing agency (UNEP PMU)	—	9 (M/F TBD)	—
		Executing agency(ies) Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT	—	3 (M/F TBD)	—
Beneficiaries	**Direct Beneficiaries:** (farmers, ABD home-gardens, training participants, community groups)		≥1000	8-10	<1%
	Indirect Beneficiaries: (household members, civil society, group members, etc.)		Not documented	2-3	—
Stakeholders - Entities			**A. Total number involved**	**B. Planned number to contact**	**Sample size (% B/A)[12]**
Partners	**Project implementing/ executing partners** (Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka (MASL))		3	3	≥1000
	Project collaborating/ contributing partners[13] (MoE / MMA&ND, DoA, SACEP, Universities, National Research Institutions)		>6	4-5	67-83%

[11] Percentage of people involved in the project that the review plans to contact.
[12] Percentage of entities involved in the project that the review plans to contact.
[13] Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc.).

	Region / country / locality[14]	A. Total number sites	B. Planned number sites to visit	Sample Size (%B/A)[15]
Possible Field Visits	Asia and the Pacific Sri Lanka	Minimum documented: 2 cascades + 5 sustainable villages + multiple ABD/restoration sites	Remote only	---

Strategies for inclusivity:

68. To ensure inclusivity during the remote data collection, especially given the severe logistical challenges of conducting the mission remotely during disaster-relief operations, the review to adapt its methodological tools to capture the inputs of marginalized groups. Since direct virtual communication with vulnerable, non-English-speaking grassroots farmers was practically impossible without in-person translation, the review utilized indirect proxy questioning and data triangulation as its primary tools to ensure their voices were included. The reviewer systematically queried project managers, field coordinators, and government extension officers about the specific needs, participation rates, and challenges faced by marginalized rural communities.

69. The gender perspective was achieved - at least partially - by prioritizing in-depth discussions with female institutional staff and indirect female beneficiaries who had the necessary connectivity and English proficiency for remote interviews. This included interviewing female civil servants holding local administrative positions (such as the Additional District Secretary), female project field coordinators, and female secondary school teachers who were direct beneficiaries of the cascade ecology training programmes.

70. Finally, to bridge the communication gap at the grassroots level, the review used these accessible female stakeholders as a tool to capture overall female opinion regarding broader project activities. During interviews, these female institutional staff and teachers were explicitly asked to reflect on how marginalized rural women perceived and benefited from other direct community interventions. For instance, they provided insights into the success and community acceptance of grassroots activities like the distribution of maize and chilli seeds, the establishment of home garden orchards, poultry distribution, and the women-led 'Hela Bojun' food outlets. This targeted, indirect questioning tool ensured that the economic realities, empowerment challenges, and feedback of marginalized rural women were mainstreamed into the review findings despite the remote nature of the mission.

C. Data Analysis

71. Data collected during the review were analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary analytical approaches employed to reach evidence-based conclusions and ratings include:

- Content analysis: reviewing interview notes and project documents to identify operational patterns, results, and implementation gaps.

[14] In case of a global project, the unit of analysis is 'region'. In case of a regional or multi-country project, the unit of analysis is 'country'. In case of a single country project, the unit of analysis is 'locality', which could refer to a city, town, village, etc.
[15] Percentage of total number project sites in each region, country or locality that the review plans to visit.

- Triangulation: systematically cross-checking information across different stakeholder accounts and secondary documents to verify findings.

- Contribution analysis and outcome mapping: assessing the project's contribution to changes in land management practices, knowledge acquisition, and institutional governance by tracing pathways from outputs to outcomes, using the reconstructed Theory of Change as a reference.

- Trend analysis: examining quantitative indicators, such as the number of hectares restored, the establishment of agrobiodiversity home gardens, and participation rates in training programs.

- Equity and gender analysis: reviewing project data to examine beneficiary inclusion and participation.

72. Findings from these analytical streams were consolidated to determine the performance ratings against the standard UNEP review criteria

73. Integration of beneficiary perspectives: due to the remote nature of the review, the ongoing disaster-relief operations in the country, and language barriers (as most local farmers do not speak English), direct interviews with final beneficiaries were severely restricted. To capture direct grassroots opinions, the review managed to conduct an in-depth interview with one direct beneficiary representative: the chairman of the Belang Kadavala Farmer Association. This direct engagement provided first-hand perspectives on historical tank damage, youth migration from the villages, and the community's transition from artificial pesticides to natural pest control methods.

74. Indirect beneficiary data gathering: to compensate for the limitation of having only one direct farmer interview, the reviewer employed a systematic indirect data-gathering strategy across all other stakeholder consultations. During interviews with government staff, PMU members, field coordinators, and academic partners, the reviewer explicitly embedded questions regarding the direct beneficiaries. Specifically, the reviewer asked these stakeholders to explain how they got in touch with and assessed the needs of the farming communities, probing into the mechanisms of participatory rural appraisals and local needs assessments.

75. Finally, these institutional informants (in particular, several key academic informants) were also questioned about the farmers' reactions, their acceptance of project interventions (such as solar panels, new seed varieties, and electric fences), and any observed behavioural changes or empowerment regarding sustainable land management. By asking service providers and government officials how they interacted with the beneficiaries and what feedback they received, the reviewer was able to use these accounts as a proxy. This indirect approach was subsequently triangulated with socio-economic baseline data and mostly project reports, ensuring that the beneficiary viewpoint was integrated into the data analysis and final performance ratings.

D. Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

76. The review process encountered specific methodological constraints that affected data collection. Foremost, due to ongoing disaster-relief operations in Sri Lanka, an in-country mission was not feasible. The review was conducted entirely remotely, which prevented direct, on-site observation of the physical tank restorations and field-level agroecological interventions. To mitigate this limitation, the review utilized remote verification methods, relying heavily on secondary data such as technical progress reports, and Project

Implementation Reviews (PIRs) provided by the executing partners as well as information found on a rich project website.

77. Additionally, there were constraints regarding stakeholder representation. Because remote consultations were conducted exclusively in English, the respondent pool was narrowed. Primary data collection from the community and local levels was limited to female civil servants holding local administrative positions and female teachers who participated in the cascade ecology training programs.

78. This approach omitted the direct perspectives of non-English speaking grassroots farmers, male community members, and other local stakeholders. To mitigate this gap in representation, the review triangulated the available interview data with extensive secondary documentation, including the project's socio-economic baseline assessments, field surveys, and evaluation reports, to assess community-level outcomes and project delivery. Several interviews were also very much oriented towards the beneficiary's perspectives, albeit, possibly biased by the interviewee.

E. Ethical Considerations

79. The review adheres to UNEG ethical guidelines. Participation in interviews is voluntary and based on informed consent. No personal identifiers appear in the report, and sensitive information is anonymized. Data, including notes, are stored securely and will be deleted after the completion of the review. Furthermore, in the context of the ongoing disaster-relief operations, the review avoided any engagement that might have interfered with the emergency response or have placed an additional burden on affected communities or frontline civil servants.

III. THEORY OF CHANGE AT REVIEW

Reconstruction Process

80. The intended results of the project were evaluated against the original Project Document, the CEO Endorsement, and subsequent implementation reports. The original results framework focused on outputs and outcomes, omitting the articulation of intermediate states and a long-lasting impact. Output-level indicators were not specified at the design stage. To assess the causal logic and the likelihood of impact, the Theory of Change (ToC) was reconstructed during the review inception phase, preserving the approved outcomes and outputs.

81. The long-lasting impact was formulated based on the original ToC diagram and the CEO Endorsement narrative, establishing a reference point for impact assessment. Four intermediate states were reconstructed to connect the causal sequence between the project outcomes and the long-term impact. Because output-level indicators were absent in the original design, they were reconstructed using data from PIR, HYR, and the project final report to support evaluability and performance analysis.

82. Overall, the original ToC was not fully aligned with the logical framework, as several indicators lacked baseline data, they were not mapped to causal pathways and did not meet SMART criteria.

83. Finally, risk identification and safeguards were underdeveloped at the design stage, particularly concerning the anticipation of procurement requirements and external economic stability factors.

Justification for Reformulation of Results Statements

84. The review maintained the original project outcomes and outputs exactly as formulated in the Project Document. However, to clearly bridge the causal gap between these outcomes and the ultimate project goals, four intermediate states and a long-lasting impact statement were reconstructed based on the original Theory of Change diagram and CEO Endorsement narrative.

85. Furthermore, because the original design lacked explicit output-level indicators and featured combined outcome metrics, specific indicators were analytically split or reconstructed using evidence from Project Implementation Reviews and final reports. These refinements were necessary to improve overall evaluability without altering the original intent of the results framework. The specific adjustments and the detailed justifications for each are presented in **Table 7** below.

Table 7: Justification for reformulation of results statements

Formulation in original project document(s) – *insert source/date*	**Formulation for reconstructed ToC at review inception (RTOC)**	**Justification for reformulation and/or consultant's explanatory notes on the interpretation[16] of the result**
(LONG LASTING) IMPACT		
Cascade landscapes restored and agrobiodiversity mainstreamed" and associated higher-level benefit "Improved human health and wellbeing (ToC Annex R) Longer-term expectation that integrating	Restored and sustainably managed VTCS cascade landscapes with mainstreamed agrobiodiversity, maintaining ecosystem functions/services (water and soil quality, reduced chemical pollution, reduced human–wildlife conflict) and contributing to improved	This is a reconstruction required for likelihood-of-impact analysis, not a proposed change to the approved ProDoc outcomes. Wording consolidates the impact line in the ToC diagram with the CEO

[16] In some instances, the results statement may not need to be reformulated, but implied meanings need to be made explicit or understanding clarified. In other cases, it may be necessary to specify the stakeholder, etc.

biodiversity and ecosystem services in land management supports restoration/preservation of ecosystem functions, resilience to climate change impacts, improved food security, nutrition, health and wellbeing (CEO Endorsement)	livelihoods, food and nutrition security, and human health and wellbeing in Sri Lanka's dry zone.	endorsement's description of expected longer-term benefits and pathways (ecosystem services → resilience → livelihoods/health).
INTERMEDIATE STATES		
"Capacity change" and "Changes in practices" layers; plus "Scaling / Institutionalisation" elements through policy makers, LUPPD, DAD, NRMC, etc. (ToC Annex R) Also: "Package of measures – practices, policies, knowledge management and awareness… scaling up methods and tools… cross-sectoral policies and planning… improved understanding… to better manage future risks and safeguard ecosystem functioning." (CEO Endorsement file)	1. Intermediate State 1 – Capacity, knowledge and networks functioning: stakeholders (community groups, extension services, line agencies, universities, private sector) have improved capabilities and shared understanding of cascade ecology, ecosystem services, agroecology/SLM and eco-health linkages; knowledge products and networks support continued learning and replication. 2. Intermediate State 2 – Sustained practice changes at farm/cascade level: farmers and land managers in target VTCS adopt agroecological and SLM practices and apply agrobiodiversity tools; restoration models are implemented and maintained; incentives/market and non-market mechanisms support continuation beyond the project. 3. Intermediate State 3 – Enabling environment and institutionalisation initiated: district/local coordination platforms and integrated planning mechanisms operate; guidelines and policy recommendations are taken up within relevant institutional mandates (e.g., planning through LUPPD/Divisional Secretariats and line agencies), creating conditions for replication/upscaling in other cascade landscapes. 4. Intermediate State 4 – Early signs of ecosystem service improvement in restored VTCS: Restored VTCS and associated micro-catchments demonstrate improved functionality (e.g., water management, reduced land degradation) consistent with the pathway toward improved ecosystem services and wellbeing.	These Intermediate States are derived from the ToC diagram's "capacity change," "changes in practices," and "scaling/institutionalisation" components, alongside the CEO endorsement's description of the transformation mechanism (practices, policy, knowledge, and awareness). They serve as analytic milestones to assess the likelihood of impact rather than revised results statements.
PROJECT OUTCOMES		
Outcome 1: Sustainable landscape management approaches in support of improved ecosystem services and ecohealth outcomes adopted in prominent socioecological sensitive areas of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) (ProDoc)	No change	Outcome 1–4 formulations remain the same as per ProDoc: Outcomes 1–3 map cleanly to the ToC's three pathways (practice / enabling environment / knowledge) : Outcome 4 is an "enabling" outcome (RBM/learning) and is treated as a support pathway for sustainability/replication rather than a direct socio-ecological change outcome.
Outcome 2: Improved enabling environment for sustainable integrated landscape planning, management and monitoring of ecohealth outcomes (ProDoc)	No change	
Outcome 3: Improved evidence base, capacity and awareness on biodiversity-agriculture-ecohealth linkages in cascade landscapes (ProDoc)	No change	
Outcome 4: Project implementation based on results-based management and application of project lessons learned in future operations facilitated (ProDoc)	No change	

OUTCOME INDICATORS		
Outcome-level indicators (source: ProDoc)		
Ecological restoration / SLM (Outcome 1): - Area of agricultural lands under improved agroecological/SLM practices and increased crop diversity (PIR Results Framework) - Sustainable eco-health village models established and operational (PIRs; ProDoc narrative) - Markets developed for VTCS goods and services (PIRs)	- *No change to intent; indicator split analytically into:* (i) area under SLM (ha); (ii) crop diversity index - Sustainable eco-health village models meeting agreed minimum criteria and operational - Markets identified and/or operational for VTCS goods/services (with evidence)	- Original indicator combines two metrics; split improves evaluability without altering outcome meaning - Clarifies unit of analysis and operational status - "Developed" ambiguous; clarification improves measurability
Agrobiodiversity & livelihoods (Outcome 2): - Multi-sectoral platforms established/participated in by HLP (PIR 2024) - Integrated landscape planning frameworks developed for VTCS (PIRs) - Guidelines and policy recommendations developed (PIRs)	- Multi-sectoral platforms established and operational with HLP participation - No change - No change	- Harmonises inconsistent PIR phrasing
Knowledge & attitudes (Outcome 3): - At least 1,000 stakeholders trained (≥50% women) (PIR target) - Cascade ecology integrated into education and research systems (ProDoc narrative) - National cascade research network established (PIRs)	- No change - Defined as: courses/modules delivered by universities - No change	- Clarification
Implementation and lessons learned (Outcome 4): - M&E system established and operational (PIRs) - Enhanced access to knowledge products (PIRs)	- M&E system approved, used for reporting and tracking indicators - Access defined via website/products dissemination	- Clarifies "operational" - Improves measurability
OUTPUTS		

On Outcome 1: 1.1 Socio-ecological and biophysical system properties mapped and defined (ProDoc / PIR) 1.2 Community familiarisation on VTCS restoration and agroecological/SLM practices (ProDoc) 1.3 Physical and ecological components of selected VTCS restored as pilot models (ProDoc / PIR) 1.4 Biodiversity-based agroecological and SLM practices promoted (ProDoc) 1.5 Goods, services and functions of VTCS ecosystems identified and mainstreamed (ProDoc) On outcome 2: 2.1 Awareness raising and capacity building on participatory ILM (ProDoc) 2.2 Policies and legislation reviewed and revisions recommended (ProDoc) 2.3 Planning and coordination platforms developed (ProDoc) 2.4 Participatory sustainable ILM guidelines developed (ProDoc) On outcome 3: 3.1 Cascade Ecology concept established via symposia/workshops (ProDoc) 3.2 Knowledge mainstreamed to extension, research and policy (ProDoc) On Outcome 4: 4.1 Gender-sensitive project monitoring system operating (ProDoc) 4.2 Best practices and lessons learned systematised and published (ProDoc)	No change No change No change No change No change - No change - No change - No change - No change - No change - No change - No change - No change	

OUTPUT INDICATORS		
On Outcome 1: Not available in the original project documents	Reconstructed (evidence-based): Baseline socio-ecological assessment reports completed in each project landscape Reconstructed: Number of VTCS tanks/components restored and operational Training/adoption repeatedly reported in PIRs Reconstructed: Number of ILM platforms established and meeting regularly	ProDoc does not list output indicators; reconstruction based on PIRs (2020–2024), HYP 2022 and the Project Final Report. Restoration works documented post-MTR; indicator needed for evaluability Training/adoption repeatedly reported in PIRs
On Outcome 2: Not available in the original project documents	Reconstructed: Number of ILM plans/guidelines produced and formally validated Reconstructed: Number of symposia/workshops held and proceedings produced Reconstructed: Number of courses/modules delivered by universities Reconstructed: M&E plan approved; reports submitted on schedule Reconstructed: Number of knowledge products published and disseminated	Platforms documented in PIRs Needed for evaluability
On Outcome 3: Not available in the original project documents		Evidence in the Project Final Report Required to test education integration
On Outcome 4: Not available in the original project documents		Based on PIR evidence Based on “Project Final Report”

86. The specific drivers and assumptions underpinning the causal pathways have been reformulated to reflect the operational reality; these are detailed in **Table 8**.

Table 8: Justification for reformulation/expansion of drivers and assumptions

Formulation in original project document(s) – *insert source/date*	**Formulation for reconstructed ToC at review inception (RTOC)**	**Justification for reformulation and/or consultant’s explanatory notes on the interpretation[17] of the driver or assumption**
DRIVERS		
No explicit drivers in documents	1. Project-facilitated participation and engagement mechanisms enable active involvement of local communities, farmer groups and local institutions in agroecological/SLM adoption and VTCS restoration. 2. Project-supported multi-sectoral coordination and platforms strengthen collaboration among national, provincial and local agencies (e.g. LUPPD, DAD, NRMC, extension and research bodies). 3. Project-generated knowledge products, training materials and technical support are made available and actively disseminated to target institutions, extension services and education systems.	Not explicitly labelled in design documents but are clearly within the project’s sphere of influence (as seen in the file CEO Endorsement and the original ToC logic (capacity building, coordination, knowledge generation and dissemination). Reformulation does not alter any results statement.
ASSUMPTIONS		
For outcome 1: land availability; no conflict with new projects; political stability; openness of local governments and communities to	1. Land required for VTCS restoration and agroecological/SLM interventions remains available and free from major competing land-use conflicts. 2. Political and administrative stability allows uninterrupted implementation of field-based	Reformulation organises original assumptions into external enabling conditions required for causal pathway from Outputs to Outcome 1, without changing substance.

[17] In some instances, the drivers or assumptions may not need to be reformulated, but implied meanings need to be made explicit or understanding clarified. In other cases, it may be necessary to add driver and assumptions that were not previously identified in the original TOC or results framework.

sustainable land management approaches (ProDoc).	activities. 3. Local governments, community institutions and farmers remain open to adopting SLM and agroecological approaches promoted by the project.	
For outcome 2: the majority of stakeholders are willing to accept integrated landscape management plans; other relevant stakeholders are interested in the healthy landscapes approach (ProDoc).	1. Farmers and land users are willing to adopt practices and land-use recommendations from integrated landscape management planning. 2. National and sub-national institutions show sustained interest in applying the healthy landscapes/cascade approach within their mandates.	Reformulated to clarify behavioural and institutional conditions required from Outputs → Outcome 2.
For outcome 3: universities and schools are willing to conduct specific courses and integrate material on cascade ecology and ecohealth approaches; stakeholders are interested in project knowledge (ProDoc).	1. Policymakers, agencies and stakeholder groups remain engaged with project-generated evidence, policy briefs and guidelines. 2. Institutional users perceive project knowledge products as relevant and continue to use them beyond project completion.	To convert original assumption into explicit behavioural conditions for capacity and knowledge change, but not implying guaranteed uptake.
For outcome 4: national audiences and stakeholder groups are interested in project progress and find knowledge products useful (ProDoc).	1. Policymakers, agencies and stakeholder groups remain engaged with project outputs (policy briefs, guidelines, evidence) 2. Institutional users perceive project knowledge products as relevant and continue using them in decision-making	To clarify how Outputs 4.1–4.2 contribute to learning, replication and potential governance influence
Gender is addressed as a cross-cutting consideration in implementation, including participation of women and tracking of women beneficiaries; no explicit human-rights-based approach, driver, or assumption is articulated in the project Theory of Change or results framework (ProDoc, CEO approval April 2018; PIRs 2020–2024)	Project interventions are implemented in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner, ensuring equitable participation and benefit-sharing for women and vulnerable groups, without structural human rights constraints limiting adoption or sustainability of VTCS restoration and agroecological practices	The original design did not embed gender equality or human rights as causal mechanisms. Reconstructing them as an explicit assumption clarifies enabling conditions for outcomes, aligns with UNEP review standards, and reflects how gender considerations were operationalised during implementation

Causal Pathways:

87. The reconstructed ToC organizes the project logic into three causal pathways and one cross-cutting enabling pathway.

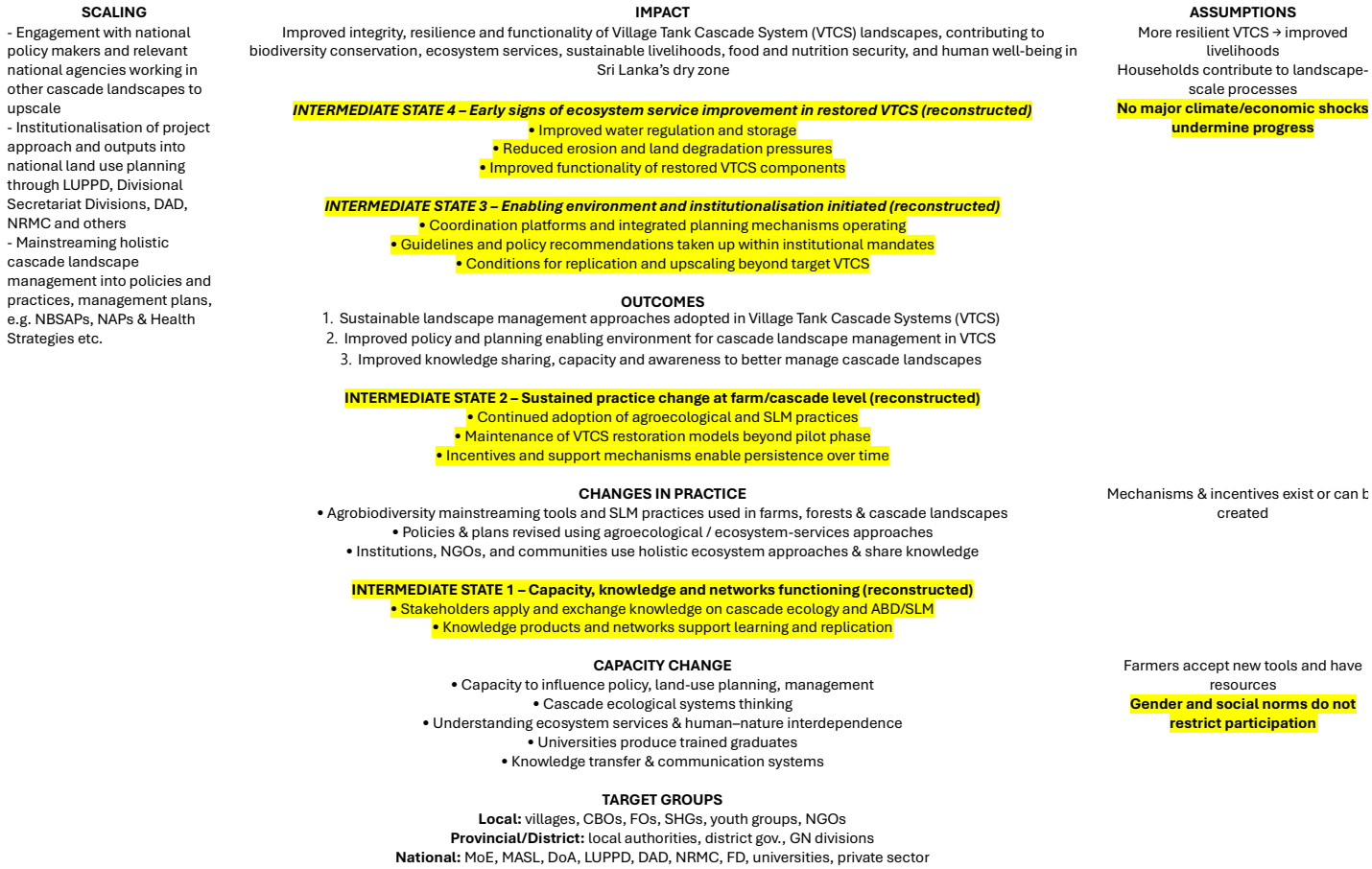
1. Practice change pathway: Project outputs, including baseline assessments, demonstration sites, VTCS restoration models, and agrobiodiversity home gardens, contribute to Outcome 1. This pathway targets the sustained adoption of agrobiodiversity and sustainable land management practices at the farm and cascade levels, which transitions toward improved functionality of VTCS ecosystems.

2. Knowledge and capacity pathway: Project outputs targeting capacity building, training, and curricula development among community members, extension officers, and researchers contribute to Outcome 3. This pathway establishes the intermediate state of functioning capacity, knowledge, and networks, supporting behavioural incentives for integrated landscape management.

3. Enabling environment pathway: Institutional engagement, multi-sectoral coordination platforms, and policy-oriented outputs contribute to Outcome 2. This pathway targets the integration of project approaches into district and national planning processes to initiate institutionalisation.

4. Monitoring and learning pathway: Outcome 4 functions as a cross-cutting support pathway. Project-level monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management systems facilitate learning and replication across the other three pathways.

Figure 4: Theory of Change at review



Drivers and assumptions:

88. To structure the causal assessment, the reconstructed ToC distinguishes between drivers and assumptions. Drivers are defined as factors within the project's sphere of influence, whereas assumptions represent external enabling conditions.

Drivers:

- Project-facilitated participation and engagement mechanisms enable the involvement of local communities, farmer groups, and local institutions in the adoption of sustainable land management and VTCS restoration.
- Project-supported multi-sectoral coordination and platforms strengthen collaboration among national, provincial, and local agencies.
- Project-generated knowledge products, training materials, and technical support are made available and disseminated to target institutions, extension services, and education systems.

Assumptions:

- Land required for VTCS restoration and agroecological interventions remains available and free from competing land-use conflicts.
- Political and administrative stability permits the uninterrupted implementation of field-based activities.

- Local governments, community institutions, and farmers remain open to adopting the sustainable land management and agroecological approaches.
- National and sub-national institutions show sustained interest in applying the cascade approach within their mandates.
- Policymakers and institutional users perceive the project's knowledge products as relevant and continue to utilize them in decision-making.

Human Rights and Gender Equality:

89. The original ProDoc did not include an explicit human-rights-based approach or a standalone result targeting gender equality or vulnerable groups. Therefore, to assess the project's contribution to equality, this dimension is integrated into the reconstructed ToC, just as an assumption.

90. The ToC assumes that project interventions are implemented in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner, ensuring equitable participation and benefit-sharing for women and vulnerable groups, without structural human rights constraints limiting the adoption or sustainability of VTCS restoration and agroecological practices.

IV. REVIEW FINDINGS

91. This chapter is organized according to the review criteria established in the Terms of Reference (TOR) and reflected in the project performance ratings table. As the main substantive section of the report, it provides a summative analysis of triangulated data relevant to each criterion. Cross-cutting issues regarding "Factors Affecting Performance" are integrated within the respective criteria assessments. Ratings are provided at the end of each assessment, with the complete ratings table included in the Conclusions (Section 5).

A. Strategic Relevance

Alignment to UNEP's UNEP Medium Term Strategy[18] (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities

92. The project has demonstrated Highly Satisfactory performance in its alignment with UNEP's strategic priorities. It directly contributes to both the "Healthy and productive ecosystems" (MTS 2018–2021) and "Nature Action" (MTS 2022–2025) sub-programmes by promoting the restoration and sustainable management of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) in Sri Lanka's dry zone. By integrating agrobiodiversity and sustainable land management (SLM) into local governance frameworks and university curricula, the project institutionalizes ecosystem health and climate resilience, directly fulfilling UNEP's Programme of Work (POW) expected accomplishments.

Table 9: Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW), and Strategic Priorities

UNEP strategic document	Alignment with UNEP's mandate and thematic priorities	Level of alignment *full, partial, or not at all*
MTS	The project was approved under MTS 2018–2021, fully aligning with Sub-programme 3, "Healthy and productive ecosystems," to enhance ecosystem resilience. During implementation, it aligned with MTS 2022–2025 under the "Nature Action" sub-programme, specifically Outcomes 2A and 2B, by promoting sustainable land management and agrobiodiversity in cascade landscapes	**Full**
POW	POW 2020-2021: the project contributes to Expected Accomplishment (EA) 3(a): "Ecosystem integrity and resilience are strengthened for human well-being" and EA (a): "The health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sectoral and transboundary collaboration frameworks at the national and international levels". POW 2022-2023: the project aligns with Nature Action PoW indicators (iii) and (iv). In particular, indicator (iii): "Number of countries and national, regional and subnational authorities and entities that incorporate, with UNEP support, biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches into development and sectoral plans, policies and processes for the sustainable management and/or restoration of terrestrial, freshwater and marine areas"	**Full**
Bali Strategic	The project fully aligns with the BSP by developing the technical capacity of local communities, government extension officers, policymakers, and university staff to	**Full**

18 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.

Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building	sustainably plan and manage cascade landscapes. This is achieved by delivering targeted training, developing short courses, and facilitating technology transfer for sustainable integrated landscape planning and cascade ecology management.	
South-South Cooperation	While project interventions were implemented exclusively at the national level within Sri Lanka, the project engaged the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) as its local service provider. Because SACEP is a regional inter-governmental organisation, this partnership structurally supports regional coordination. However, the project itself did not actively facilitate the direct exchange of resources, technology, or knowledge between developing countries.	**Partial**

Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities

93. The project is fully consistent with the GEF-6 Biodiversity Focal Area, specifically Program 8, which focuses on implementing the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS). By targeting the development of national ABS frameworks and facilitating the discovery of nature-based products, the project directly addresses the GEF's mandate to prevent the loss of biodiversity while ensuring equitable benefit sharing.

Table 10: Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partner Strategic Priorities

Donor or partner strategic document	**Alignment with donor or partner strategic priorities**	**Level of alignment** *full, partial, or not at all*
Global Environment Facility (GEF-6)	The project is fully aligned with GEF-6 Strategic Priorities. Under the Biodiversity focal area (BD-3, Program 7), it promotes the conservation and sustainable use of the genetic diversity of globally significant cultivated plants within production systems. Under the Land Degradation focal area (LD-3, Program 4), it establishes support mechanisms and drives the adoption of integrated, gender-sensitive sustainable land management (SLM) practices across tank cascade landscapes.	**Full**
Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (Executing Agency)	It is in line with the Alliance's mandate to deliver research-based solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems. By mainstreaming agrobiodiversity and promoting sustainable cascade landscape management, the project directly supports the Alliance's strategic goals to improve people's lives and address the interconnected global crises of malnutrition, climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation.	**Full**
South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)	The project aligns with its mandate as an inter-governmental organization that promotes and supports the protection, management, and enhancement of environment in the South Asian region. By rehabilitating cascade landscapes and implementing sustainable land management practices, the project directly supports SACEP's goals of environmental conservation and climate resilience in the country.	**Full**
Government of Sri Lanka (Ministry of Environment / Ministry of Agriculture)	The project is fully aligned with the Government of Sri Lanka's strategic vision for "A Sustainably Developed Sri Lanka". It directly supports the Ministry of Environment's mandate to balance economic development with natural resource conservation, and advances the government's commitments as a national focal point to the three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC) with	**Full**

	targeted programmes on biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management, and climate change adaptation in the dry zone.	

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

94. The project demonstrates full alignment with critical global, regional, and national environmental priorities by advancing commitments to multiple Sustainable Development Goals and international conventions, including the CBD and UNCCD. At national level, the intervention supports Sri Lanka's core development and climate strategies, effectively operationalizing NDCs, the NAP, and National Land Use Policy. By integrating sustainable land management into cascade ecology, the project is translating policy frameworks into field-level strategies for biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.

Table 11: Relevance to Global, Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities

Strategic document or agreement	**Alignment with global, regional, sub-regional, national environmental priorities**	**Level of Alignment** *Full, partial, or not at all*
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030	Contributions to SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life on Land). It achieves this by improving access to safe food, empowering women, promoting climate-smart agriculture, reducing agrochemical water pollution, and restoring terrestrial ecosystems and degraded land.	Full
Global Environmental Agreements (CBD, UNCCD, and Frameworks)	Supporting Gov. commitments to the UNCCD's strategic plan and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Specifically, it actively addresses Aichi Targets 2, 7, 8, 13, 14, and 18, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 2030 Targets by mainstreaming agrobiodiversity and sustainable management in production landscapes.	Full
National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change Impacts (2016-2025) & NDCs (2021)	Alignment with Gov. National Adaptation Plan and Nationally Determined Contributions. It operationalizes these plans by establishing Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) as a Nature-based Solution to enhance climate resilience against escalating droughts and extreme weather in the vulnerable dry zone.	Full
National Land Use Policy (2007) & National Environment Policy (2022)	The project actively supports those core national policies by integrating environmental conservation into land-use planning. It addresses critical national priorities including combating soil degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. It also promotes sustainable agricultural practices and the protection of natural water catchments.	Full
National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2016-2022)	Alignment with Gov's NBSAP. It directly supports the plan's strategic priorities to conserve and sustainably use natural resources, minimizing the loss of agrobiodiversity, and reducing the country's vulnerability to land degradation, soil loss, and the contamination of vital water resources.	Full

Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence

95. The project demonstrated a good complementarity and coherence with existing national and international interventions, avoiding duplication and maximizing catalytic effects. During design and implementation, the project actively sought synergies with initiatives addressing similar target groups and environmental challenges in Sri Lanka's dry zone. This included close coordination with the World Bank's ESCAMP project for human-wildlife conflict mitigation, leveraging the CGIAR FRESH initiative for agrobiodiversity mainstreaming, and upscaling models from previous UNEP/GEF projects like the BFN initiative. By integrating its activities with these frameworks, the project tried to optimize resource use and enhance its overall impact.

Table 12: Complementarity with existing interventions/coherence

Other initiatives by UNEP or other organisations	**Complementarity** *(including collaboration, coordination and overlap or duplication)*	**Level of Alignment** *Full, partial, or not at all*
World Bank ESCAMP Project (Ecosystems Management and Conservation Project)	The project collaborated closely with ESCAMP, implemented by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), to trace ecosystem-based fence paths and establish self-managed community electric fences to mitigate human-elephant conflicts.	Full
UNEP/FAO/GEF BFN Project (Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use for Improved Human Nutrition and Wellbeing)	The project avoided duplication and achieved strong complementarity by upscaling key results and research products from the BFN project. It utilized BFN's knowledge base to mainstream nutritious biodiversity into agroecological practices, local food systems, and value chains in the target locations.	Full
CGIAR FRESH Initiative (Fruit and Vegetables for Sustainable Healthy Diets)	The project collaborated with this 10-year CGIAR research initiative to leverage additional long-term funding and resources. This collaboration specifically supported the project's work in promoting the mainstreaming of agrobiodiversity around indigenous fruit trees and indigenous vegetables.	Full
GEF-UNDP ESA Project (Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation and Sustenance of Ecosystem services in Environmentally Sensitive Areas)	The project aligned with and upscaled models from the ESA project, which assisted the Government of Sri Lanka in safeguarding biodiversity in multiple land use areas through the operationalization of "Environmentally Sensitive Areas" governance frameworks.	Full

96. The project made very relevant contributions to the strategic goals of UNEP, the GEF, and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT by mainstreaming agrobiodiversity and sustainable land management (SLM) into Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS). It directly contributed to UNEP's "Healthy and productive ecosystems" and "Nature Action" sub-programmes, as well as GEF-6 priorities for biodiversity conservation (BD-3) and reversing land degradation (LD-3). By providing research-based solutions on food systems, the project indirectly addressed interconnected global crises like malnutrition, climate change, and environmental degradation.

97. Nationally, the project operationalized Sri Lanka's commitments to the Rio Conventions and multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 15) by utilizing VTCS restoration as an effective Nature-based Solution for climate resilience in the highly vulnerable dry zone. These contributions were enhanced by the project's strong

coherence with ongoing interventions. By actively collaborating with the World Bank's ESCAMP project for human-elephant conflict mitigation, upscaling models from the previous UNEP/GEF BFN project, and leveraging the CGIAR FRESH initiative, the project optimized resource use, avoided duplication, and maximized its catalytic impact on the ground.

Findings Statements on Strategic Relevance and Complementarity

98. **Finding 1: the project successfully translated high-level environmental policies into practical action on the ground.** Sri Lanka has strong national frameworks for climate adaptation and land use, but applying these in vulnerable dry zones has been difficult. The project addressed this gap by introducing tested, nature-based solutions directly to local farming communities. By putting concepts like integrated landscape management into practice, the project transformed broad national commitments to the SDGs and Rio Conventions into 'operational' working models that directly combat soil degradation and biodiversity loss.

99. **Finding 2: the project's success relied a lot on its ability to partner with existing programmes rather than starting from scratch.** Instead of creating parallel systems, the project actively worked with ongoing initiatives like the World Bank's ESCAMP project, the GEF-UNDP ESA programme, and the CGIAR FRESH initiative. This practical approach prevented overlapping work and made the best use of shared resources. By building on established networks and local models, the project increased its overall impact and helped secure opportunities for long-term funding.

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

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

Rating for Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partner Strategic Priorities: Highly Satisfactory

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

Rating for Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence: Highly Satisfactory

B. Quality of Project Design

100. Below is a detailed review of the project's design based on key aspects:

Table 13: Summary of quality of project design assessment ratings

	SECTION	RATING (1-6)	Summary Assessment
A	Project Preparation	4	The situation analysis accurately describes ecological degradation. A costed workplan is included, but procurement planning is insufficiently developed.
B	Risk Identification and Safeguards	3	Risks are identified generally but lack detailed mitigation measures, notably regarding procurement and economic volatility.
C	Governance and Supervision Arrangements	4	Governance structures are adequately described, though institutional uptake responsibilities are not fully defined.
D	Partnerships	4	Partner institutions fit the technical scope, yet initial capacity assessments were limited.
E	Strategic Relevance	5	The design aligns closely with UNEP, GEF-6, and national dry-zone policies.

F	Logical Framework and Causality	4	Features a comprehensive Theory of Change, though indicators lack baselines and are sometimes non-SMART.
G	Financial Planning	4	Includes a costed workplan but lacks contingencies for economic shocks and under-resources some components.
H	Efficiency	4	Activity sequencing is logical but not cost-optimised or resilient to procurement delays.
I	Monitoring	3	Meets minimum requirements but lacks indicator precision, baseline data, and gender-disaggregated tracking.
J	Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	4	Institutionalisation is identified as a pathway, but detailed exit strategies and long-term financing plans are absent.
K	Learning, Communication and Outreach	4	Focuses on knowledge products, though long-term maintenance mechanisms are undefined.
	Total (Weighted) Score:	*3.88*	*(Full analysis in the Inception Report, available from the Project/Task Manager)*

101. The project design demonstrates a good understanding of the environmental and socio-economic challenges affecting Village Tank Cascade Systems. Its framework aligns closely with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy and GEF-6 priorities. The inclusion of a comprehensive Theory of Change successfully maps expected practice and capacity changes, while a fully costed workplan provides a realistic basis for resource allocation and activity sequencing. These elements ensured the project remained strategically relevant and structurally viable.

102. However, specific design-stage vulnerabilities prevented a higher rating. Risk identification was only partially developed, lacking mitigation provisions for procurement bottlenecks and national economic volatility that later significantly hindered implementation. Additionally, the logical framework suffered from imprecise, non-SMART indicators and missing baseline data, directly reducing evaluability. Gender mainstreaming was also a gap; the absence of a dedicated gender analysis or budgeting, resulted in a low gender marker score. Finally, while the design identified institutionalisation pathways, it lacked detailed exit strategies or long-term financial provisions to sustain outcomes.

Rating for Project Design: Moderately Satisfactory

C. Nature of the External Context

103. The project's implementation context was defined by an extraordinary sequence of unfavourable external shocks. Initially, the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in April 2019 restricted travel and delayed critical administrative setups. This was quickly compounded by national elections in late 2019 and 2020, which caused significant political turnover and institutional paralysis within the Ministry of Environment. Specifically, the enactment of a new national bill (Budget Circular No/05 2020) stipulated that PMUs were not required for projects funded with foreign resources and prohibited ministries from allocating staff time for project management. This crippling regulatory hurdle stalled the signing of execution agreements and the disbursement of funds. To overcome this bottleneck, the project adaptively transferred local executing, administrative, and financial responsibilities to SACEP. Under this new arrangement, a Letter of Agreement was signed in July 2021 directly between Bioversity International and SACEP. Consequently, project funds were transferred directly from Bioversity to SACEP, allowing SACEP to establish and manage the PMU while reporting back to Bioversity.

104. In parallel, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered strict lockdowns and the widespread closure of government and university offices, effectively paralyzing community-level

mobilization, participatory planning, and critical field-level baseline assessments for more than a year, as travel to rural areas was restricted or forbidden.

105. The ensuing hyperinflation, severe fuel shortages, and prolonged power cuts disrupted daily operations, severely reduced partner mobility, and skyrocketed material costs. For example, cost estimates provided by the Department of Agrarian Development for physical tank restoration vastly exceeded initial projections, reaching up to USD 116,407 per tank. The project's scope was therefore drastically downscaled, reducing the number of fully restored tanks from eight to four.

106. Overall, these unprecedented crises required major budget reallocations and multiple No-Cost Extensions, ultimately pushing the original March 2022 technical completion date to June 2024.

Rating for Nature of the external context: Highly Unfavourable

D. Effectiveness

107. The outcome and output structure is slightly different[19] from the original ProDoc as it took into consideration the MTR proposed modifications that were subsequently endorsed by the PSC.

Table 14: Availability of outputs

	Narrative Assessment	Sources of Information / Evidence
Component 1: Sustainable Landscape Management Approaches in support of improved ecosystem services and eco-health outcomes adopted in prominent socio-ecological sensitive areas of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS)		
Outcome 1 Socio-ecological and biophysical system properties mapped and defined in 2 Project landscapes		
Output 1.1: Socio-ecological and biophysical system properties mapped and defined in 2 Project landscapes. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Baseline mapping and assessment targets achieved. Knowledge generated with 8 peer-reviewed papers published or drafted (vs. 2 targeted) and multiple reports published. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Comprehensive baseline assessments covering land degradation, ecosystem services, biodiversity, food security, and human health completed by April 2021. Land Use System (LUS) maps developed (a project poster was ranked in the top 5 at the Tropentag 2024 conference in Vienna).	The project delivered baseline assessments, providing necessary data for subsequent interventions. Despite early COVID-19 delays that hindered field mobility, the data directly informed pilot site selections, restoration plans, and contributed to the production of eight peer-reviewed papers Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary data: interviews - Secondary data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024, Cost Benefit Analysis report
Output 1.2[20]: Physical and ecological components of selected VTCSs restored as pilot models. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Following MTR recommendations due to severe hyperinflation, the physical restoration target was formally reduced from 8 to 4 tanks. The project surpassed this revised target by fully restoring 5 tanks and partially restoring 2. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:**	Macroeconomic inflation and a severe national economic crisis forced the MTR to reduce physical targets from eight to four tanks across two landscapes. Against these revised targets, the project completed upstream forest enrichment, physical tank renovations, and downstream water management restorations, generating ecological and livelihood benefits for local farmers. This target reduction allowed the project to redirect remaining resources	- Primary data: interviews - Secondary data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024, Cost Benefit analysis

[19] Source: Healthy Landscapes Project Workplan, revised during MTR - December 2022

[20] The original Output 1.2 on "Community familiarization" was deleted by the MTR and integrated into Component 3

downstream water management systems completed, benefiting over 2,500 farmers. 500 ha upstream forest enrichment target and 10 community nurseries established. 75,000 tilapia and 3,500 endemic *Labeo lankae* fingerlings were released into the tanks.	toward market development and policy deliverables. Level of delivery: fully delivered	report
Output 1.3[21]: Biodiversity-based agroecological and sustainable integrated land management practices implemented in the two selected VTCS pilot schemes. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** 350 ha (vs. 300 ha target) under soil conservation, and over 300 households (vs. 200 target) adopted gender-sensitive agroecological practices. 200 agrobiodiversity home gardens established. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** To mitigate human-elephant conflict, 33 km of electric fences were established, protecting approximately 6,500 ha. 24 health/nutrition camps were conducted, and maize seed was distributed to women's farmer groups.	Field-level sustainable land management and agrobiodiversity practices were introduced to farmers. Interventions directly addressed local vulnerabilities, including human-elephant conflict and diet-related health issues. The project reached rural communities and incorporated gender-responsive agricultural support with financial dividends (LKR 25 million) for women's farmer groups through targeted crop integration. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data (Interviews): - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024, Half Yearly Report 2022
Output 1.4[22]: Goods, services and functions of VTCS ecosystems identified and mainstreamed. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Central traditional food outlet (Hela Bojun) in Thirappane established with the development of a functional ecotourism site at the Hiriwadunna tank. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Hiriwadunna tank cleared of invasive aquatic plants to facilitate boating; 150 ecotourism operators trained. Value chain study and associated community training modules provided.	The project established market linkages and ecotourism models. The traditional food outlet and ecotourism site function as business models for local communities, intended to enhance livelihoods alongside cascade ecosystem conservation. Project management confirmed that the earlier reduction in physical restoration targets enabled the completion of these market components before project closure. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary data: Interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024, Value Chain Report
Component 2: Strengthened institutions, policies and integrated landscape planning of village tank cascade systems (VTCS) in socio-ecologically sensitive areas		
Outcome 2 Improved enabling environment for sustainable landscape planning, management, and monitoring for eco-health outcomes		
Output 2.1: Awareness raising and capacity building of key partner institutions, local organizations and communities in participatory integrated landscape management planning of VTCS for improved eco-health outcomes. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)**	By conducting cross-visits and localizing training materials into multiple languages, the project reached nearly a thousand participants, providing an educational foundation for integrated landscape planning among partner institutions and local communities. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report, PIR 2023, PIR

[21] Previously Output 1.4
[22] Previously Output 1.5

End-of-project targets met with 5 capacity-building programs on participatory integrated landscape management across national, district, and Divisional Secretariat levels. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Training materials generated in English, Sinhala, and Tamil. Three 3D replica models of VTCS for educational display produced with cross-visits (over 965 stakeholders)		2024
Output 2.2: Relevant national policies and legislation for enabling environment for the sustainable integrated landscape management reviewed and revisions recommended to the Government. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Synthesis report completed and published, detailing lessons learned, policies, and strategies from past Integrated Sustainable Cascade Landscape Management (ICSLM). **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Three awareness workshops conducted with LUPPD, targeting district and divisional platforms.	The project documented policy lessons from previous interventions and engaged line agencies, notably the LUPPD. Collaborative workshops were facilitated to build inter-agency understanding of cascade landscape management and to support the enabling environment for future national legislation. Project staff indicated that while the policy briefs underwent validation with academics, formal endorsement into official national legislation by the government remains pending. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report, PIR 2024
Output 2.3[23]: Participatory sustainable integrated landscape management planning and coordination platforms developed at district and local levels. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Landscape management planning activities integrated into three (previously) existing coordination platforms: (1) District Agriculture Committee and (2) Divisional Agriculture Committees. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** These platforms served as mechanisms for approving interventions, setting targets, and integrating landscape management concepts into local governance structures.	Project coordination was integrated into existing governmental agriculture committees to institutionalize participatory landscape planning methodologies. Government stakeholders confirmed that these platforms remain operational post-project, though with reduced active participation. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report, PIR 2024
Component 3 Partnerships, awareness raising and capacity building for better sustainable integrated landscape management in support of improved ecosystem services and ecohealth outcomes		
Outcome 3: Improved evidence base, capacity, and awareness on biodiversity-agriculture-Eco health linkages in cascade landscapes.		
Output 3.1: Concept of Cascade Ecology established through workshops, symposia and other knowledge products. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** The "Ecohealth Nexus" international symposium hosted, publishing 130+ articles; Community of Practice (CoP) for cascade ecology was officially established.	Through an international symposium, academic publications, and digital portals, the project contributed to the knowledge base of cascade ecology in Sri Lanka. Academics noted that while the project delivered legacy products such as the scholarly book, the	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report,

[23] The original Output 2.4 on "Participatory planning/management guidelines" was deleted by the MTR and integrated into Output 2.2

Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery: Legacy book and scholarly book published ; bilingual project website and a specialized cascade ecology data portal (ctvsrednet.lk) available (still operational by 2026)	Community of Practice has struggled to function independently since project funding ceased. Level of delivery: fully delivered	PIR 2024
Output 3.2: Knowledge mainstreamed to national extension, research institutions, including universities, and policy makers and other stakeholders on cascade ecology and landscape management, ecosystem services and ecohealth approaches. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Five cascade ecology awareness programs conducted (250 master schoolteachers and 10 regional journalists from the North Central Province trained). **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** In partnership with Rajarata University, four short courses on cascade ecology and management were developed, approved by the University Senate, and delivered to 160 practitioners.	The project integrated cascade ecology and eco-health approaches into the curricula of Rajarata University and trained master teachers and extension officers. Teachers received digital materials and incorporated cascade ecology into extracurricular science programs. Academics noted the project's linkages with the university sector to facilitate knowledge creation. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report, PIR 2024
Component 4: Knowledge, information management and monitoring and evaluation		
Outcome 4: Project implementation based on results-based management and application of project lessons learned in future operations facilitated.		
Output 4.1: Gender sensitive project monitoring system operating and providing systematic information on progress in reaching expected outcomes and targets. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Gender-sensitive M&E framework established; all reporting requirements, including PIRs and financial reports, submitted to UNEP. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** 2022 MTR with resulting recommendations formally endorsed by the Project Steering Committee (response to national economic conditions).	The M&E system tracked progress and informed adaptive management decisions, including mid-term workplan revisions. The collection of gender-disaggregated data and gender reporting improved following MTR recommendations. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PIRs 2020-2024, MTR Report
Output 4.2: Project-related best practices, knowledge products and lessons learned systematized and published for a variety of audiences and stakeholder groups. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Eighteen policy briefs compiled into a MoE compendium ; VTCS sourcebook and restoration guidelines published in multiple languages. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:**	The project disseminated its findings through technical policy briefs, field guidelines, and mass media. Following the MTR, the project shifted to prioritizing smaller, targeted knowledge products, such as the 18 policy briefs and training manuals, to reach a broader audience from local farmers to national policymakers. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024, VTCS Guidelines

Public awareness expanded through a one-hour national television broadcast, a 3D animated documentary, and inclusion in the CGIAR/BBC mini-series 'The Climate and Us'		
Component 5[24]: Project management		
Output 5.1: Establish arrangements for overall project administration and implementation infrastructure including coordination units. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Appropriate arrangements for overall project administration and implementation infrastructure, including coordination units established. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** The PMU was fully staffed in early 2022 following the transfer of local executing responsibilities to SACEP to resolve government administrative delays.	Early administrative setups were delayed by national regulatory hurdles (Budget Circular 05/2020), leading the project to shift execution to SACEP. This enabled the establishment of an on-site PMU and field-level implementation. Interviews revealed that project continuity was challenged by high turnover, with field coordinator positions changing up to four times during implementation. Furthermore, the original design lacked budget provisions to compensate government field officers for transport, which hindered initial mobility until adaptive measures were applied. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PIR 2024
Output 5.2: Plan and undertake a full project inception meeting. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Inception meeting in September 2019. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:**	The inception phase was completed on schedule and established the initial project framework, which was subsequently modified in response to national crises. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report
Output 5.3: Establish and operate project budgeting and accounting system. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Budgeting and accounting system established at project start-up **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Set up by Bioversity International and then transitioned to accommodate SACEP's management role (including budget revisions and No-Cost Extensions).	The financial management system was established; it allowed for tracking co-financing and managing budget reallocations during the national economic crisis. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report
Output 5.4: Review and refine work plans with project coordinator and partners based on better understanding of local context. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Workplans reviewed and refined taking into account local context and MTR recommendations. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Major budget revision in 2022-2023, to reduce the project's scope from 10,000 to 2,000 ha.	Workplans were refined in response to MTR recommendations and baseline findings. Stakeholders confirmed that the MTR-driven downscaling (from five to two landscapes) was communicated to the communities beforehand without causing friction at local level. Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report, Half Yearly Report 2022

[24] This component does not have a dedicated Outcome statement but is tracked through the following outputs

Output 5.5: Establish Project Steering Committees and conduct regular meetings. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** PSC established and functional. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:**	The PSC functioned as the primary oversight body, providing strategic direction and approving workplan revisions (including target reductions and timeline extensions) Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final report, PSC Meeting Minutes
Output 5.6: Establish Technical Advisory Committee to provide backstopping and guidance to technical components. **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** TAC formally established to provide scientific backstopping and guidance to the technical components. **Other information, not related to the indicators, that demonstrates Output delivery:** Formed in June 2021 and chaired by a leading academic. Three times per year meetings or as needed to validate curriculum development and ecological guidelines.	The Technical Advisory Committee provided scientific review and technical backstopping Level of delivery: fully delivered	- Primary Data: interviews - Secondary Data (reports): Final Report

108. The project delivered its programmed outputs across all components despite macroeconomic and logistical challenges. Under Component 1, although conducting baseline studies during peak COVID-19 periods was highly complicated logistically, the initial rigorous design fueled the successful production of eight peer-reviewed papers. Following the Mid-Term Review (MTR), which reduced the initial physical restoration targets from eight to four tanks and the target landscapes from five to two due to skyrocketing material costs during the national economic meltdown, the project fully restored five tanks and partially restored two. This pragmatic reduction enabled a strategic shift, allowing the project to pivot its remaining resources to focus more intensively on market development and policy deliverables. Consequently, market linkages were initiated by establishing a traditional food outlet and an ecotourism site at the Hiriwadunna tank. Furthermore, the MTR prompted a deliberate shift to prioritize a high volume of smaller, targeted knowledge products over fewer large ones, resulting in the production of eighteen policy briefs alongside a cascade restoration sourcebook.

109. Regarding institutional capacity, participatory landscape management planning was integrated into existing District and Divisional Agriculture Committees, which remain operational post-project, albeit with reduced active participation. To establish cascade ecology academically, the project hosted the "Ecohealth Nexus" symposium, launched a data portal, and embedded short courses into the curricula of Rajarata University, where trained teachers received comprehensive digital materials via external hard drives to successfully integrate cascade ecology into after-school science programs. The monitoring and evaluation frameworks effectively tracked progress and informed adaptive management decisions; the MTR-driven downscaling was communicated to communities beforehand, avoiding significant local friction. Following initial regulatory delays, challenges with high staff turnover (including the field coordinator position changing four times), and an original lack of budget provisions for government field officer transport, the transfer of local executing responsibilities to SACEP facilitated the full establishment of PMU. Despite these operational successes, the newly established COP has struggled to maintain its momentum without active project funding, and the formal endorsement of the policy briefs into official national legislation remains pending.

Achievement of Project Outcomes

110. The assessment of project outcomes evaluates the extent to which the intervention achieved its intended ecological, institutional, and capacity-building objectives within the targeted Village Tank Cascade Systems. As detailed in **Table 15**, despite severe macroeconomic shocks that necessitated a formal, MTR-endorsed reduction in physical targets, the project utilized effective adaptive management to meet or exceed all of its revised outcome indicators. Therefore, the project fully realized its intended sustainable land management, institutional governance, and knowledge generation outcomes.

Table 15: Achievement of project outcomes[25]

Component 1	
Outcome 1	Sustainable landscape management approaches in support of improved ecosystem services and ecohealth outcomes adopted in prominent socio-ecological sensitive areas of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS).

[25] Source: final 2024 PIR and No-Cost-Extension documents: the revised logical framework that was adapted in response to the MTR with (i) a reduction from 10,000ha to 2,000ha, (ii) nr of farming households reduced to 200, (iii) tank restoration target reduced from 8 to 4.

Performance Indicator(s) and Target(s):	*Indicators:* 1. number of ha of agricultural lands under SLM and % increase in crop diversity; 2. number of farming households in 03 villages adopting gender-sensitive agroecological approaches (iii) Sustainable ecohealth village models established; (iv) gender-sensitive markets identified and developed. *Target:* 1. SLM measures adopted on 2,000 ha, and a 50% increase in crop diversity; 2. at least 200 households; 3. at least 02 models established, 4. markets developed for at least 01 VTCS goods or products.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	PIR 2025, Interview, Project Documents
Narrative Assessment:	Outcome 1 generated ecological and socioeconomic benefits at the cascade pilot sites. Following the formal mid-term reduction in physical restoration targets due to the economic crisis, the project fully restored five tanks and partially restored two. SLM measures were adopted across the revised target of 2,000 ha, and crop diversity improved through the distribution of agricultural seeds and fruit plants. Over 300 households adopted gender-sensitive agroecological approaches, exceeding the revised target of 200. Market mechanisms, including an ecotourism site at the Hiriwadunna tank and a central "Hela Bojun" traditional food outlet in Thirappane, provided direct income for local communities and women's farmer groups. While the project successfully delivered on agrobiodiversity and nutrition through home gardens and food outlets, stakeholders noted a comparative weakness in the 'health' component. Despite the project's title, direct interventions addressing the root causes of local health crises, specifically Chronic Kidney Disease (CKDu), remained limited.
Level of Achievement:	Fully achieved
Outcome 2	Improved enabling environment for sustainable integrated landscape planning, management, and monitoring of ecohealth outcomes
Performance Indicator(s) and Target(s):	*Indicators:* 1. number of multi-sectoral planning platforms in project landscapes 2. number of comprehensive integrated landscape management plans and frameworks developed and implemented, 3. guidelines and policy recommendations that support sustainable integrated landscape planning and implementation developed. *Targets:* 1. at least 2 platforms established/operational, 2. frameworks in 02 VTCS covering +/- 2,000ha developed and implemented, 3. guidelines and policies published and disseminated.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	PIR 2024, Final Narrative Report, VTCS Sourcebooks and Policy Compendium
Narrative Assessment:	Outcome 2 was achieved by integrating project objectives into existing local governance frameworks. Landscape management planning was incorporated into three multi-sectoral platforms: the District Agriculture Committee of Anuradhapura and the Divisional Agriculture Committees of Thirappane and Palugaswewa. Integrated landscape management frameworks covering the revised target of 2,000 ha were formulated and executed. The project also delivered policy resources, including the publication of guidelines on cascade management and a compendium of 18 policy briefs intended to advise government stakeholders on scaling sustainable practices.
Level of Achievement:	Fully achieved
Component 3	
Outcome 3	Improved evidence base, capacity, and awareness on biodiversity-agriculture-ecohealth linkages in cascade landscapes
Performance Indicator(s) and Target(s):	*Indicators*: 1. enhanced capacity of extension, research and university staff, policy makers and other stakeholders 2. integration of cascade ecology and ecohealth approaches into education courses, 3. cascade research and development network established, 4. cascade ecology database and web-based knowledge portal developed.

	Targets: 1. at least 500 beneficiaries and stakeholders (>50% women) made aware and trained, 2. integrated into university and school courses, 3. established and functional, 4. database and portal created.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	PIR 2024, Final Narrative Report, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) CV
Narrative Assessment:	The project expanded the national evidence base and institutional capacity regarding cascade ecology. Stakeholders noted that linkages with the academic sector supported knowledge creation across school, university, and community levels. Target 1 was exceeded, with 965 individuals participating in study tours and cross-visits, and hundreds completing formal training. Four specialized short courses were integrated into the academic curriculum of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL). A Community of Practice (CoP) for cascade ecology was established during the international "Ecohealth Nexus" symposium, supported by a bilingual project website and a technical cascade ecology data portal (ctvsrednet.lk).
Level of Achievement:	Fully achieved
Component 4	
Outcome 4	Project implementation based on results-based management and application of project lessons learned in future operations facilitated.
Performance Indicator(s) and Target(s):	*Indicators:* 1. M&E system ensuring timely delivery of project outcomes and targets, 2. sourcebook and guidelines on enhancing ecosystem and ecohealth considerations in cascade tank restoration developed, 3. Policy briefs to promote and support cascade landscape restoration and management developed, 4. Cascade awareness program for master teachers in the education system undertaken. *Targets:* 1. M&E providing systematic information on project progress, 2. Finalized, 3. 12 policy briefs prepared and 4. 05 cascade awareness programs undertaken.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	PIR 2024, Final Narrative Report, MTR report
Narrative Assessment:	The gender-sensitive M&E system tracked project progress and informed mid-term workplan adaptations. A sourcebook and ecological restoration guidelines were published in multiple languages, and 18 policy briefs were compiled into a Ministry of Environment compendium. Public and academic awareness was supported by the delivery of five training programs to 250 master schoolteachers.
Level of Achievement:	Fully achieved

111. The project fully achieved all four of its intended outcomes. At the pilot sites, sustainable landscape management practices were adopted across the targeted 2,000ha, and the physical restoration of tank systems directly supported agricultural activities for local households. Concurrently, the project established a functional enabling environment by integrating participatory landscape management frameworks into pre-existing District and Divisional Agriculture Committees, supported by the publication of a series of policy guidelines.

112. Institutional capacity and the national evidence base for cascade ecology were systematically expanded. The project formally embedded targeted short courses into the Rajarata University curriculum, established a Community of Practice, and launched a dedicated data portal. Effective results-based management allowed the project to adapt to severe external economic shocks, ensuring that best practices, ecological guidelines, and policy briefs were accurately systematized and disseminated to relevant national stakeholders.

Likelihood of Impact

113. The table assesses the likelihood of the project achieving its intended long-term impact by evaluating the required transitions from project outputs to outcomes, and subsequently to intermediate states and impact. The analysis examines whether necessary institutional drivers are in place and whether the assumptions held true, drawing upon project implementation reviews, technical deliverables, and stakeholder interviews.

Table 16: Likelihood of impact

Factors influencing likelihood of impact	**Assessment**	**Justification**
Drivers to support transition from Outputs to the Project Outcomes	In place	The project established functional drivers by integrating participatory landscape planning directly into existing Divisional Agriculture Committees rather than creating redundant structures. Furthermore, providing transport and incentives to government field officers overcame critical mobility barriers during the economic crisis. The financial management facilitated by SACEP also bypassed national treasury bottlenecks, ensuring funds reached the field level
Assumptions for the change process from Outputs to Project Outcomes	Partially hold	The core assumption of a stable macroeconomic and operational environment failed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Sri Lanka's severe economic meltdown, which caused skyrocketing material costs. However, the project adaptively managed these shocks by formally reducing its physical scope (e.g., from eight to four tanks and five to two landscapes) following the Mid-Term Review (MTR)
Proportion of **Project Outcomes** fully or partially achieved	All	Evaluated against the formally revised MTR targets, all outcomes were successfully achieved. The project surpassed its revised physical targets by fully restoring five tanks, established sustainable market mechanisms such as the Hela Bojun traditional food outlet, and successfully delivered extensive capacity-building programs to hundreds of teachers and government officials
Drivers to support transition from Project Outcomes to Intermediate States	In place	The production of knowledge products, the Sourcebook, 18 policy briefs, and a scholarly book, serves as a strong driver to guide future government practices. Institutional drivers were secured by integrating short courses into Rajarata University, which is currently coordinating with the provincial governor to sustain them, and by the university assuming responsibility for maintaining the cascade ecology digital database
Assumptions for the change process from the Project Outcomes to Intermediate States	Partially	The assumption that academic networks and government agencies will sustain activities post-project holds only partially. For instance, the established Community of Practice (CoP) relies heavily on voluntary efforts and has struggled to maintain its momentum after project funding ceased. Additionally, the assumption that government line agencies possess the resources to independently scale up tank restorations is challenged by recurrent national funding deficits

Proportion of **Intermediate States** achieved	Partial	Local eco-health and agrobiodiversity models have been successfully proven at the pilot cascade sites, resulting in improved biodiversity and local income generation for women's groups. However, widespread national replication and the formal endorsement of the generated policy briefs into official national legislation or unified guidelines remain pending
Drivers to support transition from Intermediate States to Impact	In place	The project successfully elevated the profile of VTCS, aligning with its recognition as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the FAO. Extensive public outreach, including a BBC documentary and national television broadcasts, has raised widespread awareness. The MoE's strong commitment to formulating a Phase 2 project (GEF 9) acts as a key driver for scaling up long-term impact
Assumptions for the change process from Intermediate States to Impact	Partially	The transition to long-lasting impact assumes that future environmental factors will not overwhelm the restored landscapes. However, despite fencing being very successful in localised project areas, escalating human-elephant conflicts continuously threaten local agricultural stability. In addition, the lack of an overarching national strategy and action plan for cascade rehabilitation across all ministries remains a persistent risk to long-term ecological impact

114. The transition from project outputs to outcomes was driven by integrating participatory landscape planning into existing Divisional Agriculture Committees and utilizing the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) to facilitate financial execution. While the key assumption of macroeconomic stability failed due to Sri Lanka's economic crisis and hyperinflation, the project utilized adaptive management following the Mid-Term Review (MTR) to formally reduce physical targets and therefore scale down the restoration objective. Consequently, the project fully achieved its revised outcomes, restoring five tanks and establishing operational market linkages. The subsequent progression toward intermediate states is supported by institutional drivers, notably the publication of eighteen policy briefs, a cascade ecology sourcebook, and the formal integration of short academic courses into the university curriculum.

115. Despite these drivers, the achievement of intermediate states remains partial because assumptions regarding long-term post-project sustainability hold only partially. Widespread national replication is currently constrained by the limited financial capacity of government line agencies and local farmers to independently fund capital-intensive tank restorations without external capital investment. The transition to lasting ecological impact is positively driven by the global recognition of the cascade systems as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the FAO, alongside the Ministry of Environment's active commitment to formulating a Phase 2 project. However, long-term impact remains vulnerable to persistent external factors and the ongoing necessity for a cross-ministerial national strategy to address fragmented landscape rehabilitation and escalating human-wildlife conflicts.

Findings Statements on Effectiveness:

116. Adaptive management and physical target delivery: the project navigated severe macroeconomic instability and the COVID-19 pandemic by formally reducing its geographic and physical scope, following the MTR. This adaptive strategy allowed the project to complete and surpass its revised physical targets by fully restoring five tanks,

establishing sustainable land management practices across 2,000 hectares, and operationalizing market mechanisms at the pilot sites.

117. Knowledge generation versus pending policy institutionalization: the project generated technical and academic knowledge, producing 18 policy briefs, a cascade ecology sourcebook, and integrating short courses into the Rajarata University curriculum. However, systemic policy effectiveness remains partial, as the validated policy briefs currently remain publications and await formal endorsement for integration into official Government policies and strategies.

118. Institutional integration versus post-project momentum: institutional capacity was established by embedding participatory landscape planning into pre-existing Divisional and District Agriculture Committees rather than creating parallel administrative structures. While these local platforms remain operational post-project, other networking initiatives such as COP have struggled to maintain active momentum and function independently since project funding ceased.

Rating for Effectiveness: Satisfactory

Rating for Availability of Outputs: Satisfactory

Rating for Achievement of Project Outcomes: Satisfactory

Rating for Achievement of Likelihood of Impact: Likely

E. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

119. The project generally adhered to UNEP and GEF financial policies and procedures. The first cash advance of USD 300,000 was requested and received on September 3, 2019, well within the nine-month threshold following the project's approval and the signing of the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in April 2019. Financial monitoring and compliance were managed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, acting as the primary Executing Agency. To adhere to internal fiduciary standards, subsequent disbursements to the field required an 80% expenditure threshold of the previous tranche. When initial field delays resulted in underreporting and restricted subsequent cash flows, the project adaptively introduced supplementary financial reporting to expedite disbursements and ensure continuous field liquidity.

120. Procurement and operational policies had to be adapted to local constraints. Because a national treasury circular (Budget Circular No/05 2020) prevented the establishment of a PMU within the MoE for projects under USD 5 million, local execution and financial administration were subcontracted to the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). This strategic adjustment successfully bypassed rigid national treasury bottlenecks, established a highly flexible financial modality, and ensured continuous liquidity for field-level procurement during times of crisis. SACEP successfully applied its own procurement procedures for private sector contractors. For massive infrastructure works, such as tank restorations, SACEP utilized single-source procurement to contract mandated government agencies, specifically DAD, as no alternative institutional options existed. Finally, while a project-specific audit was not mandated by the donor, the project was comprehensively covered under Bioversity International's annual institutional audits conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, satisfying overall financial compliance requirements.

Completeness of Financial Information

121. At design stage, comprehensive budget tables detailing planned GEF funding and expected co-financing by budget line, component, and year were established (Annex E.1 and E.2). During implementation, the executing agency submitted quarterly and annual expenditure reports tracking actual costs against the approved UNEP budget lines. Detailed cash advance statements recording transfer dates, cumulative expenditures... and cash balances held by the executing partner were also provided.

122. Budget revisions, legal agreements, and co-financing records were thoroughly documented. Due to the severe hyperinflation during the economic crisis, the project submitted budget revisions alongside its No-Cost Extension (NCE) requests. These revisions provided line-by-line justifications for reallocating funds to cover escalated field travel and tank restoration costs without exceeding the total USD 2,000,000 GEF grant. All relevant legal agreements, including the original PCA and its formal amendments, were made available. Co-financing was (unusually) very well-documented through detailed annual consolidated reports. Due to tracking and leveraged public works, the project (uniquely) reported actual co-financing (over USD 13.3 million) that significantly exceeded the originally planned USD 9 million target.

123. Co-financing was well-documented through detailed annual consolidated reports. In a highly unusual trend for GEF projects, the final actual co-financing mobilized significantly exceeded the planned targets, reaching over 147% of the original expectation.

Table 17: Financial management

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
1. Adherence to UNEP's/GEF's policies and procedures:		**S**	
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence[26] to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		No	No major shortcomings. Institutional rules were followed by Bioversity International, and adaptive mechanisms (SACEP) were legally established to bypass national treasury bottlenecks
Was first disbursement carried out within 9 months of UNEP's project approval date.		Yes	The PCA was signed in April 2019, and the first disbursement of USD 300,000 was issued on September 3, 2019
Were the procurement policies of UNEP and the donor(s) followed? *(where applicable)*		Yes	SACEP utilized standard competitive bidding for the private sector and justified single-source procurement for exclusive government entities (e.g., DAD)
2. Completeness of project financial information[27]:		**HS**	
Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below)		**HS**	
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	Comprehensive budgets provided per UNEP budget line, component, and year (Annex E.1 and E.2)
B.	Revisions to the budget	Yes	Very detailed budget revision tables with justifications alongside NCEs
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	The original PCA (2019) and formal Amendments No. 1 and No. 2 were provided

[26] If the review 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.
[27] See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference.

D.	Proof of fund transfers	Yes	Quarterly Cash Advance Statements detailing dates and amounts of all UNEP disbursements
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	Yes	Detailed annual "Consolidated Report of Planned and Actual Co-Finance by Budget Line" provided for all years
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	Quarterly and annual expenditure statements provided tracking actuals against the UNEP budget lines
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses	Yes	Project-specific audits not required **by the donor**; however, Bioversity International's institutional audits covering the project were submitted to UNEP **annually**
H.	Procure documents[28], including the approved requisition document and Source Selection Plan	Yes	Detailed; officially, cost estimates from DAD were provided for tank renovations
I.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):	N/A	
Overall rating		**S**	

Findings Statements on Financial Management:

124. Adaptive financial execution: subcontracting local financial execution to SACEP bypassed national treasury restrictions, allowing procurement and fund flows to continue during the macroeconomic crisis.

125. Financial documentation included formal budget revisions to account for construction cost inflation. The co-financing tracking mechanism recorded actual amounts (over USD 13.3 million) above the original design target.

Rating for Financial Management: Highly Satisfactory

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

Rating for Completeness of Financial Information: Highly Satisfactory

F. Efficiency

126. The project adapted its physical targets and utilized existing institutional structures. As noted in the Effectiveness section, inflation and material cost increases led to a reduction in infrastructure targets following the MTR. Field execution and financial disbursement were delegated to SACEP to bypass administrative bottlenecks. The project utilized ongoing government programs, including collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry for seed and tree distribution, to avoid duplicated efforts. Integrating project activities into local agriculture committees removed the costs associated with establishing parallel coordination units. The MTR prompted a shift towards producing smaller knowledge products, such as policy briefs and training manuals.

127. Project timeliness was severely disrupted by external and internal factors, including COVID-19, national fuel and power shortages, and initial administrative delays in signing execution agreements. The original project design was also considered too ambitious regarding the extent of tank restoration required within the planned timeframe. So, two So, two NCEs were necessary: (i) to extend the project's technical implementation by 18 months (to 31 March 2024) to compensate for the logistical crises and allow for the

[28] Relevant for procurement action over USD 10,000 in value.

execution of the revised MTR work plans and (ii) extend by months (to 30 June 2024) to finalize monitoring, review, and terminal reporting activities.

128. The project explicitly built upon the frameworks and knowledge generated by previous GEF interventions in the country, like the Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition (BFN) project. It established synergies with the CGIAR FRESH initiative to support the mainstreaming of indigenous agrobiodiversity. It also engaged with the World Bank on infrastructure projects that cover biodiversity-sensitive restorations. A consortium of national universities was mobilized to conduct baseline assessments and develop curricula, effectively bridging the gap between academic research and government implementation.

129. While subcontracting to SACEP bypassed national treasury restrictions, efficiency was occasionally hindered at the micro-level by strict administrative thresholds that limited the amount of funds field coordinators could readily access for day-to-day mobility and partner engagement.

130. As for the environmental footprint, the decision to rely on an international executing agency (SACEP) located in Colombo, local academic experts, and mandated government departments (such as the DAD) for daily field supervision inherently minimized the need for international travel and associated emissions.

Type of project extension (cost/no-cost)	Duration (# months)	Reason for no-cost extension
No-Cost Extension 1	18 months (technical implementation)	To compensate for severe implementation delays caused by COVID-19 and national economic crises, allowing for the completion of physical works and revised MTR activities
No-Cost Extension 2	3 months (technical implementation)	To complete final monitoring, review, and terminal reporting

Findings Statements on Efficiency:

131. Reducing physical restoration targets and delegating financial execution to SACEP maintained operational viability during national inflation.

132. Relying on existing government programs (e.g., Ministry of Forestry) and past GEF initiatives reduced duplicated efforts and directed resources toward field implementation.

Rating for Efficiency: Moderately Satisfactory

G. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring of Project Implementation:

133. An M&E framework was established with a dedicated budget. During the initial implementation phase affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project completed baseline assessments covering land degradation, ecosystem services, biodiversity, food security, and human health, providing reference points and Land Use System (LUS) maps. Day-to-day monitoring was embedded into local administrative structures, with agricultural and economic development officers tracking field progress monthly. Monitoring data informed the MTR recommendations, including the reduction of physical restoration targets in response to inflation.

Project Reporting

134. The PMU, supported by Bioversity International and SACEP, submitted Half-Yearly Progress Reports (HYRs) and annual Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs). The PIRs included risk logs and documented the implementation delays caused by the political and macroeconomic crises. These reports facilitated the approval processes for the No-Cost Extensions.

135. While the original project design lacked a comprehensive gender analysis, gender-responsive reporting was actively integrated and improved during implementation. The baseline surveys collected gender-disaggregated dietary and health data to inform subsequent, community interventions. Project reporting consistently tracked the participation of women in capacity-building efforts and highlighted specific gender-sensitive value chain developments, such as the establishment of the 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlet which financially empowered local women's groups. Project management confirmed that the specific collection and reporting of gender-disaggregated data improved notably following targeted recommendations from the MTR. Furthermore, the project successfully documented its gender mainstreaming lessons by publishing a dedicated policy brief on gender dynamics in village tank cascade systems.

Findings Statements on Monitoring and Reporting:

136. Evidence-based adaptive management: the monitoring framework and MTR process led to a reduction in project scope in response to macroeconomic constraints.

137. Progress reporting met UNEP and GEF requirements. Baseline gender tracking was limited by design gaps, but the collection of gender-disaggregated data improved following the MTR.

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Satisfactory
Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation: Satisfactory
Rating for Project Reporting: Satisfactory

H. Sustainability

Socio-political Sustainability

138. The project revived a sense of socio-political ownership by shifting local communities from passive beneficiaries to active co-managers of the cascade systems. This ownership was generated primarily through the extensive use of shramadana (voluntary community labour); farmers contributed "sweat equity" by cleaning irrigation canals, planting trees for catchment reforestation, and providing security for engineers during construction. The physical restoration of the tanks served a deeper socio-political function by reversing or at least dampening the individualistic trend of farmers digging private wells and somehow may have contributed to restoring a more traditional, collectivist mindset where communities cooperate to manage shared water resources. Interviews showed that this revived community cohesion even manifested in altruistic decisions by farmer associations to allocate newly restored downstream plots to landless farmers. The project also facilitated the signing of official maintenance agreements between these Farmer Organizations and DAD. Finally, interventions that provided direct economic empowerment, in particular the "Hela Bojun" traditional food outlet run by women's societies and the integration of cash crops into homegardens, further strengthened the sustainability by providing economic incentives for continuous community engagement.

139. Still, socio-political sustainability remains vulnerable to persistent external factors, in particular, the escalating human-wildlife (elephant) conflicts and illegal land

encroachment into sensitive tank catchments. While the project successfully established over 30 km of community-managed electric fencing to mitigate crop raiding, interviews showed that maintaining community cohesion and active participation in safeguarding these common resources requires continuous effort, especially in an economic environment characterised by massive youth migration.

Financial Sustainability

140. The financial sustainability is constrained due to the high capital costs associated with Village Tank Cascade System (VTCS) infrastructure. As the national economic crisis inflated the costs of physical works to the point where neither local farmer organizations nor government line agencies have the financial capacity to fund large-scale tank restorations or extensive downstream developments without external capital investment, international support has become a de facto requirement. For example, while the upstream and tank headworks of the Thumbikulama pilot site were successfully restored, the estimated LKR 65 million required to fully develop its downstream area remains entirely dependent on securing future donor funding.

141. At the micro-economic level, the financial sustainability of livelihood interventions is very good. Introducing high-value crops into the VTCS yielded rapid financial dividends, providing women's farmer groups with significant income (e.g., LKR 25 million from maize cultivation) that can in theory subsidize minor/routine tank maintenance. Additionally, DAD provides a modest annual allocation (e.g., via the KICKSTART program) to support basic structural maintenance to prevent them from immediately falling back into disrepair.

Institutional Sustainability

142. Institutional sustainability is significantly enhanced by the project's decision to embed its coordination and planning mechanisms directly into pre-existing, permanent governance structures rather than creating parallel, temporary project units. By functioning through the established District and Divisional Agriculture Committees, the project ensured that integrated landscape management approaches remain within the official mandates of permanent government field officers. The integration of cascade ecology short courses into the permanent academic curriculum of Rajarata University further institutionalizes the project's capacity-building gains for future practitioners.

143. Nonetheless, institutional vulnerabilities persist due to gaps in policy formalization and project closure planning. The lack of an exit strategy to hand over outputs to government partners, has been a major risk in annulling project collaborative field momentum. In addition, several project products (policy briefs and cascade management guidelines) lack formal, legal endorsement into national legislation. The CoP faces other issues in maintaining its collaborative networking momentum independent of dedicated project funding.

144. While coordination mechanisms were successfully integrated into existing Divisional Agriculture Committees to ensure institutional survival, post-project monitoring reveals that these platforms are currently functioning with reduced active participation now that dedicated project facilitation has ceased.

<u>Findings Statements on Sustainability:</u>

145. Local ownership and economic incentives: community-level sustainability is supported by the application of voluntary community labour and the income generated via women-led food outlets and diversified home gardens, which provide incentives for landscape maintenance.

146. Financial sustainability for macro-level cascade restoration is constrained by the high costs of civil works, leaving large-scale tank renovations dependent on external funding.

147. The project built a lasting local foundation by permanently adding landscape planning to existing Divisional Agriculture Committees and integrating new courses into university curricula. However, broader long-term success is held back because there was no formal exit strategy to smoothly hand over all activities to the government at project closure. Furthermore, while the project produced 18 valuable policy briefs, the national government currently uses them only as informational guidelines and has not yet officially adopted them into national law or integrated them into official policies and strategies.

Rating for Likelihood of Sustainability: Moderately Unlikely

Rating for Socio-political Sustainability: Moderately Likely

Rating for Financial Sustainability: Moderately Unlikely

Rating for Institutional Sustainability: Moderately Likely

I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

148. The project demonstrated adaptive management and supervision, particularly in navigating administrative bottlenecks and major macroeconomic shocks. Wirth initial delays of a national treasury circular prohibiting the establishment of PMU in the MoE, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, subcontracted local execution to SACEP. This adaptive measure successfully bypassed rigid national financial regulations, establishing a more flexible and efficient financial modality that expedited field-level implementation and procurement while maintaining Ministry oversight.

149. Throughout implementation, the Alliance of Bioversity International provided technical backstopping, financial monitoring, and reporting compliance. PMU utilized monitoring data effectively for decision-making, most notably after the MTR. Regular PSC and TAC meetings were critical in guiding the project for a smooth implementation despite the challenging external context.

Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

150. Stakeholder engagement was multi-sectoral, actively bridging the traditional silos of government line agencies. The project integrated its coordination efforts directly into existing, permanent local structures (District and Divisional Agriculture Committees). By utilizing these platforms, the project successfully compelled diverse departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Agrarian Development, Land Use Policy Planning Department, and the Forest Department, to collaborate together on landscape-level planning and align their interventions within the cascade ecosystems.

151. At local level, the project raised community cooperation by shifting stakeholders from passive beneficiaries to active co-managers. Local farmers, women's societies (e.g., Sithamu Women's Organization), and youth groups were involved in baseline assessments, value chain identification, and physical restoration works. By reviving voluntary community labor for tasks such as cleaning canals and planting trees, the project strengthened collective ownership over the project local achievements.

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

152. The initial project design did not cover very well gender mainstreaming (e.g. no comprehensive gender analysis, no gender-disaggregated indicators, or no specific

budget for gender-responsive actions). During implementation, however, PMU addressed these gaps during implementation with baseline surveys that included gender-disaggregated dietary, health, and socio-economic data. In turn, these led to subsequent interventions tailored to women's needs.

153. The project established gender-sensitive value chains that provided direct economic empowerment to rural women. 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlets empowered local women's groups to generate independent income through the preparation and sale of local agrobiodiversity products. In the same vein, the project tracked women's participation in capacity-building (Ex1. 75% of the Master teachers trained in cascade ecology were women, Ex2 a specific gender mainstreaming policy brief was produced).

154. By actively engaging marginalized groups and securing independent income sources for rural women, the project successfully upheld the human-rights-based approach to equitable resource access and economic empowerment.

155. To assess and validate this impact during the remote review phase, the gender and human rights perspective was captured by utilizing targeted proxy interview tools. Because direct virtual communication with vulnerable, non-English-speaking grassroots female farmers was severely restricted by ongoing disaster-relief operations and rural connectivity barriers, the review prioritized in-depth discussions with accessible female institutional staff and indirect female beneficiaries. By interviewing female civil servants, female project field coordinators, and female teachers who participated in the training programs, the reviewer was able to use them as proxy informants. These respondents were explicitly asked to reflect on how marginalized rural women perceived, accepted, and benefited from grassroots activities (like seed distributions, home orchards, and the food outlets). This indirect questioning tool ensured that the economic realities, empowerment outcomes, and overall feedback of marginalized rural women were comprehensively validated and mainstreamed into the review findings.

Environmental and Social Safeguards

156. During the design phase, the UNEP Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note (ESERN) identified Safeguard Standards 1 (Biodiversity), 2 (Pollution/Chemicals), and 3 (Dam Safety) as moderate risks. To mitigate these risks, the project established the TAC with local experts to ensure that a science-based approach was applied to all tank restoration civil works.

157. It appears that physical restorations avoided disrupting existing habitats, while the promotion of biodiversity-rich agroecological practices actively reduced the reliance on agrochemicals, thereby mitigating pollution risks. To address the persistent socio-economic threat of human-wildlife conflict, the project successfully constructed over 30 km of community-managed electric fencing to protect villagers and crops from elephant raids.

Country Ownership and Driven-ness

158. By integrating its activities into the permanent mandates of government institutions rather than creating temporary, parallel structures, country ownership was visible at all levels from the MoE and DAD to the local Government structures. In addition, the project supported DAD in (re)establishing a permanent Cascade Management Committee to ensure that project achievements and approaches are followed-up in the future.

159. Through alignment with ongoing national programs (e.g. Wanaropa reforestation program and collaborative efforts with the World Bank's ESCAMP project), the government and local partners provided massive in-kind and parallel support. Consequently, the project achieved an actual co-financing total of over USD 13.3 million.

Communication and Public Awareness

160. The project implemented a large-scale knowledge management and communication strategy that raised the profile of VTCS both locally and globally. To reach the public, the project leveraged mass media (e.g. one-hour television documentary creating 3D animation videos, publishing numerous articles in national newspapers). At academic and institutional levels, the project hosted the International Conference on Ecohealth Nexus (ICEN 2023), attracting over 200 participants and generating 125 published articles.

161. To ensure long-term public awareness and educational integration, the project synthesized its findings into eighteen policy briefs and a compendium ("Way Forwards to Revitalize Village tank Cascade system"). The project also supported the development of university curricula and short courses on cascade ecology at Rajarata University, ensuring that future generations of practitioners and extension workers continue to be educated on integrated landscape management.

162. Findings Statements on Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues:

163. The strategic pivot to utilize SACEP as the local executing agency was a highly effective adaptive management decision that bypassed national treasury bottlenecks, ensuring operational liquidity and field-level delivery despite the economic meltdown

164. By embedding coordination within existing Divisional Agriculture Committees and aligning with concurrent national initiatives, the project avoided parallel structures, fostered inter-departmental collaboration, and leveraged USD 13.3 million in co-financing.

165. Despite weak gender analysis at design stage, adaptive implementation empowered women by establishing tangible economic incentives (e.g., 'Hela Bojun' food outlets) and gathering critical gender-disaggregated data to guide future cascade policies.

166. The project has been very effective in turning complex ecological data into easily understandable information across all audiences (national television broadcasts to inform the public, university curricula benefitting students, policy compendiums for decision-makers).

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

Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision: Highly Satisfactory

Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation: Highly Satisfactory

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

Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards: Highly Satisfactory

Rating for Country Ownership and Driven-ness: Highly Satisfactory

Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: Highly Satisfactory

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

167. Overall, the project performed at the **Satisfactory level**. While implementation faced severe disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic and unprecedented national macroeconomic crises, the project demonstrated high resilience and delivered comprehensively on its revised targets.

Key strengths and achievements:

168. Adaptive management and financial execution: confronted with a national regulatory hurdle (Budget Circular No/05 2020) that prohibited the establishment of a Project Management Unit within the Ministry, the project subcontracted local financial and administrative execution to SACEP. This bypassed national treasury bottlenecks, maintaining field-level fund flows during the economic meltdown. Additionally, halving the physical restoration targets accommodated skyrocketing material costs and allowed remaining resources to pivot toward policy and market deliverables.

169. Physical restoration and sustainable land management (SLM): the project fully restored five Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) and partially restored two, establishing SLM practices across 2,000 hectares. It also addressed immediate community vulnerabilities by establishing 33 km of community-managed electric fences, protecting approximately 6,500 hectares from human-elephant conflict.

170. Institutional integration over parallel structures: the project avoided creating temporary, parallel administrative units by embedding participatory landscape planning directly into permanent, existing local governance frameworks, specifically the District and Divisional Agriculture Committees.

171. Knowledge creation and capacity building: the project anchored technical knowledge in academia, establishing "cascade ecology" as an active discipline. It embedded four short courses into the permanent curriculum of Rajarata University, hosted an international symposium, and produced a cascade restoration sourcebook along with 18 policy briefs. The project also trained 250 master schoolteachers in cascade ecology, of whom over 75% were women.

172. Retrofitted gender empowerment: despite the absence of a design-stage gender analysis or dedicated gender budgeting, the project retrofitted economic incentives that empowered rural women. It established women-led 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlets and integrated cash crops (such as maize), yielding LKR 25 million in dividends for women's farmer groups.

<u>Key weaknesses and limitations:</u>

173. The financial sustainability of large-scale infrastructure such as macro-level cascade restoration is constrained by the high capital costs of civil works. For example, developing the downstream area of the Thumbikulama pilot site requires an estimated LKR 65 million. Without a dedicated national infrastructure budget, future large-scale tank renovations remain highly reliant on unsecured external donor funding.

174. Absence of a formalized legislative exit strategy: the project closed without a formal exit strategy to transition its technical outputs into binding national legislation. Consequently, the 18 policy briefs and restoration guidelines serve only as informational documents rather than official government strategies. In addition, the academic Community of Practice (CoP) established by the project relies heavily on voluntary efforts and struggles to maintain momentum now that dedicated project funding has ceased.

175. The "Eco-Health" disconnect despite featuring "Ecosystem Health" in the project title and aiming to address the root causes of the local Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu) crisis, direct medical/health-related interventions were limited. Health linkages were primarily addressed indirectly through nutrition camps and the reduction of agrochemical use, leaving a gap in proving concrete, direct health impacts.

176. Design-stage planning gaps: the initial project design lacked detailed procurement planning. This limited the early identification of supply-chain and inflation risks, which later severely constrained physical implementation during the national economic crisis.

177. The review ToR included a set of strategic questions of interest to UNEP:

Strategic question 1: "To what extent did the project successfully demonstrate and model an integrated, biodiversity-based, agroecological approach to sustainable management of Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS) in Sri Lanka?": the project demonstrated this approach at the pilot scale. Following MTR adjustments, it fully restored five tanks and partially restored two, while adopting SLM measures across 2,000 hectares. It modelled the approach by establishing 200 agrobiodiversity home gardens, 10 community nurseries, and planting trees for upstream forest enrichment to increase native species richness and habitat. It also demonstrated that biodiversity-based approaches can yield economic dividends by establishing ecotourism sites and traditional food value chains).

Strategic question 2: "To what degree did the project influence policy, institutional coordination, and capacity for integrated cascade landscape management?": the project established institutional coordination by embedding planning into three permanent platforms: the District Agriculture Committee and the Divisional Agriculture Committees of Thirappane and Palugaswewa. However, post-project monitoring indicates that these platforms are currently functioning with reduced active participation following the cessation of dedicated project funding. Capacity was enhanced by training 250 master teachers, delivering four university short courses, and hosting the ICEN 2023 international symposium. Policy influence was pursued through the production of 18 policy briefs compiled into a Ministry of Environment compendium and the drafting of restoration guidelines; however, the degree of influence is limited because formal endorsement of these briefs into binding national legislation remains pending.

Strategic question 3: "How effectively did the project address linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem services, agriculture, and human health?": the project linked biodiversity and agriculture through SLM training, crop diversification, and home garden establishment, and addressed ecosystem services through tank headwork restoration and community electric fencing. However, direct interventions regarding "human health" (specifically investigating and addressing CKDu were limited. The health linkage was primarily addressed indirectly through 24 health and nutrition camps, rather than through targeted medical interventions.

Strategic question 4: "What factors most significantly enabled or constrained achievement of outcomes, including sustainability and scaling potential?": a primary enabling factor was adaptive management. Subcontracting local execution to SACEP bypassed national treasury restrictions to maintain field-level fund flows, while aligning with existing local government committees avoided the costs of establishing parallel administrative structures. Conversely, achievement and macro-level sustainability were constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic and Sri Lanka's macroeconomic crisis, which led to material cost increases and the subsequent reduction of physical restoration targets. Finally, scaling potential is constrained by the absence of a formalized exit strategy to hand over policy outcomes to the government.

178. The table below provides a summary of the ratings and findings discussed in Chapter IV. Overall, the project demonstrates a rating of 'Satisfactory'.

UNEP Evaluation Office Validation of Performance Ratings:

The UNEP Evaluation Office formally quality assesses (see Annex XII) management led Terminal Review reports and validates the performance ratings therein by ensuring that the performance judgments made are consistent with evidence presented in the Review report and in-line with the performance standards set out for independent evaluations.

The Evaluation Office assesses a Terminal Review report in the same way as it assesses the initial draft of a Terminal Evaluation report. It applies the following assumptions in its validation process:

– That what is being assessed is the contents of the report and the extent to which it makes a consistent and justifiable case for the performance ratings it records.

- That the consultant has, within the report, presented all the evidence that was made available to them.

- That the Review has been based on a robust Theory of Change, reconstructed where necessary, which reflects UNEP's definitions at all levels of results.

- That the project team and key stakeholders have already reviewed a draft version of the report and provided substantive comments and made factual corrections to the Review Consultant, who has responded to them. The Evaluation Office assumes, therefore, that it has received the Final (revised) version of the report.

In this instance the Evaluation Office assesses the quality of the Report at the 'Satisfactory' level and validates the overall project performance rating at the **'Satisfactory'** level.

Below is the summary of project findings and ratings

Table 18: Summary of project findings and ratings[29]

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Strategic Relevance	**Full alignment with UNEP MTS, GEF-6 priorities, and national dry-zone development plans**	**Highly Satisfactory**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**
1. Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and strategic priorities	Strongly aligned with Healthy and Productive Ecosystems PoW	Highly Satisfactory	The rating is revised. The report notes that the project's alignment with UNEP's South-South Cooperation policies was partial (Table 9 on Page 41). Following the UNEP Criteria Ratings Description Matrix, this condition does not meet the requirements of the 'Highly Satisfactory' rating. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Satisfactory'.	S
2. Alignment to Donor/Partner strategic priorities	Fully consistent with GEF-6 Biodiversity and Land Degradation priorities.	Highly Satisfactory	The rating is validated.	HS
3. Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities	Highly relevant to national irrigation policies and dry-zone health/CKDu concerns	Highly Satisfactory	The rating is validated.	HS
4. Complementarity with relevant existing interventions/coherence	Built effectively on past ICSLM initiatives and World Bank ESCAMP	Highly Satisfactory	The rating is validated.	HS

[29] 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 (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Quality of Project Design	**Strong ToC, but weakened by missing gender analysis, missing output indicators, and lack of procurement planning**	**Moderately Satisfactory (MS)**	**The rating is validated.**	**MS**
Nature of External Context	**Implementation was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme national macroeconomic crises.**	**Highly Unfavourable (HU)**	**The rating is validated.**	**HU**
Effectiveness	**Overall effectiveness is solid due to strong adaptive management and revised targets.**	**Satisfactory (S)**	**The rating is validated.**	**S**
1. Availability of outputs	All formally revised outputs delivered; strong knowledge products produced.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is revised. The review report notes that all of the project outputs were fully achieved. This meets the requirements of the 'Highly Satisfactory' rating. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Highly Satisfactory'.	HS
2. Achievement of project outcomes	Five tanks fully restored, SLM adopted on 2,000 ha, and local governance activated.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	S
3. Likelihood of impact	Intermediate states achieved locally; national policy institutionalization requires continued support.	Likely (L)	The rating is validated.	L
Financial Management	**Executed flexibly to bypass treasury bottlenecks; leveraged high co-financing.**	**Satisfactory (S)**	**The rating is validated.** Note: The 'Highly Satisfactory' rating is incorrectly given to this sub-criterion in the main body of the review report (Page 59-60). However, following the UNEP Criteria Ratings Description, the rating is validated at 'Satisfactory', which is correctly indicated in this rating table (Page 71).	**S**
1. Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures	Regular reporting; project covered by broader institutional audits of the Executing Agency.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
2. Completeness of project financial information	Budget revisions documented to navigate hyperinflation; robust co-finance tracking.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated. Note: The 'Highly Satisfactory' rating is incorrectly given to this sub-criterion in the main body of the review report (Page 59-60). However, following the UNEP Criteria Ratings Description, the rating is validated at 'Satisfactory', which is correctly indicated in this rating table (Page 72).	S
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	Functional and streamlined communication, despite minor disconnects in receiving technical reports alongside financial data.	Satisfactory (S)	This criterion has been removed in the revised MLTR template and guidelines. Therefore, no rating is given to this review criterion. This review criterion is not analyzed in the main body of the report under the 'IV. Review Findings' section.	N/A

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Efficiency	**Downscaled physical targets and utilized existing institutional structures to remain viable during economic shock.**	Satisfactory (S)	**The rating is revised.** The review report notes that the project underwent two justified no-cost extensions, for which the completion of the project was delayed by 21 months from the originally scheduled completion date (Para 127). Furthermore, the reviewer also acknowledges the 'mixed' evidence of the project's efficiency - it was occasionally hindered at the macro level (Para 129). These facts do not meet the requirement of the 'Satisfactory' rating or above. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Moderately Satisfactory'. Note: The 'Moderately Satisfactory' rating is correctly given to this criterion under the Executive Summary (Table 2 on Page 14) and the *'IV. Review Findings'* section (Page 61) in the main body of the review report. Therefore, the revision of the rating is aligned with the actual analysis and rating in the main body of the report.	**MS**
Monitoring and Reporting	**M&E framework generated baseline data that successfully informed MTR adaptations.**	**Satisfactory (S)**	**The rating is validated.**	**S**
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	Fully budgeted, but original logical framework lacked explicit output indicators and gender-disaggregated baseline data.	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	This criterion has been removed in the revised MLTR template and guidelines. Therefore, no rating is given to this review criterion. This review criterion is not analyzed in the main body of the report under the 'IV. Review Findings' section.	N/A

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
2. Monitoring of project implementation	Day-to-day monitoring embedded in local administrative structures.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	S
3. Project reporting	Reporting met GEF requirements; risk logs transparently documented crises.	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	S
Sustainability	**Strong local structures but high dependency on external capital for future infrastructure.**	**Unlikely**	**The rating is revised.** Based on the calculation of the revised ratings of one sub-criterion (i.e. the aggregated score is taken as the lowest of the three sub-categories), the rating is validated at the 'Moderately Unlikely' level.	**MU**
1. Socio-political sustainability	High ownership driven by voluntary labor and tangible economic incentives	Likely (L)	The rating is validated. Note: The 'Moderately Likely' rating is incorrectly given to this sub-criterion in the main body of the review report (Page 62-64). However, following the UNEP Criteria Ratings Description, the rating is validated at 'Likely', which is correctly indicated in this rating table (Page 74).	L
2. Financial sustainability	Macro-level civil works restoration remains reliant on unsecured external donor funding.	Moderately Unlikely (MU)	The rating is validated.	MU

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
3. Institutional sustainability	Strong local integration but pending formalization of national policy guidelines and lack of exit strategy.	Moderately Likely (ML)	The rating is revised. The review report notes that the exit strategy was not developed, which became a major risk to compromising the collaborative momentum on the ground (Para 143). The reviewer also acknowledges that several project outcomes lacked formal, legal endorsement in national legislation (Para 143). These conditions do not meet the requirements of the 'Moderately Likely' rating or above. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Moderately Unlikely'.	MU
Factors Affecting Performance	**Exceptional adaptive management and retroactive gender responsiveness during execution.**	**Highly Satisfactory (HS)**	**The rating is validated.**	**HS**
1. Preparation and readiness	Comprehensive analysis and costed workplan, but weakened by insufficient procurement planning and risk mitigation strategies.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	This criterion has been removed in the revised MLTR template and guidelines. Therefore, no rating is given to this review criterion. This review criterion is not analyzed in the main body of the report under the 'IV. Review Findings' section.	N/A
2. Quality of project management and supervision	Excellent adaptive actions taken by PSC and TAC to navigate national crises.	Highly Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	HS
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	Consistent supervision and strategic backstopping, effectively guiding adaptive management decisions and No-Cost Extension approvals.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is validated,	HS
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	Robust adaptive management bypassed treasury bottlenecks via SACEP, though strict administrative thresholds hindered micro-level efficiency	Satisfactory (S)	The rating is validated.	S
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	Deep integration across multiple line agencies and community groups	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	Addressed design-stage gender gaps via economic empowerment and disaggregated data collection.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is revised. The review report notes that gender equality and mainstreaming were not well considered in the project design - there were no comprehensive gender analysis, no gender-disaggregated indicators, or no specific budget for gender-responsive actions (Para 152). In particular, human rights/gender consideration in the project expenditure is an important parameter to determine the rating for this criterion. Lack of these human rights/gender aspects does not meet the requirements of the 'Highly Satisfactory' rating. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Satisfactory'.	S
5. Environmental and social safeguards	Positive safeguards generated, notably through human-elephant conflict mitigation.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is validated.	HS
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	Leveraged over USD 13.3 million in actual co-financing, exceeding original targets.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is revised. The review report notes that several project outcomes did not undergo formal, legal endorsement in national legislation (Para 143). This does not meet the requirements of the 'Highly Satisfactory' rating. Therefore, the rating has been adjusted to 'Satisfactory'.	S
7. Communication and public awareness	Comprehensive knowledge translation across media, academic, and policy audiences.	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Overall Project Performance Rating	The project met its revised targets and built a strong knowledge legacy despite severe external shocks	Satisfactory	The overall project performance rating is validated at the 'Satisfactory' level.	S

B. Lessons learned

Lesson Learned #1:	Strategic delegation of financial execution in crisis contexts
Context/comment:	Faced with a national regulatory hurdle (Budget Circular No/05 2020) that prohibited the establishment of a Project Management Unit (PMU) within the Ministry, compounded by a macroeconomic crisis, the project transferred local executing and financial responsibilities to SACEP. This bypassed national treasury bottlenecks, allowed for direct fund transfers from the Executing Agency, and maintained operational liquidity and field-level delivery. Future projects operating in economically volatile or administratively rigid environments should consider subcontracting execution to regional or non-governmental entities to maintain fund flows.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	103, 120, 148, 163, Strategic Question 4

Lesson Learned #2:	Institutional integration over parallel structures
Context/comment:	The project integrated its participatory landscape planning into pre-existing, permanent local governance structures (the District and Divisional Agriculture Committees) rather than creating temporary, parallel project units. This alignment fostered inter-departmental collaboration and country ownership. However, post-project monitoring indicates that active participation in these committees declined once dedicated project funding ceased. While institutional integration is effective during implementation, it requires a structured post-project facilitation plan to sustain coordination
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	Table 14 - output 2.3, Table 15 – outcome 2, 109, 118, 120, 142, 144, 164, Strategic Question 2, Strategic Question 4

Lesson Learned #3:	Adjusting physical targets to mitigate macroeconomic shocks
Context/comment:	The project's reliance on physical infrastructure works (tank restorations) made it vulnerable to national hyperinflation and material cost increases. The MTR's decision to halve the physical restoration targets (from eight to four tanks) was an adaptive management measure. It maintained the project's financial viability and allowed remaining resources to be redirected toward policy and market deliverables. Environmental projects with major civil works should embed flexible target mechanisms to adapt to economic shocks.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	105, Effectiveness – Ouput 1.2 (table 14), 116, 131, Strategic Question 4,

Lesson Learned #4:	Retrofitting human rights and gender equality for direct economic empowerment and inclusion
Context/comment:	Despite an initial project design that lacked a dedicated human rights and gender analysis, explicit output indicators, and a specific gender budget, adaptive management implemented an inclusive gender-responsive approach. By establishing economic incentives, such as women-led 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlets and maize cash-crop integration, the project protected the economic rights and livelihoods of vulnerable groups and provided rural women's farmer groups with financial dividends (LKR 25 million). While this approach worked during implementation to ensure equitable benefit-sharing, future projects should strictly embed human rights and gender equity into the logical framework and budget at the design stag

Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	141, 152, 153, 165

Lesson Learned #5:	**Policy influence requires formal legislative exit strategies**
Context/comment:	The project generated knowledge products, including 18 policy briefs, a compendium for the Ministry of Environment, and restoration guidelines. However, its policy influence is limited because there was no formalized exit strategy to hand over these outputs for legal ratification. Consequently, these products currently serve as informational guidelines rather than binding national legislation. Generating technical knowledge is insufficient without a legislative roadmap.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	109, x117, 143, 147, 167, Strategic Question 2, Strategic Question 4

Lesson Learned #6:	**Anchoring technical knowledge in academic curricula**
Context/comment:	To build capacity and bridge the gap between academic research and government implementation, the project embedded short courses on cascade ecology into the academic curriculum of Rajarata University. This institutionalizes the capacity-building gains for future practitioners and creates national capacity that can outlast government administrative turnover and the cessation of project funds.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	**Table 14** *(Output 3.2)*, 109, 112, Table 15 outcome 3, 128, 142, 161

Lesson Learned #7:	**Indirect vs. direct Interventions in "Eco-Health" projects**
Context/comment:	Despite featuring "Ecosystem Health" in its title and aiming to address the root causes of the local CKDu crisis, direct medical interventions and health metrics were limited. The health linkage was addressed primarily indirectly through nutrition camps and agrobiodiversity home gardens. Future projects aiming to operationalize an "eco-health nexus" should include concrete health indicators and partnerships with the medical sector at the design stage.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	Outcome 1 – Table 15, 167, Strategic Question 3

Lesson Learned #8:	**Precision Farming as a Catalyst for Eco-Health and Youth Engagement**
Context/comment:	While traditional knowledge is foundational to VTCS, relying solely on old techniques can hinder adoption among the younger generation. The project's policy briefs and sourcebooks recommend integrating 'smart agriculture' (such as smart irrigation, drones, and AI sensors). Precision farming directly supports the eco-health nexus by optimizing the use of agrochemicals and fertilizers, which reduces the health risks (e.g., kidney disorders) associated with chemical runoff in the cascade systems.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	114, 58, 66, Strategic Question 2

C. Recommendations

Recommendation #1:	**The UNEP Task Manager and Executing Agencies should integrate concrete health indicators and establish direct partnerships with the health sector in the design of future "Eco-Health" project phases**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Despite featuring "Ecosystem Health" in its title and aiming to address the root causes of the local CKDu crisis, direct medical interventions and health metrics were limited, with health linkages addressed indirectly. Future projects targeting an eco-health nexus require concrete health indicators and partnerships with the medical sector to prove impact
Priority Level:	Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project Level (for future phases)
Responsibility:	UNEP Task Manager and Executing Agencies (Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT)
Proposed implementation time-frame:	During the formulation of the next related project phase or concept note

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Table 15 – Outcome 1, 167, Strategic Question 3

Recommendation #2:	**The UNEP Task Manager, Executing Agencies, and MoE should formulate a GEF-9 project proposal that scales the eco-health approach to new cascade sites, secures infrastructure finance, integrates explicit health metrics, and incorporates climate-smart agriculture and precision farming technologies**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project piloted the eco-health concept within VTCS landscapes, but physical replication was constrained by macroeconomic crises, and direct medical interventions were limited. As the Ministry of Environment prepares a proposal for the GEF-9 funding cycle, future programming should build upon the lessons learned from this project. A new GEF-9 project should scale the eco-health approach to new cascade sites, secure infrastructure finance, and integrate health actions by incorporating health metrics and direct partnerships with the medical sector. Furthermore, future interventions must shift towards innovative agricultural technologies. Integrating precision farming, smart irrigation, and GIS/drone technology will help optimize fertilizer and water use - directly supporting eco-health outcomes by reducing agrochemical exposure - while making farming more attractive to the younger generation
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Project Level / UNEP
Responsibility:	UNEP Task Manager, Executing Agencies (Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT), and Ministry of Environment (MoE)

Proposed implementation time-frame:	During the GEF-9 Concept Note / Project Identification Form (PIF) development phase

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Table 16 - Drivers to support transition from Intermediate States to Impact, 115, 177

Recommendation #3:	**Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats should develop and implement a post-project facilitation and financing plan to sustain the local agricultural platforms and the academic Community of Practice (CoP)**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	While the project integrated participatory landscape planning into permanent District and Divisional Agriculture Committees, post-project monitoring shows these platforms are functioning with reduced active participation following the cessation of dedicated project funding. Similarly, the academic Community of Practice (CoP) established by the project struggles to maintain collaborative networking momentum independently
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partners (Academic / Local Government)
Responsibility:	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and relevant Divisional Secretariats
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediate (within 3 months)

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

109, Table 16 – assumptions, 118, 143, 144, Strategic Question 2

Recommendation #4:	**UNEP Project Design Units and Executing Agencies must mandate and incorporate comprehensive human rights and gender analyses, gender-disaggregated indicators, and specific gender budgets at the design stage for all future projects**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The original project design lacked a dedicated gender analysis, gender-disaggregated indicators, and a specific budget for gender-responsive actions. Although the project retrofitted gender-sensitive value chains (e.g., 'Hela Bojun' outlets) via adaptive management during implementation, relying on post-approval corrections poses a risk to equitable benefit-sharing and evaluability from project inception
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	UNEP / Implementing Agency

Responsibility:	UNEP Project Design Units and Executing Agencies (e.g., Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT)
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediate (applicable to the formulation phase of all future projects)

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

135, 137, 152, 153

Recommendation #5:	**The Ministry of Environment (MoE), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, should formally endorse the project's policy briefs and mainstream them into binding national legislation or official government strategies**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project generated 18 policy briefs, a Ministry of Environment compendium, and cascade management guidelines. However, these technical products currently serve as informational guidelines; systemic policy effectiveness remains partial because formal endorsement into binding national legislation or official government strategies is pending
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partners (Government of Sri Lanka)
Responsibility:	Ministry of Environment (MoE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Within 6 months of project closure

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

109, 117, 143, 147, 167, Strategic Question 2

Recommendation #6:	**The Ministry of Environment (MoE) should actively seek and secure dedicated climate or infrastructure finance to support the high capital costs of major civil works for future macro-level cascade restorations**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The financial sustainability of macro-level cascade restoration is constrained by the high capital costs of major civil works. Consequently, future large-scale tank renovations and downstream developments depend on external donor support
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partners / Executing Agency
Responsibility:	Ministry of Environment (MoE) and South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Within 12 months

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

115, 140, 146, 167, 177

Recommendation #7:	**The Ministry of Environment (MoE), Department of Agrarian Development (DAD), and Ministry of Agriculture should initiate and draft an overarching national master plan and policy framework for VTCS rehabilitation**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Currently, VTCS restorations are conducted on a project-by-project basis without an overarching strategy. There is no national policy or master plan that prioritizes tank rehabilitation, outlines crop selection protocols, and integrates the eco-health approach. To secure long-term investments and ensure cohesive landscape management, VTCS cascade ecology should be integrated into national frameworks such as the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP), National Adaptation Plan (NAP), and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation	Partners (Government of Sri Lanka)
Responsibility:	Ministry of Environment (MoE), Department of Agrarian Development (DAD), and Ministry of Agriculture
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Within 12 to 24 months

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Table 11 – Global Environment Agreements, Table 16 – assumptions, 115

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Page Ref	Stakeholder comment	Reviewer Response

ANNEX II. REVIEW FRAMEWORK / MATRIX

REVIEW QUESTIONS	METHODS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Strategic Questions		
SQ1 What evidence exists that the project led to biodiversity-based strategies to improve land and natural resource management?	Semi-structured interviews with MoE, MASL, DoA, NRMC, LUPPD, PMU, Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT; review of SLM/ecohealth restoration outputs; field verification (if feasible).	ProDoc; PIRs 2020–24; MTR; Final Report; VTCS restoration documents; ABD garden and nursery records; MASL guidelines; PSC minutes.
SQ2 What lessons can be drawn for restoration of degraded ecosystems, VTCS surface water, soil/groundwater, and biodiversity?	Contribution analysis; interviews with MASL, DoA, NRMC, LUPPD; field visits to restored tanks and ABD pilot sites; review of technical restoration protocols.	Restoration reports; ecohealth monitoring outputs; water quality data; ABD and nutrition camp records; MoE technical guidelines.
SQ3 How has the project contributed to improving local livelihoods? Through which pathways?	Outcome mapping; household interviews (farmers, women, youth); review of ABD livelihood output data; cross-check with DoA and DAD extension officers.	PMU livelihood data; ABD household lists; homegarden logs; nutrition camp records; PIR livelihood indicators.
SQ4 How has the project engaged local authorities and institutions and contributed to long-term adoption of healthy landscape approaches?	Institutional mapping; interviews with LUPPD, Divisional Secretariats, MASL, DoA, DAD, NRMC, universities; review of policy briefs, curricula, guidelines, coordination	Policy briefs; technical guidelines; curriculum materials; SAG/PSC minutes; institutional memos; MoE dissemination logs.
SQ5 What adaptive management responses emerged during COVID-19, the economic crisis, and 2024–25 disruptions?	Process tracing; interviews with PMU, UNEP TM, Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT; review of revised workplans, NCE documentation; analysis of delays	NCE1/NCE2 documents; revised workplans; PIR crisis analyses; MTR; PSC minutes.
Strategic relevance		
Alignment with UNEP MTS and PoW (SP3 Healthy & Productive Ecosystems).	Document comparison; interviews with UNEP TM; ToC alignment check.	ProDoc; UNEP MTS; PoW 2018–21; CEO Endorsement.
Alignment with national priorities for VTCS restoration, ABD conservation, ecosystem–health linkages.	Policy analysis; interviews with MoE, MASL, DoA, NRMC, LUPPD.	National Environmental Policy; NBSAP; MASL strategy; provincial development plans.
Alignment with GEF-6 objectives (BD-3, LD-3).	Alignment mapping; comparative analysis.	GEF-6 Programming Directions; CEO Endorsement.

REVIEW QUESTIONS	METHODS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Complementarity with government and donor programmes.	Interviews; mapping exercise; review of parallel programmes.	Government plans; partner reports; PSC minutes.
Quality of Project Design		
Clarity and coherence of objectives and expected results.	Logframe analysis; ToC reconstruction.	ProDoc; CEO Endorsement; MTR.
Validity of causal pathways, risks, drivers, assumptions.	ToC testing; risk analysis.	ProDoc ToC; Annex R; reconstructed ToC.
Adequacy of gender, human rights, safeguards integration.	UNEP design checklists; gender analysis.	Gender elements; Output 4.1 documentation; ESS screening.
Nature of External Context		
Influence of external shocks (COVID-19, economic crisis, 2024–25 disaster).	Timeline reconstruction; interviews with PMU, UNEP, partners.	PIR crisis analysis; NCE documentation.
Effectiveness		
Availability of Outputs		
Delivery of planned outputs (quality, timeliness, usefulness).	Output verification; beneficiary interviews; field validation.	Output reports; nursery logs; training lists; ABD records.
Achievement of Project Outcomes		
Extent of achievement of Outcomes 1–4.	Contribution analysis; outcome mapping; triangulation.	PIRs; MTR; Final Report; interviews.
Evidence of behavioural change (SLM adoption, ABD uptake, KAP change, institutional uptake).	Field visits; household interviews; institutional interviews.	ABD adoption records; teacher training data; policy briefs.
Likelihood of impact		
Presence of intermediate states enabling long-term change.	ToC testing; assumption & driver analysis.	Reconstructed ToC; institutional uptake evidence.
Financial Management		
Adequacy, transparency, and timeliness of financial management.	Financial audit review; interviews with PMU finance, UNEP Fund Management Office.	Financial reports; audits; expenditure tables.
Co-financing mobilisation as planned.	Comparative review; partner interviews.	Co-financing matrix; partner reports.
Efficiency		
Cost-effectiveness of implementation.	Cost–benefit qualitative analysis; timeline analysis.	Budget vs. expenditure reports; workplans.
Reasonableness of delays (avoidable/unavoidable).	Process tracing; interviews.	PSC minutes; NCE documentation.
Monitoring and Reporting		

REVIEW QUESTIONS	METHODS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Monitoring of project implementation		
Adequacy of monitoring design and use of data for adaptive management.	M&E system review; interviews.	M&E framework; monitoring templates; PIRs.
Reporting of project implementation		
Accuracy, timeliness and results-focus of reporting.	Completeness check; cross-validation.	PIRs; HYRs; PMU reports.
Sustainability		
Socio-political sustainability		
Stakeholder ownership and post-project support.	Interviews (MoE, MASL, DoA, DS offices); community groups.	Policy context; institutional commitments.
Financial sustainability		
Likelihood of continued financing.	Budget review; interviews.	Government & donor commitments.
Institutional Sustainability		
Strength of capacities and mechanisms for continuation.	Capacity assessment; institutional interviews.	Training records; curricula; guidelines.
Factors affecting project performance and cross cutting issues		
i. Preparation and Readiness		
Were prerequisites in place for effective start-up?	Desk review; interviews.	ProDoc; inception documents.
Quality of project management and supervision		
Quality of UNEP oversight and PMU performance.	Interviews; PSC analysis.	PIRs; PSC minutes.
Stakeholder participation and cooperation		
Inclusiveness, gender-responsiveness, engagement quality.	Participation mapping; interview diversity checks.	Training records; stakeholder lists.
Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity		
Integration and monitoring of HR and gender elements.	Gender lens review; interviews.	Gender-related outputs; M&E data.
Environmental and social safeguards		
Was ESS screening conducted and followed?	ESS compliance review; field validation.	ESS documents; PMU reporting.
Country ownership and driven-ness		
Alignment with national priorities; degree of leadership.	Interviews; policy mapping.	National frameworks; partner mandates.

REVIEW QUESTIONS	METHODS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Communication and public awareness		
Were knowledge products relevant, accessible, and used?	Interviews; usability testing.	Policy briefs; sourcebook; curricula; media outputs.

ANNEX III. STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED DURING THE REVIEW

People consulted during the Review

Organisation	Position	Role in the project	Gender
Ministry of Environment (MoE)	Director (Land Resources)	Government Partner / Coordinator	F
Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT (CGIAR)	PLANS Regional Team Lead - Asia	Financial Management	F
Ministry of Environment (MoE)	MoE Official	Government Coordinator / Liaison	M
Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT (CGIAR)	Associate Scientist	Technical Advisor / Scientist	F
South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)	Senior Programme Officer	Local Executing Agency Representative	M
UNEP	Safeguard Advisor / Global Portfolio	UNEP Representative / Reviewer	F
UNEP	Task Manager	Project oversight and technical guidance	F
UNEP	FMO	Finance/ Programme support	F
UNEP	Finance and budget assistant	Finance/ Programme support	F
UNEP	Programme Management Assistant	Programme support	M
Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT (CGIAR)	Senior Scientist	Lead Technical Adviser / Focal Point	M
Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT (CGIAR)	Research Fellow	Communications and Knowledge Management	F
University	Professor	Academia / Lead for scholarly book	M
University of Kansas	Distinguished Professor	Independent Researcher / Co-author of book chapter	M
University	Professor	Academia / Vice President of the CoP research network	M
SACEP / PMU	National Project Manager	Project Management	M
Divisional Secretariat	Official	Government Representative	M
Government (Anuradhapura)	Additional District Secretary	Local Government Partner / District Administration	F
SACEP / PMU	Field Coordinator	Field Coordination	F
Wayamba University	Professor	Academia	M
Belang Kadavala Farmer Association	Chairman / Farmer	Beneficiary	M

ANNEX IV. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

1. Project deliverables & academic publications

- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, and BBC. "The Ancient Invention Critical to Daily Life." *The Climate and Us* (Mini-series). Video documentary. November 2023.
- Dharmasena, P. B., H. K. Kadupitiya, and Sujith S. Ratnayake. *First Baseline Assessment Report – Methodological Framework and Desk Review (Delivery Report 01)*. The Healthy Landscapes Project, October 2020.
- Healthy Landscapes Project (HLP). *Course Materials - Advanced Short Course on Sustainable Management of Tank Cascade Systems*. 2024.
- Healthy Landscapes Project (HLP). *Sourcebook for Sustainable Tank Cascade Management*. Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, 2024.
- Healthy Landscapes Project (HLP). *Training Documents for Building Stakeholder and Community Capacity: Integrating Value Chain and Marketing Strategies in VTCS*. 2024.
- Healthy Landscapes Project (HLP). *Way Forward to Revitalize Village Tank Cascade Systems in Sri Lanka: A Compendium of Policy Briefs*. Edited by Mohamed Esham, Chandana Jayathilake, and Keminda Herath. The Healthy Landscapes Project, May 2024. ISBN: 978-624-5817-49-8.
- Mendonce, Sharon. "An ancient water management system in Sri Lanka is being revived - here's why." Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (Blog). October 24, 2022.
- Mendonce, Sharon. "Forget me not! Reviving the use of traditional vegetables in rural Sri Lanka for delicious and nutritious meals." Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (Blog). October 16, 2023.
- Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL). *Proceedings of the International Conference on EcoHealth Nexus: Bridging Cascade Ecology and Human Well-Being (ICEN 2023)*. Mihintale, Sri Lanka: Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, December 2023.
- Ratnayake, Sujith S., A. Khan, M. Reid, K. Herath, P. B. Dharmasena, H. K. Kadupitiya, D. Hunter, and B. Kogo. "Land Use System Based Participatory Assessment of Ecosystem Services in Village Tank Cascade Systems of Sri Lanka." *Sustainability* 14, no. 16 (August 2022): 10180. https://doi.org/10.3390/su141610180.
- Ratnayake, Sujith S., M. Reid, N. Larder, N. Kariyawasam, C. Hunter, D. Hunter, P. B. Dharmasena, G. Pushpakumara, and B. Kogo. "Sustainability and Productivity of Village Tank Cascade Systems: A Bibliometric Analysis and Knowledge Mapping." *Sustainability* (2024). https://doi.org/10.3390/su16083360.
- Ratnayake, Sujith S., M. Reid, N. Larder, H. K. Kadupitiya, D. Hunter, P. B. Dharmasena, L. Kumar, B. Kogo, K. Herath, and C. S. Kariyawasam. "Impact of Climate Change on Paddy Farming in the Village Tank Cascade Systems of Sri Lanka." *Sustainability* (2023). https://doi.org/10.3390/su15129271.

2. Government documents, strategies, and policies

- Government of Sri Lanka. *Budget Circular No/05 2020*. Colombo: Ministry of Finance, 2020.
- Government of Sri Lanka. *National Action Programme for Combating Land Degradation in Sri Lanka (Land Degradation Neutrality targets)*. Colombo.
- Government of Sri Lanka. *National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for Climate Change Impacts in Sri Lanka*. Colombo.
- Government of Sri Lanka. *National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP)*. Colombo.
- Government of Sri Lanka. *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*. Colombo.
- Ministry of Environment. *Integrated, Sustainable and Participatory Landscape Management for Village Tank Cascade Systems*. Colombo: Ministry of Environment, 2024.
- Ministry of Environment. *Review of Sustainable Land Management Related Policies - Special Reference to Management of Lands in Village Tank Cascade Systems*. Colombo: Ministry of Environment, 2024.
- Ministry of Environment. *The National Red List 2012 of Sri Lanka; Conservation Status of the Fauna and Flora*. Colombo: Ministry of Environment, 2012.
- United Nations. *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*.
- United Nations. *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Strategic Plan*.

3. Internal project & review documents

- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. *Final Report – Healthy Landscapes Project*. October 2024.
- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. *Healthy Landscapes Project Resource List 2019-2024*.
- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, and South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). *Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting Minutes (1st to 4th)*.
- Gonsalves, Julian. *Mid-Term Review Report: Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health*. December 2022.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Approved CEO Endorsement Document (including Annexes)*. GEF ID: 9409.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Terminal Review Inception Report*. January 2026.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Bioversity International. *Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and Amendments No. 1 & 2*. 2019–2024.
- South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). *Progress Reports for UNEP GEF Healthy Landscapes Project*. 2021–2024.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Half-Yearly Progress Report – from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Half-Yearly Progress Report – from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021*.

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Half-Yearly Progress Report – from 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Half-Yearly Progress Report – from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Project Implementation Review (PIR) Fiscal Year 2020 – Reporting from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Project Implementation Review (PIR) Fiscal Year 2021 – Reporting from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Project Implementation Review (PIR) Fiscal Year 2022 – Reporting from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Project Implementation Review (PIR) Fiscal Year 2023 – Reporting from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Project Implementation Review (PIR) Fiscal Year 2024 – Reporting from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024*.
- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. *Consolidated Reports of Planned and Actual Co-finance (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)*.
- Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. *Quarterly Expenditure Statements / Financial Reports to UNEP (Q2 2019 through Q3 2024, and Oct-Nov 2024)*.
- Annual audit reports of project funds through the overall Bioversity annual audit report (not project-specific)
- South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). *Financial Reports to Bioversity International (2021–2024)* (Includes: 1 Sep - 31 Dec 2021; 1 Jan - 30 Jun 2022; 1 Jul - 31 Dec 2022; 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2023; 1 Apr - 30 Jun 2023; 1 Jul - 31 Aug 2023; 1 Sep - 10 Nov 2023; 11 Nov - 31 Dec 2023; 1 Jan - 30 Jun 2024)

ANNEX V. REVIEW ITINERARY

Date	Location	First name	Family name	Position	Institution
2026-02-17	Remote (Online)	Nilmini	Wickramarachchi	Director (Land Resources)	Ministry of Environment (MoE)
2026-02-17	Remote (Online)	Maria	Gehring	PLANS Regional Team Lead - Asia	Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT
2026-02-18	Remote (Online)	Darshana Kumara	Gunarathna	Development Officer / Coordinator	Ministry of Environment (MoE)
2026-02-19	Remote (Online)	Kavita	Sharma	Task Manager	UNEP
2026-02-19	Remote (Online)	Peerayot	Sidonrusmee	Support Assistant	UNEP
2026-02-20	Remote (Online)	Teresa	Borelli	Associate Scientist	Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT
2026-02-23	Remote (Online)	W.K.	Rathnadeera	Senior Programme Officer	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)
2026-02-24	Remote (Online)	Marieta	Sakalian	Safeguard Advisor / Global Portfolio	UNEP
2026-02-25	Remote (Online)	Danny	Hunter	Senior Scientist / Lead Technical Adviser	Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT
2026-02-26	Remote (Online)	Sharon	Mendonce	Research Fellow	Alliance Bioversity International - CIAT
2026-02-27	Remote (Online)	Dulmini	Rathnayaka	Science Teacher / Beneficiary	Provincial Department of Education / School
2026-02-27	Remote (Online)	Nalaka	Geekiyanage	Senior Lecturer (Scholarly book editor)	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka
2026-03-02	Remote (Online)	Christopher	Koliba	Distinguished Professor / Independent Researcher	University of Kansas (USA)
2026-03-03	Remote (Online)	Chinthaka	Karalliyadda	Senior Lecturer (Human Ecology)	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka
2026-03-03	Remote (Online)	Ajith	Silva	National Project Manager	SACEP / PMU
2026-03-08	Remote (Online)	Ajith	Silva	National Project Manager	SACEP / PMU
2026-03-10	Remote (Online)	Ajith	Silva	National Project Manager	SACEP / PMU
2026-03-18	Remote (Online)	M.H.J.P. (Janaka)	Gunarathna	Professor / Coordinator Component 3	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka
2026-03-18	Remote (Online)	Bellankadawala	Rajapakse	Chairman / Farmer	Belang Kadavala Farmer Association
2026-03-18	Remote (Online)	Prabash	Bandara	Official	Ministry of Finance / Divisional Secretariat
2026-03-18	Remote (Online)	Sandya	Abeysekara	Additional District Secretary	District Secretariat, Anuradhapura

2026-03-20	Remote (Online)	Jayamanda	B.A.	Director)	Land Use Policy Planning Department (LUPPD)
2026-03-20	Remote (Online)	Herath	Keminda	Professor, on Component 3	Wayamba University
2026-03-20	Remote (Online)	Thushani	Dissanayake	Field Coordinator	SACEP / PMU

ANNEX VI. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS ASSESSMENT

ESS PLANNING AT PROJECT DESIGN	
List any ESS issues identified at project design (e.g. SS 1.7, SS 2.3, etc.)	• SS 1: Biodiversity, natural habitat and Sustainable Management of Living Resources: challenges of the landscape planning approach, risks from modern engineering conflicting with traditional Village Tank Cascade Systems (VTCS), and changing agricultural practices. • SS 2: Resource efficiency, pollution prevention and management of chemicals and wastes: water quality issues affecting human health, requiring a precautionary approach to hazardous chemicals and pesticides (IPM). • SS 3: Safety of dams: risks associated with structural measures for tank renovations and urgent repairs. • SS 9: risks of unequal economic benefits, urbanization, and climate change, highlighting the need for equitable benefit-sharing among marginalized populations.
For any ESS issues identified at project design, were mitigation strategies developed (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes The project design required a precautionary, science-based approach to ecosystem management and tank renovation. It specified a baseline assessment—including socio-economic mapping to identify roles across ethnic and economic groups, including gender. This would inform a management risk plan at project start-up to ensure equitable benefit-sharing and risk avoidance (e.g., integrating Integrated Pest Management approaches.
Were any gaps in ESS issues identified at the review inception phase (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes Risks were identified broadly but lacked in-depth analysis and mitigation strategies. Specific gaps included the absence of a gender analysis, gender-disaggregated indicators, and a dedicated gender budget; furthermore, gender was missing from the risk framework. Finally, the lack of procurement planning limited the identification of supply-chain and inflation risks, which later constrained implementation during the national economic crisis.

ESS MONITORING AT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	
Is there evidence that the potential emergence of ESS issues was actively monitored during project implementation (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes The project monitored the ESERN document and safeguard standards (SS1, SS2, and SS3) throughout implementation. In early 2022, it established the Technical Advisory Committee of local experts to provide oversight. The TAC evaluated safeguard risks to maintain a precautionary, science-based approach to ecosystems and apply mitigation measures that minimize harm during project activities.
Is there a justification for the absence of ESS monitoring (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	No

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIVENESS DURING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	
Identify the ESS issues/events triggered by the project.	The project did not trigger any negative environmental or social safeguard issues. PIRs confirm no complaints or grievances related to social or environmental impacts were received during implementation.
Describe consequences of ESS issues/events during project implementation.	Since no adverse ESS events occurred, there were no negative consequences. Tank restoration activities proceeded without disrupting habitats or exacerbating soil erosion.
Describe the management response and identify supporting documentation.	To address the moderate risks identified at design, the PMU monitored activities and adapted management under TAC guidance. Management prioritized protecting local ecosystems and biodiversity during physical restoration. Social safeguards focused on inclusive stakeholder engagement, involving local communities and marginalized groups.
Were negative ESS effects offset by management response (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes Management's precautionary approach to tank rehabilitation prevented negative effects, ensuring restoration did not disrupt habitats or cause soil erosion. Furthermore, inclusive stakeholder engagement supported local livelihoods (e.g., via ecotourism and gender-sensitive value chains), maintaining a balance between environmental integrity and social well-being.

ANNEX VII. COMMUNICATION AND OUREACH TOOLS

https://www.healthylandscapesproject.org/

https://ctvsrednet.lk/

ANNEX VIII. BRIEF CV OF THE REVIEWER

Name: Vincent LEFEBVRE

Profession	Agronomist
Nationality	Belgian
Country experience	• Europe: Belgium • Africa: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia • Americas: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay • Asia: Cambodia, Laos, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, Vietnam • Oceania: Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau
Education	• Tropical Agriculture Engineer

Vincent Lefebvre is an environmental and climate change specialist with over 25 years of international experience in project management, evaluation, and technical audits. Born on October 19, 1967, in Belgium, he holds a Master's degree in Agronomy from the Université Catholique de Louvain, with further qualifications in Business Administration and Communication for Environmental Protection. Proficient in several languages, including French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch, he has worked extensively across Africa, Latin and Central America, the Caribbean region, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.

Key specialities and capabilities cover Project formulation, monitoring, and evaluation (M&E), Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, Sustainable land and water management, Biodiversity conservation and natural resource governance, Agro-forestry, climate-smart agriculture, and renewable energy, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and cartography, Institutional capacity building and cross-sectoral policy integration…

Over his career, Lefebvre has led and participated in over 80+ independent reviews and evaluations for international organisations such as UNEP, UNDP, GEF, and the European Union. Selected assignments and experiences include:

- Mid-term evaluation of the BIOPAMA Programme (budget: 80M EUR), focusing on biodiversity and protected area management in Africa
- Terminal evaluation of the Burkina Faso Climate Transparency Framework (budget: 2M USD), assessing gaps in institutional arrangements and climate data systems
- Independent review of the African Union Research Grants Program (budget: 17M USD), focusing on climate resilience in agriculture across multiple African countries
- Final evaluation of the Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Tourism project in Cape Verde (budget: 6M USD), assessing coastal and marine biodiversity conservation efforts

- Mid-term review of the "Africa Adaptation Initiative" (budget: 12M USD), which supports African governments in building resilience to climate change and mainstreaming adaptation into national policies
- Final evaluation of the "Climate Resilient Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa" project (budget: 10M USD), which developed climate-smart agriculture techniques while strengthening institutional frameworks in rural areas
- Institutional evaluation of the "Climate Governance Capacity Development Project" in Mozambique (budget: 5M USD), focused on building government capacity for integrating climate risk into national policies and developing cross-sectoral climate governance frameworks

His expertise spans policy development, technical assistance, and capacity building, and his work has contributed to advancing global and regional environmental governance. Currently, he continues to work as an independent consultant, leading evaluations and fostering environmental sustainability in various international contexts.

ANNEX IX. GEF PORTAL INPUTS

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

Table 19: GEF portal inputs

Question: What was the performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets? (For projects approved prior to GEF-7[30], these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided[31]).

Response:

Core Indicator 4 (Area of landscapes under improved practices): the project had an original target of 20,000 hectares. At project completion, 1,000 hectares materialized. This variance is due to adaptive management measures taken during the Mid-Term Review (MTR) to reduce physical infrastructure targets (from eight to four tanks) in response to national hyperinflation and material cost increases.

Core Indicator 11 (People benefitting from GEF-financed investments): the project met its end-of-project target of 200 direct beneficiaries.

Project Performance against GEF Core Indicator Targets

GEF Core / Sub Indicators	Mid-term Target	End-of-project Target	Total Target	Materialized to date (Completion)	Remarks / Location
4: Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares)	750	2,000	2,000	1,000	Variance due to adaptive management and scope reduction during the MTR.
11: People benefitting from GEF-financed investments	100	200	200	200	The end-of-project target was successfully and fully met

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

Response:

Following the MTR, the project engaged a range of stakeholders using a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach. Rather than creating temporary parallel project units, the project integrated participatory landscape planning directly into permanent local governance structures, specifically the District and Divisional Agriculture Committees. Furthermore, universities (notably Rajarata University, Peradeniya, and Ruhuna) and government agencies (e.g., NRMC, Department

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

[31] This is not applicable for Enabling Activities

of Agriculture) were mobilized to coordinate knowledge products, bridging the gap between academic research and government implementation.

Challenges: while institutional integration occurred during implementation, post-project monitoring indicates that stakeholder participation, local agricultural platforms and the academic Community of Practice (CoP) has declined following the cessation of dedicated project funding and facilitation.

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

Response:

Although the original project design lacked a dedicated gender analysis, gender-disaggregated indicators, and a specific budget for gender-responsive actions, the project management unit retrofitted gender equality measures during implementation. The project established gender-sensitive value chains that provided economic empowerment to rural women. Key measures included the establishment of women-led 'Hela Bojun' traditional food outlets and the integration of maize cash-crops, which provided rural women's farmer groups with financial dividends (e.g., LKR 25 million). The project engaged established Women's Agricultural Societies and tracked the proportion of women involved in capacity building for sustainable land management (SLM) approaches.

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

Response:

The project monitored the ESERN document and associated safeguard standards (SS1, SS2, and SS3) throughout implementation. To oversee these, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of local experts was established in 2022 to provide guidance. Management prioritized the protection of local ecosystems and biodiversity during physical restoration works by employing a safety approach to tank rehabilitation. This ensured that structural measures did not disrupt existing habitats or cause soil erosion. Social safeguards focused on inclusive stakeholder engagement, which supported equitable benefit-sharing and local livelihoods (e.g., via ecotourism and value chains). No negative environmental or social safeguard issues were triggered by the project, and no grievances were received.

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

Response:

Outcomes: The project produced a portfolio of knowledge deliverables. It generated 18 policy briefs, a Ministry of Environment compendium, and the *Sourcebook for Sustainable Tank Cascade Management*. To bridge the gap between research and practice, the project embedded four short courses on cascade ecology into the permanent academic curriculum of Rajarata University. It also established the Cascade Ecology Database and Knowledge Portal (CTVS RedNet) to host ecological and GIS data.

Challenges: The challenge identified is the lack of a formalized exit strategy to hand over these knowledge outputs for legal ratification. Consequently, the 18 policy briefs currently serve as informational guidelines rather than binding national legislation. Additionally, the academic Community of Practice (CoP) established by the project relies on voluntary efforts and has struggled to maintain its networking momentum independently since project funding ceased.

Question: What are the main findings of the evaluation?

Response:

- Adaptive execution in crises: confronted with a national regulatory hurdle prohibiting a Ministry PMU, severe COVID-19 lockdowns, and a macroeconomic crisis, the project's decision to subcontract local financial execution to SACEP and halve its physical infrastructure targets (from 8 to 4 tanks) bypassed national treasury bottlenecks and maintained operational viability.
- Knowledge generation vs. policy mainstreaming: the project generated technical and academic knowledge, producing 18 policy briefs and embedding cascade ecology courses into university curricula. However, systemic policy effectiveness remains partial because formal endorsement of these briefs into binding national legislation is pending.
- Institutional integration: embedding participatory landscape planning into permanent, pre-existing District and Divisional Agriculture Committees, cross-departmental collaboration and avoiding the creation of parallel structures. However, sustaining post-project momentum requires a structured facilitation and financing plan.
- Retrofitting gender equality: despite gaps in design-stage gender budgeting, the project secured economic dividends for rural women by establishing economic incentives such as the 'Hela Bojun' food outlets.
- Eco-health nexus: direct medical interventions addressing the root causes of Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Etiology (CKDu) remained limited. Future projects targeting an eco-health nexus require concrete health metrics and direct partnerships with the medical sector.
- Scaling up: the financial sustainability of macro-level cascade restoration is constrained by the high capital costs of civil works. Future replication will require integration into a National Master Plan and the securing of dedicated climate or infrastructure finance (e.g., through a GEF-9 phase).
- Modernizing the VTCS: sustaining cascade landscapes and engaging a younger generation in agriculture requires combining traditional VTCS practices with climate-smart agriculture. Integrating precision farming and smart irrigation systems optimizes water-use efficiency and minimizes agrochemical pollution, which directly supports the eco-health nexus.

ANNEX X. GEF COFINANCE

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Cofinancing	Investment Mobilized	Amount ($) at CEO	Amount ($) at MTR[32]	Amount ($) at TE
Other	Bioversity International	Cash	Investment mobilized	33,076	7,582	42,098
Other	Bioversity International	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	314,789	77,903	293,766
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Environment	Cash	Investment mobilized	3,272,800	254,500	1,315,440
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Environment	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	5,427,200	528,255	2,332,403
Recipient Country Government	Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC)	Cash	Investment mobilized	0	190,043	970,409
Recipient Country Government	Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	0	298,580	1,660,950
Recipient Country Government	Department of Agriculture (DOAS)	Cash	Investment mobilized	0	120,620	1,244,625
Recipient Country Government	Department of Agriculture (DOAS)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	0	355,615	2,143,935
Recipient Country Government	Department of Irrigation (DOI)	Cash	Investment mobilized	0	120,258	688,340
Other	Department of Irrigation (DOI)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	0	237,140	1,430,098
Other	University of Peradeniya	Cash	Investment mobilized	0	85,310	458,853
Other	University of Peradeniya	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	0	149,010	773,424
Total Co-financing				9,047,865	4,719,765	13,354,341

[32] In 2022

ANNEX XI. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Title and Reference No.: Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health in Sri Lanka - SMA ID: 34679

Contact Person (TM/PM): Kavita SHARMA

	PLANS			
RECOMMENDATIONS	**ACCEPTED (YES / NO / PARTIALLY)**	**WHAT WILL BE DONE?**	**EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE**	**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY**
The UNEP Task Manager and Executing Agencies should integrate concrete health indicators and establish direct partnerships with the health sector in the design of future "Eco-Health" project phases	Partially	In case of any future projects, the health sector may be engaged throughout the project	N/A	Ecosystem Division
The UNEP Task Manager, Executing Agencies, and MoE should formulate a GEF-9 project proposal that scales the eco-health approach to new cascade sites, secures infrastructure finance, integrates explicit health metrics, and incorporates climate-smart agriculture and precision farming technologies	Partially	The Executing agency will be informed of this recommendation through this report.	N/A	Govt. of Sri Lanka and UNEP TM
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats should develop and implement a post-project facilitation and financing plan to sustain the local agricultural platforms and the academic Community of Practice (CoP)	Partially	RUSL will be informed of this recommendation through sharing of this report.	N/A	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats
UNEP Project Design Units and Executing Agencies must mandate and incorporate comprehensive gender analyses, gender-disaggregated indicators, and specific gender budgets at the design stage for all future projects	Yes	Future project design for similar projects will include comprehensive gender analyses, gender-disaggregated indicators, and specific gender budgets, as stipulated by the GEF	N/A	UNEP TM

	PLANS			
RECOMMENDATIONS	**ACCEPTED (YES / NO / PARTIALLY)**	**WHAT WILL BE DONE?**	**EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE**	**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY**
The Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture should formally endorse the project's policy briefs and integrate them into national legislation or official government strategies	Partially	The Executing agency will be informed of this recommendation through this report.	N/A	Govt. of Sri Lanka
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats should create a financing and facilitation plan to sustain local agricultural platforms and the academic Community of Practice (CoP)	Partially	RUSL will be informed of this recommendation through sharing of this report.	N/A	Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) and the relevant Divisional Secretariats
The Ministry of Environment should secure dedicated climate or infrastructure finance to fund civil works for future macro-level cascade restorations.	Partially	The Executing agency will be informed of this recommendation through this report.	N/A	Govt. of Sri Lanka
The Ministry of Environment, Department of Agrarian Development (DAD), and Ministry of Agriculture should draft a national master plan and policy framework for VTCS rehabilitation within the next 12 months	Partially	The Executing agency will be informed of this recommendation through this report.	N/A	Govt. of Sri Lanka

ANNEX XII. QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE REVIEW REPORT

Review Title: 'Healthy Landscapes: Managing Agricultural Landscapes in Socio-ecologically Sensitive Areas to Promote Food Security, Well-being and Ecosystem Health in Sri Lanka (GEF ID: 9409)'

Consultant: Mr. Vincent Lefebvre

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

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
Section A: Executive Summary	Assessment	
1. Does the ***Executive Summary*** act as a concise, accurate standalone section, especially to inform decision-making? Consider how clearly and concisely the report presents: • a clear summary of the review object • review objectives, scope and methodology • the overall project review rating • a summary of main review findings, including key features of performance (strengths and weaknesses) • summary responses to key strategic review questions • summary of main conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	Coverage/omissions: All necessary elements are covered. Strengths/weaknesses: The Executive Summary serves well as a concise presentation of review findings. The major aspects of the project's performance are generally well presented, enabling readers to understand the gist of the review report. The section covers both achievements and drawbacks in a very well-balanced manner in line with the review criteria. These are well articulated and presented, using bullet points. Responses to key strategic questions are well summarized. Gender and human rights dimensions could have been described more explicitly and extensively, as the main body of the report covers an analysis of gender and human rights aspects of the project. Except for this minor shortcoming, the Executive Summary is well-crafted, acting as a standalone overview of the review product.	5.5
Section B: The Project	Assessment	
2. Does the report clearly describe the ***key parameters, scale and complexity of the evaluand***? Consider how well the report presents: • an overview of the main issue that the project is trying to address • timeline, including dates of project approval, duration and number of phases (where appropriate) • geographic coverage (regions/countries) • total secured budget and project financing, including a table with funding sources • implementing and funding partners • institutional context (i.e. UNEP sub-programme, Division, Branch etc) • implementation structure with diagram	Coverage/omissions: The section presents all essential information. Strengths/weaknesses: The *'Introduction'* section is well presented, with a clear description of all key aspects of the project. It serves as a good introduction to the report and successfully situates the evaluand in the institutional context. Especially, changes in design during implementation are well described in detail in a chronological manner. As part of it, changes suggested by the Mid Term Review (MTR) are well elaborated, especially the revision of the results framework. The project finance is also well described with two financial tables. In particular, co-finance is analyzed thoroughly with concrete figures. The impact of inflation on the project finance is well	6

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
• UNEP results frameworks to which it contributes (e.g. PoW Direct Outcome) • summary of results framework as stated in the ProDoc (or as officially revised) • stakeholder groups organised according to relevant common characteristics • whether the project has been evaluated in the past (e.g. mid-term, by an external agency, etc.) • substantive or significant changes in design during implementation	elaborated, together with a description of the budget revision. These analyses add value to the review report, although some of them could have been parts of the findings. All in all, the section is comprehensive and strong.	
Section C: Review Methods and Theory of Change	Assessment	
3. Does the report present a clear, comprehensive and adequate description of the ***review methodology***? Consider how well it presents the following elements, and their adequacy based on the scope of the review: • statement of the purpose of the review and the key intended audience for the review findings • data collection methods and information sources • justification for methods used (e.g. electronic/face-to-face interviews, qualitative/quantitative analysis) • criteria and sampling strategies used to select stakeholders for consultations, and for sites/countries visited • number and types of respondents *(including in a table broken down by gender)* • strategies used to increase stakeholder engagement and response rate • methods used to include the voices/experiences of different and potentially excluded groups (e.g. women, marginalised) • data verification methods (e.g. triangulation) • data analysis methods (e.g. scoring, thematic analysis) • review limitations and mitigation measures (e.g. how these were addressed by the reviewer) • consideration for ethics and human rights issues, including how anonymity and confidentiality were protected	The Evaluation Office notes that in-country conditions meant that the Reviewer was unable to engage with beneficiaries to the desired level. <u>Coverage/omissions</u>: The section includes most required information, except for sampling strategies. <u>Strengths/weaknesses</u>: The section is well described with most required information, enabling readers to easily understand an overview of review approaches. The required information is elaborated in a well-balanced manner. In particular, strategies for inclusivity, including the gender/human rights-responsive review methodologies, are well elaborated. It covers how to incorporate gender/human rights considerations into not only data collection but also data analysis. These methodologies are not generic but well-grounded theoretically and practically, considering the operational challenges that the reviewer has faced in data collection and data analysis. Data analysis methods are also generally well described, covering diverse methodologies, although triangulation could have been more explicitly and extensively discussed in the section. Methodological limitations are well presented, along with mitigation measures that were taken. While the primary data collection, especially stakeholder interviews, is well elaborated, the secondary data collection, such as document review, is not explicitly described. The report very briefly refers to a purposive sampling method, but there is no clear mention of how the reviewer has selected interviewees. For example, the reviewer interviewed one direct beneficiary representative, but it is not clear how this specific person was identified as an interviewee.	4.5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	In relation to the sampling strategy, the sampling table (Table 6) is incomplete – the number of stakeholders who were interviewed is not mentioned. And the table seems to be the one that was used in the inception report. Table 6 could have been updated properly.	
4. Does the report describe an assessment and reformulation of the ***Theory of Change***, and present an adequate articulation of the TOC causal pathways that were used to assess project performance (*narratively and diagrammatically)?* Consider how well the report presents: • whether the project design included a TOC • how the *TOC at Review*[33] was designed (e.g. who was involved, etc) • confirmation/reconstruction of results in accordance with UNEP definitions (*including reformulation table, which may have initially been presented in the Inception Report and should appear in the Main Review report.)* • articulation of causal pathways • identification of drivers and assumptions • identification of key actors in the change process	Coverage/omissions: Most required information is presented in this section, except for a comprehensive diagram of the reconstructed TOC. Strengths/weaknesses: The reconstructed TOC is generally well described in the section, covering most required information. Reconstruction of results is described in the table. Besides the table, the respective causal pathways are briefly described but could have been better articulated in detail. Drivers and assumptions are identified and described. The linkages between assumptions/drivers and respective causal pathways are also briefly explained in the table. Key actors in the change process are broadly mentioned, especially as drivers. Gender and human rights dimensions of TOC and causal pathways are also briefly analyzed and described. Causal pathways could have been better illustrated in the reconstructed TOC diagram, together with drivers and assumptions. A clearer visualized presentation of causal pathways, including the linkage between assumptions/drivers and causal pathways (i.e., different levels of results), could have enhanced the clarity of the reconstructed TOC. Apart from the description of this section, the quality of the reformulated result statements (Impact and Intermediate States) could have been further improved – a clearer articulation of each result statement would have been required.	4
Section D: Evidence and Analysis	Assessment	
5. Is the report based on ***sufficient and adequate data*** and ***clear and credible evidence***? Consider how well the report presents: • sufficient evidence that is consistent throughout the report • evidence that is supported by data	Coverage/omissions: The report covers sufficient data and credible evidence in general. Strengths/weaknesses: Evidence, i.e., interviews and documents, is generally well presented to support findings,	5

[33] During the Inception Phase of the review process a *TOC at Review 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 review process this TOC is revised based on changes made during project intervention and becomes the *TOC at Review*.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
sources (e.g. quotes, reports, etc) • evidence that is explicitly triangulated, unless noted as having a single source • gaps in data are explained and justified • data sources that are reliable, adequate, sufficient for the scope of the review	although these are not always cited in the main text specifically (the Annex includes lists of interviewees and documents consulted). In some parts of the *'Review Findings'* section, the type of the method to collect specific evidence (i.e., interviews) is clearly referred to in compliance with the confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected in the data collection process. In general, triangulation is occasionally and implicitly done across the report. Although not all evidence is articulated in narrative form, readers can generally see many findings being backed up by triangulation of specific evidence. Data gaps, their related challenges, and mitigation measures are described in detail in the *'Review Methods'* section. Generally, data sources are reliable to support findings and ratings as credible evidence. Although the country mission to Sri Lanka was not possible due to ongoing disaster relief operations, adequate information/data was properly collected to conduct most necessary analyses in the review, effectively using secondary data sources and triangulation. For the *'Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues'* criterion, necessary information/data are not adequately collected, which makes it difficult to analyze all parameters that are needed to determine the ratings of sub-criteria. A more comprehensive coverage of data that is aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix could have further enhanced the quality of the reviewer's analyses and findings.	
6. Does the report include ***rigorous analysis*** and ***logical findings***? Consider the extent to which the findings are: • supported by clear analysis that is consistent with the evidence presented • logical, clear and coherent • aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix • aligned with the review framework • more than descriptions and provide insights into 'how' and/or 'why' the project performed a certain way • balanced, presenting both successes and weaknesses	<u>Coverage/omissions</u>: Rigorous analyses and logical findings are covered for most review criteria in the report. <u>Strengths/weaknesses</u>: Overall, findings are generally supported by clear analyses that are consistent with evidence, which makes the reviewer's argument logical, clear, and coherent. A strength of the report is that it is well-balanced, demonstrating both the project's successes and weaknesses, from which lessons learned and recommendations are derived. Many findings are derived from the reviewer's in-depth analysis of 'how' and 'why' the project performed a certain way. They provide insights that enhance learning. The robustness of the analyses slightly varies by review criteria to some extent. For the *'Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues'* criterion, the reviewer's analyses do not cover all	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	parameters that are needed to determine ratings of sub-criteria, while most other review criteria generally do so. As a result, the ratings for a few sub-criteria under the *'Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues'* section are not aligned with the narratives/analyses and UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix. More consistent support for findings and performance ratings could have been ensured in line with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix.	
Section E: Review Findings	Assessment	
7. Does the report present evidence and analysis of project ***Strategic Relevance*** with respect to UNEP, partner and geographic policies and strategies at the time of project approval? Consider how well the report addresses: • Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities • Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities • Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities • Complementarity with Existing Interventions: complementarity of the project at design (or during inception/mobilisation[34]), with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups.	Coverage/omissions: An assessment of each sub-criterion is well presented in the section. Strengths/weaknesses: Alignments to various strategies and priorities are well analyzed and described with proper categorization. In particular, the project's alignment with various national environmental priorities is well elaborated from multiple perspectives. Coherence analysis, including both external coherence and internal coherence, is also well done. Complementarities and their effects brought from the project to other interventions (and vice versa) are described. Key findings statements are well articulated, bringing deeper insights into the project's strategic relevance. The project's alignment with POW indicators is described, while no other indicators, such as global indicators (i.e., SDGs), are explicitly mentioned.	5.5
Does the report present a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the ***Quality of Project Design***, based on the detailed assessment presented in the Inception Report?	Coverage/omissions: A summary of the project design is included in the section. Strengths/weaknesses: Overall, major aspects of the project design are well presented with a few concrete examples. Both strengths and weaknesses of the project design are concisely described, which serves as a good summary of the quality of the project design. A description of the strengths and weaknesses is also presented in a table, covering all sub-criteria, in addition to a concise narrative summary.	**NOT RATED**

[34] 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.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	There seems to be no change in the rating of any sub-criterion from the inception report, but there should have been clarification in the narrative, if any.	
Does the report recognise and describe, when appropriate, key features of the ***Nature of the External Context*** under which the project was implemented that limited the project's performance (e.g. conflict, natural disaster, political upheaval[35]), and how they affected performance?	Coverage/omissions: An analysis of key external features of the project's implementing contexts is covered with a few details. Strengths/weaknesses: The analysis is well done from multiple perspectives and well described in detail, covering political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and hyperinflation. The section elaborates on how these external factors have affected the project's performance in detail. It also includes how the project addressed the issues. In particular, the reviewer's analysis on Sri Lanka's political instability is well described in the section, including how different issues, such as terrorist attacks and national elections, were compounded, and in what ways these external circumstances adversely affected the project management structure and financial management, with concrete examples. The COVID-19's impact on the project could have been further described.	**NOT RATED**
8. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the ***Availability of Outputs*** to the intended beneficiaries? Consider how well the report presents: • a convincing, evidence-supported and clear presentation of the outputs made available by the project compared to its approved plans and budget • assessment of the nature and scale of outputs versus the project indicators and targets • assessment of the timeliness, quality and utility of outputs to intended beneficiaries • identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	Coverage/omissions: Almost all required information is covered in the section, except for the effects of the project on women and disadvantaged groups. Strengths/weaknesses: Output analysis is well described with evidence. The project performance at the output level is well analyzed with sufficient detail. The narrative assessment of each Output is well elaborated. The narrative assessment includes not only whether the respective Outputs have been achieved or not, but also the reasons for the achievement/non-achievement of Outputs with a sound analysis. The utility of the Outputs to intended beneficiaries is generally well articulated with convincing evidence from the respective stakeholders. The source of information is cited to comply with confidentiality.	5

[35] 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.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	While the timelines of Outputs are not necessarily well described for all Outputs, the quality of outputs is generally well analyzed. The indicator-wise analysis is done, but for some indicators, baselines, targets, and results are not very clear. Description of the project's effects on women and disadvantaged groups is generally limited. A proper analysis and insertion of the relevant areas would have given added value to the section.	
9. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the ***Achievement of Outcomes***, as a result of the uptake, adoption and/or implementation of outputs by the intended beneficiaries? This may include behaviour changes at an individual or collective level. Consider how well the report presents: • a convincing and evidence-supported analysis of the uptake of outputs by intended beneficiaries • assessment of the nature, depth and scale of outcomes versus the project indicators and targets • discussion of the contribution, credible association and/or attribution of outcome level changes to the work of the project itself • any constraints to attributing effects to the projects' work • identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	Coverage/omissions: The section provides most required information with evidence. Strengths/weaknesses: The Outcome assessment is generally well done, covering the analyses of the nature, depth, and scale of the project Outcomes versus the project indicators and targets. The uptake of Outputs by intended beneficiaries is well described – some relevant analyses are covered in the Outcome assessment, while others are articulated as part of the Output assessment. In line with the uptake of Outputs, the project's contribution of Outcome-level results is generally well analyzed and described, while the attribution of Outcome changes to the project is not explicitly mentioned, mostly due to the limitation of the review methodologies. Identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups could have been more explicit and extensive – it is articulated only in Outcome 4.	5
10. Does the report present an integrated analysis, guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC, of all evidence relating to ***Likelihood of Impact***? Consider how well the report presents: • an explanation of how causal pathways emerged and the resulting change processes • an explicit discussion of how drivers and assumptions played out • an explanation of roles played by key actors and change agents • identification of any unintended negative effects of the project, especially on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	Coverage/omissions: The section presents most required information, except for an explicit explanation of any unintended negative effects. Strengths/weaknesses: The assessment of the likelihood of impact is generally well articulated with evidence. Causal pathways towards the impact are well examined, together with a detailed assessment of the roles of drivers and assumptions in the causal pathways. The reviewer's assessment is well-balanced, covering both what worked well and what did not work, which also provides deeper insights into the likelihood of impact. The analysis of how each of the drivers and assumptions played out is explicit and well-structured, with a description of a few concrete examples, which helps clarify how causal pathways emerged.	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	The roles played by key actors and change agents are broadly discussed, especially as part of the assessment of drivers. There is only limited mention of the unintended negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including women. It could have been more explicit and extensive.	
11. Does the report present 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 and actual co-financing used and explanation of any variances between planned and actual expenditures	Coverage/omissions: Most required information is included in the section. Strengths/weaknesses: The analysis of the project's completeness of financial information is generally well done, covering the necessary elements to be analyzed. Table 17 includes a brief assessment of the status of the completeness of financial documents. The description of the status of each required document is concise but includes a necessary analysis. Especially, the documentation of co-finance is well analyzed and described. The project's adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures is also generally well analyzed, covering cash advances, procurement, and audit. However, a few parameters that are required to determine the rating are not adequately covered. For example, the reviewer does not explicitly address regular analysis of actual expenditure against the budget and workplan. Except for these few minor reservations, the section is generally well analyzed and described.	4.5
12. Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under ***Efficiency***? Consider how well the report presents: • cost-effective or time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe • implications of any delays and no cost extensions • discussion of making use, during project implementation, of/building on pre-existing institutions, partnerships and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. • the extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint.	Coverage/omissions: The section covers most required information that is needed for efficiency analysis. Strengths/weaknesses: The assessment of the project's efficiency is generally well done to highlight the project's efforts to increase efficiency. In particular, the project's cost-effective measures, including the use of existing institutional structures and partnerships, are well elaborated. The utilization of knowledge generated by previous GEF projects and synergetic effects on the project's efficiency resulting from the partnerships are also well analyzed and described with concrete examples. The project's delay and its no-cost extensions, including its justification, are briefly described in both narrative form and a table. Still, the implication of the delay could have been elaborated more extensively and explicitly.	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	The project's measures to minimize environmental footprints are also briefly mentioned with an example. The narratives are not necessarily aligned with the criterion rating, and the rating is adjusted as a result of the EOU's validation exercise.	
13. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the project's ***Monitoring and Reporting***? Consider how well the report addresses the following: • the quality of *monitoring of project implementation* (including use of monitoring data for adaptive management) • the quality of *project reporting* (e.g. PIMS and donor reports)	Coverage/omissions: The section includes only a brief description, for which the necessary information is somewhat missing. Strengths/weaknesses: Some analyses of the project's monitoring and reporting function are done and described concisely. In particular, gender-responsive reporting and collection of gender-disaggregated data are well elaborated, which gives added value to the reviewer's analysis of the project's monitoring and reporting. However, a few key elements, such as the monitoring plan, indicators, and the use of data for adaptive management in the *'Monitoring of Project Implementation'* section, could have been further analyzed to cover all necessary parameters that are needed to provide a rating with proper justification. More detailed analyses, backed up by evidence, could have substantiated the findings in a more comprehensive manner.	4
14. Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under ***Sustainability*** (i.e. the endurance of benefits achieved at outcome level)? Consider how well the report addresses the following: • socio-political sustainability • financial sustainability • institutional sustainability	Coverage/omissions: The section presents the assessment of three dimensions of the project's sustainability with most required information. Strengths/weaknesses: All three aspects of sustainability are generally well analyzed in a concise manner, covering most parameters that are needed to determine the ratings of the respective sub-criteria. In particular, each dimension of sustainability is assessed, coupled with analyses of various potential risks, which is well articulated in the section. Some analyses, especially socio-political sustainability and financial sustainability, include not only macro-level policy perspectives but also grassroots-level viewpoints with examples, which makes the reviewer's assessment multi-dimensional. For socio-political sustainability, ownership and commitment are well addressed, along with the potential risks coming from external factors. The project's financial sustainability is generally well analyzed, especially its high dependence on future donor funding. The micro-level success in	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
	financial sustainability is well articulated with concrete examples. A lack of an exit strategy is mentioned as part of the institutional sustainability. Institutional sustainability is broadly analyzed, especially the institutionalization of project outcomes, but other essential elements, such as capacity development and the risk to staff retention, could also have been elaborated in more detail. The rating of *'Institutional Sustainability'* could have been better aligned with the findings.	
15. Does the report present a well-evidence analysis of the ***Factors Affecting Performance***, either in this section or in cross-referenced sections? *These factors are not always discussed in stand-alone sections and may be integrated in the other performance criteria as appropriate. However, if not addressed substantively in this section, a cross reference must be given to where the topic is addressed, and that entry must be sufficient to justify the performance rating for these factors.* Consider how well the report addresses the following cross-cutting issues: • quality of project management and supervision[36] • stakeholder participation and co-operation • responsiveness to human rights and gender equality • environmental and social safeguards • country ownership and driven-ness • communication and public awareness	Coverage/omissions: All sub-sections are covered in a standalone section, while some required information is missing in several sub-sections. Strengths/weaknesses: The assessment of each cross-cutting issue is generally concise, covering some (but not all) parameters that are required to determine the ratings of the respective sub-criteria. However, the quality of the reviewer's analysis varies by sub-criterion. For example, the '*Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality*' and *'Communication and Public Awareness'* are generally well elaborated with concrete examples, which adds value to this section. Meanwhile, all other sub-sections do not necessarily cover information/evidence adequately. As a result, the ratings given to these sub-criteria are not backed up by strong evidence and analyses. Nonetheless, the 'Highly Satisfactory' rating is provided to all sub-criteria under the *'Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues'* section. The section would have benefited from more extensive analyses, which could substantiate the respective ratings of sub-criteria.	3.5
Section F: Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations	Assessment	
16. Do the ***Conclusions*** present a summative assessment of the evaluand as a whole, reflecting on prominent aspects of the	Coverage/omissions: Most required information is covered, including a summary of the strengths and weaknesses in the	5

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

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
project's performance? Consider how well the conclusions: • provide a compelling narrative and integrated assessment of project project's performance (i.e. achievements and limitations) • add deeper insights and analysis beyond the findings under each individual criterion • are derived from the synthesized analysis of evidence gathered during the review process • provide clear and succinct response to the key strategic questions • address the human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention explicitly (e.g. how these dimensions were considered, addressed or impacted on) • provide lessons that are rooted in real project experiences, describe the context from which they are derived, and do not duplicate recommendations	overall performance and responses to key strategic questions. Strengths/weaknesses: The section includes a series of summative statements, covering major findings of the project's performance, enabling readers to understand the overview of the performance. It covers both achievements and limitations of the project's performance in a well-balanced and structured manner. These statements are not categorized by review criteria but are well synthesized and integrated, highlighting the most critical findings of the review, which adds deeper insights for audiences. The human rights and gender dimensions are described in a standalone paragraph, highlighting the summary of the relevant analyses done in the main body of the review report. Responses to four key strategic questions are generally well analyzed and described, respectively. Lessons learned are generally well-articulated. They are properly derived from review findings. Many of these lessons cover identification of the problem (based on review analysis/findings) and root causes of the problem. It also includes two distinct lessons learned that are focused on gender and human rights-related issues. However, some lessons learned (i.e., Lessons Learned #2, #3, #5, #6, and #8) are generally not very clear in terms of whether and how these lessons could be applied to other projects in similar contexts on the ground. A clearer description of potential benefits and applicability to other projects/similar contexts would have further enhanced the utility of lessons learned.	
17. Does the report present ***Recommendations*** for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting the project or the sustainability of its results? Consider how well the recommendations: • are clearly formulated and logically derived from the findings and/or conclusions • are feasible to implement within the timeframe and resources available (including local capacities) and specific in terms of who would do what and when • include at least one recommendation relating to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions • represent a measurable performance target in order that the Evaluation	Coverage/omissions: Seven recommendations are presented in a table format, covering some essential information. Strengths/weaknesses: Each recommendation is generally well formatted with some analysis. All are derived from the findings of the review, which makes them realistic. All recommendations are also concrete and measurable. The responsibility of each recommendation is clearly defined, which makes the respective recommendations clear and actionable. Recommendation #4 is related to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of the UNEP interventions.	4

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
Office can monitor and assess compliance with the recommendations. NOTES: **(i)** 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. **(ii)** 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.	However, in general, analysis of challenges/problems to be addressed by the respective recommendations could have been further enriched and elaborated, which would make each recommendation more convincing. The timeline could have been better defined. Some recommendations (Recommendations #1, #2, and #4) are not very clear in terms of the implementation timeframe. Recommendation #7 exceeds one year, which is the UNEP's pre-fixed time frame of review recommendations.	
Section G: Report Structure and Presentation	Assessment	
18. Is the report ***well-structured and complete***? Does it: • follow the Evaluation Office structure and formatting guidelines • include all required sections and annexes, as applicable • not exceed 50 pages in length from the Executive Summary to the end of the Conclusion Does the report ***present*** information clearly and appropriately? Is it written: • in clear and accessible language • largely free from grammar, spelling and punctuation errors • in an adequate and professional tone • with the use of visual aids, such as maps, graphs tables and photos	Coverage/omissions: The report contains all necessary sections, mostly following the UNEP guidelines. All required Annexes are included. Strengths/weaknesses: The report is generally well-structured and formatted. The report follows the UNEP's reporting structure and formatting guidelines in principle. With the use of clear English, the report is generally easy to follow, enabling all readers to understand what is written across the report. Overall, it is a well-written English report without major grammatical errors. The language is adequate, and the tone is also appropriate. Additionally, tables are generally well used following the pre-fixed template, but visual aids could have been used more effectively, even where there are no pre-fixed visual aids templates, to further enhance the readability of the report. The report is 67 pages long. It could have been a little shorter.	5
OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING		**4.8**

A number rating 1-6 is used for each criterion, with half-point increments allowed (e.g., 3.5 or 4.5). Highly Satisfactory = 6, Satisfactory = 5, Moderately Satisfactory = 4, Moderately Unsatisfactory = 3, Unsatisfactory = 2, Highly Unsatisfactory = 1. The overall rating is based on a simple average of the ratings for each criterion.

Rating the Report Quality Criteria

Rating (1–6)	Description
6	Provides all content with high quality.
5	Provides all content with minor weaknesses.

4	Provides most content with minor weaknesses.
3	Provides most content with significant weaknesses.
2	Omits substantive content with significant weaknesses.
1	Omits almost all content with major weaknesses.