
Evaluation of the UNEP Nature Action Subprogramme January 2014–June 2025



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Photo Credit

Front cover: Variable sunbird in Kenya
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This report was prepared by a team of two external consultant evaluators and is a product of the Evaluation Office of UNEP. The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Member States or UNEP Senior Management.

During the preparation of this evaluation report, the Evaluation Team made light use of AI tools to summarise meeting notes and key findings arising from interviews and deep dives. Detailed triangulation was carried out across all sources to ensure the validity and robustness of findings.

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The evaluation consultants hope that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will contribute to continuous improvement of the Nature Action Subprogramme across all countries, regions and contexts.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Adaptation Fund
ANAE	Association Nationale d'Actions Environnementales (National Association for Environmental Actions)
ANCOT	Association for Nature Conservation and Tourism (Bhutan)
APCME	Advancing the Principles of Cooperation among Multilateral Environmental Agreements
ARA	Adaptation Research Alliance
ARO	Additional Reporting Officer
CAG	Coordination Advisory Group
CAMCA	Central Asia Mountain Communities Alliance
CBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
CCN	Conservation Caucus Network
CEE	Centre for Environment Education (India)
CHIRAG	Central Himalayan Rural Action Group
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CIFOR-ICRAF	Center for International Forestry Research & World Agroforestry
CITIES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COFAV	Madagascar National Parks
CoP	Conference of the Parties
COP15	15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CRB	Centre for Responsible Business
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DaRT	Data Reporting Tool for Multilateral Environmental Agreements
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission
DRAE	Direction Régionale de l'Agriculture et de l'Élevage (Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DREDD	Direction Régionale de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Regional Directorate of Environment and Sustainable Development)
DRI	Directly Responsible Individual
DTU	Technical University of Denmark (Danmarks Tekniske Universitet)
EA	Expected Accomplishment
EAS	Early Action Support
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation

EC	European Commission
EEY	Environmental Education and Youth
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ESP	Early Support Project
EURAC	European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen (EURAC Research)
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FMOs	Fund Management Officers
FPOs	Farmer Producer Organizations
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEF-SLMD	Global Environment Facility – Sustainable Land Management and Desertification focal area
GEO	Global Environment Outlook
GFCR	Global Fund for Coral Reefs
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPI	Global Peatlands Initiative
GRET	Groupe de Recherche et d'Échanges Technologiques (Research and Technological Exchange Group)
GSLEEP	Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme
GSPC	Global Subprogramme Coordinator
HQ	Head Quarters
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGCP	International Gorilla Conservation Programme
IGNFA	Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy
IIFM	Indian Institute of Forest Management
IIFSR	Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research
ILBIRS	Ilbirs Foundation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPLC	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
IPMR	Integrated Project Management Report
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention

ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Whaling Commission
IWEco	Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
KM-GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LBSNAA	Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration
LDC	Least Developed Country
LMO	Living Modified Organism
LVT	local village trainers
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MALF	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries
MCA	Ministry of Corporate Affairs
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MEAH	Ministère de l'Eau, de l'Assainissement et de l'Hygiène (Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)
MEDD	Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development)
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoAFW	Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (Government of India)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MRI	Mountain Research Initiative
MSMEs	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks
MTS	Medium-Term Strategy
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NA-SP	Nature Action Subprogramme
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
PCPs	Programme Coordination Projects
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services

PIR	Project Implementation Report
PISLM	Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management
PoW	Programme of Work
PPD	UNEP Policy and Programme Division
PPR	Programme Performance Report
PRB	Principles for Responsible Banking
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
PSI	Principles for Sustainable Insurance
RBM	Results-Based Management
RSCAP	Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans
RSPC	Regional Subprogramme Coordinator
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound
SRO	Second Reporting Officer
TEEB	The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity
TNFD	Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures
ToC	Theory of Change
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme, World Conservation Monitoring Center
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UWIFoRT	Uganda Wildlife Integrated Forest Resource Trust
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WHO	World Health Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **Background.** This evaluation assessed UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme (NA-SP) over the period 2014–2024, covering three Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) periods: Ecosystem Management (2014–2017), Healthy and Productive Ecosystems (2018–2021), and Nature Action (2022–2025). The term NA-SP is used to denote all three Subprogramme periods. Across these periods, the Subprogramme sought to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into global, regional, and national decision-making, while responding to the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste.

2. The NA-SP portfolio expanded significantly over the ten-year period, with a portfolio value increase from USD 143 million in 2014 to over USD 204 million in 2024 and a current active multi-year portfolio volume of USD 1.36 billion, including partner contributions.¹ The portfolio is characterized by partnerships spanning MEAs Secretariats, UN agencies, NGOs, academia, and increasingly, although still limited, private sector entities. Approximately 64% of the portfolio at the time of this evaluation, in terms of value, comprises of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) supported projects, accounting for 83% of total number of projects, underlining the importance of the GEF partnership.

3. Thematic priorities and approaches evolved over the three MTS periods.² The 2014–2017 period largely focused on technical assistance related to country specific issues of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, ecosystem management, and environmental governance, anchored in national legislative and institutional capacity-building. In 2018–2021, attention shifted to wider ecosystem sustainable management and policy integration, linking natural resource management with national development plans, sustainable land and water use and strongly aligned with the SDGs and MEA priorities. The current 2022–2025 period carried forward a greater emphasis on a nexus-driven and transformative agenda, connecting biodiversity with food systems, climate adaptation, and sustainable livelihoods. Projects on agrobiodiversity, nature-based solutions, and circular economy and valuing natural assets emerged seeking to embed nature action into policy, production and market systems.

4. The subprogramme coordination function, led by a Global Subprogramme Coordinator (GSPC), has shifted structurally over the period between UNEP's Policy and Programme Division and the Ecosystems Division, although with no change in function. The GSPC role is currently anchored in the Ecosystems Division, with Regional Subprogramme Coordinators (RSPCs) operating from within UNEP's six Regional Offices. At the time of this evaluation, the subprogramme staffing comprised 162 posts³, with the majority based in the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

5. **Methodology.** This evaluation followed the UNEG norms, OECD-DAC criteria, and UNEP's 2023 Evaluation Manual, using a theory-based, utilization-focused approach. The evaluation was underpinned by the MTS 2022–2025 NA-SP Theory of Change (ToC), which sets out the

¹ Portfolio value is based on the approved project budgets in the NA-SP portfolio IPMR database, cross verified with the GEF project dashboards / IPMR as of 20 August 2025. It does not include recently closed projects or projects under design/early implementation that are not yet fully approved.

² This is a brief overview of key areas of the subprogramme in the three MTS periods for the purpose of this executive summary. For a more detailed presentation of the subprogramme's focus, see I. Background, A. Introduction to the NA-SP,

³ Subprogramme staffing was mapped to the Nature Action management and portfolio across all Divisions at the time of the evaluation. A staffing review was underway at the time of the evaluation and numbers are expected to change.

causal pathways through which the NA-SP inputs and activities are expected to contribute to outcomes and impacts and identifies assumptions, risks, and external drivers, as well as the interconnections with other UNEP subprogrammes. Evidence sources included 85 project evaluations, 288 ongoing projects and 10 deep-dive case studies (see Annex 2 for selection criteria), interviews with approximately 50 key respondents and survey responses from 37 UNEP staff, including NA-SP coordinators/programme/project/task managers. The evaluation aims to strengthen UNEP's future strategic positioning, inform the 2026–2029 MTS, inform adaptive and strategic planning of the Nature Action subprogramme, and assess its alignment with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF).

KEY FINDINGS

6. **Relevance.** The NA-SP is highly relevant to global priorities (KM-GBF, the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, SDGs, particularly SDGs 14 & 15 as well as SDGs 13 and 6) and to national strategies, with strong policy influence through support to National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) as national strategic instruments and their integration into laws and sectoral planning frameworks. Strategic initiatives demonstrate potential to build alignment at a larger scale. The deep dive case studies demonstrated strategic alignment and national uptake. This evaluation confirms that UNEP's comparative advantage for the NA-SP lies in its convening role, and credibility as a neutral broker, as well as technical support expertise in relation to global and normative processes.

7. The Regional Office role was consistently identified by partners and staff as an important point of contact with countries to develop and maintain critical contacts and ensure on-going alignment between global, regional and national efforts. Survey results indicate that NA-SP projects are generally well aligned with national priorities and enhance policy uptake, though donor-driven design and limited local consultation remain key challenges.

8. **Subprogramme and Project Designs.** Over the evaluation period, the subprogramme provides an important focus for UNEP's work related to sustainable management of natural resources. Each MTS has shown a slightly different emphasis, from ecosystem management to ecosystem health and in the most recent MTS placing a focus on nature conservation and restoration, mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors and systems, and supporting countries in developing policies and incentives that address the drivers of biodiversity loss and promote sustainable and inclusive economic activities. Evaluations across the period suggest that previously the subprogramme was too widely dispersed. Key interviews confirmed that internal subprogramme strategic focus is thought to have improved, benefiting in part from the introduction of Programme Coordination Projects (PCPs) that assisted in aligning projects with the MTS 2022-2025 priorities and from projects that were specifically designed to enhance coordination. However, the evaluation found that actual subprogramme implementation is still widely stretched. Across the subprogramme implementation, consistently identified design weaknesses include: insufficient clarity in the portfolio's strategic priorities; varying depth of stakeholder engagement in design co-creation; overly broad scope in project designs; thematically dispersed projects with difficulty in demonstrating contribution to strategic priorities; short project durations for complex and long-term processes and weak monitoring frameworks.

9. **Effectiveness.** Evidence, through the analysis of evaluations, shows significant contributions to policy change, institutional strengthening, and sustainable ecosystem management across the portfolio. The NA-SP has demonstrated consistently strong performance in contributing to UNEP's higher-level results through attainment of expected

indicators as reported in the biennial Programme Performance Reports (PPR). Performance has been consistently high despite COVID-19 disruptions, with full attainment of all subprogramme indicators. In the latest published PPR, covering 2022–2023, the NA-SP fully achieved 3 of 4 indicators were exceeded and one subindicator with target \$200 million was partially achieved (99%) with USD197,06 million. Data for the 2024 PPR indicates continued positive performance for the NA-SP overall, with all indicator targets exceeded. This aligns with the satisfactory performance demonstrated through the individual project evaluations.

10. Specific achievements highlighted in the evaluation include shaping global biodiversity finance dialogues, advancing MEA synergies, and embedding ecosystem-based adaptation in countries such as Nepal and South Africa. Tangible and substantial results were recorded in project-level evaluations and in the deep dive case studies such as the EcoVillage Madagascar, the Environmental Education and Youth Project, and UNEP-FI finance initiatives. Survey results show reports of positive results in innovation, lesson sharing, mainstreaming sustainable practices, and conservation, but lack of incentives towards fostering systematic synergies with other UNEP subprogrammes. Yet, consistent implementation challenges included limited replication and scaling of pilots and uneven cross-divisional collaboration.

11. **Efficiency.** Projects generally achieved high disbursement rates, but start-up delays, procurement bottlenecks, and staff shortages reduced efficiency. In the earlier years of the evaluation period, financial systems (e.g., Umoja and Anubis for GEF projects) were described as poorly integrated and complex, leading to disbursement delays. However, these concerns have lessened in more recent evaluations. Lengthy internal procedures were consistently raised as a bottleneck that then led to rushed implementation to enable spending within available deadlines. This was seen to compromise the proper planning of expenditure and also shorten timeframes for attaining outcome level results. Despite constraints to efficiency, the NA-SP has shown the capacity to mobilize substantial resources. This is due to the capacity of the NA-SP actors to work actively with both long-standing and new partners, the processes that enable the development of partnership arrangements and the close integration with the MEA and UN country processes.

12. **Sustainability.** The likelihood of sustainability⁴ is moderate to high where results are embedded in national frameworks, supported by strong partnerships and/or country ownership, or linked to livelihoods and service delivery. Financial sustainability is more fragile, given dependence on vertical funds and short-term donor grants.

13. **Coherence and Integration.** Coherence within the subprogramme is challenging given the need to respond to the priorities and resources available in-country of Member States and partners. The implementation of the PCPs coordination efforts intended to provide a mechanism to strengthen strategic coherence. This included the conduct of PCP Coordination Committees and by relating projects to overarching documented MTS objectives. However, the extent of subprogramme coherence was less evident in implementation. Projects with a clear focus that combine NA-SP priorities and funding partner priorities provide an opportunity to be focused, innovative and coherent with subprogramme targeted outcomes. However, coherence across the subprogramme is limited to adhoc, collegial links rather than systematic subprogramme implementation. Integration with other UNEP subprogrammes has improved over time, particularly with climate and pollution.

⁴ Defined in a project context as the likely endurance of the development and environmental benefits derived at outcome level.

14. **Partnerships.** Partnerships with MEA Secretariats are valued and form the basis of many project designs, aligning with, and contributing to, synergistic MEA outcomes. However, there is insufficient inter-divisional liaison on existing and joint partnerships with MEA, such that partnerships are not always the best fit for achieving optimal integration. Partnerships with GEF and the Global Climate Fund are fundamental to UNEP's NA-SP with both organizations benefiting from the specific capacity of the other. The NA-SP works closely with vertical funds and other financing partners on strategic issues, with positive results. Collaboration with UN agencies is mixed: positive with agencies such as FAO, IFAD, and UN Women, but less systematic with other agencies despite complementary mandates. Partnerships with academia and NGOs are strong and an important mechanism to assist with project delivery. Private sector engagement shows notable progress in the finance sector, but remains limited and uneven across the wider private sector. Private sector engagement in the TEEBAgriFood project being implemented under the Economics of Nature (TEN) Unit is building strong partnerships with agri-businesses. The main avenue for private sector engagement is in partnership with the Industry and Economy Division, which is a valid avenue for the subprogramme. However, there is potential for stronger private sector engagement across multiple projects.

15. **Gender, Youth, and Inclusion.** Evaluations found that project designs included mandatory Gender Action Plans and youth-related activities, though the depth and quality of implementation varied. Most youth-related activities are conducted through partnerships with organizations such as UNESCO and ILO. Key initiatives such as We Are Nature and the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge have mobilized young people and teachers, notably in India, Kenya, and South Africa. However, project evaluations and deep dives reveal that inclusion is often treated as a compliance requirement in results frameworks to meet approval requirements rather than the driving force that was expected in the NA-SP theory of change. The subprogramme has fallen short of systematic implementation of approaches for inclusion in project workplans and budgets or of actively monitoring the successes or constraints to tangible benefits to women, youth, or marginalized communities in Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) or in specific focus for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) or Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS).

CONCLUSIONS

16. **The NA-SP remains a relevant and critical vehicle for UNEP to advocate for strategic nature action initiatives.** The work programme and resources across the subprogramme clearly embed consideration of biodiversity in integrated development approaches. Overall, the projects develop innovative approaches to priority issues related to protecting natural assets and to respond to global priorities, including nexus issues such as food security, climate action, sustainable livelihoods and responses to environmental crises. The work of the subprogramme aligns strongly with the KM-GBF, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the relevant MEAs such as UNCCD and CBD. In general, projects address the concerns of Member States with consistent and rising demand for subprogramme support, particularly for implementation of NBSAPs, linked to other national frameworks, and to protect vulnerable natural resources, ecosystems and species.

17. **Implementation performance has been effective in making progress towards specific objectives but still has challenges with coherence.** Across successive MTS periods, the performance of the subprogramme has been assessed in the evaluations of projects as satisfactory overall. The performance of the GEF and non-GEF portfolios are comparable

showing consistently positive achievements across the whole portfolio. Through the evidence from project evaluations, substantiated through interviews, there is a slightly higher overall performance by thematic-focused, medium sized projects covering a number of selected countries with common priorities than small and single country projects or very large global projects. This was attributed to several key factors including a clearer technical focus and results chain, multi-year budgets, the ability to adapt project operations to different country contexts and timeframes and the ability to operate more efficiently with a project team with targeted technical and project management capability.

18. There has also been increased coordination between other UNEP subprogrammes, divisions and branches but this largely relies on ad hoc and organic dialogue between colleagues rather than a systematic move towards greater integration. The evaluation found that sharing of information within the Ecosystems Division, where it occurred, was very valuable but that this was not a feature of all branches so there were gaps in knowledge across the subprogramme. Current efforts within UNEP to strengthen knowledge management, and AI-supported data analytics, coupled with improved communications, has substantial potential to capitalize on the rich data sources across the portfolio. Similarly, coordination within countries with other UN agencies and in-country partners was sporadic and largely driven by project activities and through engagement with MEA secretariats and focal points at regional level and through other policy dialogues.

19. **UNEP's convening power has contributed to subprogramme efficiency.** The NA-SP has been successful in securing major resources for the NA-SP during the evaluation period. The NA-SP, through UNEP's mandate and the focus of the NA-SP, is seen by partners as having a unique contribution through its neutrality⁵ and expertise and therefore is seen as a valuable partner for funding initiatives. The global availability of resources is likely to decline during the next MTS period but there are opportunities to continue to leverage funds, particularly through Member States individually, through multi-lateral funds and increasingly through specifically designed private sector partnership initiatives.

20. Based on feedback through the interviews and through the portfolio review, the portfolio has become slightly more cohesive over time, but this remains a challenge as the subprogramme plans strategically but also responds to isolated requests for support, or to demands of partners that may not fully align with the stated subprogramme priorities. The value of partnerships is fundamental to the subprogramme operations and responsiveness to demand from partners and Member States is a valid approach. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to be more proactive in early discussions with financing and operational partners to enhance alignment and implement coherent projects that more clearly contribute to subprogramme objectives. Furthermore, given funding and operational priorities that may result in dispersed interventions, more can be done to harness the results that are achieved through each initiative so that there is a clear contribution to knowledge building, partnerships and scaling up in relation to MTS and NA-SP priorities.

21. **The impact of the NA-SP is evident within the context of projects and partners but is less clearly articulated at the subprogramme level.** The NA-SP through its portfolio of projects has delivered valuable policy influence, restoration pilots, and capacity building, but impact is constrained by insufficient attention to systemic approaches and pathways for scaling. Knowledge generation occurs within projects but the impact of such knowledge is held within

⁵ 'neutrality' here refers to an impartial and trusted convener, not representing the interests of any single Member State, donor, or stakeholder group.

projects with little avenue to create wider impact. Gender, youth, and equity considerations are noted in NA-SP strategic guidance but are inconsistently embedded during implementation, reducing the potential for deeper results for the most vulnerable.

22. **The future of the NA-SP faces significant contextual uncertainties that require a clear focus, continuing strength in partnerships and stronger versatility.** The assumptions in the NA-SP theory of change (2022-2025) point to the importance of engagement with governments and private sector to address environmental protection and degradation. Political fragility and government volatility were identified as risks but the extent to which this has escalated means that the NA-SP will be functioning in a very uncertain context. This threatens engagement with current and future commitments to biodiversity and the ability to replicate or scale successful approaches. Achievements are likely to endure where embedded in national frameworks, but financial sustainability and engagement remain fragile, particularly in the tightening fiscal and diverging global and national contexts.

Lessons learned and implications for the future.

23. The key lessons arising from the evaluation are that results are strongest where interventions are embedded in national frameworks, respond to explicit country demand, and are supported by sustained partnerships. Projects that link biodiversity objectives to national policies, planning instruments, and, in some cases, livelihoods and service delivery show higher likelihood of sustainability. However, centrally-driven design, limited time for consultation, and insufficient attention to institutional anchors and capacity reduce relevance and sustainability. Pilots generate success but lack mechanisms and resources to move beyond project-level achievements towards larger scale results and knowledge sharing.

24. Partnerships are a defining strength of the NA-SP, particularly with MEA secretariats, vertical funds, NGOs, academia, and UN agencies. These partnerships enable resource mobilisation, policy influence, and technical delivery. Nevertheless, collaboration is often ad hoc rather than strategic, with insufficient cross-divisional coordination within UNEP and uneven engagement with UN Country Teams. Integration across UNEP subprogrammes has improved but remains largely informal and dependent on individual initiative rather than institutionalised processes.

25. The NA-SP has generated a substantial body of evidence, tools, and knowledge products, yet monitoring, evaluation, learning, and knowledge management are under-utilised as strategic assets. Lessons arising during implementation are not systematically harvested or fed back through active communication loops, consequently staff and partners across the portfolio have limited awareness of knowledge and experience within the subprogramme that could enhance performance.

Recommendations

1. **Sharpen focus in operations inline with the SP-NA strategic priorities** by targeting fewer, high-impact thematic areas consistent with a nexus-driven agenda such as support to NBSAP planning, financial mechanisms to support biodiversity and innovative approaches to key biodiversity risks, amongst others. Address the key risks with clearer sustainability plans, scaling strategies and adaptive delivery models.

2. **Institutionalize targeted integration** across UNEP subprogrammes, MEAs and UN agency collaboration to strengthen and extend existing good coordination practices and also address the need for strategic coordination such as regular knowledge sharing amongst and between teams. This will also require active and strong relationships with partners and Member States to focus on the most critical global issues as well as support countries in their specific contexts to protect the most vulnerable land, water and biodiversity assets. This also means improved communication skills and capacity, active project reporting – not just compliance – and robust adaptive planning approach to work with partners and Member States to adjust implementation to the changing contexts. The NA-SP needs to work proactively with UNEP-wide efforts in knowledge management to improve subprogramme outcomes.
3. **Leverage proven and promising partnerships** for country and regional impact through a stronger regional role for the NA-SP, with regional and national MEA initiatives related to biodiversity and land, and in regional and national forums, as well as in UN country team coordination.
4. **Strengthen vertical fund engagement** at early stages of MTS and NA-SP PoW planning and during implementation to acknowledge the importance of working strategically with vertical funds, building on current relationships and positive results, reducing future resource risks and complementing wider NA-SP objectives.
5. **Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning** as a strategic subprogramme asset, more actively harnessing the lessons inherent in the NA-SP portfolio as a growing body of knowledge for biodiversity outcomes. Despite UNEP's standard M&E framework, project managers responding to the evaluation survey identified key challenges, including differing donor and reporting requirements, insufficient staff resources, limited time for data analysis, lessons from reports, mid-term reviews and evaluations not being systematically actioned, and gaps in data availability and quality.

I. BACKGROUND

A. Introduction to the NA-SP

1. In UNEP, the four-year MTS and two-year PoW provide strategic direction and priorities for each of the 7 subprogrammes. Over the evaluation period (2014-2025), the NA-SP evolved through three successive MTS cycles, each with similar aims but with a different strategic focus and specific objectives. During this period, the subprogramme name has changed from Ecosystem management (2014-2017); Healthy and productive ecosystems (2018-2021) and then Nature Action (2022-2025). For the purpose of this evaluation, the name “Nature Action Subprogramme” or NA-SP is used throughout to denote the series of sequential MTS periods focused on UNEP’s work in ecosystems.

2. During the evaluation period, there has been an increasing focus within UNEP for synergies between the NA-SP and the other UNEP subprogrammes. This reflects the systemic nature of environmental issues and aligns with UNEP’s positioning within the UN system, intergovernmental forums and with global frameworks, to deliver coherent support to countries for synergistic investments. It is also consistent with UNEP’s commitment to respond to oversight reports that have highlighted poor integration within UNEP operations as counterproductive to effective performance.

3. The evolution of the NA-SP objectives are as follows:

- **2014–2017 (Ecosystem Management): Objective:** *“to promote a transition to integrating the management of land, water and living resources, with a view to maintaining biodiversity and providing ecosystem services sustainably and equitably among countries,”*

Focus on sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, marine issues, and enabling environment using the ecosystem approach.

- **2018–2021 (Healthy and Productive Ecosystems): Objective:** *“Marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are increasingly managed through an integrated approach that enables them to maintain and restore biodiversity, ecosystems’ long-term functioning and supply of ecosystem goods and services”*

Focus on cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks: Helping countries to institutionalize the health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems in education, monitoring, cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks, and inclusion of ecosystems in economic decision-making: assisting policymakers in the public and private sectors to include ecosystems in decision-making.

- **2022–2025 (Nature Action): Objective:** *“Living in harmony with nature.” (SCBD, 2010), where humanity prospers in harmony with nature;*

For the current MTS, the NA-SP is stated to “focus on the comparative advantage of UNEP to achieve three 2025 outcomes:

Outcome 1 – An economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is established.

Outcome 2 – Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks.

Outcome 3 – Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced.

4. From an activity perspective, the MTS Focus in 2014-2017 was increased use of ecosystem approach in countries, with a view to maintaining ecosystem services and the sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems, integration of services and benefits derived from ecosystems in development planning and accounting, particularly in relation to wider landscapes and seascapes and the implementation of biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements. From 2018-2021 there was a focus on cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks, helping countries to institutionalize the health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks as well as strengthening the enabling environment through assisting policymakers in the public and private sectors to include ecosystems in economic decision-making. The MTS 2022-2025 activities has had a focus on nature conservation and restoration. mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors and systems; support countries in developing policies and incentives that address the drivers of biodiversity loss and promote sustainable and inclusive economic activities.

5. Throughout the evaluation period, the NA-SP consistently responds to the three interlinked global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These challenges, rooted in unsustainable consumption and production, exacerbate biodiversity loss, threaten ecosystem services, human well-being, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The NA-SP strongly aligns with major international environmental frameworks, notably the KM-GBF, and supports revision/alignment of the national biodiversity targets and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with GBF and implementation of NBSAPs.

6. Over the 10-year period, NA-SP's annual budget grew from USD 143 million in 2014 to over USD 204 million in 2024.⁶ The internal budget funds are supported by core and extrabudgetary sources including vertical funds from the GEF, GCF, and the Adaptation Fund, to achieve a current combined portfolio value of USD 1,36 billion.⁷ As part of a new Delivery Model Policy, introduced in 2023, the NA-SP portfolio was organized by three priorities and a new Planetary Trust Fund, called the Nature Action Fund, was introduced to support resource mobilization towards overarching priorities.

7. The subprogramme fostered partnerships with MEA secretariats, UN agencies (e.g., FAO, UNDP, WHO), UNEP centers such as UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Center (UNEP-WCMC), GRID-Arendal, academic institutions, and networks such as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Global Coral Reef Partnership. It also engaged with the UNEP Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, which form an integral part of the multilateral environmental governance architecture for marine and coastal ecosystems and the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) to combat biodiversity loss through desertification/land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought. UNEP provides support to a number of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) by hosting secretariat offices. Through the NA-SP Programmes of Work and relevant financial mechanisms of the

⁶ USD 143 million in 2014 prices at cumulative inflation of 35.6% calculates to approximately USD 194 million in 2025 dollars (rounded to nearest million based on official data CPI index) demonstrating a real net increase in funding at a time when other agencies and programmes are declining.

⁷ NA-SP portfolio data as of August 2025 cross referenced between IPMR and GEF data. As of 2024 GEF Annual Impact Report, UNEP's GEF programme supported 240 biodiversity and land degradation projects across 147 countries, with a combined value of USD 769 million. Comparison of full NA-SP with earlier timeframes is not possible due to shifting portfolio with subsequent institutional reforms and different recording mechanisms.

MEAs, UNEP supports member States/ Parties to implement their obligations under the respective MEAs, particularly eight key biodiversity conventions:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES),
- Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS),
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance,
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage - World Heritage Convention (WHC),
- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)
- [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#)

8. The thematic scope of the NA-SP is very broad, encompassing such themes as mainstreaming of nature-related matters into policies and economic systems, technical aspects of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, ecosystem restoration, valuation of ecosystem services, and a wide range of other associated land, water, coastal and marine ecosystems. However, the three MTS outcomes (para 3, above) are intended to provide overarching guidance for implementation of the subprogramme. Based on the contextual information provided by the 2022-2023 UNEP Programme Performance Report (PPR),⁸ the current subprogramme focuses on assisting countries to:

- **Adapt integrated approaches** to address environmental and social issues and/or tools for valuing, monitoring and sustainably managing biodiversity.
- **Mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services** into financial, public- and private sector financial decisions and risk management frameworks and to increase financial flows towards ecosystem management.
- **Mainstream sustainable management** of biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches into development and sectoral plans, policies and processes for sustainable management and/or restoration of terrestrial, freshwater and marine areas.
- **Enhance** nature conservation and restoration.

9. **Institutional arrangements.** The subprogramme is led by the Lead Subprogramme Director supported by the Global Subprogramme Coordinators. The current NA-SP is led through the Ecosystems Division by a GSPC and team, in coordination with other UNEP divisions and regional offices.

10. The NA-SP is one of UNEP's three thematic pillars, the others being Climate Action and Chemicals and Pollution Action. The thematic objectives are to be achieved with the support of two foundational subprogrammes: Science-Policy, Environmental Governance and two enabling subprogrammes: Finance and Economic Transformations, and Digital Transformations. The subprogrammes collectively deliver on the Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work. The

⁸ The PPR does present the NA-SP priorities differently than the of the MTS/PoW outcomes, and in the opinion of the evaluators, this inconsistency does contribute to the lack of focus for the subprogramme and a clearer alignment across all key documents would be beneficial.

NA-SP is expected to coordinate across all operational divisions as required for integrated corporate delivery of the respective MTS and PoW.

11. **Subprogramme Coordination.** The NA-SP coordination function over the evaluation period has been structurally shifted within the organization, although the function has remained constant. Over the past 10 years, GSPCs have, at different times, been located in technical divisions (i.e. Ecosystems Division) and the Policy and Programme Division (PPD). When located in the Technical Divisions guided delivery of their respective subprogrammes and, when anchored in the Policy and Programme Division, the GSPC's role also supported strategic planning and integration across UNEP's work. In 2025, the GSPC for NA-SP is physically located in the Ecosystems Division, with the Ecosystem Division Director serving as Lead Subprogramme Director.

12. The Nature Action GSPC position currently reports directly to the Director of the Ecosystems Division, with the Deputy Executive Director as second reporting officer (SRO) and the Director of the Policy and Programme Division as an additional reporting officer (ARO). The GSPC is responsible for portfolio coordination, thought leadership, strategic planning, reporting, analysing results, resource allocation and mobilization and innovative approaches. The GSPC is supported by RSPCs. The Nature Action RSPCs located in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and West Asia report to their respective Regional Deputy Directors (except for North America) and have the GSPC as their additional reporting officer.

13. **NA-SP Staffing.** Based on the Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR), 162 posts are allocated to Nature Action, of which 105 are located at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi.⁹ The data specifies how many full-time staff equivalents are dedicated to the delivery of NA-SP outcomes, other subprogrammes, corporate functions and the extent to which staff allocation is on a full-time or part-time basis. However, it does not clearly elucidate the extent of time that each staff member invests in the subprogramme. At the time of writing the Evaluation Report, 44 positions in the ecosystem Division were vacant at HQ, and 24 were unfunded. However, it is not clear how many of these are applied as contributing to the NA-SP. The critical position of RSPC in Latin America and the Caribbean is currently vacant, with an acting RSPC in place.

14. The GSPC provide strategic leadership and operational coordination for the NA-SP, under the operational guidance of the Ecosystems Division Director, but also coordinating beyond the Division where relevant for subprogramme implementation. The RSPCs also provide important input to NA-SP leadership and operational coordination in their respective regions. They operate under the guidance of the Regional Director and the Deputy Regional Director, with the GSPC as additional reporting office. The NA-SP delivery is coordinated with all division and regional offices to mainstream nature action into UNEP's operations. PPRs indicate progressive achievement of expected accomplishments/strategic objectives across all MTS cycles. Evaluations (available for 85 completed projects from 2014–2024) provide evidence for meta-analysis and formative insights.

B. NA-SP Evaluation Purpose and Methodology

15. **Purpose.** The evaluation considers the extent to which the subprogramme was able to meet its objectives as stated in respective MTS across the evaluation time period. It aims to

⁹ Staff data was based on search by functional area to extract all the positions (both vacant and encumbered) that were tagged with the words Nature Action, UNEP HR, CSD, email of 05/12/2024. At the time of the evaluation, there was an on-going mapping exercise of staff roles and the number of staff contributing to the NA-SP PoW is likely to change but was not available in time for this report.

assist UNEP to identify key lessons on effective strategic positioning, portfolio planning, management arrangements and implementation performance as a contribution to improved subprogramme design, coordination, and delivery. It also considered lessons from previous subprogramme evaluations and the current project portfolio in the light of the current evolving global development and financial landscape.

16. **Audience.** The immediate and priority target users of the evaluation are the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), UNEP senior management (including Division and Regional Directors), GSPCs, RSPCs and all UNEP units and staff involved in the NA- SP. Other NA-SP stakeholders and partners, including: the UN Secretariat, UN or other international bodies working in the area of Nature Action, UN oversight bodies, commissions and committees, donors, NGOs and civil society groups, research centres and academia, etc may find the report of interest. Given the breadth of stakeholders and the observed difference in understanding of certain terms, a glossary is provided in Annex I of key terms as they are used throughout this report.

17. **Scope.** The scope covers work carried out between January 2014 to December 2024, but any critical new initiatives carried out up to June 2025 have been taken into consideration at the level of recommendations. The evaluation does not assess activities solely undertaken by MEA Secretariats, however, UNEP's support to the implementation of biodiversity-related MEAs is considered. Partnerships spanning MEAs, UN agencies, NGOs, academia, and regional networks are included insofar as they feature in the delivery of UNEP's project-level efforts.

18. The NA-SP has global, regional and national coverage. The evaluation acknowledges these different levels of implementation and pays particular attention to the strategic linkages between the different levels of operation. In addition, the evaluation assesses the extent to which activities consider specific country contexts and groups of countries with special features such as LDCs and SIDS. The evaluation includes all projects implemented under NA-SP by the Ecosystems Division but will acknowledge that some initiatives have previously been implemented through other UNEP divisions or have been recently transferred into the newly created Climate Change Division.

19. The current portfolio of the NA-SP, as of July 2025, consists of 288 projects, although 24 projects lack data on IPMR, limiting the completeness of available project implementation and monitoring information. (See Annex II for NA-SP portfolio scope at the time of the evaluation). The total current NA-SP portfolio value amounts to USD 1.36 billion¹⁰, with the largest proportion of funding in terms of value (64%) through the GEF, while the remaining 36% is financed from non-GEF sources.¹¹ This highlights the centrality of GEF in resourcing the NA-SP while also reflecting some diversification of funding streams. The portfolio is dominated by single-country projects (157 projects, 58%), underscoring the focus on national-level interventions. Projects that cover more than one country in a specific region represent 65 projects (24%), reflecting significant engagement in subregional challenges. Projects that extend across different regions and cover multiple countries account for 48 projects (18%). An increasing number of projects are emerging in the portfolio that take a thematic approach across multiple countries and regions but that operate on a facility-type approach that enables countries to access funds in line with their specific needs and timing.

20. **Methodology.** The evaluation follows UNEP Norms and Standards (2016), OECD-DAC criteria (2019), and UNEP's Evaluation Manual (2023). The evaluation of UNEP's NA-SP (2014–

¹⁰ NA-SP current portfolio budget data, as of June 2025.

¹¹ Based on the available data, the distribution of the number of UNEP/GEF projects to UNEP projects is 82% to 18%.

2024) was designed as a theory-based and utilization-focused exercise. It combines accountability for past performance with a forward-looking orientation to inform UNEP's positioning in relation to the KM-GBF, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the development of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy for 2026–2029.

21. The evaluation was underpinned by the MTS 2022-2025 NA-SP Theory of Change (ToC), which sets out the causal pathways through which the NA-SP inputs and activities are expected to contribute to outcomes and impacts. The ToC spanned the previous MTS period 2018-2021 and represented clear causal threads throughout the MTS narrative. Consequently, the evaluation applied the current ToC as the central analytical tool for assessing progress towards the three strategic outcomes of the current UNEP MTS and the NA-SP performance. This ToC, presented in diagrammatic form in Annex V: Nature Action Subprogramme Theory of Change (2022–2025), identifies assumptions, risks, and external drivers, as well as the interconnections with other UNEP subprogrammes.

22. The methodology relied on multiple streams of evidence. These included a comprehensive review of strategic and technical documentation. The use of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (MaxQDA) assisted a detailed and systematic review of 85 completed project evaluations (See Annex III for Bibliography). The team reviewed the databases of the portfolio composition for 288 projects active at the time of the evaluation with salient data available. A set of 10 “deep dive” case studies was selected from the current portfolio to reflect the diversity of the subprogramme in terms of geographic scope, thematic emphasis, and type of intervention and illustrate different positive results and challenges of the NA-SP portfolio (see Annex II for Sustainability in NA-SP Evaluation by MTS period and Annex VI for Deep Dive Project Summaries). An initial proportional long list was generated that was refined by identifying projects with strategic relevance, varying complexity and innovation for the NA-SP PoW and in response to input from the Evaluation Consultative Group (see Annex VIII for ECG membership). Priority was given to projects that were active and close to completion to give greater understanding of results and likelihood of sustainability.

23. The ECG members provided input to the inception report, initial findings and the first draft report, as well as participating in the active evaluation consultation. To capture the perspectives of UNEP staff, partners, and stakeholders, a total of 48 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key staff and strategic partners, for deep dives with operational staff and a sample of operational partners (see Annex IV for List of People Consulted) with use of AI to summarise meeting notes. A staff survey of 75 project/task managers and regional coordinators was circulated, achieving a 48% response rate (37 respondents) (see Annex VII for the Summarized Survey Analysis). Light use of AI tools assisted in summarizing key findings arising from interviews and deep dives. Detailed triangulation across all sources was critical for ensuring the validity and robustness of findings.

24. **Context and limitations to the evaluation.** Collectively, subprogramme evaluations, ideally carried out every 6 years, form an evaluation of the relevant MTS and PoW. The evaluation was conducted in a period of contextual change as UNEP implemented a new Delivery Model Policy during the period 2022-2025, is preparing a new MTS for 2026-2029 and is operating during a recent period of increasing austerity, following a previous period of growth. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted programming in 2020–2021 was also considered. These shifts were reflected in the analysis of performance and institutional efficiency.

25. Evaluation limitations were faced, such as incomplete data for earlier projects and for accurate staffing and contribution data in projects implemented through other Division.

Gathering accurate portfolio data for the NA-SP was difficult due to it being spread over multiple databases. This issue was addressed by the Ecosystems staff manually compiling the data; however, this is an on-going issue faced by the GSPC and other NA-SP staff. Dialogue with primary beneficiaries was not possible given limited resources for field consultations, but the deep dive projects and consultations with partners were used as proxies to probe on the extent of beneficiary engagement and benefit. Together, these issues were mitigated through triangulation of sources, recourse to archived documentation, and reliance on independent project evaluations that had engaged directly with project participants.

II. EVALUATION FINDINGS

A. Relevance

26. **Overall finding on relevance.** The evaluation found the NA-SP to be relevant to global, regional, and national biodiversity priorities. Its previous and current portfolio aligns closely with the SDGs, GBF, MEAs, and other key frameworks. The increasing focus on support to MEAs and on aligning national plans, particularly NBSAPs, with KM-GBF and other global frameworks is helping to translate global biodiversity commitments into national policy, planning, and institutional frameworks. The subprogramme's comparative advantage lies in UNEP's convening and technical role, ensuring biodiversity is integrated into decision-making processes. Strong national ownership and multi-stakeholder partnerships reinforce its alignment with country priorities, though the breadth of thematic coverage and low visibility of the NA-SP framework itself have at times diluted focus. Interviews highlighted that the strategic focus was directly to the MTS and that alignment with the NA-SP was given lower priority. This, plus different wording between the MTS and the NA-SP reporting through the PPR hinders alignment. Greater thematic prioritization, clearer internal communication of NA-SP priorities, and country-level flexibility could strengthen recognition of the subprogramme's strategic contribution to nature action.

27. **Scope and Thematic Breadth of the NA-SP.** The NA-SP evaluations show that it operates under a wide range of themes encompassing such as biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, ecosystem management, invasive alien species control, sustainable use of water and wetlands, and protection of threatened species. It also extends to integrating ecosystem services into policy, planning, valuing of natural assets and financing frameworks. The portfolio demonstrates UNEP's geographic and thematic breadth-with activities spanning water and sanitation projects in Small Island Developing States, invasive species eradication in the Caribbean, ecosystem service valuation in Latin America, and threatened species recovery in the Andes. This diversity highlights UNEP's strength in mobilizing expertise across multiple contexts, yet it also exposes the continuing challenge of maintaining depth and coherence within such a broad scope. However, this diversity in reach has sometimes led to dispersion of effort and uneven impact, underscoring the need for clearer prioritization and focus.

28. **Strategic Alignment and Comparative Advantage.** All sources of evidence showed that the NA-SP portfolio is strongly aligned with global biodiversity frameworks, the Sustainable Development Goals, and national priorities. Across the strategic interviews, the distinctive contribution of NA-SP was seen in translating global commitments and technical approaches into national policy and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships that embed nature action objectives into national development planning. However, it is notable that few stakeholders related the portfolio work to the nature action subprogramme which had a very low profile. Rather, the relevance and comparative advantage of the projects was linked back to thematic areas of work and the UNEP MTS. Through UNEP's convening power, technical credibility, and

policy influence, the NA-SP supports countries in mainstreaming biodiversity into national strategies and investment systems.

29. **Relevance to strategic decision-making processes.** UNEP projects frequently targeted policy influence by equipping legislators and ministries with the tools and evidence to integrate biodiversity into decision-making. The Conservation Caucus Network (CCN) project in Colombia and Kenya built multi-partisan caucuses that succeeded in strengthening wildlife legislation and raising penalties for poaching. In Costa Rica, the National Biosafety Framework project established digitized systems for handling Living Modified Organism (LMO) requests, harmonizing procedures and enhancing systemic transparency and efficiency. These examples show UNEP's value in shaping enabling environments and systemic capacities rather than only delivering localized pilots. Similarly, work in the Caribbean addressed gaps between national and international frameworks, drawing directly on MEAs such as the Cartagena Convention, CITES, and the International Plant Protection Convention. This anchoring in existing plans and treaties increased legitimacy and uptake.

30. **Focus on national and regional priorities.** A number of common strengths emerged from analysis of evaluations on the portfolio's relevance. Policy influence and institutional embedding have been a consistent feature of both regional and national projects. Several initiatives align with national and regional priorities by producing global knowledge products that guide regional cooperation and national action. One example is UNEP-WCMC's collaboration with CMS, where the State of the World's Migratory Species report has been used to inform regional flyway initiatives, transboundary species frameworks, and the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity. . Community-based marine and coastal projects also reflected regional, including transboundary, multi-country and local priorities, with strong ownership around coral reef and mangrove restoration

31. The survey results indicate that Nature Action projects are generally well aligned with national biodiversity strategies (NBSAPs) and local priorities, with many respondents highlighting strong government engagement and national ownership. Partnerships with governments, NGOs, and UN agencies were consistently seen as central to ensuring political legitimacy, technical capacity, and alignment with country needs, while academia, indigenous peoples, and local communities added knowledge and legitimacy. Survey respondents noted that alignment with national strategies enhances policy uptake and sustainability, though challenges remain where design processes are overly donor-driven, insufficiently flexible, or constrained by limited time for full consultation with stakeholders, particularly at community levels and with indigenous people.

32. **Contribution to thematic priorities.** In the project evaluations, relevance was strongest, where there was contribution to shaping global biodiversity governance, NBSAP processes, and cross-cutting agendas. Many initiatives were designed to mainstream ecosystem and biodiversity considerations into national policies and frameworks, such as water policy reform in Pacific SIDS, invasive species management strategies in the Caribbean, and conservation campaigns in the Andes.

33. Engagement with multiple ministries and on combined priorities, for example disaster management in Tuvalu and fisheries in Jamaica helped broaden uptake and improve institutional buy-in from the concept stage. In India, the True Value Accounting project matched agricultural and biodiversity priorities, integrating ecosystem economics into ICAR curricula and national officer training. In Dominica, post-hurricane recovery projects responded directly to urgent resilience needs. Pilots in Brazil, India, and Malaysia linked biodiversity with food

systems, influencing national reporting to the CBD. However, alignment often relied on individuals and was uneven across countries.

34. Survey respondents emphasized alignment of projects with the country priorities, especially GEF biodiversity and land degradation projects. To enhance the relevance of the subprogramme, survey respondents recommended providing clearer guidance and communication on project alignment, concept submission, and the subprogramme's value-add. In summary, survey respondents suggested placing more focus on clear thematic, multi-country priorities while allowing country-level flexibility, investing to achieve multiple benefits, and complementarity with climate and pollution action once target areas are defined. They also emphasized the need to have clearer and consistent language about the focus of the subprogramme, rather than frequent shifts in language and use simple, clear terms to strengthen both political and science-based communication.

B. Project Design

35. **Designs are responsive to county priorities.** The project evaluations demonstrate a satisfactory level of relevance. Most project designs are built to link global commitments and relevant MEAs, with support to existing national and regional strategies, strengthening ownership and policy coherence. For example, the Pacific Wastewater and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) projects explicitly aligned with the Pacific Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Water Management and Samoa's "Water for Life" Framework, ensuring that demonstration projects supported national planning priorities while catalyzing watershed conservation policies and GIS-based water resource mapping. In India, the True Value Accounting project matched both UNEP's MTS and country agricultural priorities, helping integrate biodiversity into ICAR curricula and policy frameworks. In Dominica, post-Hurricane Maria interventions were directly tied to urgent national resilience needs.

36. **Strengths in project design.** included UNEP's credibility in science-policy integration, convening power, and clear alignment with SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG 14 (Life below water), and SDG 15 (Life on land), and contribution to other SDGs. Regional examples - such as mangrove restoration in South Asia targeting poor fishing households, or Caribbean Invasive Alien Species (IAS) campaigns that linked ecological outcomes with community engagement ("Eat it to beat it") demonstrate both technical innovation and social reach. Community engagement and awareness-raising have been strong in the design process. Evaluations at country level identified that participatory approaches underpinned project initiatives, from compost toilets in Tuvalu that reached five percent of the national population, to campaigns that achieved 20–30 percentage point increases in public awareness and behavior change.

37. There are positive indications that investments have been catalytic by creating demonstration models that influenced policy and mobilized additional financing. In Haiti, ecosystem restoration and green economy projects supported plastic recycling value chains and ecotourism opportunities linked to Macaya National Park, combining livelihood benefits with conservation outcomes. In the Amazon Basin, projects integrated indigenous knowledge into biodiversity management, enhancing both environmental and social sustainability. These investments illustrate UNEP's ability to channel relatively modest funds into initiatives that leverage wider institutional, financial, and behavioral change.

38. **Weaknesses in project design.** Evaluations highlight recurring weaknesses in project design, particularly related to the readiness for implementation. One highlighted in the evaluations was the overly dispersed scope of many projects. Initiatives often attempted to

tackle multiple themes simultaneously such as water management, invasive species, livelihoods, and governance, leading to diluted resources and limited depth. While the integration of these themes is strategic, attempting to design interventions beyond the realistic scope of the resources was counterproductive. For example, invasive alien species pilots that spread effort across numerous species and islands sometimes failed to achieve complete eradication, such as the incomplete removal of goats and donkeys on Cabritos Island.

39. Another consistent weakness in design was insufficient duration to consolidate behavior change. Evaluations of campaigns such as Pride/Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) or integrated catchment or forest management often demonstrated early successes but were too short to embed long-term shifts in practice. Many projects lacked robust monitoring frameworks and exit strategies as an integral part of design.

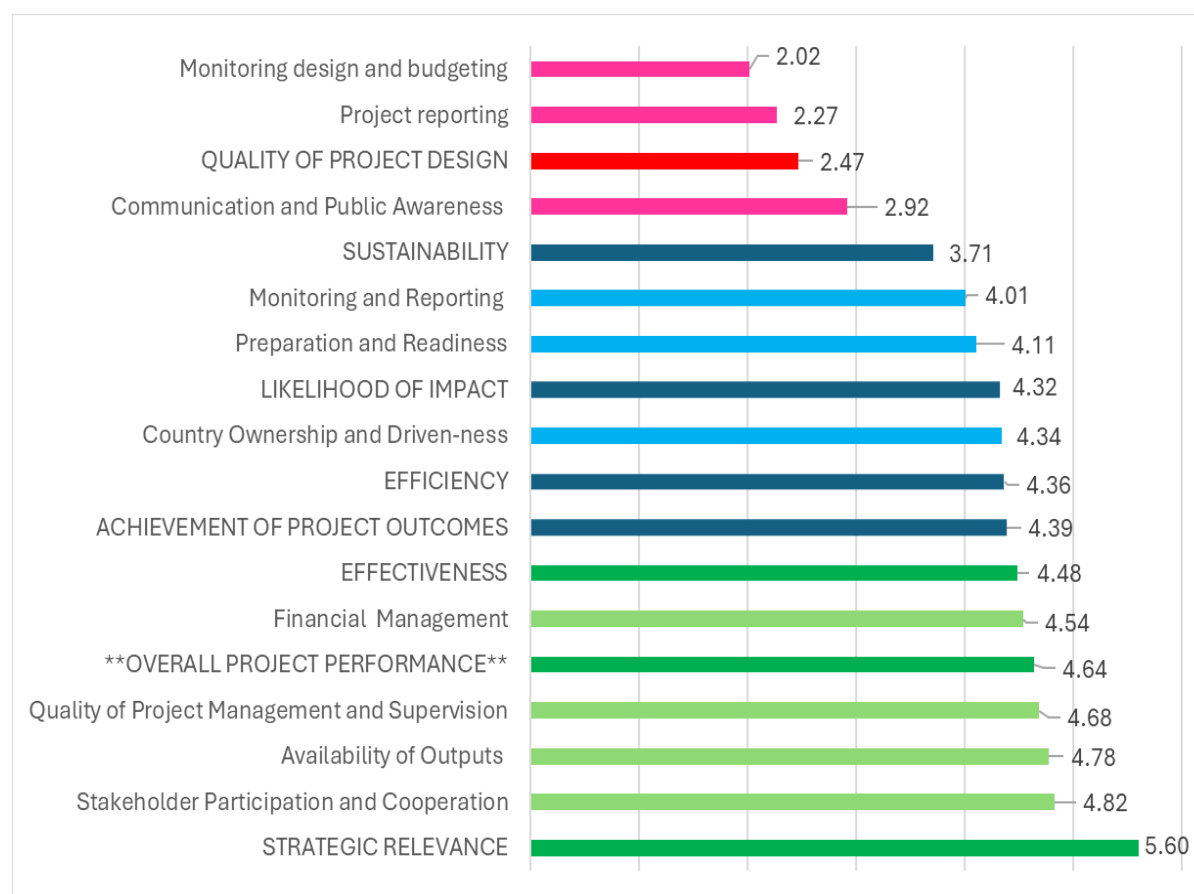
C. Effectiveness

40. **Overall findings on effectiveness.** The evaluation finds that the NA-SP has delivered credible and visible results across ecological, institutional, and policy domains. Overall, the subprogramme demonstrates solid performance and clear strategic value, but its potential for transformation is constrained by implementation that is not sufficiently systems-oriented, inconsistent coordination and weak mechanisms for sustaining outcomes. Projects have effectively translated global biodiversity and ecosystem goals into national and local actions, supported by UNEP's scientific credibility and convening role. Evidence shows that results are strongest where structured partnerships, coherent design, and country demand align. At the same time, many initiatives remain pilot-scale, with uneven follow-up and limited integration into national frameworks.

41. **NA-SP evaluation ratings demonstrate positive performance overall.** Evaluated projects demonstrate the subprogramme's capacity to operate from the global to the local level, bridging international frameworks with potential solutions for on-the-ground implementation. Figure 1 shows that the 'overall project performance'¹² across the 85 project evaluations was an average rating of 4.64 which is in the satisfactory range, as were most of the key criteria, with strategic relevance scoring consistently high ratings. As confirmed in the previous section, strategic relevance was consistently scored highest (5/6), confirming the subprogramme's alignment with global frameworks and national priorities. However, ratings for quality of project design, along with monitoring and budgeting, reporting and communication and public awareness were moderately unsatisfactory.

¹² The UNEP Evaluation Office weights the performance ratings for each of its evaluation criteria to arrive at an 'overall project performance' rating. The criteria carrying the most weight are achievement of outcomes and sustainability.

Figure 1. Summary of NA-SP Evaluations' Performance Ratings 2014-2024



Source: Evaluation Analysis 2025. UNEP EO Rating scale¹³: 6-Highly satisfactory, 5-satisfactory, 4-moderately satisfactory, 3-moderately unsatisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1, highly unsatisfactory. The factors in CAPITALS and darker colours are composite ratings for main evaluation criteria. The factors in lower case are sub-criteria.

42. The 'overall project performance' ratings varied slightly based on different parameters. Over the MTS periods¹⁴, the average 'overall project performance' rating was higher in the period 2014-2017 (4.78/6), lowest in the period 2018-2021 (4.4/6) and rising again to 4.6/6 in the period 2022-2024. This demonstrates consistently satisfactory performance during the evaluation period. Two examples of external factors that are likely to have affected performance ratings are the COVID-19 pandemic and adjustments to the Evaluation Office's weighted ratings approach in 2018. Both of these are likely to have reduced performance levels.

43. Projects that were of smaller value (<USD2M) and larger value (>USD10M) had a lower average overall performance rating (4.3/6, 4.4/6, respectively) compared to mid-range value projects of USD2-5M and USD 5-10M (4.9/6 and 4.7/6, respectively). The evaluation reports suggest that this is due to small projects being usually single or two country projects, with limited resources to address the identified needs. Larger projects are able to secure a project team and project management resources that help to drive performance. However, the largest projects tended to have complex and over-ambitious designs. The larger projects tended to

¹³ UNEP (2023) Evaluation Manual

¹⁴ The four-year time periods refer to project evaluations completed within that time, rather than the projects implemented in those years (i.e. project evaluations take place after project completion).

cover multiple countries and integrated themes, whereas projects between USD2-10M were more focused and manageable across clear, linked themes and countries with a demonstrated interest in the specific theme.

44. The ratings for the GEF and other subprogramme projects were comparable (average overall performance of 4.6/6 and 4.7/6, respectively) although ratings in the GEF portfolio for design, monitoring, reporting and safeguards were slightly lower than the other projects in the portfolio. This seemed to be due to the stringent requirements of the GEF evaluation process that places greater emphasis on these factors from design to evaluation. The other portfolio comprises a variety of funding sources, themes and partnerships that cannot be stratified further but does display positive performance overall.

45. **Effectiveness reported through the UNEP Programme Performance Report.** For each biennium, UNEP generates a Programme Performance Report (PPR) that provides an overview of subprogramme performance and contribution to overall UNEP corporate indicators. The following paragraphs summarize the reported performance of the NA-SP and its predecessor subprogrammes during the evaluation period.

46. In the 2014–2017 MTS cycle, in the 2014–2015 PPR, the overall UNEP performance reports full achievement of 70% in relation to expected accomplishments and 30% partially achieved, with 79% of indicator targets attained. The Ecosystem Management subprogramme was reported to have achieved all of its indicator targets, reporting full attainment. This indicates that ecosystem-related delivery was stronger than the organizational average during this period. In the 2016–2017 PPR, overall UNEP performance was reported to be 65% of indicator targets fully achieved, 25% partially achieved and 10% not achieved. The Ecosystem Management subprogramme performed below the organizational average with less than 20% of its indicators being fully achieved and approximately 20% not achieved, with the majority partially achieved. The subprogramme exceeded its targets in two areas, marine litter and wastewater management, but it was less effective (less than 60% achievement) in supporting countries to improve water frameworks and integrating ecosystem approaches into development planning.

47. In the 2018–2019 PPR, overall UNEP performance was reported to have 93% of indicator targets fully achieved, 6% partially achieved and 1% not achieved. The NA-SP (Healthy and Productive Ecosystems subprogramme) performed particularly strongly, achieving 100% of its expected accomplishment indicators. This marks one of the strongest performance periods for this SP during the evaluation period. In the 2020–2021 PPR, overall UNEP performance was reported to have remained high despite COVID-19-related disruptions, with 88% of indicator targets fully achieved and 12% partially achieved, and no targets recorded as not achieved. The NA-SP (Healthy and Productive Ecosystems subprogramme) continued to demonstrate strong delivery, exceeding all six target indicators.

48. In the 2022–2023 PPR, released July 2024, under the first cycle of the dedicated Nature Action Subprogramme, overall UNEP reported 93% of thematic subprogramme indicators fully achieved and 7% partially achieved, with zero not achieved. Within this, the Nature Action Subprogramme itself attained 80% of its indicators fully and 20% partially achieved, reflecting strong but not complete attainment. The NA-SP was reported to have fully attained and exceeded all of its indicator targets for 2024, indicating consolidation and improvement compared to the previous biennium. Although the corporate indicators are broad and detailed cumulative NA-SP data is not comprehensive, this reported performance aligned with the extent

of performance demonstrated through analysis of individual project evaluations, indicating generally positive performance on higher level indicators, through the evaluation period.

49. **Effectiveness in contributing to subprogramme outcomes.** The following paragraphs assess the extent to which the subprogramme is effective in delivering projects and wider initiatives on the basis of the 2022-2025 Theory of Change and drawing from all evidence sources. It considered how NA-SP tagged projects achieved their specific objectives and how those results contributed to the effectiveness of the NA-SP strategic outcomes.

2025 NA-SP Outcome – Sustainable Management of Nature is Adopted and Implemented In Development Frameworks

Strategic contribution to KM-GBF, SDGs and MEA Frameworks:

50. A strong theme across multiple interviews was the critical role of UNEP's engagement with MEAs. (See **Error! Reference source not found.**) The NA-SP has clearly made a positive contribution to advancing global biodiversity goals and implementing multilateral environmental agreements. Respondents underscored that UNEP administers several MEAs and hosts multiple secretariats, offering a unique entry point to align Nature Action with global biodiversity governance. However, interviewees cautioned that MEA staff and partners are often not well informed about UNEP's MTS in general, and the Nature Action Subprogramme objectives, which creates gaps in coherence.

51. The projects effectively supported the development of policy frameworks, restoration initiatives, and institutional capacity building, supporting the incorporation of global biodiversity and ecosystem targets into country-level plans and, in some cases, into implementation. The current portfolio continues to reflect this strength: the Environmental Treaties Programme strengthens MEA synergies, The GBF Early Action Support Project worked with the CBD Secretariat, UNDP, and BIOFIN to help 65 countries align NBSAPs with the KM-GBF, The Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services Project engaged Regional Seas Conventions, The Environmental Education and Youth Project advanced GBF Target 21 by engaging millions of youth through the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge and Playing for the Planet Alliance, and In Dominica, the Hurricane Maria Resilience Project connected CBD and UNCCD by restoring forests and farmland, developing a Climate Resilient SLM and Forest Resource Plan, and piloting livelihoods.

Box 1. Insights from the Deep Dives – UNEP's Engagement with MEAs

UNEP plays a central role in advancing multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), both as host of secretariats and as a convener of synergies initiatives. Across its portfolio, the NA-SP has supported translation of global MEA commitments into national action. For example, the Environmental Treaties Programme strengthened MEA synergies through the Party-led Bern Process, which enhances cooperation among MEAs for coherent GBF implementation and through DaRT which is recognized in COP decisions as a tool to streamline knowledge management for reporting. It has also developed gender guidance for NBSAPs in Lao PDR and Myanmar.

UNEP-WCMC's work with CMS has supported the State of the World's Migratory Species Report and the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity. Ecosystem- and species-focused projects further advanced MEAs. *The Vanishing Treasures Project* (Luxembourg-funded) supported CBD and CMS by conserving tigers, snow leopards, and gorillas, while addressing Paris Agreement adaptation. The Global Peatlands Initiative reinforced CBD and UNFCCC frameworks via the Global Peatlands Assessment, Hotspots Atlas, and Brazzaville Declaration, supporting peatland integration into NDCs

and NBSAPs in Peru (UNDP-led), Indonesia (UNDP-led), and the Congo Basin, in collaboration with national governments and other implementing partners.

The Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services Project engaged Regional Seas Conventions and mobilized blue finance with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, advancing CBD and SDG 14. The Environmental Education and Youth Project advanced GBF Target 21 by engaging millions of youth through the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge and Playing for the Planet Alliance, partnering with UNESCO and UNICEF. In Dominica, the Hurricane Maria Resilience Project addressed CBD and UNCCD priorities by restoring forests and farmland, developing a Climate Resilient SLM and Forest Resource Plan, and piloting livelihoods.

Nonetheless, UNEP's support to MEA secretariats has at times been constrained by insufficient cross-divisional coordination in supporting Member States to implement MEA commitments, limited sustainability of tools, and inconsistent follow-up. Tools like DaRT are recognized in multiple MEA decisions, but based on interview feedback, national adoption remains voluntary, uneven, and politically constrained and GBF Early Action support was sometimes rushed with limited time for genuine consultations.

There are continuing opportunities for the NA-SP to strengthen MEA synergies by leveraging UNEP's convening role, including support to Party-led cooperation under the Bern Process, and by further promoting tools such as DaRT to facilitate more coherent implementation and reporting under the GBF at national level, while fostering stronger synergies across CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC commitments with national institutional policies, plans and local action.

Strong convening power and policy influence:

52. UNEP's convening power and policy influence have been central to strategic achievements in nature action. The NA-SP engagement in global forums and events has reinforced UNEP's role as a neutral broker and a thought leader in the global biodiversity agenda. The subprogramme's technical credibility, underpinned by robust science-policy interactions and evidence-based tools, has helped the NA-SP to work with internal and external partners on strengthening international norms and guidelines. The design of specific projects aim to assist countries in aligning national strategies with global biodiversity commitments, and the evaluations demonstrate that where projects have targeted strategic outcomes, that performance has largely been successful. Projects in the deep dives, such as the *Global Peatlands Initiative*, *Vanishing Treasures*, and the *GBF Early Action Support Project*, illustrate how UNEP's normative work and global partnerships have informed international frameworks and moved efforts towards mainstreaming into national frameworks, institutional plans and budgets. The survey results also indicate a strong perception among UNEP staff on the need for UNEP to focus more on policy and strategy support at the country level, while supporting partners in on-the-ground implementation.

Partnerships are a defining and underpinning strength of the NA-SP:

53. UNEP's convening power and neutrality provide a solid foundation for collaboration, but this potential is not systematically leveraged. UNEP's convening power constitutes a key comparative advantage for the subprogramme; its strategic application through partnerships enables the subprogramme to extend its reach and results. The collaboration with MEAs, vertical funds, UN agencies, research institutes, national governments, and other actors has been essential for achieving policy impact and resource mobilization.

54. A core factor identified across the 85 project evaluations; 10 deep dives and the survey results were the importance of partnerships in leveraging results. Cooperation with UN agencies such as FAO, IFAD, WFP, and UN Women has enhanced integration of gender and agriculture,

with gender mainstreaming in India's organic farming as a noted example. Across the different evaluation evidence sources, collaboration with UNDP was found to be uneven reflecting shared areas of positive collaboration in strategic activities but with areas where there was less systematic operational engagement at the country level, especially in GEF-funded biodiversity programming, NBSAP support, and integrated development planning. Partnerships with a wide range of organizations such as the IKEA Foundation, DG INTPA, and GRID-Arendal have enabled scaling of pilots and strengthened technical delivery, while TEEB India demonstrates effective engagement with subnational governments and financial institutions through UNEP-FI.

55. GEF is one of the most critical partners in terms of combining the strategic directions of GEF and the NA-SP with the expertise of subprogramme staff and the demand and interests of the Member States. The UNEP/GEF portfolio has enabled UNEP to align national biodiversity frameworks and strengthen policy coherence through projects such as the *GBF Early Action Support* initiative, which supported more than 70 countries to align National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the KM-GBF. However, engagement with the GEF and other funds remains uneven across different countries.

56. The participation of NA-SP coordinators and technical personnel in networks relevant to their expertise are effective mechanisms to demonstrate credibility and engage in dialogue that contributes to maintaining partnerships and identifying new opportunities for partnership. This is important for the development of innovative projects and pilot investments. The collaboration in multi-country networks also helps to establish relationships with relevant Ministry stakeholders. However, interviews suggested that coordination with UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators is not as active as it could be with UNEP's contributions in general and the NA-SP's work often overshadowed by agencies with stronger field presence. Partnerships that had the potential to deliver structural transformation, such as in the *Vanishing Treasures project*, *Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services Project*, remained confined to isolated projects without being scaled or embedded in national frameworks.

2025 NA-SP Outcome – An Economically and Socially Sustainable Pathway for Halting and Reversing the Loss of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Integrity is Established

57. **Potential economic and social pathways have been strengthened through UNEP's technical credibility, but solutions are insufficiently tailored to context.** Economic and technical advances achieved were strongest where structured coordination existed between the NA-SP, technical divisions and external partners such as in the *Finance Initiative* and *Early Action Support Project*. In financial systems, the UNEP-FI emerged as an example of a good practice of how to bring banks and insurers into biodiversity risk and disclosure dialogues. This project, which is managed through the UNEP Industry and Economy Division, but which includes work on supporting financial mechanisms to support nature action, is a good example of how UNEP's work is integrated at the strategic level across subprogrammes. Country-level examples show how this can translate into practical commitments: in India, the True Value of Food Systems work, which is managed through The Economics of Nature Unit in Ecosystems Division, used structured public-private dialogues and UNEP-FI-convened roundtables with insurers, banks and agribusiness; five companies expressed interest in applying the approach, and linkages were built from large corporates to MSMEs and farmer producer organizations along the same value chains. Beyond firm-level change, the project helped embed biodiversity in national systems through curricular integration (Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) universities), tailored guidance for regulators (e.g., Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)/Government of India, Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), and training for senior civil

service academies, signaling early mainstreaming into human capital and policy ecosystems rather than isolated pilots.

58. Respondents also highlighted emerging facilities and instruments (e.g., for palm oil/soy) intended to shift production practices, though their ultimate effectiveness remains unproven given limited corporate operational disclosure and lagging contribution analysis. Senior management respondents underscored the need to push life-cycle assessment and foot printing more deeply into industry practice to move beyond “end-of-pipe” measures, while acknowledging weak incentives and funding for cross-divisional collaboration that would be required to scale these tools.

59. The capacity of the subprogramme to develop, maintain and build technical internal and external partnerships was critical to the delivery of innovation and in the contribution to normative products. UNEP-WCMC’s collaboration with CMS expanded UNEP’s role in supporting MEA implementation and coordination with the State of the World’s Migratory Species Report and the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity at COP14. The partnerships in the *Global Peatlands Initiative* were the decisive factor behind its success; under this project, a collaboration with Succow Stiftung has resulted in major joint knowledge products that have advanced the global understanding and visibility of peatlands, among others. The One Health agenda has introduced a niche for ecosystem-based risk reduction, with tools adopted in Ghana. The food systems initiative embedded biodiversity in agriculture and finance debates, expanding subprogramme’s reach beyond conservation. Yet, overall integration across divisions and subprogrammes remained *ad hoc*, with biodiversity and freshwater, terrestrial and marine, and law and ecosystem units often working in isolation.

60. **The subprogramme’s technical knowledge and guidance functions are a clear strength.** Toolkits, assessments, and knowledge platforms such as Global Peatlands Assessment, NBSAP Forum (knowledge platform), DaRT (decision-support tool), the Bern Process (Party-led coordination platform), and ecosystem valuation guidance- enhanced UNEP’s reputation as a global knowledge broker. Project evaluations, deep dives, and interviews indicate uptake was strong where tools were directly linked to formal MEA processes, national reporting requirements, or supported through targeted capacity building. However, their uptake and practical application at the country level remain inconsistent due to limited dissemination support, weak capacity follow-up, and a lack of systematic monitoring of the use of tools, assessments and platforms. This is also reflected through interviews with partners and project managers that suggest that while production of tools, assessments and platforms is appreciated, their application relies on the local practitioners being fully convinced of their relevance and applicability and having sufficient time and resources to adapt these to contextually appropriate applied solutions.

61. The DaRT platform, supported through the Environmental Treaties Programme and also being applied in some cases in the EWS project, was noted as a practical and a shared repository, implemented jointly with the Environmental Governance subprogramme, to underpin reporting and analysis. Interview feedback indicated that the tool is useful when the users are properly oriented, but it remains underutilized in many countries and is sometimes misunderstood as a reporting system rather than a knowledge management tool; early “country sandbox” spaces (e.g., Cameroon, Ghana) show promise when national focal points actively curate data. Countries choose their approach to the implementation of these tools. Building national capacity rather than through external consultancy is strengthening institutional retention of capacity and creating clearer lines of sight from the MTS to country processes, but it is not always practical in countries with insufficient technically qualified resource personnel.

62. Yet, multiple interviewees cautioned that the production of toolkits and platforms does not guarantee their implementation or uptake. In several cases, UNEP's knowledge products remained underutilized at country level due to limited follow-up, inadequate capacity support, and weak feedback loops. The emphasis on generating outputs has sometimes overshadowed the need to ensure that governments and partners can adapt these tools to local contexts. Without mechanisms for systematic dissemination, monitoring of use, and integration into national systems, UNEP risks being seen more as a producer of documents than as an enabler of applied solutions.

2025 NA-SP Outcome – Nature Conservation and Restoration are Enhanced

63. Mainstreaming nature into policies, plans, and financial systems marks a positive step in aligning development with ecological sustainability. Evaluation findings show that the NA-SP has significantly advanced the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into policy and practice through structured, demand-driven, and partner-aligned initiatives.

64. **Progress is most visible where mainstreaming is anchored in national plans and financial systems.** Interview evidence suggests UNEP identifies and, in some places, makes progress on credible entry points to mainstream nature into planning and finance, but results remain uneven, strong where structured initiatives, clear partner roles and demand-driven country engagement exist, and weaker where efforts are ad hoc, project-bounded, or insufficiently linked to national budgeting and financial decision-making.

65. Positive examples include countries such as Nepal, where ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) informed the National Adaptation Plan; South Africa, where EbA was embedded in catchment and coastal management; and Peru and Colombia, where valuation studies and EbA tools shaped national and municipal adaptation frameworks. In Dominica, the Hurricane Maria Resilience Project and Sustainable Land Management Plan linked CBD and UNCCD goals, embedding reforestation, resilience, land-use planning in geospatial systems and legislation.

66. The combination of science, policy influence, and field practice has enhanced UNEP's convening power and positioned the subprogramme at the centre of international biodiversity and ecosystem governance. Interviewees consistently pointed to UNEP's comparative advantage: setting direction, producing tools and guidance, and convening finance and planning actors. The Nature Frameworks Early Support Project (ESP) was cited as a systematic channel to embed the GBF within national policy and monitoring architectures. It aligns country work plans, indicators and procurement with GBF/NBSAP alignment, and explicitly pursues mainstreaming through three strands, policy alignment, monitoring frameworks, and financial leverage, while working directly with ministries and regional coordinators.

67. **Strengthening Ecosystem Management and Restoration through successful pilots.** At the operational level, evaluations of NA-SP projects demonstrated how pilot interventions could catalyze systemic uptake. In Cambodia, integrated natural resource management was incorporated into provincial land-use planning, linking biodiversity to development decisions across sectors. In the Pacific Islands, biodiversity and ecosystem considerations were integrated into coastal zone management policies, balancing conservation and development pressures. In the Caribbean, the subprogramme worked with governments to integrate ecosystem services into tourism and coastal development policies, demonstrating how project pilots influenced policy frameworks at a regional scale. These cases illustrate causal linkages from field-based demonstrations to institutional and cross-sectoral uptake particularly where these pathways have been identified at the design stage and where resources have been applied to step towards wider application.

68. In the Caribbean, invasive species control projects led to the adoption of management frameworks and national campaigns, such as the “*Eat it to beat it*” lionfish initiative, which shifted consumer behavior through a systematic and monitored information campaign, and which informed fisheries management policies. In the Pacific, invasive species eradication and wastewater management projects informed water and sanitation policies, linking environmental health to human well-being. Globally, UNEP’s work on plastics, chemicals, and waste provided governments with knowledge platforms and technical guidance, which were then used to strengthen regulatory frameworks and promote circular economy models. These examples demonstrate how UNEP’s normative and technical inputs are translated into national policies and regulatory action.

69. At the same time, evaluations highlight recurring weaknesses. The portfolio often suffers from an overly dispersed scope, spanning species protection, land, oceans, pollution, restoration, and valuation without clear prioritization leading to diluted impact. Many interventions remained at pilot scale, with limited pathways in design and implementation for replication or scaling up, constraining their broader influence and falling short of the intended MTS and subprogramme outcomes at scale. The portfolio has limited coherence across projects, reducing opportunities for synergies and lesson sharing. Resource constraints, both staff and financial, have further limited the Subprogramme’s capacity to deliver on its wide ambitions. Finally, monitoring challenges are evident across projects: results frameworks are often inconsistent, with stronger evidence of outputs than of outcomes or impacts, limiting UNEP’s ability to demonstrate transformative change.

70. **Work in the science-policy-practice for biodiversity and ecosystems provides a foundation for effective results.** The evaluations and deep dives found that where projects with physical assessments, valuation tools, and vulnerability studies provided a scientific and economic justification for embedding biodiversity and ecosystem restoration into national planning and financial systems there was resulting action. This also required strong communication with decision-makers. However, results remain uneven where efforts are ad hoc or insufficiently tied to budgetary and institutional frameworks. There are also systemic constraints that limit uptake of scientifically sound approaches. These include that capacity development and demonstration remain largely project-bound, rarely linked to national budgets, MTEFs, or sectoral financing, leading to weak institutional anchoring. While pilots in countries such as Brazil, Malaysia, and Ghana show feasibility, translation into budgeted programmes and alignment with NBSAP/GBF indicators are inconsistent. Monitoring and knowledge management are activity-focused, with limited feedback loops and inaccessible dashboards, constraining adaptive management and evidence-based engagement with finance ministries. Broader mainstreaming into development and fiscal frameworks is further hindered by ad hoc collaboration, thin staffing, and unclear roles except where cross-unit logframes, as in ESP or TEEB/UNEP-FI efforts, foster more systemic integration.

NA-SP 2025 – Factors affecting effectiveness

71. **Tangible results across most projects, but scale is limited.** Across the targeted 16 direct outcomes for the NA-SP, the evaluated projects have generated positive direct outcomes across biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, protected areas management, and sustainable land and water resource management. The evaluation ratings show that project performance was generally satisfactory overall (average 4.64/6), yet weaknesses persisted in project design, M&E frameworks, and communication, all rated moderately unsatisfactory, particularly in linking outputs to measurable impacts. National initiatives have delivered tangible ecological improvements and institutional capacity strengthening across a very wide

range of themes and ecosystems, such as land-use planning reform in Cambodia and coastal ecosystem management in the Caribbean and Pacific Islands. Cross-sectoral integration was stronger in land and terrestrial ecosystems but weaker in marine and freshwater domains, where institutional silos constrained ecosystem-wide management.

72. While these achievements are substantial, the evaluations highlight persistent limitations. Many interventions remained at pilot scale, with uneven replication and limited pathways for systemic uptake. Interview evidence highlights that UNEP plays an important role in supporting NBSAPs, but its contribution is generally confined to supporting alignment, enabling activities and global-level guidance rather than strategic and broad scale country-level implementation. The effectiveness of support is highly uneven, with isolated good practices but persistent gaps in follow-up, resourcing, and role clarity vis-à-vis other UN agencies and partners. The deep dives provide clear evidence that tangible outcomes are being achieved, although the scale of results and the opportunities for replication and scaling up are varied. (See Box 2.)

Box 2. Insights from the Deep Dives – Effectiveness in Current Projects

UNEP's Nature Action projects have generated tangible ecological, social, and policy results, albeit at different scales of operation. Across the deep dives, positive results were identified in the Global Peatlands Initiative that informed national climate and biodiversity policies in Indonesia, Peru, and the Congo Basin. The Vanishing Treasures project has contributed to the conservation of key species and associated socio-ecological systems in the Virunga Mountains of East Africa (Uganda, Rwanda; Mountain gorillas), Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan; snow leopards), and the Hindu-Kush Himalayas (Bhutan; Bengal tigers), while linking climate adaptation and ecosystem resilience.

The Vanishing Treasures project advanced habitat restoration and local governance across multiple countries, while the Global Peatlands Initiative informed NDCs and national peatland policies in Indonesia, Peru, and DRC. The Environmental Treaties Programme strengthened MEA coherence across 30 countries, developed tools such as DaRT and the Bern Process, and produced gender guidance for Lao PDR and Myanmar. The *GBF Early Action Support Project* assisted 70 countries in aligning NBSAPs with the KM-GBF, enabling early adoption in Uganda and Nigeria and leveraging €45m (IKI) for biodiversity finance planning.

At a smaller scale, the *EcoVillage Madagascar* conducted Natural Capital Assessments across 18 pilot sites, restored 147 ha, reforested 262.7 ha, distributed 1,200 solar lamps (avoiding 5,508 tCO₂), and engaged 1,940 households in agroecology, with women occupying 40–50% of leadership and training roles. The performance of the *Environmental Education and Youth Project* exceeded targets, three youth partnerships adopted environmental curricula, three gaming companies integrated sustainability content, and three global alliances were formed. Initiatives like India's *Tide Turners Plastic Challenge* spurred youth-led recycling and advocacy, with over 70% of participants being young women.

Effectiveness was driven by participatory governance, capacity building, and partnerships. Feedback highlighted the need to strengthen regional and national and regional capacities. Deeper private sector engagement is important to leverage resources, particularly to expand pilots into new scalable designs. Additionally, it emphasized stronger knowledge management systems to build effective internal and external learning loops.

73. **Institutional functionality is currently in place, but there are risks to future effective implementation.** The evaluation found that the subprogramme's institutional architecture and operational systems are functional, working effectively to deliver their targeted results and

achieving satisfactory performance. Leadership, proactive project management and strong person-to-person connections were repeatedly identified as important for credibility and opportunities for resource mobilization. As resource opportunities tighten, the NA-SP may risk losing key staff that are critical for partnership management and resource leverage. In the survey results, coordination and integration also emerged as the most frequently cited need to enhance effectiveness, with respondents calling for better cross-division cooperation, integrated programmes, and stronger synergies with other UNEP subprogrammes and donor frameworks, supported by structured mechanisms for knowledge exchange.

74. The NA-SP has improved integration with other UNEP subprogrammes and strengthened MEA cooperation. Partnerships with UN agencies, civil society, and the private sector have enhanced delivery, though systematic tracking of partnership outcomes could be improved. UNEP's support to NBSAPs is valued for its technical guidance, global convening power, and capacity-building activities, but is constrained by weak follow-up systems, limited country level engagement, and insufficient, targeted collaboration with other UN agencies. NA-SP's contribution to NBSAP processes is widely valued for its technical guidance, global convening role, and capacity-building support across the portfolio. Interviews and survey evidence indicate that these contributions are strongest at the normative and knowledge-sharing level, while the depth and continuity of country-level follow-up and coordination vary across contexts. To maximise its contribution, the subprogramme would benefit from institutionalising continuous feedback mechanisms, strengthening documentation of how project outputs contribute to NBSAP objectives, and clarifying roles and complementarities across the UN system to support more coherent and country-driven delivery.

75. The portfolio of NA-SP-supported projects demonstrates credible causal linkages to MTS outcomes through collaboration across divisions, particularly in the areas of climate, biodiversity, and pollution. In many cases, while the NA-SP played a catalytic role, the other divisions provided scientific evidence, convening platforms, and piloting approaches that shaped policies and practices at both national and global levels. For example, NA-SP interventions contributed to advancing climate policies and commitments, including support to NDCs, net-zero targets, and nature-based solutions. The Environmental Treaties Programme is managed through the Environmental Governance Subprogramme portfolio and contributes significantly to delivery of the biodiversity outcomes across a range of projects. Projects in energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and adaptation provided clear causal pathways to climate objectives, showing how pilot demonstrations influenced policy commitments. EbA initiatives in Nepal and South Africa were incorporated into national adaptation strategies, evidencing how UNEP's science-policy interface facilitated policy uptake. Causal linkages were also evident in UNEP's work on chemicals, plastics, and waste. Interventions in the Caribbean and Asia supported regulatory reforms and promoted circular economy models, with governments drawing directly on UNEP's capacity-building and knowledge platforms to implement pollution reduction strategies. These pathways illustrate how UNEP contributed not only to normative frameworks but also to practical implementation of pollution control measures

76. However, coherence and integration remain uneven across the portfolio and between subprogrammes. Interview evidence overall highlighted persistent silos between freshwater and biodiversity, terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and between Law and Ecosystems Divisions, which undermined integration at design and delivery.

77. **Bringing Together Key Sectors Enhances Project Effectiveness:** Cross-sectoral coordination has been a defining strength of several NA-SP projects, yet its application and

depth remain uneven. Projects that actively engaged multiple sectors, along with civil society, scientific institutions, and private enterprises, demonstrated stronger results in policy uptake, institutional ownership, and replication potential. For instance, the True Value Accounting project linked the agriculture and environment ministries with research and farmer organizations to mainstream biodiversity in food systems, Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services project linked environment, fisheries, tourism, and finance sectors through Regional Seas frameworks; the *EcoVillage Madagascar project* brought together environmental, forestry, and rural development authorities with NGOs and local communities to institutionalize natural capital planning; the *Vanishing Treasures initiative* connected wildlife, tourism, and climate sectors with universities and conservation NGOs to strengthen integrated mountain ecosystem management; and UNEP-FI mobilized the finance, insurance, and investment sectors to integrate nature-related risks into global financial frameworks.

78. Partnerships such as the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration, Regional Seas Conventions, and the Brazzaville Declaration illustrate how multi-ministerial and intergovernmental mechanisms can bridge conservation, climate, and development agendas. In emerging areas such as One Health, UNEP's nature-risk reduction lens has opened policy dialogue across sectors; however, systematic screening of biodiversity and wildlife projects through a One Health lens is not yet routine, and regional capacity limitations hinder consistent application.

79. Overall, the deep dives indicate that bringing together key sectors substantially enhances project effectiveness when built into design and governance structures. However, weak institutional mandates, absence of joint planning frameworks, and short project cycles further constrained sustained cross-sector collaboration, particularly where coordination relied on informal or ad hoc arrangements rather than established intersectoral platforms. The PCPs were found to be beneficial in the work of the GSPC and RSPC's through their active coordination activities, and to a moderate extent in strengthening subprogramme coherence at the central level. However, they were found to have limited relevance in project implementation and active coordination across the portfolio. There was little knowledge or understanding of the PCPs and how they contribute to improved programming and were seen largely as an additional reporting line.

80. Effectiveness was constrained by institutional silos and delivery that does not sufficiently consider systemic integration. Freshwater and biodiversity remain separate, limiting ecosystem integration. Terrestrial and marine biodiversity units rarely collaborated, with biodiversity mainstreamed more in land than in oceans. Cooperation between Law and Ecosystems Divisions was event-driven and not institutionalized. Regional Subprogramme Coordinators are often not included in the strategic processes, weakening country-level alignment and effectiveness.

81. Based on the lessons arising from the project evaluations, areas for improvement identified through interviews are in stronger coherence with other initiatives to achieve greater scale, more (formally built into design, not only by default) adaptive management to respond to contextual changes, and more active cross-divisional collaboration. Coordination must move from being project-based to being institutionally embedded across divisions and regions. Stronger incentives for cross-divisional collaboration, clearer roles for regional offices in shaping technical priorities, and more systematic partnerships with MEAs and UNDP could reduce duplication and improve integration. Building on successes such as GBF Early Action and UNEP-FI, the subprogramme should prioritize institutional pathways that hardwire integration into UN system processes, regional governance, and national policy frameworks,

ensuring that partnerships consistently translate into long-term systemic coherence. These improvements would be likely to improve performance for the coming MTS period, particularly given the likelihood of resource constrictions that will impact on implementation. Maintaining strategic internal and external coordination links will be increasingly important for the next MTS period.

D. Efficiency

82. **Main Factors Affecting Efficiency.** Across the evaluation cohort, NA-SP projects generally demonstrated positive fund-raising efforts, high disbursement rates and produced tangible outputs with available resources. Efficiency was frequently undermined by systemic delays, administrative bottlenecks, staffing weaknesses, and uneven risk management. While some projects adapted effectively through flexible approaches, others struggled with institutional and financial inefficiencies.

83. **Positive Resource mobilization with partners.** The NA-SP has demonstrated strong fundraising performance, securing commitments from vertical funds, bilateral and private partners. The Nature and Health team noted mobilizing approximately €5 billion over four years through the European Commission (DG INTPA). The True Value Accounting project secured support from the IKEA Foundation from 2023, which enabled the project to expand to Kenya and continue works in India. The work with food systems in India also demonstrated how private finance can strategically sustain activities after funding from earlier EU-funded interventions ceased. High-profile projects with a clear identity also demonstrated the power to leverage resources, for example, the *Vanishing Treasures* and *Global Peatlands Initiative Project*. These partnerships also provided co-financing leverage and policy visibility far beyond their direct budgets. Such high-visibility partnerships were seen as evidence of UNEP's convening power and credibility with donors.

84. **Contribution of the Nature Action Planetary Fund to coordination.** The introduction of PCPs and the Planetary Fund represented a deliberate institutional attempt to improve portfolio-level coherence. By 2023–24, the Nature Action Fund had channeled roughly USD 8.4 million from Finland and Norway, for 288 projects in approximately 180 countries (USD 1.4 billion portfolio). These mechanisms were expected to enable cross-divisional collaboration and clearer alignment between MTS, PoW and project delivery.

85. Staff acknowledged that PCPs opened access to coordination resources for designing joint projects and integrating biodiversity, climate, and pollution themes, which is an important step toward a more coordinated, systems-based approach. The PCPs provided an avenue for strategic design work and opportunities for more collaborative and innovative coordination. Yet, the project staff particularly noted that the PCPs also involved additional reporting layers and duplication. They reported that inconsistent understanding across divisions created delays and blurred accountability. Despite these weaknesses, their conceptual contribution in this subprogramme was significant: they served as UNEP's first structured attempt to connect donor funding to subprogramme outcomes. As PCPs are being reviewed, suggestions through staff and partner interviews indicated that efficiency gains could be preserved by institutionalizing lighter-touch mechanisms that retain their strengths, such as pooled funding, portfolio accountability, and incentives for collaboration, but without their administrative burden.

86. **Quality of funds management was uneven.** Across the evaluations, projects largely achieved good disbursement rates by project completion, such as Pacific IWRM (93%), COAST (97%), and biodiversity initiatives (87–96%). However, these figures masked uneven spending patterns and front-loaded delays. This was reported to be due to difficulties in identifying

absorbative capacity, leaving additional resources needing to be used swiftly. Efficiency improved where adaptive mechanisms, such as flexible disbursement thresholds or performance-linked financing were introduced. In contrast, reliance on multiple intermediaries, as in the Guatemala Mangrove and Caribbean Biosafety Framework projects, caused severe slowdowns when funds stalled at headquarters.

87. The evaluations and multiple interview respondents described delays in disbursement and inconsistent spending patterns, with funds approval through the budget committee being delayed until late in the financial year, leading to rushed implementation and compromised quality. However, these funds were often released too late for meaningful planning, resulting in hurried activities. Several project teams in the deep dives flagged that disbursements were sometimes made late leaving insufficient time for impact. Survey respondents also noted that timely allocation of resources makes a major difference, and closer links between projects and government schemes can optimize outcomes and enhance sustainability.

88. There are systemic challenges in financial systems integration. While project design is tracked through IPMR and budget execution through UMOJA, there is no consolidated mechanism to capture subprogramme-level spending across divisions. Cross-divisional sub-allotments were described as a recurring source of misalignment, approximately 30–40% of cases involved project completion while sub-allocated activities were still incomplete. The practice of tying installments to consolidated expenditure across divisions also created inefficiencies: faster-spending divisions were forced to wait until slower divisions had disbursed funds before the next tranche could be released.

89. **Management and administrative processes have improved but complicated procedures still constrain implementation.** Efficiency in SP-NA delivery was shaped by complex approval processes and heavy financial procedures, and reliance on informal networks. Mechanisms such as PCPs and the Budget Steering Committee were reported through interviews to lead to added multiple reporting layers and delayed fund disbursement. The 'line of sight' for efficiency has depended on goodwill/strong informal relationships to accelerate urgent approvals. Digital systems like Umoja and IPMR do not consolidate expenditure with operations across divisions, making oversight difficult.

90. At project start-up, delays in recruitment and coordination mechanisms were the most significant drag on efficiency. Across nearly all evaluated projects and interview responses, administrative complexity emerged as the most pervasive source of inefficiency. Delays in legal clearances, procurement, and approval processes, often involving several layers between task managers, divisions, and the Budget Steering Committee slowed fund release by six to eight months, compressing implementation time. Examples include the Pacific NBSAPs and Caribbean Invasive Alien Species projects, where slow consultant contracting and staff turnover delayed progress, and the Bahamas Marine Protected Area (MPA) and MedPartnership projects, which faced early inefficiencies due to postponed manager recruitment. Small or under-resourced project management units often lacked the capacity to manage heavy workloads, and institutionalization of positions beyond project life was rarely secured.

91. In interviews and the survey, stakeholders expressed that where control was centralized more delays were experienced and that decentralized management was more efficient. Fund Management Officers (FMOs) operate primarily at project level, lacking visibility of portfolio-wide risks or disbursement timing. Cross-divisional sub-allotments that are estimated to affect 30-40 percent of projects often caused mismatched timelines where one division's completion depended on another's pending disbursement. Because subsequent installments were tied to

consolidated expenditure across divisions, faster-moving teams were penalized by slower ones, forcing end-year rushes.

92. The majority of survey feedback pointed to heavy and inefficient administrative processes, including delays in approvals, cumbersome procurement and legal agreements, parallel reporting systems, and unclear concept submission procedures. Many criticized internal bureaucracy and top-down management styles, noting disconnect between senior leadership and field realities, as well as a lack of vision and support from divisions and branches. Also with large projects, there were some complex arrangements that were beyond the capacity of the NA-SP to manage unless the project included specific expertise e.g. for financial, risk and safeguards management, also communications, monitoring and reporting. The 2022 Delivery Model Policy and forthcoming restructuring efforts were viewed through interviews as an opportunity to modernize processes, strengthen regional authority, and integrate data systems, however this has not eventuated as expected.

93. Common recommendations from evaluations to improve efficiency included to: integrate realistic risk assessments at design stage, accounting for political, administrative, and capacity constraints, and avoid over-ambitious multi-country designs, institutionalize accountability and staffing arrangements within national systems to reduce reliance on project-only structures, simplify financial flows by reducing intermediaries and tailoring reporting systems to country capacities.

94. Projects anchored in enduring governance or legal frameworks achieved higher efficiency and sustainability. The Caribbean Biosafety Frameworks established national mechanisms for risk assessment and compliance that continued functioning after project closure, while Andean Biotrade initiatives used existing trade institutions to accelerate implementation. In India's True Value of Food Systems project, embedding activities in national research institutions and private-sector partnerships reduced transaction costs and built ownership. Such cases confirm that institutionalization with clear mandates, permanent staffing, and integrated safeguards reduces dependency on ad hoc project structures. Conversely, where projects operated as stand-alone entities, gains dissipated once external funding ended. The lesson for the NA-SP is that efficiency is best sustained when accountability is embedded in national or sectoral systems, allowing UNEP to act as facilitator rather than direct implementer.

95. **Positive examples of efficiency show strengths in responding to context and building local capacity.** Good practice examples, such as the Pacific Integrated Water Resources Management Project (IWRM), where compliance and approvals were clearly delineated, show that efficiency improves with transparent tracking, predictable release schedules, and portfolio-level risk visibility. Similarly, adaptation and innovation at the project level contribute to efficient results, despite design weaknesses. At the operational interface, many NA-SP projects displayed resilience and adaptability in responding to contextual shocks and bureaucratic constraints. Examples include post-hurricane recovery activities in Dominica, re-targeted youth and education campaigns during COVID-19, and the Pacific IWRM and COAST projects. Projects that employed performance-based disbursement thresholds or flexible expenditure rules were able to maintain implementation momentum even when institutional bottlenecks arose.

96. **Human resource, expertise and coordination are important assets but are at risk.** Efficiency was affected by shortages and high turnover at both project and regional levels. The evaluations noted recurring recruitment delays often extend to six months or more, especially in multi-country projects such as the Pacific NBSAPs and Caribbean Invasive Alien Species

initiatives. Small or temporary Project Management Units (PMUs) frequently struggled to manage large, complex portfolios, while institutionalization of posts beyond project closure was rare. With staff vacancies across the subprogramme, examples were found where the project management role was being handled by interns or consultants, with associated issues raised, particularly through partner interviews.

97. At headquarters, project managers were reported to juggle multiple projects with limited administrative support. For staff, there are currently vacancies in key positions and personnel in multiple and acting roles that stretch resources and leave implementation gaps. For example, at the time of the evaluation, the Marine and Freshwater Branch – critical for fragile ecosystems, had only four out of seven positions filled, the Freshwater and Wetlands Unit even fewer with five out of ten positions filled. The Economics of Nature Unit had three out of nine positions unfilled. Capacity constraints among national counterparts also affected implementation speed and quality, with the NA-SP often lacking the resources to provide hands-on technical or fiduciary support when weaknesses were identified.

98. The 2022 Delivery Model has led to more central decision-making and weakening RSPC authority and autonomy. Regional teams reported that project co-creation became a “tick-box” exercise after global designs were finalized, widening the disconnect between country needs and implementation. Divisional collaboration, particularly between the Law and Ecosystems Divisions, was described as ad hoc and event-driven, with weak incentives to share resources or planning.

E. Sustainability of NA-SP Results

99. The project ratings through the evaluations show moderate to high likelihood of sustainability, with average ratings by sustainability dimension and MTS period as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sustainability in NA-SP Evaluation by MTS period. (Average)

MTS Period	Overall Sustainability	Socio-political Sustainability	Financial Sustainability	Institutional Sustainability
MTS 2014-17	3.68	4.41	4.05	4.27
MTS 2018-21	3.84	4.32	4.00	3.95
MTS 2022-25	3.67	4.28	3.84	4.16

Source: UNEP Evaluation Office, Ratings Data, 2025. N=85. Rating scale: 6-Highly Satisfactory, 5-Satisfactory, 4-Moderately Satisfactory, 3-Moderately Unsatisfactory, 2-Unsatisfactory, 1, Highly Unsatisfactory.

100. Detailed analysis indicated that sustainability overall was strongest particularly when embedded in national frameworks or supported by strong partnerships. Financial sustainability is the lowest average rating across all MTS periods. Evidence from the evaluation analysis showed positive opportunities for sustainability across socio-political, financial, institutional and environmental sustainability dimensions with important gains, particularly where sustainability pathways were considered in project designs.

101. **Socio-Political Sustainability.** The evaluation analysis showed that NA-SP projects often were continued as a result of political commitment and stakeholder mobilization, but the extent of on-going support varied. For example, Uganda’s National Planning for Food Security project, sustainability was rated likely, as the government in Uganda integrated ecosystem management approaches into national planning. In Madagascar, the *EcoVillage project*

demonstrated strong political visibility and national buy-in, with the Ministries of Environment, Forestry, Water, and Agriculture embedding natural capital and eco-village models in local governance frameworks—indicating high socio-institutional ownership. Similarly, the *Global Peatlands Initiative Project* achieved sustained policy traction in countries such as Indonesia and Peru, where inter-ministerial peatland management frameworks were established under the Brazzaville Declaration, demonstrating strong regional and political alignment. In contrast, the evaluation in India showed weaker uptake, with lower than targeted integration into policies. The Environmental Learning Action in the Malopo–Nossob transboundary area highlighted that land tenure issues undermined socio-political sustainability in South Africa, despite strong community engagement. In caucus-based initiatives, environmental legislation was moved forward creating opportunity for long term legislative change, for instance, Colombia’s caucus supported sustainable agriculture and mining legal reforms.

102. **Financial Sustainability.** Several evaluations highlighted innovative resources for sustainability, but overall financial sustainability was often uncertain to ensure that necessary resources are available for on-going maintenance and/or further activities. The Andes Threatened Species project created local water funds financed by municipal contributions and user fees, which provided stable support in some sites (e.g., San Vicente de Chucuri, Colombia), but in others (e.g., Guasca) funds were legally insecure and undercapitalized. The Pacific IWRM project leveraged new national budget lines (Palau, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands) and on-going donor support to extend activities like watershed and septic system management. In Bosnia, financial sustainability for protected areas remained “moderately likely,” with recommendations to embed biodiversity conservation into national budgets and expand ecosystem accounting.

103. **Institutional Sustainability.** Institutional sustainability was strongest where NA-SP projects aligned with existing governance and policy frameworks. Several projects in the deep dives achieved significant institutional integration at national level. The TEEBAgriFood initiative in India embedded ecosystem valuation into ICAR curricula, IFS officer training, and centrally sponsored agricultural programmes, with IKEA financing ensuring continuity into Phase III. In Malaysia, TEEB results were incorporated into national biodiversity reporting and planning, showing how UNEP pilots can feed into NBSAP processes. The GBF Early Action project has already supported 65 countries to align NBSAPs with the new global framework, with systemic change evident in early submissions by Uganda and Nigeria. UNEP-FI, through its member-driven model, has sustained biodiversity integration in finance, ensuring institutional continuity beyond project cycles. The Pacific IWRM project institutionalized water efficiency and management strategies across Pacific Island countries, supported by capacity-building programmes and a regional Graduate Certificate in IWRM. In the *Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services Project*, institutional partnerships with Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), GFCR, and other multi-stakeholder initiatives ensured co-financing, technical support, and wider uptake of innovative practices. In the Deforestation-free Beef and Soy Market Transformation project, institutional sustainability was rated highly likely, since the initiative worked to mainstream processes into financial systems built on existing structures such as central banks and banking associations. In contrast, the Andes project evaluation found that there was limited investment in support services and reliance on NGOs with uncertain funding streams rather than embedding practices into government extension services. These cases illustrate that when UNEP pilots connect to government institutions, they have a higher chance of leaving behind durable institutional change.

104. **Environmental Sustainability.** Long-term environmental outcomes considered likely through NA-SP investments varied depending on the integration of climate and ecological risks. The Andes project evaluation assessed advances in watershed conservation and erosion control, helping mitigate GHGs and adapt to climate change, but maintenance arrangements were insufficient to secure sustainability. The Andes project contributed to forest and watershed conservation, improving carbon sequestration and water flows, but the project evaluators noted that climate change considerations had not been systematically integrated to protect against the likelihood of increasing environmental pressures.

105. In the Pacific IWRM project design was explicitly linked to adaptation to climate change, building in sustainability measures from the outset. Demonstration sites (e.g., Tuvalu's drought response project) equipped countries for longer-term climate resilience, while integration with PACC and R2R programmes created pathways for scaling up. Nonetheless, project evaluators warned that natural disasters such as cyclones could wipe out infrastructure gains, underscoring the fragility of environmental sustainability in SIDS.

106. The likelihood of sustained environmental change was strongest where community ownership and local relevance were built into project design. For example, marine and coastal small-grants projects empowered coastal communities to manage coral reef and mangrove restoration, creating stewardship that continued even after UNEP's direct support ended. Similarly, in Dominica, post-hurricane recovery projects addressed urgent resilience priorities and generated immediate environmental benefits, but these gains were fragile, as continuity depended on external donor funding rather than domestic institutionalization.

107. **Prospects to improve sustainability.** The deep dives show strong prospects for sustained change where UNEP projects have secured follow-on financing and embedded outputs in policy frameworks. Vanishing Treasures moved into a second phase (2024–2027), expanding to the Northern Andes while reinforcing work in Bhutan and Central Asia, backed by strong government ownership and scientific partnerships. The Global Peatlands Initiative Project similarly advanced into a ten-year strategic plan and Phase II proposals with AfDB financing and successfully anchored peatlands in NDCs and the Brazzaville Declaration. These cases suggest that catalytic UNEP interventions can translate into durable environmental and institutional outcomes when supported by long-term donor confidence and political uptake.

108. The Survey respondents emphasized that sustainability is strongest when projects align with national needs and priorities, build local ownership, and are embedded in policies, governance frameworks, and financing mechanisms. However, without addressing capacity gaps, practical implementation challenges, and UNEP's own systemic limitations, sustainability risks remain fragile and uneven across contexts.

109. By contrast, sustainability prospects were less certain in contexts with limited national absorption capacity or heavy reliance on voluntary participation. In Dominica, reforestation and resilience planning were embedded in national geospatial databases, but progress remains vulnerable to recurrent climate shocks and reliance on external donor funding. The Marine and Coastal Ecosystem project provided useful tools such as the MPA toolbox and blue economy frameworks, but fragmented portfolios and limited long-term financing constrained scaling. Similarly, the Environmental Treaties Programme advanced MEA coherence through DaRT and the Bern Process, yet national adoption of these tools has been uneven, with sustainability depending on voluntary uptake and small project teams

110. The survey results indicate that stakeholder engagement in project design varied, ranging from strong involvement of governments and academic partners to tokenistic

consultation, limited inclusion of indigenous groups, and constraints caused by short timelines. Where engagement was strongest, there was clearer evidence of alignment with objectives and readiness for implementation. In planning systems, multiple interviews described mainstreaming gains when UNEP paired global guidance with structured, multi-stakeholder processes. A comparatively lower rating for project design quality (2.4/6) relative to implementation effectiveness (4.5/6) suggests that initial project designs were not sufficiently aligned with local contexts or needs. Strengthening consultation with local partners and stakeholders during the design phase was identified as a key strategy to enhance contextual relevance and address this gap.

111. For the NA-SP, the lesson is that sustained environmental and institutional change requires a realistic project design, systematic embedding into government systems, predictable long-term financing, and mechanisms for institutionalizing knowledge products. Future programming should ensure that catalytic pilots are designed in close consultation with the local partners, with clear pathways to Phase II or integration into policy frameworks from the outset. Strengthening regional delivery capacity, creating incentives for country adoption of tools like DaRT, and securing diversified financing beyond donor cycles will be critical for NA-SP to ensure that its initiatives move beyond piloting into durable systemic change.

112. UNEP's portfolio often demonstrated practical benefits that enhanced sustainability. Projects linking conservation to livelihoods and service delivery such as improving farm productivity, reducing drought risks, or safeguarding water supply enjoyed stronger uptake. Applied research and monitoring also generated credibility, as illustrated by water lens protection in Majuro Atoll and ecosystem service valuation in Chiapas.

F. Gender, Youth and Inclusion

113. **Overall, the NA-SP's portfolio demonstrates progress in advancing inclusion.** The NA-SP projects do demonstrate positive results in stakeholder inclusion in general, with average ratings across all MTS periods being satisfactory (4.95, 4.32 and 5.00 out of 6 for each successive MTS period, respectively). However, the focus on human rights and gender was less clear. The evaluations did not consistently rate human rights and gender equality until the MTS 2018-2021. Thereafter the ratings are varied, averaging moderately satisfactory (3.95 for MTS 2018-2021 and 4.36 for MTS 2022-2025 with a rating out of 6). The detailed evaluation analysis identified that gender mainstreaming, youth engagement, education, and Indigenous peoples' participation has been identified in designs but performance has been generally superficial across projects and themes. While there are strong examples of inclusive approaches delivering tangible community benefits, inclusion overall remains fragmented and largely project driven. Gender and inclusion aspects are incorporated in project design as an integral part of the Prodoc process but reporting on outcomes remains inconsistent and the scale of benefits across the subprogramme is not adequately reflected by participation data. Gender mainstreaming has gained traction across the evaluated projects, with many including gender action plans and gender-disaggregated indicators.

114. Examples include the Pacific IWRM project, which provided gender-sensitive training for water user committees, and the Andes threatened species conservation project, which enhanced women's leadership in community monitoring (Box 3). However, implementation has often been treated as a compliance requirement rather than a transformative strategy. Systematic gender analysis and long-term equity strategies were rarely embedded, and monitoring of gender outcomes remained limited. Project evaluations reveal that inclusion is often treated as a compliance requirement in results frameworks to meet approval

requirements rather than the driving force that was expected in the NA-SP theory of change, particularly for youth networks. The subprogramme has fallen short of systematic implementation of approaches for inclusion in project workplans and budgets or of actively monitoring the successes or constraints to tangible benefits to women, youth, or marginalized communities in Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities or SIDS.

115. Mobilizing youth around awareness and advocacy has occurred sporadically. The Global Environmental Citizenship project fostered youth-led biodiversity campaigns in Latin America, while the Caribbean project Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (IWEco project) involved youth groups in coastal clean-ups and ecosystem education. These initiatives were able to build awareness and skills, but participation remained largely confined to outreach activities, with limited pathways for youth voices in environmental planning or institutional governance.

116. Environmental education and awareness-raising were prominent and often well executed features of the subprogramme portfolio in the past but is less predominant now. For instance, the Mekong River Basin project conducted school-based water conservation campaigns, while the African e-waste management initiative delivered training through vocational institutions to improve recycling practices. Such approaches supported behavioral change and knowledge-building but were rarely scaled to policy or curriculum levels, and systematic monitoring of education outcomes was limited. On the other hand, tailored approaches, such as the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge in India, demonstrated the potential for scaling youth-led advocacy, integrating environmental curricula into formal and non-formal education, and leveraging digital platforms to reach large audiences, leading to anchoring of global objectives into national and local contexts.

117. Disability inclusion remains the weakest dimension of UNEP's inclusion agenda. Few projects incorporated disability considerations. In the Mediterranean Marine Litter project, awareness campaigns were not adapted for accessibility, while in the West Africa ecosystem restoration project, engagement of vulnerable groups did not specify the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This gap highlights a significant area where UNEP lags behind international best practice on inclusive development.

118. Engagement with Indigenous communities represents a relative strength in the evaluation analysis but less in the current portfolio. The Amazon Basin biodiversity project partnered with Indigenous communities to integrate traditional knowledge into sustainable resource use, while the Arctic adaptation programme drew on Indigenous knowledge to monitor climate change impacts. These examples illustrate the value of rights-based approaches and traditional practices in strengthening project outcomes. However, engagement often depended on local partners, and safeguards were applied inconsistently across the portfolio. For example, in the Sustainable Management of Coastal and marine ecosystem services project, indigenous peoples' issues received less guidance during the first phase, though this is now being addressed more directly, with disaggregated data on Indigenous beneficiaries and a forthcoming UNEP report on Indigenous community management of coral reefs. While the new UNEP MTS has a stronger Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) language, translating this normative ambition into tangible projects and interventions remains a challenge.

119. Deep dive projects have embedded IPLC engagement in design, monitoring, and implementation, yet the degree of integration varies across initiatives and operational components. The Global Peatlands Initiative Project engaged IPLCs extensively from the outset,

ensuring near parity in authorship for the Global Peatlands Assessment and facilitating their participation in national and regional consultations. South-South exchanges and workshops further strengthened IPLC capacity and knowledge-sharing in the Congo Basin, linking community insights to regional policy agendas such as the Brazzaville Declaration.

120. The EcoVillage Madagascar project included local communities as active participants in agroecological interventions, restoration, and livelihood programs, incorporating traditional knowledge in decision-making and demonstrating tangible linkages between IPLC engagement and project outputs. TrueValue Accounting, AgriFood Systems (India) systematically collected data on IPLC participation in farming, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and community decision-making, integrating these findings into policy scenarios to highlight the role of traditional practices in sustainable agriculture. The Vanishing Treasures project supported IPLCs in mountain landscape governance, ensuring their inclusion in training, community-based conservation, and ecotourism initiatives, while projects such as Coastal Marine Ecosystem Services integrated IPLC perspectives in sustainable blue economy planning, benefit-sharing frameworks, and spatial management tools.

121. Despite these efforts, challenges remain. IPLC inclusion is often project-specific rather than institutionalized, limiting scaling and integration into national policy processes. Monitoring frameworks rarely track IPLC participation systematically, and reporting often overlooks local knowledge contributions. Capacity-building and engagement rely heavily on motivated staff or partner organizations, and political, land-use, or legal constraints can restrict the effectiveness of community-based approaches. Strengthening IPLC inclusion requires systematically embedding their participation across all stages of project design, implementation, and monitoring. UNEP should establish dedicated IPLC indicators, integrate traditional knowledge into reporting and adaptive management systems, and link community engagement to policy, planning, and financing decisions. Expanding co-designed knowledge platforms and cross-project exchanges will enhance IPLC agency, ensure continuity, and improve the sustainability and equity of Nature Action outcomes.

122. **SIDS and remote areas.** The evaluations highlighted several lessons from NA-SP work in SIDS. For example, the Small Island Developing States renewable energy project effectively improved energy access for remote and low-income households, and the South Asia mangrove rehabilitation project targeted poor fishing families for livelihood diversification that assisted with mangrove protection initiatives through ensuring economic benefits to local communities whilst protecting the critical natural resources on which they depend.

123. The Dominica Hurricane Maria Resilience project actively engaged farmers, women's cooperatives, and the indigenous Kalinago community in sustainable land management and reforestation, embedding monitoring into national geospatial databases. However, recurrent climate shocks and dependence on external funding limited continuity beyond the project cycle.

124. Similarly, the Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services project worked with community and indigenous groups on coral reef and mangrove management, feeding lessons into UNEA and Regional Seas frameworks, but the benefits remained unevenly distributed and highly dependent on donor pipelines. The IWEco Caribbean project demonstrated youth and community engagement through coastal clean-ups and environmental education, but without pathways into policy or governance roles. These experiences highlight both the opportunities and fragility of inclusion in SIDS: projects generate visible community benefits, but impacts are rarely institutionalised. While impactful, these initiatives were typically donor- or project team-driven and not part of a systemic national framework approach that would provide a pathway

to scaling up results. A common issue was the realistic issue in SIDS of absorptive capacity of government and the need for tailored support to each country.

125. There are opportunities to link community-based activities to national budget lines and resilience funds, ensuring that projects efforts are maintained. Structured South-South exchanges among Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean island states could replicate successful models, such as the youth campaign under the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge in the Caribbean and eco-village governance in Madagascar, could assist isolated project gains connect and lead into durable, systemic change.

Box 3. Insights from the Deep Dives – Gender and Inclusion

UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme has advanced women's engagement in project activities, though integration remains uneven and project-dependent. Where gender is embedded in project design and monitoring, outcomes are stronger.

The *EcoVillage Madagascar* model applied an integrated, gender-responsive approach combining restoration, agroforestry, watershed rehabilitation, and livelihoods. Across 18 pilot villages, women held 40–50% of leadership and training roles, directly linked to improved restoration and livelihood outcomes. *Environmental Education and Youth (EEY)* achieved over 70% female participation in youth-led campaigns, environmental challenges, and digital platforms. *The Vanishing Treasures project* promoted women's leadership in conservation governance, sustainable tourism, and community-level training. *The Coastal Marine Ecosystem Services project* strongly mainstreamed gender from the outset, with dedicated indicators and activities focusing on strengthening women's roles in natural resource management, producing a report on gender mainstreaming in coastal management, and providing global examples. Beyond gender, it embedded broader equity and benefit-sharing considerations in blue economy and spatial planning tools.

In India, the *TrueValue Accounting–AgriFood Systems (TEEBAgriFood) project* systematically integrated gender into policy scenarios and budgeting, assessing impacts on women and indigenous groups. It generated sex-disaggregated data and collaborated with UN Women to enhance women's participation in Farmer-Producer Organizations and agribusiness systems. *The Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) project* embedded gender equality and inclusivity from the design stage, achieving near parity in authorship for the Global Peatlands Assessment and maintaining sex-disaggregated data collection across activities. *The Environmental Treaties Programme* supported gender and inclusivity in MEA implementation, guiding NBSAP gender roadmaps for Lao PDR and Myanmar and producing CBD gender-mainstreaming guidance materials.

Strengthening gender indicators, embedding women's leadership in decision-making, and ensuring systematic reporting would enhance inclusivity and effectiveness across Nature Action interventions.

G. Monitoring, Feedback Loops and Knowledge Building

126. Evaluation evidence points demonstrate that monitoring, reporting, and knowledge management remain among the NA-SPs weakest functions. Further, interview respondents consistently described fragmented systems, one-way reporting flows, and overreliance on individual initiative rather than institutionalized mechanisms. While some projects and partnerships demonstrate structured monitoring or adaptive learning, these remain the exception rather than the norm.

127. A recurring theme was the absence of feedback loops. RSPCs highlighted that knowledge largely flows upwards from the field to headquarters, with little or no feedback

returning to the regions. Similarly, in India's True Value of Food Systems project, country teams collected detailed, gender-segregated field data that fed into global monitoring frameworks, but staff had no access to consolidated dashboards or regular feedback on how their inputs contributed to overall indicators. This disconnect has limited the opportunities for adaptive management and alignment with the MTS.

128. Interviewees stressed knowledge management, synthesis of lessons, and lesson-sharing platforms as essential for scaling and replication as a part of the theory of change and not simply as an activity or project component. However, the evaluation found that fragmented monitoring and results-based management systems, including dual PIR/IPMR reporting for GEF projects, and insufficient resources to gather the required data hinder timely decision-making and institutional learning across the subprogramme. Regional Subprogramme Coordinators (RSPCs) were rarely involved in strategic processes, limiting the feedback loop between field operations and global planning, and weakening alignment between subprogramme objectives, reducing opportunities for partnership and resource leverage, lowering the profile of UNEP and the subprogramme at regional and country level.

129. Biodiversity governance workshops under the APCME project were a formal channel for incorporating feedback from countries and partners into UNEP's knowledge base. Yet follow-up was typically limited to webinars, and no mechanism existed to track how lessons were integrated into NBSAP processes. Interviews pointed to the absence of structured cross-divisional platforms to ensure thematic continuity or knowledge transfer when staff rotate or depart.

130. Good practice examples were identified. The ESP was repeatedly cited as an example of a project deliberately designed around a "virtuous cycle": close contact with MEA secretariats, UNEP divisions, and national focal points, with lessons feeding directly into the next phase of activity. Similarly, the India TEEB project introduced weekly and six-monthly reporting cycles, linked field-level monitoring to global frameworks, and integrated learning's from earlier project phases into design adjustments. However, even in these cases, interviewees stressed that knowledge management remained heavily reliant on committed individuals and informal exchanges, rather than systematic institutional structures.

131. Monitoring and reporting are activity-focused rather than results- or impact-oriented. Respondents across One Health and Nature & Health projects observed that indicators in the Programme of Work are "very general" and do not capture the substance of what is being delivered, leaving reporting misaligned with outcomes. UNEP's heavy emphasis on short-term reporting cycles undermines adaptive learning for long-term issues such as biodiversity mainstreaming or One Health integration.

132. Despite comprehensive monitoring systems, feedback loops from projects remain limited. Reporting challenges arise from dual reporting requirements within UNEP; the Project Implementation Report (PIR) and the Integrated Project Management Report (IPMR) require duplicative data entry and occasionally result in inconsistencies or outdated information. Discussions with project managers and the survey results highlight the heavy reporting burden that detracts from time investment in implementation. The frequency and duplication of effort is seen as counterproductive rather than a valuable avenue for management information and is likely to contribute to data inaccuracies as reporting is rushed and not prioritized.

133. Survey respondents also identified monitoring and reporting as a systemic weakness across the NA-SP projects. They cited fragmented and overlapping reporting requirements from different financing and partner agencies, leading to duplication, redundant systems, and

inconsistent formats. Weak data quality, insufficient staff and technical capacity, inadequate data systems, and limited training were recurrent challenges.

134. **Knowledge management emerged as a critical cross-cutting weakness.** A common theme across interviews is that UNEP is strongest at the strategic and meta level. Respondents consistently emphasized UNEP's comparative advantage in developing global tools, guidelines, and processes that help countries align their NBSAPs with the KM-GBF. The ESP, for instance, was specifically designed to fast-track alignment between GBF and NBSAPs. Interviewees credited its smooth delivery to frequent networking activities, experienced GEF task management, and structured communication with ministries of environment. One team member explained how UNEP worked with Nicaragua's Ministry of Environment to prepare its own alignment exercise internally, rather than outsourcing consultants, thereby retaining capacity within the ministry. This was presented as an example of effective, country-tailored support (See also Box 4).

135. Beyond such structured initiatives, however, most biodiversity-related work at the regional level was described as ad hoc. RSPCs reported that new projects often had to generate baseline data and knowledge from scratch because no long-term monitoring frameworks existed. This weakens continuity and undermines the ability of NBSAPs to demonstrate progress over time. Similar concerns were raised in relation to UNEP's limited engagement at country level. The extent of engagement at country level is largely driven through projects and therefore have an operational rather than strategic and normative engagement. Projects that work with a group of countries and provide support and south-south networking seem to have a higher profile at country level and better linkage into national systems. Regional officers are seen as important to link between projects and wider national concerns. GRID-Arendal and other partners noted that UNEP often ends up competing with UNDP or IUCN for operational-level projects, despite being better placed to provide strategic guidance rather than direct implementation due to the lack of engagement in national planning and UN-related coordinated approaches that are relevant to the NA-SP.

136. The Law Division's workshops under the Advancing the Principles of Cooperation among Multilateral Environmental Agreements (APCME) project were cited as one of the few formal mechanisms through which country partners provide feedback into UNEP's knowledge base. Regional sessions in West Africa and the Pacific, involving MEA secretariats and the GEF Secretariat, allowed participants to adapt UN-developed tools to their national contexts. Yet follow-up was typically limited to webinars, with no systematic mechanism to track whether workshop lessons were integrated into national planning or reporting. This gap was widely recognized as reducing the relevance of UNEP's contributions to actual NBSAP implementation.

137. There were also positive examples of country-level influence. In India, respondents described how UNEP's food systems work contributed to NBSAP priorities through UN Common Framework approaches. Malaysia was highlighted as an example where UNEP's pilot initiatives were directly used to strengthen national reporting to the CBD, while in Brazil biodiversity-agriculture linkages supported ministries to integrate biodiversity into planning processes. Ghana was cited as another case where UNEP's Nature for Health tools informed national environment-health policy. These examples demonstrate that when UNEP projects are well aligned with country priorities and supported by strong partnerships, they can feed directly into NBSAP processes. Despite these achievements, respondents were clear that UNEP's support remains poorly documented and fragmented. Pilot project results are not systematically captured against NBSAP indicators, making it difficult for countries to demonstrate progress to

the CBD. Monitoring and reporting systems remain activity-focused and are not sufficiently linked to national biodiversity targets.

138. Respondents consistently highlighted one-way information flows from the field to headquarters, limited feedback loops, and the absence of a structured repository or handover process. New staff reportedly navigate their roles largely through personal networks rather than institutional guidance, while project staff in India indicated that they rarely receive consolidated monitoring data back from headquarters to inform adaptive management.

139. Several respondents reflected on the loss of earlier accessible knowledge platforms. For example, the TEEBWeb site was recalled as a “one-stop shop” where outputs and lessons were easily accessed; after migration into UNEP’s corporate site, information became scattered and less user-friendly. This shift was seen as a decline in ability to maintain central, usable knowledge hubs. Partners noted that project monitoring and evaluation remained highly project-bounded, with little contribution analysis or portfolio-level synthesis to reflect UNEP’s added value.

Box 4. Insights from the Deep Dives on Knowledge Management

Knowledge management in the Nature Action Subprogramme (NA-SP) has effectively generated and consolidated evidence for adaptive management, policy influence, and cross-sectoral learning. Projects such as Madagascar’s EcoVillage, EEY in India, Coastal and marine ecosystem services Project, GPI project, Vanishing Treasures, UN-REDD, and the Environmental Treaties Programme (DaRT) exemplify this. Initiatives ranged from mapping PIR indicators to NA-SP outcomes (EcoVillage) and gamified tracking (EEY) to Reef Plus and MPA toolboxes (Coastal and Marine project), the Global Peatlands Assessment and Congo Basin knowledge system (GPI Project), economic case studies and storytelling (Vanishing Treasures), and AI-enabled forest finance dashboards (UN-REDD/CFU). Together, these have enhanced evidence-based planning and cross-regional learning.

However, systemic weaknesses persist. Reporting duplication increases workload, while the absence of institutional repositories risks knowledge loss post-closure. Capacity gains often depend on individuals rather than systems, and platforms such as Reef Plus or DaRT remain project-specific with limited uptake. Cross-divisional learning is minimal, AI and digital tools are underused, and language barriers reduce accessibility.

To strengthen learning, NA-SP should institutionalize subprogramme- and country-level repositories, harmonize reporting, and embed structured feedback loops. Involving local partners in design and monitoring (EcoVillage, EEY) can sustain institutional memory. Current efforts in UNEP to expand dashboards, multilingual products, and AI tools will improve access and integration. Knowledge outputs should explicitly link to policy and finance decisions. Finally, bridging divisional silos, empowering regional offices, and allocating communication resources will enhance visibility, usability, and long-term impact.

140. Building on these gaps, UNEP has now established a Knowledge Management Task Force, which is developing a new strategy to systematize classification, tagging, and storage of documents and knowledge products. The task force has begun consolidating over 280 project websites into a unified platform, improving taxonomy and searchability, and introducing quality control processes for publications. It is also piloting tools including an Excel-based tracker and

a planned AI-supported online database to assess how UNEP knowledge products are being used by policymakers and stakeholders, producing an “impact matrix” to guide learning and adaptive management. In parallel, divisions are mapping what knowledge they generate to ensure alignment with organizational needs, and in-house systems (e.g., within the Ecosystems Division) are being strengthened to support new managers with operational briefings and repositories. This work is expected to evolve into a UNEP-wide system, aimed at ensuring consistency, accessibility, and impact of UNEP’s knowledge products.

H. Factors Affecting Subprogramme Results

141. Overall, the evaluation highlights a consistent pattern in which institutional arrangements, partnerships, and funding modalities strongly shape delivery under the NA-SP, while weak internal systems, particularly monitoring, knowledge management, and communications, undermine coherence and scaling potential.

142. Institutional level reforms and changing arrangements have affected the structure of NA-SP delivery but committed, adhoc implementation continues to underpin positive results.

Throughout the evaluation period, institutional changes such as restructuring and the PCPs introduced additional layers of complexity without resolving fundamental inefficiencies. Despite changes in strategic language in the MTS and PoW, structural and delivery model changes, results have continued largely through adaptive management and strong personal relationships, rather than through robust systems. This reliance on informal mechanisms is also evident in coordination across subprogrammes, where effective integration tends to occur case-by-case, with duplication and gaps emerging in areas such as elephants, chemicals, or climate. Internal challenges involve staff turnover and data gaps, while external risks relate to political commitment and financing stability.

143. Partnerships stand out as a central strength and the backbone of UNEP’s delivery model.

Where partnerships are strong, the collaboration between the subprogramme and partner teams is highly instrumental in design, implementation, adapting to contexts and in recording results. These partnerships build credibility for the subprogramme (or at least the specific projects, given the low profile of the NA-SP itself). Partnerships provide an opportunity to foster innovation, and create entry points for future work at global, regional, and national levels. The evaluation ratings data show a largely positive assessment of partnerships through country ownership and national drive in implementation, with ratings of moderately satisfactory for each subsequent MTS period (4.54, 4.00 and 4.28, respectively). There is no specific evaluation rating for partnerships but evaluations consistently highlight good practices such as the Ninh Hai Coral Reef Management Project in Vietnam that was part of a broader, transboundary China Sea Initiative and that engaged with multiple partnerships. The Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem – Regional Component (MedPartnership) was an example of support for a larger-scale strategic partnership under the Barcelona Convention to promote biodiversity conservation and integrated coastal zone management protocols across multiple partners.

144. However, interview evidence shows that often partnerships are driven by individual staff efforts and that UNEP’s structures and coordination mechanisms are not consistently effective in supporting NA-SP delivery. The majority of respondents emphasized weak regional headquarters linkages and ad hoc cross-divisional collaboration. At the same time, positive examples, including the ESP project, and the GRID-Arendal partnership, illustrate UNEP’s potential when coordination is structured, roles are clear, and mechanisms for portfolio management are in place. Similarly, cooperation with MEAs demonstrates UNEP’s unique

convening role through the NA-SP, but collaboration remains fragmented, ad hoc, and overly dependent on personal networks. Structured, system-wide platforms are only beginning to emerge and remain fragile.

145. Vertical funds (GEF, GCF, AF) are important for piloting normative products and have the potential to enable scaled impact. The funds are moving towards programmatic “parent and child” projects that are linked and have a stronger focus on measurable results, sustainability and knowledge management. These are also valuable directions for the NA-SP but may generate tension for the subprogramme on whether to adjust its operational priorities to the current priorities of GEF and the respective Member States. The current pragmatic course of the partnership is to engage in dialogue at the design stage and agree on common priorities. This is likely to continue and the subprogramme needs to work closely with vertical funds. Early consultation becomes even more important to focus priorities on combined objectives with high likelihood of success and potential for scaling.

146. The GEF remains the single most important external driver for the NA-SP as a key financial mechanism that supports countries to fulfil respective MEAs obligations. This support has enabled UNEP to work with countries to achieve significant geographic and thematic reach on complementary objectives. However, it also makes the Subprogramme operationally sensitive to shifts in GEF strategic direction, replenishment cycles, and operational modalities for countries. For example, UNEP has successfully aligned projects such as GBF Early Action Support and the Environmental Treaties Programme with GEF priorities, allowing for direct contributions to support countries with NBSAP implementation and MEA coherence. The Global Peatlands Initiative Project and Vanishing Treasures also benefited from GEF’s willingness to support innovative, multi-country pilots. Yet, while GEF investments are central to delivery, they are insufficient to cover the institutional backbone of the Subprogramme: staffing for coordination, knowledge management, monitoring, and communications and these often remain under-resourced, leaving systemic gaps.

147. The strategic partnership with GEF is therefore both a strength and a risk. On the one hand, the subprogramme’s technical credibility and convening power ensure that it remains a valued partner, particularly in areas like MEA synergies, biodiversity finance, and normative guidance. On the other hand, the NA-SP’s close partnership with GEF means that strategic direction is strongly shaped by external priorities, with less flexibility for the subprogramme to drive its own agenda.

148. The NA-SP has progressively deepened its engagement with the private sector, shifting from ad-hoc, CSR-type collaboration toward more strategic, systems-oriented partnerships that leverage business capabilities, finance, and supply-chain influence. Evaluations over time show an increasing and shifting range of initiatives in partnership with private sector. Major consumer-goods companies (e.g., PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, Danone, Unilever, Coca-Cola), agriculture-linked firms such as Starbucks and Bunge, and financial actors like JPMorgan Chase and Circulate Capital increasingly participate with UNEP not only as contributors but as co-implementers and investors, particularly in areas such as circular economy, plastics value chains, sustainable commodities, and blended-finance arrangements. These partnerships offer substantial opportunities for scaling impact: businesses help shift market practices. For the NA-SP, the main support as part of UNEP–FI has been the engagement with finance and insurance sectors, for instance with FI as co-founder of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures launched the “TNFD” framework, which sets out a detailed but as yet voluntary process to help private sector and financial organisations review and report on nature-related risks and opportunities and integrate findings into business and financial planning.

149. The UNEP-FI published a high-level financial sector roadmap for aligning financial flows with the KM-GBF, with the objective to support and enable all interested actors within the financial landscape to build action on nature in line with the KM-GBF's 23 targets for action by 2030. The roadmap proposed recommendations for all actors within the financial landscape such as finance ministries, financial supervisory entities, public development banks, private financial institutions, investors on integrating the KM-GBF targets within their policies and decision-making processes. This has the potential to extend NA-SP's reach into global supply chains, mobilize voluntary capital investment and promote innovation in biodiversity beyond public-sector resources.

150. These opportunities also entail potential reputational and operational risks for UNEP that are already identified in UNEP's partnership policy. Risks include potential perceptions of undue corporate influence, misalignment between profit motives and environmental objectives, and risks of partnering with companies whose environmental practices may be contested. The evaluations demonstrated that private sector partnerships can become fragmented where communication processes do not align with private sector expectations, particularly between technical teams, communications units, and project offices. As the NA-SP works on multi-stakeholder platforms, including public-private coalitions, communication about partnership objectives, expectations, and long-term value propositions can be inconsistent, which reduces mutual trust or clarity with corporate partners. Publicly available information reinforces these patterns: UNEP FI stresses the need for structured engagement frameworks; UNEP's circular economy and plastics initiatives demonstrate the value of transparent reporting mechanisms; and recent global processes (e.g., Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution) show growing reliance on business coalitions alongside heightened scrutiny from civil society. Delays in implementation can lead to disengagement of private sector, despite initial interest. The normative role of the NA-SP requires strong due-diligence processes, transparency in partner selection, and clear safeguards to avoid conflicts of interest as well as a shift towards more effective communications. Overall, the NA-SP's private-sector engagement represents an important opportunity for systemic transformation particularly in market and finance systems provided UNEP maintains robust safeguard, communication, and accountability mechanisms to protect its neutrality and credibility.

151. Strengthening institutionalized platforms for cross-divisional work, ensuring meaningful regional engagement, and embedding systematic knowledge feedback loops will be essential for the NA-SP to move beyond reliance on personal goodwill and deliver more coherent and impactful results. Competition for limited resources and UNEP's relatively low in-country presence risk the potential to capitalize on the NA-SP's potential to contribute effectively in national development processes. There is a tension in efforts to engage in collective action with the UN system. Collaboration with UNCTs is promising but constrained by resources, weak communications, and overstretched Regional Offices.

152. Support to NBSAP implementation is progressing positively with the subprogramme contributing strategic tools, guidelines, and capacity-building, while GEF investments support national institutions. However, weak knowledge management, ad hoc follow-up, and insufficient resources limit systematic uptake and scaling. An opportunity lies in leveraging strategic partnerships and biodiversity finance mechanisms to align with country priorities and strengthen institutional capacity through focused thematic multi-country designs supporting countries with a common concern that also consider national context-specific priorities.

Influence of external drivers, assumptions, and risks

153. The 2022–2025 NA-SP theory of change sets out the enabling conditions under which UNEP's Nature Action portfolio can contribute to outcomes across biodiversity policy, institutional strengthening and restoration. It identifies explicit assumptions, drivers, and risks, representing a positive evolution from earlier MTS periods in which these elements were less clearly articulated. This section briefly summarizes the extent to which these have influenced the subprogramme and identifies key areas of risks that need to be considered for the next MTS.

154. **Continuing and growing commitment to biodiversity.** The NA-SP assumes that governments and private-sector partners remain committed to biodiversity goals and continue integrating GBF targets and NBSAPs into national planning frameworks. Similarly, there is an expectation that multistakeholder platforms such as government, civil society, academia, local communities and youth movements remain willing to collaborate and will adopt and drive nature-positive approaches facilitated by NA-SP guidance. In general, this has been demonstrated through widespread engagement in subprogramme initiatives. While UNEP's credibility is strong, the evaluation shows uneven commitment that is strongly driven by resource availability. Engagement with governments and partners remains highly context dependent. The neutrality, convening influence, and coordination platforms are a major influence in securing commitment that needs to be further fostered in the next MTS period.

155. **Political fragility and governance risks.** The NA-SP theory of change assumed that political environments would remain stable. The results from evaluations and deep dives clearly highlighted the high risks of political and government change on the performance of projects and also the potential for long term change where political and government support was stable and continued. Political instability and policy discontinuity are particularly of concern for the NA-SP because sustained nature action depends on governments embedding biodiversity commitments into national development frameworks. Shifts in political will, contested land/resource governance, or weak institutional capacity undermines implementation and reduces the tangible outcomes. The NA-SP cannot influence such risks but can be alert to where they are affecting subprogramme implementation. The limited country-level engagement of the subprogramme, staffing constraints, and coordination difficulties constrain the ability of the subprogramme to be highly responsive to changes. The regional coordination roles are therefore critical for the subprogramme to be aware of regime risks and potential governance shifts that may affect subprogramme operations.

156. **Positive advances in market, finance and policy drivers.** Expanding nature-related risk disclosure frameworks such as the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures, ESG standards and blended-finance mechanisms are encouraging governments and companies to account for biodiversity in decision-making. Major finance and commodity sector actors (e.g., JPMorgan Chase, Circulate Capital, Bunge, PepsiCo, Unilever) are increasingly participating in nature-action platforms, reinforcing market drivers for change and potentially influencing wider uptake of biodiversity action, albeit with risks that need to be carefully managed.

157. **Youth and NGO engagement as a key driver is evident in several key initiatives but is not systematic at the subprogramme level.** Projects like the Global Peatlands Initiative, and Regional Seas networks demonstrate how cross-sector alliances can drive policy change, knowledge exchange and shared investment. These alliances act as a critical driver for scaling and institutional uptake of nature-based solutions and need to be closely coordinated, although the evaluation finds that collaboration is still more personality-driven than institutionalized and there are resourcing risks that need to be discussed with current partners to ensure effective risk management. Youth-led digital activism increases public visibility of nature crises, creating pressure for policy action and strengthening societal demand for transformative biodiversity

interventions. Youth initiatives such as Tide Turners Plastic Challenge, We Are Nature, and regional environmental education alliances have the potential to act as a strong inter-generational behavioral and political driver, but the NA-SP has had marginal engagement in driving or scaling up these initiatives during the last MTS period. Multi-stakeholder Alliances and Coalitions Partnerships between governments, MEAs, NGOs, local communities, academia, and private sector actors increasingly shape ecosystem governance and create pathways for collective action.

158. Digital Transformation and Data Systems. Accelerating developments in digital technologies including geospatial monitoring, big-data analytics, AI, digital collaboration platforms was seen as a driving force for the NA-SP. There are positive signs in UNEP's emerging data architecture, particularly reshaping how ecosystem data is analyzed, reported and used for decision-making. Digital transformation has the potential to serve as a major driver of cost-effective monitoring and supports compliance with GBF and MEA reporting requirements. Effective nature action depends on robust monitoring of ecosystems, biodiversity, and policy progress. Yet systemic subprogramme challenges around data availability, comparability, and timeliness constrain evidence-based management and global reporting. For NA-SP, this weakens the capacity to measure results, identify risks early, and build the case for scaling and replication. Unless addressed rapidly, the NA-SP risks falling behind and losing relevance in the current context. The evaluation notes UNEP-wide moves toward improved knowledge management and AI-enabled analytics are commencing, which, if embedded effectively, can significantly enhance NA-SP performance but this needs a proactive approach across the whole sub-programme rather than sporadic and disconnected efforts in projects.

159. Financial risks and uncertainty. The NA-SP is heavily resourced through vertical funds and is also vulnerable to current trends in reductions of voluntary and earmarked contributions. Without strong national visibility and coherent UN collaboration, nature action risks being overshadowed by larger agencies or fragmented across multiple initiatives. This creates uncertainty for long-term ecosystem and biodiversity interventions, where continuity is essential. The short donor cycles contribute to fragmented results but are a subprogramme reality that needs a stronger knowledge-based approach to justify the investment of resources in more coherent approaches towards subprogramme objectives. While efforts towards more coordinated, common thematic approaches are promising, rising competition for resources may constrain efforts for more coherent funding. This requires the subprogramme to place more emphasis on promoting the results and benefits of linking resources into projects that have stronger likelihood of scalable and sustainable results.

160. Climate shocks and systemic environmental change. As part of UNEP's response to the "triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste"), NA-SP projects operate in ecosystems that are highly vulnerable to climate extremes and ecological tipping points and carry major risks to biodiversity. Rapid environmental change can overwhelm adaptive management capacities and erode conservation gains, requiring stronger resilience-building in project design. This means that the gains achieved through projects are subject to risks of deterioration. Knowledge management and continuing communication through partners is important to be able to collect data on gains that are maintained, how and to what extent to build knowledge on innovations and practices that assist member states in efforts to address these risks.

III. CONCLUSIONS

A. Summary of Responses to Key Evaluation Questions

KEQ 1. Institutional Arrangements & Line of Sight from Results to Delivery

161. Institutional arrangements have been overall inefficient, with UNEP reforms not fundamentally altering delivery, though disruptions did occur when subprogramme structures were shifted. Delivery continues to rely heavily on personal relationships rather than formal systems. The analysis of evaluated projects shows that project design quality is often rated as weak but is offset by higher ratings in adaptive and strong project-level management, contributing to broadly satisfactory performance. The Programme Coordination Projects (PCPs) were considered by interviewed project staff and partners to bring added complexity to operations and reporting, creating additional design, approval, and reporting requirements that were perceived as onerous. Resource flows are constrained by slow budget committee processes, with cash disbursements taking up to eight months, thus compressing implementation time, particularly for shorter projects. While strategic and operational approaches are beginning to strengthen coherence by connecting small initiatives to broader impact pathways, monitoring at the subprogramme level remains poor and inconsistent. Increasingly complex designs (beyond GEF and specific donor-driven projects) demand higher expertise in adaptive, facility-type programmatic approaches.

KEQ 2. Ownership, Coordination & Synergies across Subprogrammes

162. Active coordination across UNEP divisions occurs sporadically, depending on individual initiatives, as there are no systematic mechanisms to share information across divisions, apart from PCP Steering Committee membership. Feedback on the coordination mechanisms that do exist is positive but interviews across the NA-SP highlighted that there was a range of duplication and gaps, for example in elephant conservation and management, chemicals, or climate change work. Many projects operate in silos, with limited day-to-day interaction across divisions. Cross-divisional coordination is often triggered only through mechanisms like GEF reviews or thematic alignment. E.g., the Dominica project had limited Climate Change Division involvement despite climate resilience components. Where active coordination does occur, it is usually effective but still largely dependent on individual relationships. PCP steering committee and monthly branch meetings exist but are insufficient to ensure technical coherence, while thematic or nexus-style exchanges could help improve cross-branch collaboration. Strategic programmes such as One Health and Early Support have demonstrated their potential as effective integration vehicles. However, reporting tends to remain activity- or output-focused, making it difficult to assess progress towards higher-level outcomes. Furthermore, mandatory reporting requirements, combined with fragmented reporting systems (PIR/IPMR), and limited interoperability, reduce efficiency and constrain the effective use of reporting outputs for knowledge management, adaptation and decision-making. Resource constraints will continue to hinder stronger coordination unless UNEP finds more effective ways to leverage internal networks and strengthen technical partnerships.

KEQ 3. Partnerships & Networks (Prioritization, Synergy, Innovation)

163. Partnerships remain a core strength of UNEP's delivery model, with internal and external collaborations fostering both synergy and innovation. UNEP's strong global profile enhances its credibility, but sustaining this depends on visible, applied innovation and presence at regional and country levels. Evaluations consistently note positive, participatory partnership management. However, knowledge generation and management are weak, limiting replication

and scaling potential. As funding tightens, competition among partners is increasing, which poses risks for the NA-SP given UNEP's non-resident status and relatively low in-country visibility. Strengthening regional and national partnerships, particularly by supporting capacity development of partners, will be key to maintaining UNEP's credibility and reinforcing impact pathways.

KEQ 4. Role of Vertical Funds (GEF, GCF, AF) for NA-SP

164. Vertical funds remain essential for enabling partnerships, piloting normative products in-country, and delivering scaled benefits. At times, tensions emerge in aligning NA-SP priorities with GEF funding strategies, but alignment is most effective when based on long-term, strategic partnerships. While vertical funding tends to be more rigid and compartmentalized, NA-SP is increasingly moving towards integrated and complex approaches that require flexibility. With funding becoming scarcer, UNEP may need to adopt dual modes of operation: one track focused on vertical fund delivery, and another on SP-led priorities of integration and learning. Although these approaches have different success metrics and expectations, they can be managed as complementary when handled strategically.

KEQ 5. Collective Action with UN RC System, UNCTs, and EMG

165. Engagement with UNCTs is relatively limited, but when it occurs, it is generally successful, though constrained by resource and implementation limitations. A key challenge in responding to requests from UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) is the limited availability of flexible resources and staff capacity at the UNEP corporate level, combined with uneven understanding across UNEP divisions of the technical support needs and response capacities required. This is partly due to the reliance on extrabudgetary funding for many staff positions, which limits flexibility to respond to emerging country-level demands. Regional offices are closer to countries and understand local political, cultural, and institutional contexts, but the 2022 Delivery Model Policy has reduced their operational role, in favor of more intelligence gathering and representative roles. The RSPCs play a vital connecting role but are overstretched, leaving country-level engagement as the weakest link. Weak communication channels further reduce UNEP's visibility, coherence, and capacity for internal learning. Projects with strong communications investments as part of project design, resourcing, implementation and monitoring are better positioned to raise profile, coordinate internally, and share lessons widely. However, projects without such resources often struggle, particularly given declining corporate support and constraints to the extent that Regional Offices can deliver required support.

KEQ 6. Cooperation & Synergies Among Biodiversity-related MEAs and Other MEAs

166. The NA-SP has contributed significantly to cross-MEA cooperation through normative guidance, global convening power, and capacity building, strengthening UNEP's reputation as an effective convener that links biodiversity to wider MEA agendas. UNEP has leveraged structured tools and strategic partnerships to enhance synergies across biodiversity-related MEAs. Platforms such as DART and the Bern Process enable national focal points and MEA secretariats to coordinate reporting, track implementation, and share knowledge. Initiatives like the Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) Project and Vanishing Treasures have leveraged partnerships with MEAs, UN agencies, and research institutions to generate evidence that informs both national strategies and global conventions. Collaborations with academic institutions and regional workshops facilitated technical support and South-South exchanges, enhancing the uptake of biodiversity knowledge at national and regional levels. Nonetheless, cooperation remains fragmented and often reliant on informal networks or personal initiative.

Regional contributions are insufficiently integrated into global processes, and challenges remain in linking country-level outcomes to MEA targets. Emerging structured platforms for system wide knowledge sharing are positive but face issues of limited access and uncertain sustainability. Moreover, monitoring frameworks do not clearly connect country level project results to global MEA objectives. While cross divisional collaboration exists, particularly at regional level when a need is recognized, it lacks consistent orchestration globally.

KEQ 7. Support to NBSAP Implementation & Scaling (Including Finance Platforms)

167. UNEP primarily supports NBSAPs at the strategic level through tools, guidelines, and capacity building (e.g., via KMGBF and APCME), complemented by GEF investments that strengthen national institutions. Projects like Madagascar's EcoVillage/True Value Accounting illustrate this approach by mapping PIR indicators to NA-SP outcomes and tracking gender-disaggregated participation, directly linking project results to NBSAP priorities. The Environmental Treaties Programme provides support to countries through tools such as DaRT and through UNEP's convening and secretariat role in Party-led processes such as the Bern Process that is implemented in cooperation with MEA Secretariats and recognised in COP decisions. Apart from this, UNEP corporate tools such as the *Meltwater* media monitoring platform support wider institutional monitoring and communication, contributing indirectly to policy coherence. The GPI and Vanishing Treasures projects demonstrate how flagship projects can produce evidence, economic case studies, and policy-ready knowledge that inform national planning and landscape-level strategies. However, integration and scaling of NBSAP support remain uneven. Ad hoc feedback loops, weak knowledge management, and limited follow-up constrain systematic uptake at national level. Increasingly, UNEP is supporting activities that tie outputs more directly to NBSAP processes. There is also rising demand to leverage biodiversity finance and financial inclusion platforms to mobilize resources and build institutional capacity. Strategic partnerships across ministries are essential to ensure alignment with country priorities, and UNEP is well positioned to play this role, however, resource limitations remain a critical barrier.

168. Taken together, the findings for the KEQs highlight that while UNEP's NA-SP is resilient, adaptive, and partnership-driven, it is constrained by institutional inefficiencies, fragmented coordination, and underdeveloped systems for monitoring, knowledge management, and communication. The increasing use of linked projects, if paired with stronger reporting, financial innovation, and structured knowledge platforms, could offer a pathway to more coherent, scaled, and strategically positioned impact. Embedding adaptive feedback loops, institutionalizing country-level repositories, and linking technical knowledge to policy, planning, and financing decisions will be critical to ensure sustained impact.

IV. Lessons Learned and Implications for Future NA-SP Implementation

169. The lessons arising from the evaluation findings and conclusion is that overall, the NA-SP is achieving positive results that are of crucial importance to its biodiversity objectives and to the work of MEAs and other implementing partners. It achieves strong success in implementation but also faces challenges.

170. Table 2 summarizes the key lessons arising from the evaluation and the implications for future implementation.

Table 2. Lessons Learned and Implications for NA-SP future

Topic	Key Lessons Learned	Implications for NA-SP Future
Strategic Focus & Portfolio Coherence	Portfolio expansion and wide thematic spread contribute to fragmentation and diluted impact. Strategic focus improved over time but is not consistently reflected in implementation.	Sharpen thematic prioritization in line with MTS and GBF priorities; target fewer, high-impact areas and apply clearer guidance on expected contribution pathways at design stage.
Alignment with Global Frameworks (GBF, MEAs, SDGs)	UNEP has a strong comparative advantage in translating global commitments into national policy, particularly through MEAs and NBSAPs, but follow-through to implementation is uneven.	Strengthen pathways from policy alignment to implementation, including institutional mandates, financing strategies, and monitoring systems at country level.
Country Ownership & Contextualization	Results are strongest where projects respond to explicit country demand and are embedded in national frameworks.	Institutionalize early country and regional co-creation in project design and require explicit articulation of national ownership and institutional anchoring.
Project Design Quality	Projects often have overly broad scope, short timeframes for complex change, and weak theories of change linking outputs to outcomes.	Stronger design discipline with realistic scope, clearer results chains, and timeframes appropriate for institutional and behavioural change.
Scaling & Replication	Successful pilots often lack explicit pathways or incentives for scaling and replication, limiting systemic impact.	Require explicit scaling, replication, or policy uptake strategies in project design; prioritize medium-sized, thematically focused multi-country projects.
Partnerships & Convening Power	Partnerships are a core strength but are often leveraged on a project-by-project basis rather than strategically across the portfolio.	Maintain strategic partnership frameworks at regional and thematic levels, with stronger inter-divisional coordination on shared partners.
Regional Role & Decentralization	Regional Offices and RSPCs can play a critical role in country engagement but are unevenly resourced and leveraged.	Strengthen the regional coordination role of the NA-SP with clearer mandates, resources, and accountability for coherence and knowledge sharing.
Integration Across UNEP Subprogrammes	Cross-subprogramme integration has improved but remains largely informal and personality-driven.	Institutionalize cross-subprogramme collaboration through joint planning, shared results frameworks, and incentives for integrated delivery.
Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)	A strong evidence base exists, but lessons are not systematically harvested or used for adaptive management; focus remains on outputs.	Position MEL as a strategic asset by strengthening outcome-level indicators and more systematically feeding lessons into planning and decision-making.
Knowledge Management & Use of Tools	High-quality tools and knowledge products are produced, but uptake at country level is inconsistent due	Shift emphasis from production to uptake and use of knowledge

Topic	Key Lessons Learned	Implications for NA-SP Future
	to limited follow-up and capacity constraints.	products, embedding tools in national systems and tracking utilization.
Gender, Youth & Inclusion	Gender and inclusion are often treated as compliance requirements rather than drivers of change, limiting transformative impact.	Embed gender, youth, and inclusion more substantively in workplans, budgets, indicators, and monitoring systems.
Financial Sustainability	Heavy reliance on vertical funds and short-term grants creates financial fragility despite strong mobilization performance.	Strengthen early engagement with vertical funds and diversify financing sources, including private sector and blended finance aligned with NA-SP priorities.
Institutional Capacity & Staffing	Staff shortages, vacancies, and fragmented systems constrain efficiency, coordination, and learning.	Align staffing, skills, and systems with strategic priorities and invest in coordination, KM, and adaptive management capacity.

Source: NA-SP Evaluation findings, 2025.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

171. Based on the evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned, the evaluation proposes the following key recommendations. These have been proposed with understanding of a dynamic context at the time of the evaluation, with the active pursuit of plans for UN80. These are not stand-alone recommendations but rather require strategic and synergistic approaches to achieve coherent and mutual progress across all five recommendations. It is notable that four of the five recommendations align with recommendations arising from other recent corporate level evaluations, particularly in relation to a sharper focus, improved coordination, leveraging partnerships and building knowledge systems. These require a whole-of-UNEP approach to be most effective, although with specific attention to NA-SP requirements. The recommendation related to the importance of vertical funds is of particular importance for the NA-SP, given the current high intensity of partnership and resources within the subprogramme. This is already working effectively but can be improved and nurtured for future programming, particularly for innovation and scaling up. Moving forward, the NA-SP needs to build on, harness and promote its strengths internally, with partners and to a wider audience to ensure continued engagement with MTS and subprogramme objectives.

1. Sharpen focus by prioritizing fewer, high-impact thematic areas with clearer scaling strategies and adaptive delivery models

172. The NA-SP's portfolio has grown rapidly but remains overly dispersed, spanning species, land, oceans, invasive species, finance, and governance. This breadth dilutes impact and strains limited resources. The next MTS should prioritize fewer, systemic, high-impact thematic clusters such as biodiversity–climate–land linkages, threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems, critical natural resource concerns such as water sources and protected areas and biodiversity finance while embedding explicit scaling pathways into design.

173. Modular project structures with “core” components and optional add-ons should allow continuity under constrained resources and enable rapid scaling when co-financing or vertical funds are secured. This does not prevent engagement in smaller projects if there is a clear line

of contribution and sufficient resources to include adequate staffing, monitoring and learning capture and dissemination, but would act as a brake on small or less relevant projects that are not geared to higher level impact. Institutional processes (budget approvals, PCPs, dual reporting systems) should be streamlined, with leaner digital systems and automated approvals to reduce fund flow delays noted in current evaluations.

2. Strengthen active, structures and targeted coordination with UNEP Subprogrammes, divisions and MEAs

174. UNEP's convening role is a key comparative advantage, but integration across divisions and with MEAs remains ad hoc and driven by personal goodwill. To address this, the NA-SP should establish a structured inter-divisional coordination mechanism on MEA-related partnerships and synergies. For the NA-SP more active collaboration with CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC focal points, MEA Secretariats, particularly Rio Conventions, and UNEP divisions around priority themes aligned with NA-SP objectives. More proactive and regular communication would help to ensure coherent engagement and more systematic, value-adding collaboration in programme delivery and in country level implementation towards specific MEA priorities.

175. Key tools and platforms like DaRT, the Bern Process, and the Global Peatlands Assessment should be more strongly promoted, scaled, improved and embedded across the NA-SP as appropriate and into NBSAPs and national monitoring systems support, with clear capacity development for longer term adoption at country level.

176. Clearly linked projects should be used strategically to drive integration across divisions, supported by AI-enabled dashboards and harmonized PIR/IPMR reporting. NA-SP may consolidate and package existing MTS priorities and other relevant information into short, MEA-specific briefs that clearly set out available support and contact points for countries to facilitate improved coordination.

177. Subprogramme Coordinators need to be considered in budgeting to provide sustained strategic coordination, ensuring that integration is anchored in local contexts and inclusive of gender, Indigenous Peoples, and youth. The NA-SP needs to work proactively with UNEP-wide efforts in knowledge management to improve subprogramme outcomes.

3. Leverage Partnerships for Country and Regional Impact

178. Partnerships are a core NA-SP strength, but their effectiveness is inconsistent. To maintain legitimacy as a largely non-resident agency, UNEP should reinforce its anchoring role in regions and countries through strengthened Regional Office coordination and strategic alliances with agencies that have stronger field presence (e.g. FAO, IFAD, UN Women).

179. Platforms such as the GBF Early Action Support demonstrate the catalytic potential of multi-partner models, but these need structured follow-up and systematic integration into NBSAP implementation. Regional hub-type activities should be developed to aggregate demand for biodiversity/MEA support, creating economies of scale.

180. Partnerships with private finance (e.g. UNEP-FI, agribusiness, blue economy) should be responsibly considered for scaling up to mobilize biodiversity finance and outcome-based agreements. South-South exchanges, IPLC-led networks, and youth initiatives (e.g. Tide Turners Plastic Challenge, Playing for the Planet) should be embedded in portfolio design to ensure both legitimacy and sustainability. Leveraging success in partnerships by capitalizing on

MEA and UN agency collaboration and expanding on lessons learned in private sector engagement will advance partnerships in the emerging development context.

4. Align Vertical Fund Engagement for Complementarity

181. With over 80% of the NA-SP portfolio financed by the GEF, dependence on vertical funds is both a strength and a fragility. UNEP should negotiate flexible windows with GEF, GCF, and the Adaptation Fund for innovation, pilot scaling, and rapid adaptation, particularly for SIDS and fragile contexts where flexibility is critical. Operating in “dual modes” is essential: use vertical fund projects for scaled delivery, while leveraging NA-SP’s subprogramme resources to drive integration, innovation, and lesson learning. Systematic feedback loops with vertical fund secretariats should be institutionalized to showcase outcomes, capture lessons, and adapt modalities, improving predictability and value-for-money.

5. Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Management as a Strategic Asset

182. Current monitoring is fragmented and largely activity-focused, limiting UNEP’s ability to demonstrate systemic change across NA-SP portfolio. Despite UNEP’s standard M&E framework, project managers responding to the evaluation survey identified key challenges, including differing reporting requirements for different donors, insufficient staff resources, insufficient time for data analysis, lessons from reports/mid term reviews/evaluations not being systematically actioned, and gaps in data availability and its quality.

183. Enhancing sustainability by embedding financing, knowledge management and exit strategies into all projects to improve long-term results. The NA-SP should establish automated and linked portfolio-level monitoring frameworks that effectively track contributions to GBF targets, NBSAP implementation, and One Health outcomes, amongst others, over longer timeframes.

184. Lessons from pilots need to be systematically integrated into national and MEA processes rather than left as isolated outputs. User-friendly digital repositories and structured handover systems should institutionalize knowledge arising through monitoring and evaluation reports and knowledge products. Systems should reduce reliance on personal networks. Feedback loops between HQ, regional, and country levels should ensure that field staff see how their data contributes to global outcomes. All monitoring systems must embed gender-disaggregated and IPLC indicators, with adaptive learning explicitly built into partnership agreements and reporting cycles to demonstrate the NA-SP contribution.

ANNEXES

Annex I. Glossary of Key Terms

Agrobiodiversity: The variety and variability of animals, plants, and micro-organisms used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture. UNEP defines it as a critical subset of biodiversity that contributes to agricultural production, ecosystem services, and livelihood resilience. UNEP/CBD Technical Series No. 69, 2012

Biodiversity: Refers to the variability among living organisms from all sources, including inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. (CBD, 1992)

Capacity Development: The term capacity development is defined by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) as the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain the ability to manage their affairs over time. Any intervention or activity purposely designed to contribute to the development or strengthening of the capabilities of people, institutions and systems is considered to be capacity-building. <https://www.cbd.int/cb/default.shtml>. In UNEP, capacity development as an outcome requires evidence that capacity has strengthened.

Circular Economy: An economic system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources. UNEP promotes circularity in sectors such as textiles, food systems, and tourism to achieve sustainability and resource efficiency. <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/circular-economy-new-normal-2021>

Co-financing: The financial resources provided by other partners, in addition to the GEF or UNEP funding, support project implementation. This includes both in-kind and monetary contributions, often from national governments, NGOs, or private actors. <https://www.thegef.org/documents/gef-co-financing-policy-2018>

Demonstration Pilot: Small-scale, practical interventions designed to test and showcase innovative approaches or technologies in a real-world context. Used to validate [and document, the efficacy of] models for replication and scaling-up in broader development or environmental programmes. UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions, December 2023. In the context of this evaluation, evidence was sought of actual replication or scale up to indicate success of the pilot, rather than just complet

Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA): The use of biodiversity and ecosystem services to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. Often integrated in sustainable land management and disaster resilience interventions. UNEP EbA Guidelines, 2012

Ecosystem Services: Are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as flood and disease control; cultural services such as spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; and supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, that maintain the conditions for life on Earth. UNEP. (2005). Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Biodiversity Synthesis. A Report of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

Line of Sight: Refers to there being one, easily apparent, UNEP staff member accountable for any individual UNEP project. Implicit in this term is the existence of an effective line

management chain from a project and its implementation sites to the accountable staff member, such that the accountable person can be reasonably expected to have knowledge of the work. In the UNEP context, a specific application was that a Division Director would be the Directly Responsible Individual for country work, not the Regional Director.

Mainstreaming Biodiversity: Integrating biodiversity considerations into policies, strategies, and practices of key public and private actors. UNEP promotes biodiversity mainstreaming in national planning, tourism, and economic policy through natural capital accounting. <https://www.cbd.int/development/doc/cbd-good-practice-guide-mainstreaming-biodiversity-booklet-en.pdf>, 2010

Natural Capital Accounting (NCA): A system for measuring and valuing natural resources and ecosystem services to inform planning and investment decisions. UNEP supports countries in integrating NCA into development, tourism, and fiscal planning to promote conservation and sustainable use. <https://seea.un.org/>

Nature-based Solutions (NbS): Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively. NbS provide human well-being and biodiversity benefits and are central to many UNEP-supported projects. UNEP NbS Guidelines, 2021

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs): NBSAPs are the principal instruments for implementing the CBD at the national level. They reflect each country's priorities and needs for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/X/2, 2010

Normative Products: Standards, principles, regulations and methodologies, developed to shape and guide global environmental practice. UNEP's Finance Initiative develops such products to influence financial institutions toward sustainable development. UNEP Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2025

Outcome: An outcome is the use (i.e., uptake, adoption, application) of an output by intended beneficiaries, observed as a change in institutions or behaviors, attitudes or conditions. UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions, December 2023

Output: An output is the availability (for intended beneficiaries/users) of new products and services and/or gains in knowledge, abilities and awareness of individuals or within institutions. For example, access by the intended user to a report, new knowledge held by a workshop participant at the end of a training event, or heightened awareness among targeted decision-makers. (Outputs are viewed from the perspective of the intended beneficiary or user of the output rather than the provider.) UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions, December 2023

Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM): A regional mechanism to support the implementation of sustainable land management through policy alignment, capacity building, and knowledge exchange. Used in Caribbean projects to integrate ecosystem-based disaster recovery and sustainable agriculture. <https://www.pislm.org/>

Programme Coordination Project (PCP): A Programme Coordination Project represents a strategic programme—not a field-level implementation project—which is designed to coordinate, align, support, and enable a thematic focus within a subprogramme. It is designed to enhance coherence, oversight, knowledge management, reporting, and stakeholder engagement across a portfolio of UNEP projects in line with the NA-SP objectives. The NA-SP

is comprised of three PCPs, each with a related portfolio of ongoing projects and projects under development (both soft and hard pipeline)

Resilient Farming Practices: Agricultural techniques that increase the capacity of farming systems to absorb shock, adapt to change, and maintain productivity. Often promoted post-disaster or in climate-vulnerable areas to ensure food security and livelihood stability. UNEP Resilience Framework for Agriculture, 2020

Sustainable Food Systems: Systems that deliver food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social, and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. UNEP works on transforming food systems to be circular, low-impact, and equitable. UNEP and FAO Sustainable Food Systems Programme, 2019

Sustainable Tourism Development: Tourism that fully accounts for its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts. UNEP supports tourism policy alignment with biodiversity and natural capital goals, particularly through investment planning. <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/tourism-and-sdgs-policy-brief>, 2020

Sustainable Use: The use of components of biological diversity in a way, and at a rate, that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations (CBD, 1992).

True Cost Accounting / True Value Accounting: A method to measure and value all costs and benefits - social, environmental, and economic- of food systems. Used to guide policy and private sector shifts towards Nature-positive food production and consumption. TEEB for Agriculture and Food Interim Report, 2015

Terminal Evaluation: A Terminal Evaluation is a summative evaluation performed at the operational completion of a project or programme. UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions, December 2023

Theory of Change: A Theory of Change is a method used for planning a project, describing the participation that will be needed by different actors and for evaluating the project's performance. It articulates long-lasting intended impact and then maps backwards to identify the preconditions necessary to achieve this impact(s). It is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a context. A Theory of Change also allows for unintended positive and/or negative effects to be depicted. UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions, December 2023.

Annex II. NA-SP Project Portfolio and Deep Dive Study Selection

Portfolio Overview

Current portfolio in implementation phase. 288 projects in total- 215 ongoing projects; USD 1.44 billion approved budget; Concentrated under GEF focal areas (Biodiversity, Land Degradation, Multi-focal) with a large share also in International Waters and dedicated PCP portfolio projects. Geographical spread includes Global, Regional, and Single-Country initiatives, with strong representation in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The portfolio is dominated by single-country projects (157 projects, 58%), underscoring the focus on national-level interventions. Projects that cover more than one country in a specific region represent 65 projects (24%), reflecting significant engagement in subregional challenges. Projects that extend across different regions and cover multiple countries account for 48 projects (18%). An increasing number of projects are emerging in the portfolio that take a thematic approach across multiple countries and regions but that operate on a facility-type approach that enables countries to access funds in line with their specific needs and timing.

Design Phase. In addition to projects under implementation there are 64 projects in pipeline, 43 already approved at CAG level as the latest available information. This comprises an USD 533 million indicative budget. The pipeline is focused on emerging key initiatives of GEF (e.g., SIDS Restoration, Mountain multi-country restoration, Peatlands, Nature-based Solutions implementation) which appears to be strongly providing the majority of resourcing of the NA-SP while also reflecting some diversification of funding streams.

The specific countries named across the current portfolio database are shown overleaf in alphabetical order. There is insufficient portfolio data available to verify the extent of relative coverage for each country or to classify the portfolio further by types of intervention or support, but the graphic following was provided by the NA-SP as indicative of subprogramme coverage.¹⁵

¹⁵ The list of countries and graphic do not fully align but this may be due to the different dates for data sources or different sources for the countries engaged. Therefore, the coverage data needs to be considered with caution.

Albania	Colombia	India	Mongolia	Seychelles
Algeria	Comoros	Indonesia	Montenegro	Sierra Leone
Angola	Congo	Iraq	Morocco	Solomon Islands
Antigua and Barbuda	Costa Rica	Italy	Mozambique	Somalia
Argentina	Cuba	Jamaica	Myanmar	South Africa
Armenia	Côte D'Ivoire	Jordan	Namibia	South Sudan
Azerbaijan	Democratic Republic of the	Kazakhstan	Nauru	Sri Lanka
Bahamas	Congo	Kenya	Nepal	Sudan
Bangladesh	Djibouti	Kiribati	Nicaragua	Suriname
Barbados	Dominica	Kyrgyzstan	Niger	Syrian Arab Republic
Belize	Dominican Republic	Lao People's Democratic	Nigeria	Tajikistan
Benin	Ecuador	Republic	North Macedonia	Thailand
Bhutan	Egypt	Lebanon	Palau	Timor-Leste
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	El Salvador	Lesotho	Panama	Togo
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Equatorial Guinea	Liberia	Papua New Guinea	Trinidad and Tobago
Botswana	Eritrea	Libya	Paraguay	Tunisia
Brazil	Eswatini	Madagascar	Peru	Turkmenistan
Burkina Faso	Ethiopia	Malawi	Philippines	Tuvalu
Burundi	Fiji	Malaysia	Polynesia	Türkiye
Cabo Verde	Gabon	Maldives	Republic of Moldova	Uganda
Cambodia	Gambia	Mali	Rwanda	Ukraine
Cameroon	Georgia	Marshall Islands	Saint Kitts and Nevis	United Republic of
Central African Republic	Ghana	Mauritania	Saint Lucia	Tanzania
Chad	Grenada	Mauritius	Saint Vincent and the	United States of America
Chile	Guatemala	Mexico	Grenadines	Uruguay
China	Guinea	Micronesia	Samoa	Uzbekistan
	Guinea Bissau		Sao Tome and Principe	Vanuatu
	Guyana		Senegal	Venezuela
	Haiti		Serbia	Viet Nam
	Honduras			Yemen
				Zambia
				Zimbabwe

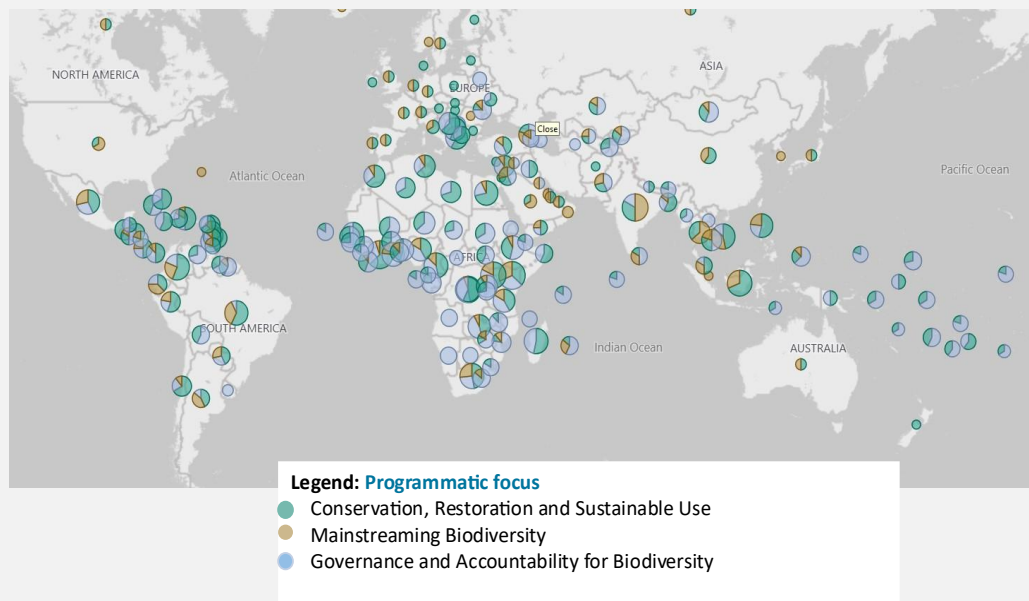
Living in harmony with nature strategic objective

Adapt of integrated approaches for valuing, monitoring and sustainably managing biodiversity

Mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services into development and sectoral plans; public and private finance sector

Enhance nature conservation and restoration

Linked to 19 UNEA 2- 6 resolutions



Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

The following 10 projects were selected for more detailed assessment¹⁶: These could not be representative of the full portfolio but were selected on the basis of diversity to provide a window into the different types of engagement supported through the NA-SP. Their purpose was for illustration and learning. (see the methodology section for a detailed selection criteria and purpose of these deep dives)

Project title	UNEP Project ID	Geographic scope	Thematic scope	Duration	Budget & Funding	Type of interventions (Objectives & Components, Implementing Partners)	Implementation Status	Evaluation Status
PCP: Conservation, restoration and sustainable use								
Vanishing Treasures: Climate-resilient mountain ecosystems for resilient livelihoods and mountain flagship species	112.8 SB-010994 / PIMS 02040	Global (Inter-regional) – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Rwanda, Uganda, Bhutan; Phase II: Colombia, Ecuador	Conservation & Restoration	2018–2024 (Phase I); 2024–2027 (Phase II)	EUR 9,000,000 (Luxembourg, Phase I)	Promotes synergies between climate adaptation and biodiversity by protecting flagship species and supporting livelihoods through stakeholder engagement, participatory tools, EbA pilots, capacity building, policy uptake, and outreach, implemented with UNEP, GRID-Arendal, Bhutan Tiger Center, Snow Leopard Trust, Ilbirs Foundation, Humboldt University, and regional partners.	Phase I completed 2024; Phase II active	MTR 2024 completed
The Global Peatlands (GPI) Initiative Project	PIMS 317.3 / SMA 39707 / Umoja SB-012094	Global – Indonesia, Peru, Republic of Congo, DRC (added 2024: Colombia, Mongolia)	Conservation & Restoration, Mainstreaming	2019–2026	EUR 1,999,567 (IKI)	Supports global and national peatland conservation through assessment, policy integration, advocacy, and partnerships, with FAO, Michael Succow Foundation, Duene, CIFOR, and David Suzuki Foundation.	Recently completed (2025)	Interim report 2025; Project Revision #2 (2023)
Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services	PIMS 02019 / SMA 37979 / Umoja SB-010591	Global – Regional Seas & pilots (Caribbean, Pacific, Indian Ocean, ASEAN, etc.; 16 countries)	Conservation & Restoration	2018–2024 (closed); succeeded by MFWB project 2024	USD 15,015,491 (multi-partner incl. EC, Monaco Foundation, GFCR, Joint SDG Fund, Env Fund)	Incorporates marine ecosystem services into decision-making via partnerships, ecosystem-based tools, outreach, innovative finance, and regional ocean governance, involving UNEP, Regional Seas, GRID-Arendal, , CBD Secretariat, and partners.	Phase I completed 2024; successor started 2024	MTR 2021; TE 2025 (draft)
Strengthening resilience of	SMA 36843 /	Single Country – Dominica	Conservation & Restoration	2019–2026	USD 3,591,484 (GEF 1.57m +	Restores forests and agricultural lands post-Hurricane Maria, promoting	Active	MTR 2024; PIR 2025

¹⁶ Philippines could not proceed due to unavailability of a project manager such that operations had not yet commenced.

Project title	UNEP Project ID	Geographic scope	Thematic scope	Duration	Budget & Funding	Type of interventions (Objectives & Components, Implementing Partners)	Implementation Status	Evaluation Status
agricultural lands and forests in Dominica in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria	GEF ID 9978 / Umoja GFL-11207-14AC00 03-SB-009724.02				Co-finance 2.015m)	resilience and sustainable land management through reforestation, farming practices, and institutional support, with PISLM, government ministries, IICA, and UNEP.		
PCP: Mainstreaming across sectors								
UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI) – Nature Workstream	102770	Global (>400 institutions; regional hubs in APAC, Europe, Americas, Africa)	Mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into finance and business	2022–2025 (next phase 2026)	USD 19,893,000 (membership fees, UNEP core, bilateral donors)	Aligns financial systems with sustainability goals via banking, insurance, and investment platforms, thematic workstreams on climate, nature, pollution, and social issues, supported by UNEP, PRI, and 400+ financial institutions	Active	Biennial progress reports; Evaluation planned
True Value Accounting – Food Systems Transformation in India and Kenya	166289	Bi-national – India, Kenya	Mainstreaming	2023–2027	Phase 1 IKI Kenya; EU India Phase 2 IKEA Foundation India and Kenya	Transforms food systems using TEEBAgriFood framework through policy reforms, business accountability, and community empowerment, implemented with UNEP, CRB, IKEA Foundation, Capitals Coalition, ICAR, IIFM, CIFOR-ICRAF, and state partners	Active	Terminal Evaluation planned 2025
Natural Capital & Ecovillages – Madagascar	GEF ID 10389 / SMA 142658 / Umoja SB-022228	Single Country – Madagascar	Mainstreaming (Biodiversity & Land Degradation)	2023–2028	GEF USD 5,653,425 + Co-fin USD 27,476,346	Promotes natural capital accounting, eco-villages, and sustainable land management through policy frameworks, land-use tools, and community pilots with UNEP, MEDD, ANAE, GRET, DREDD, Madagascar National Parks, and local NGOs.	Active	PIR 2025
Environmental Education and Youth	PIMS 02007 / 319.1	Global (multi-region: Africa, Asia-Pacific, LAC, Europe, North America, West Asia)	Mainstreaming	2018–2023 (Phase 2); Phase 3 from 2025 ('ONE UNEP Youth & Education Project')	USD 5,968,093 (planned 2.25m)	Strengthens youth and education networks via curricula, advocacy, digital training, and partnerships with UNEP Education Unit, GRID-Arendal, GUPES, WOSM, WAGGGS, WWF India, universities, IOC, UNICEF, and others.	Completed 2023; new phase from 2024	TE 2024

Project title	UNEP Project ID	Geographic scope	Thematic scope	Duration	Budget & Funding	Type of interventions (Objectives & Components, Implementing Partners)	Implementation Status	Evaluation Status
PCP: Governance and Biodiversity								
Environmental Treaties Programme – Realizing Synergies for Biodiversity	PIMS 01988 / SMA 35480	Global – Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe, LAC, West Asia	Governance & Accountability	2017–2023 (Treaties I); Next phase approved 2023 ('Treaties II')	Switzerland, China, Sweden, Nordic Council, European Commission	Supports coherent MEA implementation through synergies dialogues, information tools, DaRT platform, and capacity-building with UNEP Law Division, UNEP-WCMC, regional offices, CBD, Ramsar, CMS, FAO, UNESCO, EU, and Swiss Government.	Concluded in 2023 and is being followed by a new phase with an expanded scope covering biodiversity, climate, and chemicals and waste-related MEAs (SMA ID 157483), which was not included in the deep dive analysis	Terminal Review 2025
Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support	GEF ID 11039 / Umoja SB-020703	Global – 69 countries (65 engaged by 2024)	Governance & Accountability (NBSAP alignment, biodiversity finance)	2022–2025 (closure 2026)	GEF USD 1.5m (no co-finance, leveraged IKI €45m, CBD in-kind)	Assists countries in aligning NBSAPs with GBF through rapid reviews, monitoring systems, policy coherence, and biodiversity finance, implemented by UNEP, CBD Secretariat, UNDP, GIZ, FAO, IUCN, CI, BirdLife, and TNC.	Active (2025)	PIR 2024; TE planned Sep 2025

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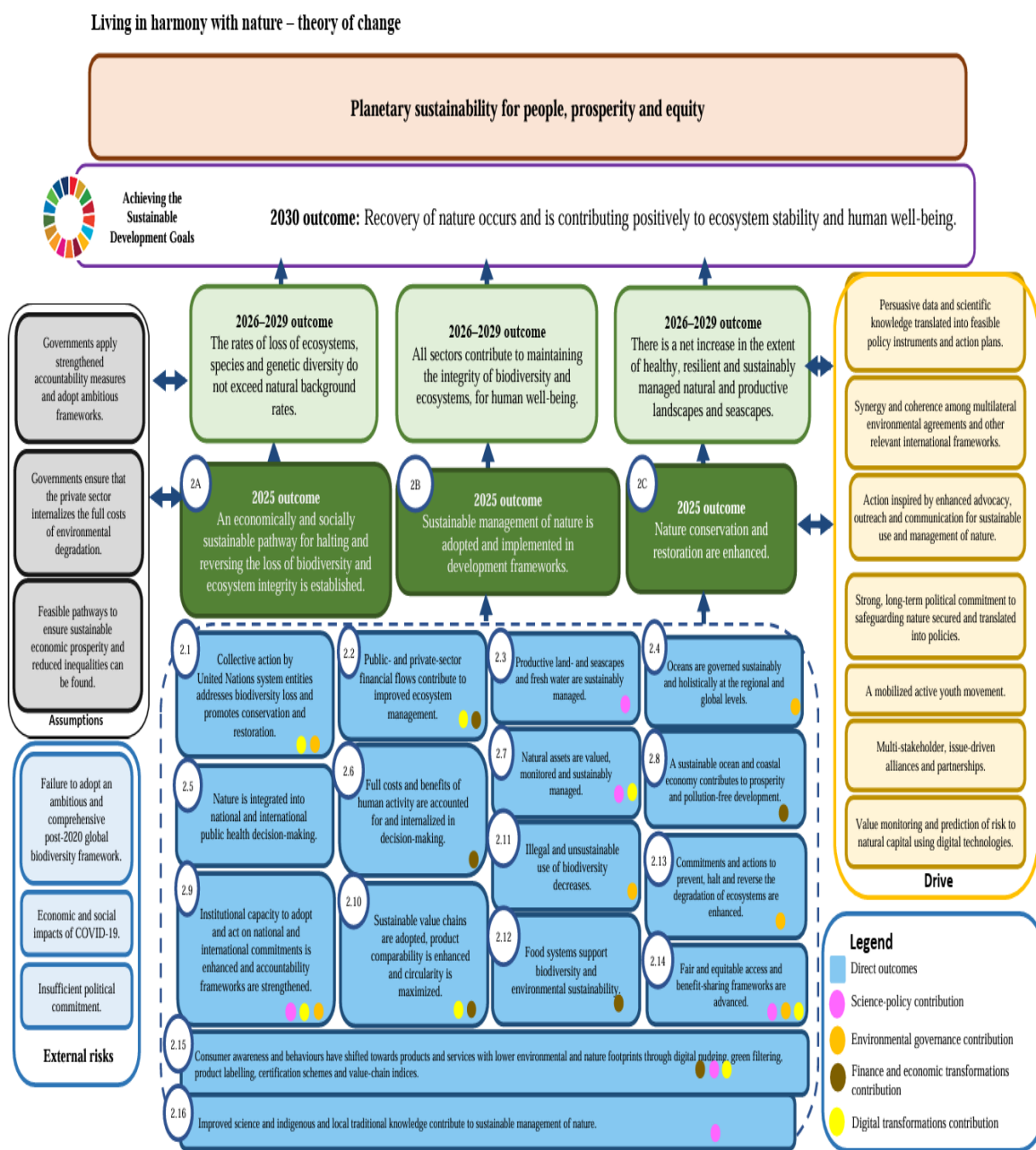
Annex IV. List of People Consulted

No.	Designation, organization
1.	Director, UNEP International Ecosystem Management Partnership (UNEP-IEMP)
2.	Chief Manager, UNEP – DHI (Centre on Water and Environment)
3.	Chief Scientist, GRID-Arendal (Deep Dive: -Vanishing Treasures
4.	University of Portsmouth
5.	Deputy Division Director, Industry and Economy Division, UNEP
6.	Division Director, Policy and Programme Division, UNEP
7.	Director, UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre
8.	Senior Programme Management Officer, Global Coordinator, Economic and Finance Transformations
9.	Head, Nature and Health Team, UNEP, Nairobi, Nature Action Subprogramme evaluation ECG member
10.	Chief, Scientific Assessment Branch, Early Warning and Assessment Division, UNEP
11.	Chief, Environmental Conventions and Policy Branch, Law Division, UNEP
12.	Head, Climate Mitigation Unit, UNEP
13.	Head (ai), UNEP Climate Finance Unit, UNEP
14.	Knowledge Management Task Force, UNEP
15.	Head of Branch, Disasters and Conflict Branch, UNEP
16.	Chief, oic Regional Seas Branch, Ecosystems Division, UNEP
17.	Global Sub-programme Coordinator, NA-SP, UNEP
18.	Former RSPC West Asia, now in GEF STAP
19.	Regional Sub-programme Coordinator, Nature Action, Asia and Pacific Office Asia, UNEP
20.	Regional Sub-programme Coordinator, Nature Action, Regional Office: Europe, UNEP
21.	Chief Scientist, Knowledge Management Working Group, UNEP
22.	Fund Management Officer, Ecosystems Division (Responsible for projects in the Marine and Freshwater Branch and Biodiversity and Land Branch), UNEP
23.	Head of the Unit,- Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, Ecosystems Division, UNEP
24.	Task Manager for the Asia portfolio, Ecosystem Division, UNEP

25.	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, Ecosystems Division, UNEP
26.	Programme Management Officer, UNEP <i>Vanishing Treasures</i>
27.	Programme Management Officer, OiC Head of the Biodiversity, Peoples and Landscapes Unit, Biodiversity and Land Branch, Ecosystems Division, UNEP <i>Global Peatlands Initiative Project</i>
28.	Global Peatlands Initiative Coordinator, Ecosystems Division, UNEP <i>Global Peatlands Initiative Project</i>
29.	Project Manager, UNEP <i>Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services" (2018-24)</i>
30.	Project Manager, UNEP <i>Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services" (2018-24)</i>
31.	Programme Officer, Biodiversity and Land Degradation Branch, Ecosystems Division, UNEP <i>Strengthening Resilience of Agricultural Lands and Forests in Dominica in the in the Aftermath of Hurricane Maria (2019-24)</i>
32.	Head, Nature and Health, UNEP <i>True Value Accounting Food Systems</i>
33.	Senior Policy Advisor, UNEP TEEBAgriFood India, former PCCF&HoFF Assam and Additional Secretary Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Project Coordinator, UNEP <i>True Value Accounting Food Systems</i>
34.	India/Private sector coordinator, TEEB, UNEP <i>True Value Accounting Food Systems</i>
35.	Regional Technical Advisor for Africa, Ecosystems Division, UNEP & Task manager <i>"Evaluation of Natural Capital to Support Land Use Planning, Improved management effectiveness of Terrestrial Protected Areas, deployment of SLM practices and Creation of Eco-Villages in Central Madagascar</i>
36.	Chief, Youth, Education and Advocacy, UNEP <i>Environmental Education and Youth</i>
37.	Sr. Programme Director, South and Southeast Asia Network of Environmental Education (SASEANEE) <i>Partner: Environmental Education and Youth</i>
38.	Senior Programme Director, CEE School Programme Himalaya Programme Northern Regional Cell

	<i>Partner- Environmental Education and Youth</i>
39.	Global Policy Advisor, Land and Water Resources, UNEP <i>Environmental treaties programme-Realizing Synergies for Biodiversity (2017 – 2023)</i>
40.	Project Officer, Education/nature, Division of Environmental Policy and Implementation (GEF-Biodiversity, Land Degradation and Biosafety Unit), UNEP <i>Technical Support for the Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support project (GEF) (2023-26)</i>
41.	UNEP-GEF Task Manager <i>Technical Support for the Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support project (GEF) (2023-26)</i>
42.	Head, Nature Frameworks Support Unit, Early Action Support Project. <i>Technical Support for the Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support project (GEF) (2023-26)</i>
43.	Co-Lead Nature, UNEP Finance Initiative
44.	National Project Manager, Dominica <i>Partner: Strengthening Resilience of Agricultural Lands and Forests in Dominica in the in the Aftermath of Hurricane Maria (2019-24)</i>
45.	Senior Specialist, Ecosystem Management, GRID-Arendal <i>Partner: Environmental Education and Youth</i>
46.	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) <i>Partner- Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services” (2018-24)</i>
47.	Member of the GPI Steering Committee & Global Peatland Database Professor at Greifswald Mire Centre/University <i>Partner-: Global Peatlands Initiative Project</i>
48.	Director of the Michael Succow Foundation (Greifswald Mire Centre) <i>Partner-Global Peatlands Initiative Project</i>

Annex V. Nature Action Subprogramme Theory of Change (2022–2025)



Source: PoW 2022-2025

Annex VI. Deep Dive Project Summaries

1. Vanishing Treasures Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The Vanishing Treasures project – Climate Resilient Mountain Ecosystems for Resilient Livelihoods and Mountain Flagship Species (PIMS ID 02040, UNEP Project No. 112.8 SB-010994) was launched in June 2018 with a Phase I budget of EUR 9 million, funded by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and concluded in 2024. Phase II (2024–2027) expands the project to the Northern Andes (Colombia, Ecuador) while continuing activities in Central Asia, the Virunga Mountains, and the Hindu-Kush Himalayas (UNEP 2019).¹⁷

The project is strongly aligned with UNEP's Programme of Work on Climate Action (subprogramme 1B) and Nature Action (subprogrammes 2B and 2C), contributing directly to MTS 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 outcomes, and advancing SDG targets 6.6, 13.2, 13.3, and 15.4. It supports the Paris Agreement, CBD objectives, including mountain biodiversity and the Central Asian Mammals Initiative, CMS (gorilla agreement), Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLEP), and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (UNEP 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Phase I focused on improving ecosystem resilience, protecting flagship species, and promoting alternative livelihoods. Country ownership was strong in Uganda, Rwanda, Bhutan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, though more participatory design in Phase I could have strengthened alignment with national priorities, Theory of Change refinement, and demonstration of co-benefits across climate, ecosystems, and resilient livelihoods (UNEP, 2024).

Institutional structure and mechanisms:

The project is led by UNEP's Biodiversity, People and Landscapes Unit, with technical support from partners such as GRID-Arendal, Bhutan Tiger Center, Snow Leopard Trust, Ilbirs Foundation, EURAC Research, Humboldt University, and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. Contributions from universities and research centers including Liverpool John Moores University, Woodwell Climate Research Center, and the Max Planck Institute, ensured outputs such as climate vulnerability assessments, participatory tools, ecosystem-based adaptation pilots, and knowledge products were scientifically rigorous and contextually relevant. National governments and local stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Rwanda, Uganda, and Bhutan provided operational support and facilitated policy engagement. While this multi-layered setup enabled inter-regional learning and stakeholder collaboration, reliance on headquarters and international partners occasionally constrained implementation speed at local pilot sites. Centralised strategic leadership combined with empowered national and community-level mechanisms proved essential to optimising both ecosystem and livelihood outcomes (UNEP 2019, 2024).

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

Vanishing Treasures established strong partnerships at local, national, and international levels. Key national partners included Bhutan Tiger Center, National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology, and Uganda Wildlife Integrated Forest Resource Trust (UWIFoRT), while Central Asian collaborations involved Ilbirs Foundation, Association for Nature Conservation and Tourism (ANCOT) Bhutan, the GSLEP alliance, UNEP Central Asia Mountain Communities

¹⁷ Project website: https://www.unep.org/regions/europe/our-projects/vanishing-treasures-protecting-endangered-mountain-species?_ga=2.207138705.304494136.1731906897-941100999.1730378580

Alliance (CAMCA), European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen (EURAC Research), UNDP, and other NGOs. Coordination with UN agencies (UNDP, FAO, IFAD) aligned activities with CBD, 15th Conference of the Parties decisions, the Paris Agreement, SDGs, and leveraged IKI funding. Engagement with national and local stakeholders was strong in some regions, moderate in others, with governments, NGOs, and private sector actors participating via pilots, workshops, and trainings. Technical partners, including International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) in the Nkuringo Buffer Zone, promoted bottom-up community participation, shared ownership, and integration of conservation, adaptation, and livelihood interventions.

Strategic innovation in private sector engagement enhanced visibility and outreach; for example, the UNEP–Adidas Run Wild Challenge, alongside immersive storytelling using GoPro and 360VR, showcased tiger and gorilla conservation globally. Collaboration with media and journalist training increased communication impact, even in contexts with restrictive approvals, such as Bhutan. Phase II plans include participatory refinement of the Theory of Change and logframe, stronger links with applied science, wildlife networks, and traditional knowledge initiatives, and targeted engagement with global policy processes to amplify peer-reviewed validation and science–policy influence.

Operations

Most outputs and outcomes were delivered. Notable achievements include the 4th National Tiger Survey in Bhutan (131 tigers by 2022) (Government of Bhutan (2022), and pilot interventions in the Virunga Mountains reaching over 120 households, scaling improved stoves to 300 households. The project demonstrated high potential for long-term impact due to its innovative approach, strong communications, and focus on globally significant mountain ecosystems and flagship species. Initial design gaps, such as an incomplete Theory of Change, limited early interventions; future phases aim to integrate comprehensive planning, enhanced field engagement, and adaptive management to strengthen sustainability.

The project influenced national policies, including Bhutan’s Tiger Action Plan referencing UNEP-GRID outputs (Government of Bhutan (2024), and increased global visibility for mountain gorilla conservation through VR films and other communications. Baseline assessments, such as the first-ever snow leopard population near Bishkek, informed targeted habitat protection and policy. Integration across subprogrammes supported Climate Action (1B) and Nature Action (2B, 2C). Efficiency was strong: modest funding was fully utilised, adaptive management was applied, and delays from COVID-19, political transitions, and partner capacity constraints were mitigated to a large extent. While vertical fund mobilization has yet to be realised, regional partnerships present high potential for leveraging future resources. Community-centered climate risk assessments, participatory conservation planning, climate-smart landscape management, and nature-based livelihood solutions demonstrate transformative, replicable innovation.

Sustainability and Impact

Project outcomes are moderately likely to be sustained. Community engagement, institutional capacity-building, and integration into national policies (e.g., Bhutan Tiger Action Plan) provide a strong foundation, while intergovernmental partnerships like the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration support multi-ministerial buy-in. Scaling-up potential is high in the Virunga region, Bhutan, and Andes due to strong local partnerships, government support, and research-NGO linkages. Key risks include weak policy implementation, limited local capacity, landscape-level dependencies, economic constraints, institutional instability, and

underinvestment in communications, which require strategic mitigation to ensure long-term impact (UNEP 2024).

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

Monitoring and reporting were satisfactory, with clear indicators, baselines, and targets tracking implementation. Regular project reports were high-quality, supporting both accountability and communications. Gender and social inclusion were integrated in trainings, workshops, and livelihood pilots, ensuring balanced participation, though inclusion in policy-level interventions remained limited. Multi-level monitoring, including core teams, regional leads, verification missions, and senior management oversight, enabled adaptive management. Knowledge dissemination through scientific publications and the Mountain Research Initiative ensured lessons were captured and shared. Phase II is developing comparative analyses of impact, Theory of Change, and lessons learned to support adaptive management and cross-regional knowledge transfer.

Cross-cutting Issues

The Project actively integrated cross-cutting considerations, particularly gender, social inclusion, and human rights, into its conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation interventions. Gender balance was promoted in community-level activities, trainings, workshops, and pilot projects, with women supported to take leadership roles and participate fully in decision-making. Livelihood initiatives, such as household water cisterns and climate-smart agriculture pilots, were designed to benefit both women and men. Social inclusion was fostered through engagement of local councils, civil society organizations, and community groups, ensuring broad participation in project planning and implementation. While these measures strengthened equitable participation and enhanced community ownership, gender and human rights considerations were less systematically integrated into policy-level interventions, highlighting an area for further strengthening in Phase II.

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The Vanishing Treasures project demonstrated how strategic, evidence-based interventions can advance climate-resilient mountain ecosystems, flagship species conservation, and community-based adaptation across diverse regions, including the Virunga Mountains, Bhutan, Central Asia, and, in Phase II, the Northern Andes. Its successes were driven by innovative approaches such as community-centered climate risk assessments Skrimizea et al (2023), participatory conservation planning, and immersive storytelling tools (e.g., VR films, Adidas Run Wild Challenge), alongside strong scientific partnerships with universities and research centers that enabled evidence-based decision-making. The project effectively engaged governments, local communities, civil society, and the private sector, with particular attention to gender balance and inclusive participation, enhancing the potential for ownership, sustainability, and policy uptake. National policy integration was achieved in Bhutan and Central Asia, while multi-ministerial platforms such as the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration facilitated cross-sectoral engagement and upscaling of pilot results to regional and international processes.

Financial and operational efficiency was demonstrated through catalytic use of modest resources, strategically investing in pilots, economic case studies, and communications to strengthen visibility, donor confidence, and replicability. Adaptive management, multi-level monitoring, and knowledge-sharing through initiatives such as the Mountain Research Initiative

and peer-reviewed publications reinforced learning and evidence-based decision-making, while Phase II is set to consolidate comparative analyses to inform broader Nature Action strategies.

To maximize future impact, UNEP should strengthen alignment with country priorities, upscale innovative communications to influence policymakers, scientists, advocacy networks, and global funding bodies, and systematically integrate gender, human rights, and social inclusion into policy-level interventions rather than limiting them to capacity-building activities. The project should leverage its wide network of actors, including Mountain Research Initiative (MRI), Group on Earth Observations (GEO), Mountain Partnership, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and mountain science communities, to disseminate knowledge, advocate Vanishing Treasures priorities, and advance broader agendas on climate-smart wildlife conservation, ecosystem-based adaptation, and resilient mountain livelihoods. Future phases should incorporate comprehensive Theory of Change frameworks, increase field engagement, and pursue vertical funds and co-financing by leveraging UNEP's regional links and experience with national governments. Maintaining strong outputs, high-quality communications, and active community engagement will be critical to sustaining long-term impact, enhancing uptake, and scaling Nature Action outcomes globally.

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2. Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The GPI, Assessing, Measuring and Preserving Peat Carbon (PIMS 317.3; IKI-18_III_096) is implemented by UNEP's Ecosystems Division (Biodiversity, People and Landscapes Unit) together with UNEP-WCMC in close collaboration with the Climate Division, FAO, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Michael Succow Foundation, Duene, and the David Suzuki Foundation. Operating across Indonesia, Peru, the Republic of Congo, DRC, Colombia, and Mongolia, the project supports national and global action on peatland conservation by assessing peatland extent and carbon storage, producing knowledge products such as the Global Peatlands Assessment and Hotspots Atlas, and fostering cross-sectoral capacity building. Launched in 2018 with national rollout in 2019, the initiative is funded by International Climate Initiative (IKI), and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), supplemented through co-financing, private sector engagement, and innovative partnerships, e.g. with additional resources leveraged from GEF (Mongolia and Congo), IKI (Congo), vertical and thematic funds, and other co-financing, enabling expansion to Indonesia, Colombia, and Mongolia (UNEP 2023, 2025).

GPI is highly aligned with UNEP's mandate and the Nature Action Subprogramme, contributing to ecosystem conservation, restoration, and sustainable management, as well as advancing SDGs 6, 13, and 15. Outputs such as the Global Peatlands Assessment, Peatland Hotspots Atlas, and policy briefs have informed NDCs (e.g., Peru's Amazonian peatlands) and regional frameworks such as the Brazzaville Declaration, while technical capacity building through workshops, webinars, and the Research Working Group has strengthened national implementation. The initiative was designed to work primarily towards NDCs rather than NBSAPs, though at one point internal pressures to reframe it for NBSAP reporting created tension with the project's original design. Cross-divisional collaboration and South-South cooperation, including the International Tropical Peatlands Center and partnerships with MEAs, donors, and the private sector, have reinforced policy uptake and resource mobilization, exemplified by a \$5 million AfDB proposal (UNEP 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

The project has addressed key challenges, including political turnover and competing land-use priorities, by rebuilding engagement with newly appointed national counterparts and integrating environmental and social safeguards into planning. Knowledge management systems, including the Congo Basin platform, support adaptive management and bridge science-policy gaps. GPI's contributions have been recognised through UNEP's Kipepeo Award for Environmental Impact (2024) and reinforced the global profile of peatland conservation as a priority for climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Phase II and a 10-year strategic plan are under development to consolidate governance, expand membership, and scale up cross-country and private sector engagement, ensuring long-term sustainability and alignment with national, regional, and global biodiversity and climate commitments.

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The project operates under UNEP's Ecosystems Division, anchored in the Biodiversity, People and Landscapes Unit, together with UNEP-WCMC, with strong collaboration across the Climate Division, FAO, CIFOR, and other implementing partners. Coordination mechanisms link global, regional, and national actors, enabling support tailored to country needs, including Indonesia, Peru, the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Colombia, and Mongolia. High-level political support from successive Executive Directors provided visibility and legitimacy, though middle-management engagement was weaker, limiting some ambitions.

Weaknesses in institutional memory and knowledge retention also constrained coordination effectiveness. Regional offices provide logistical support, dissemination, and facilitation of workshops, webinars, and innovation labs, while national focal points are engaged to enhance ownership and alignment with local priorities. Flexible approaches, such as Peru developing enabling conditions for Amazonian peatlands in consultation with UNEP, demonstrate the project's capacity to translate global and subprogramme objectives into actionable, context-specific results, bridging science-policy gaps, strengthening governance, and fostering sustainable peatland management.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

The project has established a wide-ranging network of partners, including FAO, CIFOR, IUCN, Wetlands International, national ministries, universities, NGOs, and private sector actors, ensuring cross-divisional and multi-stakeholder coherence. Partnerships are strategically managed to link countries to technical expertise, policy guidance, and financing opportunities, exemplified by joint initiatives such as the International Tropical Peatlands Center, the Brazzaville Declaration, and the EU Horizon projects. Engagement with governments, CSOs, private sector actors, and local communities has been intensive, supported through workshops, webinars, innovation labs, and capacity-building activities. High-profile outputs and recognition, including the UNEP Kipepeo Award for Environmental Impact and UN Secretary-General Award visibility, underscore the initiative's role in fostering collaboration, advancing sustainable peatland management, and mobilising diverse actors for transformative climate and biodiversity action.

A defining feature was that over 200 scientists contributed voluntarily to the Global Peatlands Assessment without pay, reflecting a partnership model based on collective impact rather than financial transactions. Partners were required to contribute the content of their work, reinforcing ownership and shared purpose. The UNEA resolution served as a political lever, empowering partners to use global recognition to advance national action

Operations

The GPI has effectively delivered outputs and outcomes at global and national scales. By 2024, most planned activities in pilot countries including Peru, Indonesia, RoC, DRC, Colombia, and Mongolia were completed, with technical tools, knowledge products, and guidance shared and adapted to country-specific contexts. The project supported regional knowledge exchanges, workshops, and innovation labs, while the Congo Basin knowledge management system, Peatland Hotspots Atlas, and other platforms facilitated data collation, knowledge sharing, and progress monitoring. Some gaps remain where national data are insufficient for reporting. Peer-to-peer exchanges- minister-to-minister, indigenous-to-indigenous, and scientist-to-scientist were deliberately designed as a core learning mechanism. Many spillover effects, such as uptake in Canada, Europe, Patagonia, and Southeast Asia, were not systematically documented, limiting visibility of their full impact

Delays due to consultation, political turnover, and donor disbursement were mitigated through adaptive planning. Financial resources were efficiently utilised, with strategic leveraging of IKI funds, co-financing, and private sector engagement enhancing impact relative to the core budget.

Sustainability and Impact

The GPI demonstrates strong potential for sustainability by embedding outputs into national policies, monitoring systems, and institutional processes. Early policy impacts are evident, with

pilot countries such as Peru, Indonesia, and the DRC integrating peatlands into NDCs, while Congo Basin countries adopted the Brazzaville Declaration as a political commitment to peatland protection. Capacity has been strengthened through workshops, the Research Working Group, and multi-stakeholder dialogues, enabling systemic change in governance, planning, and monitoring. Approaches developed by GPI are replicable and scalable, supported by platforms like the Peatland Hotspots Atlas, Virtual Peatland Pavilion, and South–South cooperation mechanisms. Long-term financial sustainability is being pursued through diversified funding, including GEF and IKI funds for Congo and Mongolia, alongside vertical and thematic funds.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

GPI employs a coherent monitoring framework aligned with project and international indicators, complemented by tools such as the Congo Basin knowledge management system and Peatland Hotspots Atlas. Data gaps and uneven country-level capacities are addressed through adaptive management, with findings systematically feeding into project planning and the design of the next phase. The Research Working Group played a central role in aligning science with policy, producing a list of priority research questions to guide policy-relevant science. Many lessons and spillovers were exchanged informally and not systematically documented, creating weaknesses in institutional memory and limiting replication.

Cross-cutting Issues

Gender equality and inclusivity were integrated from the design stage (UNEP 2017), with near parity in Global Peatlands Assessment authorship and attention to IPLC engagement. While sex-disaggregated data collection is maintained, further progress is needed on human rights, equity, and social safeguards integration across operational components (UNEP 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) illustrates how targeted, evidence-driven interventions can promote peatland conservation, climate mitigation, and sustainable land management across multiple regions, including Indonesia, Peru, the Republic of Congo, the DRC, Colombia, and Mongolia. Its successes have been driven by innovative approaches such as comprehensive peatland mapping and assessments (Global Peatlands Assessment, Peatland Hotspots Atlas), South–South cooperation, knowledge-sharing platforms, and multi-stakeholder engagement that integrates policy, science, and finance.

The project has effectively engaged governments, civil society, local communities, and private sector actors, while leveraging high-intensity outputs including COP events, UNEP publications, and innovation labs, to strengthen policy uptake and national ownership. Notable policy achievements include Peru integrating peatlands into its NDCs, Congo Basin countries adopting the Brazzaville Declaration, and the establishment of the International Tropical Peatlands Center in collaboration with Indonesia and Republic of Congo. Multi-country coordination, research working groups, and technical capacity-building have reinforced adaptive management and strengthened evidence-based decision-making.

Financial and operational efficiency has been demonstrated through catalytic use of limited resources, combining IKI funding with co-financing, private sector engagement, and partnerships with FAO, CIFOR and other Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) members. Strategic

resource mobilization, including proposals to the African Development Bank, has amplified the initiative's reach and sustainability. Adaptive management, monitoring systems, and the development of a Congo Basin knowledge management platform ensure lessons are captured and applied to the next phase and 10-year GPI strategy.

The initiative's design focused on NDCs, with NBSAPs addressed only indirectly, a distinction that should inform future alignment across MEA frameworks. Success in leveraging voluntary partnerships, high-level political cover, and diversified funding (IKI, GEF, vertical and thematic funds) positions GPI as a model for building collective impact without transactional dependency. Weaknesses around middle-management support, documentation of spillovers, and institutional memory remain areas for improvement in future phases. To maximise future impact, UNEP should strengthen alignment with country-specific priorities, expand stakeholder engagement through GPI Town Halls and the 4th Partners Meeting, and integrate environmental and social safeguards more systematically into project planning. Leveraging GPI's extensive network including governments, MEAs, research institutions, and the private sector will be critical to advancing peatland conservation, climate mitigation, and sustainable finance. Future phases should focus on embedding peatland protection in national policies and regional strategies, scaling knowledge-sharing platforms, and securing diversified, long-term funding to sustain outcomes. Maintaining strong outputs, continuous stakeholder engagement, and adaptive learning will be essential to achieving lasting Nature Action results at global and national levels.

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3. Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services (2018–2024)

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The project, "Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services," implemented from May 2018 to June 2024 with a budget of USD 15 million, was executed by UNEP's Ecosystems Division (Marine and Freshwater Branch) together with UNEP-WCMC, in collaboration with Regional Seas Programmes, GRID-Arendal, and other technical and organizational partners. The project succeeded the Global Coral Reef Partnership (Project 321.2) and has been followed by the MFWB project. It operated globally, with regional pilot testing across the Caribbean, East Asian Seas, Pacific, Western Indian Ocean, West and Central Africa, ROPME Sea Area, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and country-specific pilots in Kenya, the Philippines, the Gambia, Belize, Bahamas, and Vietnam (UNEP, 2022/23, 2025).

The project's objectives focused on integrating the values of marine and coastal ecosystem services into policy and decision-making, developing tools and guidance for ecosystem-based management and sustainable blue economy approaches, and supporting regional ocean governance under the post-2020 GBF. Its design was highly aligned with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (2018–2021; 2022–2025), PoW SP3 EAa Output 6, relevant SDG indicators (14.2.1 and 14.5.1), and UNEA resolutions on oceans, coral reefs, and mangroves. Gender, inclusivity, and indigenous knowledge were mainstreamed throughout project design, with gender-balanced expert groups, dedicated guidance, and case studies on gender-responsive ecosystem management (UNEP, 2022/23, 2025).

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The project operated through a multi-layered coordination structure. UNEP divisions, Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), and expert partners were linked via PCP 1, ensuring cross-sectoral and transboundary alignment. Implementation involved 16 executing partners and 24 additional organizational partners across six years, with strategic collaboration with financial institutions, private-sector actors, and local and regional authorities. Coordination was further enhanced through engagement with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR), UNEP ROAP, and other regional and international stakeholders (GFCR 2024).

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

A wide network of partners was mobilized, including national ministries and agencies, regional fisheries management organizations, UN agencies (FAO, International Maritime Organization - IMO, IOC/UNESCO, UNDP), multilateral development banks, and ecosystem-focused partners (UNEP-WCMC, WCS, ICRI, UNEP FI). Engagement spanned pilot projects to global governance initiatives, promoting knowledge exchange, capacity building, and mainstreaming of sustainable blue economy practices. Private-sector participation was incorporated through initiatives such as Green Fins, coral restoration programs, and investment pipelines for sustainable enterprises, although formal engagement strategies could be strengthened in future phases.

Operations

The project effectively delivered most of its outputs, with high ratings for Outputs 1, 3, 4, 5, and 5a, and moderate ratings for Output 2; six outcome-level indicators were fully met and three partially achieved. Key tools, including the MPA toolbox, decision-support frameworks for blue economy planning, and regional governance guidance were piloted and disseminated,

supporting policy uptake and strengthening regional ocean governance, while some outputs, such as gender-balanced MPA training workshops, were not implemented. The project demonstrated innovation and transformative approaches by integrating ecosystem-based management, gender mainstreaming, indigenous knowledge, private-sector engagement, digital platforms, and investment pipelines, leveraging Blue Finance and GFCR resources. Adaptive learning facilitated the transition from tool development to country-level implementation and informed follow-on projects. Financially, 92% of the final budget was spent, with an additional USD 3.5 million mobilized, though delays due to COVID-19, partner timelines, and UN contracting affected over half of the milestones, highlighting the need for enhanced coordination to improve timeliness (UNEP, 2024).

Sustainability and Impact

The project's sustainability is moderately likely. Policy continuity is supported by the adoption of UNEA resolutions and the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022–2025 (UNEP 2023, 2025). Institutional sustainability is strengthened through long-term partnerships and ongoing engagement with GFCR. Financial sustainability depends on follow-on funding, including blue carbon initiatives and partner-led grants. The project contributed to systemic change by strengthening regional governance frameworks, advancing integrated ocean management, and embedding innovative ecosystem management practices, laying the foundation for long-term environmental and policy impact. Risks include dependence on political will, external funding, and absence of a formal exit strategy.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

Monitoring systems were expanded from 10 to 27 output indicators, covering deliverables, activities, and gender inclusion. While reporting tracked outputs and progress, outcome-level reporting, especially for regional interventions, was inconsistent, and some indicator definitions were unclear. Feedback loops existed but were informal, with selective uptake of lessons learned into follow-on initiatives (GFCR, blue carbon projects). Strengthening roles, standardised templates, and systematic integration of lessons learned are recommended to enhance adaptive management.

Cross-cutting Issues

Gender, inclusivity, and human rights considerations were integrated from the design stage and reflected in project outputs, expert groups, and guidance materials. While overall gender mainstreaming was successful, specific outputs (e.g., MPA tool training workshops) were not delivered, and indigenous knowledge integration remains limited at the SP-NA level, requiring expansion in future phases.

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The Sustainable Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Services project has established a robust foundation for advancing regional ocean governance, ecosystem-based management, and sustainable blue economy approaches. It demonstrated strong alignment with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (2018–2021, 2022–2025), the Programme of Work (PoW SP3 EAa Output 6), SDG targets 14.2 and 14.5, and key UNEA resolutions on oceans, coral reefs, and mangroves. Piloted tools, including the MPA toolbox, blue economy decision-support frameworks, and gender-responsive interventions, strengthened knowledge platforms, informed policy uptake, and supported implementation of the KM-GBF. Institutional partnerships with Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), GFCR, and other

multi-stakeholder initiatives ensured co-financing, technical support, and wider uptake of innovative practices.

The project also demonstrated transformative approaches, integrating ecosystem-based management, gender mainstreaming, indigenous knowledge, private-sector engagement, digital platforms, and investment pipelines leveraging Blue Finance and GFCR resources. Adaptive learning facilitated a shift from tool development to country-level application, enabling replication and informing the design of follow-on projects.

For future UNEP projects under the NA-SP, lessons from this initiative highlight the need to strengthen cross-branch coordination and project management to improve timeliness and reduce delays, enhance monitoring, evaluation, and learning through standardised reporting and systematic use of lessons, and the need to institutionalise sustainability mechanisms by securing long-term funding, developing exit strategies, and embedding outputs into national policies and regional governance frameworks. Future efficiency could be enhanced by strengthening UNEP's internal technical capacity in software and digital project management. When projects involve software development, UNEP should have in-house technical expertise to guide design choices and translate programmatic needs into realistic development workflows.

Scaling and replicating innovative tools and private-sector engagement models, deepening structured collaboration with governments, regional bodies, multilateral agencies, CSOs, IPLCs, and the private sector, and promoting cross-cutting integration of gender, indigenous knowledge, and inclusivity are critical. Additionally, leveraging digital knowledge and financial platforms will support capacity building, policy coherence, and evidence-based decision-making. By integrating these measures, future initiatives can consolidate gains, scale high-impact interventions, and strengthen the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems, contributing systematically to global biodiversity and ocean governance objectives.

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4. Dominica Hurricane Maria

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The “Strengthening resilience of agricultural lands and forests in Dominica in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria” project (UNEP SMA IPMR ID 36843; GEF ID 9978) was launched on 16 September 2019 with a total approved budget of USD 3.59 million, comprising GEF funding of USD 1.58 million and co-financing of USD 2.02 million. Scheduled to conclude on 30 September 2026, the project aims to restore forests and agricultural lands damaged by Hurricane Maria, while strengthening ecosystem resilience, sustainable land management (SLM), and climate adaptation for local communities. UNEP serves as the implementing agency, with execution led by the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) in collaboration with national Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, IICA-Dominica, FAO, and private sector nurseries.. As of June 2025, USD 816,365 has been expended. The project aligns strongly with UNEP's mandate, the NA-SP objectives, the GEF focal areas, and national priorities, particularly post-hurricane recovery and climate resilience, contributing indirectly to NBSAP and biodiversity tracking through reforestation monitoring and geospatial databases (UNEP 2019, 2022).

Institutional Structure and Mechanisms

Project execution is largely self-contained within UNEP divisions, with coordination across divisions being partial and project-dependent. For example, the Climate Change Division was not actively involved in Dominica despite climate resilience being a key component. Technical reviews occasionally involve other divisions depending on the orientation of interventions, but day-to-day interactions remain limited. GEF review processes provide some cross-cutting alignment on indicators and safeguards, though implementation largely occurs in silos. At the country level, PISLM functions as Chief Technical Officer, bridging national capacity gaps in SIDS and coordinating directly with local ministries. Frequent changes in government leadership- three to four in both the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture since project inception - have affected continuity, requiring repeated alignment of project activities with evolving policies.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

Key partnerships include PISLM, FAO, national Ministries, private nurseries, farmers' cooperatives, and youth organizations. PISLM executes projects in Dominica and Grenada and collaborates with FAO on soil management projects, providing practical field-level expertise in SLM. Engagement activities have reached over 500 farmers, women, and indigenous Kalinago community members. Youth participation included more than 200 attendees at the OECS Youth in Agriculture Forum, while private nurseries were contracted to produce seedlings for reforestation. Collaboration with FAO and Global Environment Facility – Sustainable Land Management in the Caribbean (Global Environment Facility – Sustainable Land Management and Desertification focal area (GEF-SLMD)) ensures strong regional synergy, though integration with other UNEP divisions and MEA frameworks remains partial. The project has maintained relevance by adapting to recurrent climate shocks, including hurricanes, floods, and droughts, requiring iterative interventions to meet both ecological and livelihood objectives.

Operations

Outputs are moderately satisfactory, achieving 64% of targets, including reforestation surveys, seedling production, and capacity building. Outcomes are moderately unsatisfactory, with delays in land conversion, policy adoption, and public awareness due to procedural and procurement challenges. The Climate Resilient Sustainable Land and Forest Resource Management Plan, first of its kind for Dominica, has informed draft climate and food security policies. Women's cooperatives in Salisbury, Grand Fond, and the North East received targeted support to produce and market agricultural goods, strengthening community resilience and promoting inclusive growth. UNEP's support in integrating project outcomes into national geospatial databases enhances monitoring, while work through its center UNEP-WCMC situates local results within broader regional and global data. Overall, the project advances NA-SP's Theory of Change by restoring ecosystems, promoting SLM, and strengthening climate resilience.

Project efficiency is moderately unsatisfactory. Underutilization of funds have constrained delivery. Partnerships with PISLM and FAO helped bridge capacity gaps and provide on-the-ground support, while leveraging vertical funds ensured continuity despite limited national budgets and recurrent climate shocks. Adaptive management, including reallocation of funds for emerging needs, mitigated some delays, though leadership changes and repeated interventions required by recurrent climate events slowed progress.

Sustainability and Impact

Overall sustainability is rated unlikely. Socio-political and institutional support is moderately likely, but financial sustainability is weak due to the absence of post-project funding and a clear exit strategy. The project has strengthened national capacity in sustainable forestry management, SLM planning, and strategic decision-making in response to climate hazards. It demonstrates strong replication potential across Dominica, but sustainability is constrained by policy gaps, incomplete knowledge management, and the high dependence on socio-political factors. UNEP's provision of predictable GEF funding has been critical in maintaining continuity, though repeated climate-related shocks necessitate ongoing adaptation and reduce long-term predictability.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The project's results framework is moderately unsatisfactory. While indicators, baselines, and targets are defined, gaps exist in data availability and reporting, limiting comprehensive assessment. Knowledge management is largely self-contained within the project, with limited strategic linkage across projects. Efforts include tracking reforestation extent, integrating geographic intervention footprints with national databases, and using UNEP-WCMC's expertise for portfolio-level analysis. At the UNEP level, the project has representation in UNEP's knowledge management task force, which aims to strengthen learning and adaptive management, though additional resources are required for systematic cross-project uptake (UNEP, 2023).

Cross-cutting Issues

The project incorporated gender-responsive measures and human rights considerations, particularly benefiting women and indigenous communities. Youth engagement included exposure to sustainable agriculture practices, while knowledge products were produced in French Creole for migrant populations. However, inclusion of persons with disabilities, broader youth engagement, and marginalised groups beyond the Kalinago community remains limited.

Sustainability and scaling of project achievements will depend on integrating these cross-cutting considerations more comprehensively in future planning and interventions (UNEP 2019, 2022, 2023).

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The Dominica Resilience project has provided a foundational framework for advancing sustainable land management, climate adaptation, and ecosystem restoration in small island developing states, while also highlighting the challenges inherent in delivering Nature Action outcomes in such contexts. With a total approved budget of USD 3.59 million, including GEF funding complemented by co-financing, the project engaged multiple stakeholders: PISLM, FAO, national ministries, private nurseries, women's cooperatives, and youth groups—establishing broad-based implementation structures. Notable achievements include development of the Climate Resilient Sustainable Land and Forest Resource Management Plan, capacity building in sustainable forestry and agriculture, geospatial tracking of reforested areas, and policy support for climate-resilient food security. These interventions contributed to strengthening technical knowledge, community engagement, and the integration of ecosystem-based approaches at a local level.

However, several limitations tempered overall project effectiveness and sustainability. Coordination across UNEP divisions remained partial, with critical inputs from the Climate Change Division largely absent, and financial management was constrained, resulting in underutilization of available funds and delays in reporting. Institutional silos, repeated interruptions due to leadership changes in national ministries, and recurrent climate-related events limited the timely implementation of key outputs such as monitoring systems, land conversion, and public awareness programs. Sustainability risks were high: financial continuity post-project remains unconfirmed, policy frameworks are only partially finalized, and knowledge management systems are incomplete, all of which reduce the likelihood of long-term impact. While socio-political and institutional support is moderately likely, critical gaps in policy, funding, and adaptive mechanisms continue to constrain project outcomes.

To enhance future impact, integrated strategic planning, strengthened institutional coordination, improved financial management, and robust knowledge management are essential. Accelerating completion of monitoring systems, finalizing critical policies, consolidating capacity-building efforts, and ensuring inclusion of marginalized groups and youth will be crucial to translating project outputs into sustainable outcomes. The Dominica project underscores UNEP's capacity to deliver Nature Action results through strategic partnerships and multi-level engagement, but also demonstrates that without dedicated resources, adaptive management, and stronger cross-divisional coordination, replicability and long-term sustainability in SIDS contexts remain limited.

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5. UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI): 2022–2025

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

UNEP-FI is a global partnership between UNEP and more than 400 financial institutions, anchored in the Ecosystems Division and operating across UNEP's Climate Action, Nature Action, and Pollution & Circular Economy subprogrammes. The initiative aims to integrate sustainability into banking, insurance, and investment practices through sectoral principles (PRB, PSI, PRI), thematic tools (e.g., Exploring Natural Capital Opportunities, Risks and Exposure (ENCORE)), and disclosure frameworks (e.g., Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)). With a budget of USD 19.9 million (2022–2025), financed through UNEP core support, membership fees from 500+ institutions, and donor grants (e.g., Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), EU, GEF), UNEP-FI contributes to MTS 2022–2025 outcomes and supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It indirectly supports GBF and NBSAP alignment by translating global biodiversity commitments into actionable steps for the finance sector, while mainstreaming biodiversity as a financial materiality issue rather than philanthropy (UNEP, 2021).

Institutional structure and mechanisms:

Governance is provided by a Global Steering Committee and three industry boards (Banking, Insurance, Investment), supported by ~200 staff, including 30 core UNEP staff and consultants, with 32 dedicated to communications. Regional teams remain small but are growing, with coordinators based in Asia (e.g., Mumbai), North America, and Europe. UNEP-WCMC plays a key technical role as co-developer of ENCORE, and pilots are implemented with private sector institutions (e.g., Japanese bank on rubber in Indonesia, South African insurance pilots). Donor-funded programmes (SECO, EC, GEF) support targeted workstreams such as blue economy and ENCORE development.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

UNEP-FI works with >300 financial institutions and >100 supporting organizations, engaging banks, insurers, investors, regulators, and stock exchanges. Partnerships include the Ocean Finance Initiative (80 organizations), and the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), where UNEP-FI plays a central role with 50 pilot members testing frameworks (TNFD, 2025). Within UNEP, UNEP-WCMC supports this work as a co-developer of ENCORE. Regional engagement is supported through roundtables, training academies, and South–South exchanges, bringing in institutions from SIDS, LDCs, and V20 economies. Donor partnerships (EU, SECO, GEF) have enabled pilots in Peru, Colombia, Indonesia, and South Africa, with varying levels of local uptake.

Operations

Planned outputs included sectoral principles, guidance, capacity-building initiatives, and publications, with delivery between 2020–2025 resulting in 39 publications across biodiversity, oceans, disclosure, and finance-policy alignment. Widely referenced tools such as ENCORE, the PRB Nature Target-Setting Guidance, and the PSI Global Guide were produced, while membership expanded from 50 to 500 institutions. UNEP-FI also contributed to global policy fora, including Finance for Biodiversity Day at CBD COP16, the G20, and COP dialogues, and played an active role in the TNFD, which now has over 620 organizations with USD 20 trillion AUM committed to nature-related reporting. Outputs were largely delivered on schedule, although the ProDoc and syntheses provide no evidence of delays or ex-post budget data. Membership growth and publications indicate success, but interviews cautioned that

“numbers do not do justice” to the real impact, which lies in narrative and systemic shifts rather than quantifiable biodiversity outcomes.

Sustainability and Impact

Sustainability is supported by UNEP-FI’s member-driven governance, institutionalized frameworks (PRB, PSI), and structured membership contributions. Donor funding (SECO, EU, GEF) supports targeted workstreams but remains earmarked and a structural risk. UNEP-FI has catalyzed a narrative shift: biodiversity is now framed as a material financial risk/opportunity, mainstreamed into sectoral practice through disclosure, guidance, and capacity building. While systemic influence is evident (e.g., TNFD integration, GBF Roadmap for Finance), direct biodiversity or climate outcomes are not systematically measured. Capacity-building for the Global South is a priority, though uptake varies across institutions and regions (UNEP, 2025a 2025b).

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The ProDoc includes a results framework with baselines and milestones (e.g., Principles for Responsible Banking (PRB)/ Principles for Sustainable Insurance (PSI) membership, biennial reporting, TNFD deliverables). Reporting mechanisms include collective progress reports, third-party reviews, and member disclosures. However, indicators are output-heavy (membership numbers, guidance produced, reports delivered) and lack outcome-level biodiversity or climate metrics. Knowledge dissemination is strong, with 32 dedicated communications staff and hundreds of webinars, publications, and ENCORE case studies. Much of the impact is systemic and narrative, which is “not easily quantifiable” within existing MEL frameworks.

Cross-cutting Issues

The ProDoc identifies human rights and social issues as a thematic workstream. Capacity building and training place emphasis on the Global South, including SIDS, LDCs, and V20 economies. However, gender is not systematically mainstreamed in indicators or outputs. Inclusivity is reflected in training academies, peer exchanges, and regional roundtables, but systematic integration into MEL frameworks remains limited.

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI) demonstrated how a member-driven governance model and strategic partnerships can mainstream biodiversity, climate, and pollution concerns into global financial systems. Its successes have been driven by the development of widely used tools (ENCORE, PRB Nature Target-Setting Guidance, PSI Global Guide), sectoral principles (PRB, PSI, PRI), and contributions to global policy processes such as Finance for Biodiversity Day at CBD COP16, G20 dialogues, and the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD). By shifting the narrative from biodiversity as philanthropy to biodiversity as a material financial concern, UNEP-FI has helped anchor sustainability into private-sector decision-making. Membership growth from 50 to over 500 institutions, combined with targeted regional pilots in Peru, Colombia, Indonesia, and South Africa, shows its potential for scaling.

Operational efficiency has been supported by a lean secretariat leveraging membership fees, UNEP core grants, and donor contributions (SECO, EU, GEF), though reliance on earmarked funding remains a risk. Strong communication strategies, including 32 dedicated staff, have enabled translation of technical biodiversity language into business-friendly frameworks, strengthening uptake and donor confidence. Capacity-building through regional

academies, roundtables, and South–South exchanges has prioritized Global South institutions, supporting early-stage integration of nature into banking and insurance.

To maximize future impact, UNEP-FI should institutionalize stronger links with MEAs (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD) by embedding its financial tools and disclosure guidance into national biodiversity strategies and global reporting frameworks. It should also expand support for developing countries where uptake has been slower, ensuring equitable access to finance tools. Systematic integration of cross-cutting issues-gender, youth, and inclusivity- into guidance and monitoring frameworks remains a gap to be addressed. Scaling-up will require diversifying financing beyond donor dependence, pursuing vertical funds, and strengthening regional delivery capacity. Maintaining high-quality outputs, evidence-based policy engagement, and a strong convening role with the private sector will be essential for sustaining systemic change and deepening the contribution of finance to Nature Action outcomes globally.

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6. True Value Accounting Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The True Value Accounting: Making the Economic Case for Food Systems Transformation in India and Kenya project (UNEP Project ID 166289) was launched in August 2023, implemented by UNEP's Ecosystems Division with support from ROAP and ROA. The project is funded in Kenya by IKI (Phase 1), European Union in India (€8.5 million, Phase 2), and IKEA Foundation (USD 8,690,830, Phase 3) from Dec 2023- July 2027. It operates in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Assam in India, and in selected Kenyan watersheds. The project's objective is to transform food systems to be more resilient, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human well-being. It promotes mainstreaming approaches through the TEEB AgriFood Framework, integrating natural, social, and human capital into policies, business practices, and community actions. In India, the project builds on lessons from the EU-funded predecessor and engages multiple stakeholders, including Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), ICAR institutions, IIFM (MoEFCC), UN Women, and private sector partners like CRB and IKEA Foundation, ensuring gender inclusion and cross-sectoral coordination.

The project is strongly aligned with UNEP's mandate, Medium-Term Strategy outcomes 2A and 2B, and PoW objectives on sustainable food systems, circular value chains, and integration of environmental costs into decision-making. It supports UNSDCF priorities and contributes to India's NBSAP revision process through strategic engagement of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), including workshops and steering committee inputs. It also addresses SDGs 2, 6, 12, 13, and 15, and aligns with national policies including the National Agroforestry Policy, National Mission for Clean Ganga, and *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana*.

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The project is implemented through multi-level partnerships. Public-sector partners include ICAR's Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research (IIFSR) in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) in Assam, and state-level boards such as the Uttarakhand Organic Commodities Board and Assam Agroforestry Development Board. Private-sector and civil society engagement is led by the Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) and supported by Capitals Coalition and IKEA Foundation. Key research partners include CAFRI, GB Pant University, Tata-Cornell Institute, and Center for International Forestry Research & World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF). Community-level engagement involves farmers' groups, women-only FPOs, local community networks, and NGOs such as Development Alternatives, Aarohi, Central Himalayan Rural Action Group (CHIRAG), and SAFE. The project has strengthened gender inclusion through active collaboration with UN Women, promoting women's participation in FPOs and field interventions. A national project steering committee co-chaired by MoEFCC and MoAFW and having members from Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Biodiversity Authority and heads of Agriculture and Forest Departments of the project States ensures policy alignment based on a cross sectoral approach. .

The project employs structured public-private dialogues, national- and state-level workshops, and bilateral consultations. Curricula on sustainable food systems and biodiversity economics are being embedded in the curriculum of civil service officers at the premier training Institutions such as LBSNAA and IGNFA. UNEP's Global Coordinator TEEB had addressed 80 Indian Forest Service officers in September 2024. . Community and sectoral capacity is strengthened through organic farming and agroforestry trainings, MSME engagement, thematic pilots (30 identified applying TEEB Agri guidelines), and case-study-based learning, while adaptive

learning is informed by knowledge exchanges with international projects (e.g., Brazil's experience with Urban and Periurban Agriculture (UPA), Organic Rice in Thailand etc) and lessons from the EU-funded predecessor project.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

Partnerships have been central to project delivery, linking UNEP with UN agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP, UN Women), donors (EU, AFD, IKEA Foundation), and initiatives such as FOLU and UNEP-FI to advance sustainable food systems and biodiversity integration. Collaborations with CEE, CRB, and the Capitals Coalition strengthened private sector engagement, with over 450 stakeholders and 30 pilot applications applying the TEEBAgriFood approach; five companies (Arvind, Ecociate, Go4Fresh, OLAM India Agri Rice, BASF) adopted biodiversity-informed business practices. Subnational partnerships with Assam Agroforestry Development Board, Uttarakhand Organic Commodities Board, and ICAR institutions enhanced FPO-based implementation and gender inclusion. Engagements with MoEFCC, MoAFW, and nine national entities ensured policy integration (Clean Ganga Mission, PKVY, MOVCDNER, Agroforestry Policy, and Rainfed Area Development Programme (RADP) and Climate Resilient Agriculture). Despite robust collaboration and financial continuity through the IKEA Foundation, limited structured engagement with UNDP constrained systemic knowledge sharing. Overall, partnerships enabled policy alignment, technical delivery, and cross-sectoral collaboration, embedding nature-positive approaches into India's agroecological and business systems (UNEP 2021, 2022, 2024a, 2024b)

Operations

The project has achieved significant progress in mainstreaming. Policy influence includes contributions to the National Agroforestry Policy, Framework for Voluntary Carbon Market for Agriculture, Mission Organic Value Chain Development (Northeast India), and National Mission for Clean Ganga. TEEBAgriFood principles were introduced in the new curriculum of ICAR for the undergraduate program in Natural Farming, available in 3 Central Agriculture Universities and 54 State Agri Universities. The TEEBAgriFood has been included in the Framework for Assessment of Ecosystem Service in Organic and Natural Farming to be implemented under the ICAR All India Network Program for Organic and Natural Farming, implemented in 20 collaborating centres across 16 States of India. Public and private partners now work jointly on the same agri-value chains, same agri-value chains in the project States so that the complete agri-value chain from production to consumption are addressed. The project leverages continuity from the EU-funded predecessor while integrating private sector funding from IKEA Foundation. Resource utilization aligns with planned budgets, supporting field interventions, capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement. Efficiency gains arise from co-located public-private implementation, though continuation in identical states could be optimized.

Sustainability and Impact

Institutional sustainability is supported by UNEP presence in India, adoption by ICAR in academics and field implementation, asks by DAFW, MoEFCC and MoSPI and enhanced integration into national training Academies. Partnerships with UN agencies (UNEP 2025), donors, and private actors, along with community-based structures such as women-only FPOs, enhance continuity. Policy continuity is evidenced through integration into centrally sponsored programs and alignment with national biodiversity priorities. Long-term systemic change is facilitated through community adoption of organic and agroforestry practices, pilots demonstrating value chains, and TEEBAgriFood Communities of Practice in India and

Kenya. Risks include dependence on individual champions, informal knowledge management, and continued implementation without clear rationale for state selection. Examples of exit strategies include the Mau Mara Natural Capital Company in Kenya.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The project has structured monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Field-level data, including gender-segregated indicators, flows from implementing partners to the private-sector lead, who formats it for integration into consolidated monitoring. The country Project Manager consolidates information for reporting to UNEP headquarters. Reporting cycles include monthly updates, six-monthly progress summaries, and weekly project meetings, ensuring regular oversight. Capacity-building on monitoring includes training for country staff on the online M&E platform, helping them understand how their input contributes to overall indicators. Knowledge management is supported through learning from predecessor projects (EU-funded phase) and international exchanges, e.g., São Paulo urban and peri-urban agriculture, flood prevention, and cooling effects, which were applied to Assam interventions.

However, gaps remain. Country staff do not consistently receive feedback on consolidated monitoring data, limiting opportunities for adaptive learning. Coordination between country teams and headquarters often relies on informal networks and personal connections rather than systematic mechanisms. The project demonstrates adaptive learning in gender inclusion and joint site-level public–private implementation, but a more formal knowledge-sharing system is needed to institutionalize learning and support evidence-based adjustments across sites and countries.

Cross-cutting Issues

Gender inclusion is strongly mainstreamed through women-only FPOs, and partnerships with UN Women, and Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (Government of India) (MoAFW), ensuring women's leadership in pilot projects, agroforestry, and organic farming initiatives. Gender-disaggregated data is systematically collected and integrated into monitoring frameworks, capturing women's roles in farming, MSMEs, and community decision-making.

Context for the future of the NA-SP.

The project provides a decade-long foundation for integrating TEEBAgriFood principles into food systems governance in India and Kenya. Structured engagement across policy, private sector, and communities demonstrates replicable models for scaling sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and agroforestry. Knowledge-sharing platforms, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and the TEEBAgriFood Communities of Practice enable cross-country learning and adaptive management. Future efforts should formalize institutional mechanisms, strengthen knowledge management, expand youth and human rights integration, and diversify funding to ensure sustained policy influence and systemic adoption of sustainable food practices beyond 2027.

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7. Ecovillage-Madagascar Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The project, "Evaluation of Natural Capital to Support Land Use Planning, Improved Management Effectiveness of Terrestrial Protected Areas, Deployment of Sustainable Land management (SLM) Practices, and Creation of Eco-Villages in Central Madagascar" or "Ecovillage", was launched in February 2023 with GEF financing of USD 5.65 million and co-financing of USD 27.48 million. Implemented by UNEP's Ecosystems Division in collaboration with Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development) (MEDD), Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et de la Pêche (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries) (MALF), Ministère de l'Eau, de l'Assainissement et de l'Hygiène (Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) (MEAH), ANAE, Groupe de Recherche et d'Échanges Technologiques (Research and Technological Exchange Group) (GRET), Direction Régionale de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Regional Directorate of Environment and Sustainable Development) (DREDD), Direction Régionale de l'Agriculture et de l'Élevage (Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock) (DRAE), and Madagascar National Parks (COFAV), the project operates across 18 pilot ecovillages in the Central Highlands. It aims to integrate natural capital accounting into land-use planning, enhance Protected Area management, promote sustainable land management (SLM) practices, and operationalize eco-villages that improve biodiversity conservation and livelihoods (UNEP 2023a).

The project is strongly aligned with UNEP's mandate, Medium-Term Strategy, and the NA-SP, contributing to SDGs 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.b, 15.3, 15.4, GBF targets 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 14, 19, and Madagascar's NBSAP and national environmental strategies. It is responsive to country needs, promoting a shift from a narrow provisioning view of natural resources toward a holistic natural capital approach. Gender, inclusion, and participatory approaches are embedded in design and implementation, ensuring women, youth, and vulnerable groups benefit from the interventions (UNEP 2023a, 2023b).

Institutional structure and mechanisms

Coordination is managed through UNEP's Ecosystems Division in partnership with national and local government bodies, regional directorates, and NGOs. Institutional anchoring is supported by alignment with national priorities such as the NBSAP, National Forest Policy, National Climate Strategy, and REDD+ Coordination frameworks. Multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms include technical and steering committees, regular community consultations, and training programs for local village trainers (LVTs), patrol officers, and households. These mechanisms ensure local ownership and capacity building while strengthening the institutionalization of natural capital assessments and eco-village governance (UNEP 2024, 2025).

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

The project has mobilized a broad network of stakeholders, including ministries, regional directorates, NGOs, development banks, USAID, World Bank, private partners, and local communities. Stakeholder engagement is participatory, culturally sensitive, and inclusive, with 57% of beneficiaries being women. Collaboration with other UNEP subprogrammes occurs at the design stage through the Coordination Advisory Group (CAG), although cross-divisional integration could be further strengthened. Private sector involvement remains limited, with the focus on community-led initiatives.

UNEP plays a central role in Madagascar, being the largest GEF Implementing Agency in the country. Since 1996, UNEP has implemented 19 national projects, covering approximately 40% of the national GEF portfolio. This extensive presence enhances efficiency of scale, strengthens policy and institutional continuity, and provides a platform for leveraging co-financing and technical support across projects. Partner institutions together illustrate how the Madagascar project combined community-level action (ANAE, GRET) with regional directorates (DREDD, DRAE) and national ministries (MEDD, MALF, MEAH) to mainstream SLM and natural capital approaches into policy and practice.

Operations

By mid-2025, the project achieved significant outputs. The Natural Capital Assessment (NCA) was completed, guiding municipal land-use decisions. A total of 698,545 seedlings were planted across 409.7 ha (147 ha restored, 262.7 ha reforested), while 824.21 ha of farmland adopted agroecological practices, benefiting 1,940 households and producing 45.65 tons of compost. Solar lamps were distributed to 1,200 households, avoiding 5,508 tCO₂ emissions, and 16,150 ha of COFAV-protected areas were impacted. The 18 operational ecovillages show strong gender inclusion (40–50% women in leadership/training roles) (UNEP 2025).

Effectiveness is rated satisfactory in the PIR 2025, with most outcome indicators on track. The eco-village model demonstrates transformative potential by linking restoration, livelihoods, and natural capital accounting with the NA-SP Theory of Change. Efficiency is supported by partnerships and USD 27.48 million co-financing, though reporting challenges persist due to dual PIR/IPMR systems. As of June 2025, USD 2.02 million of USD 2.28 million disbursed was spent. While most activities are on schedule, some outputs, including ecovillage and policy integration components, reached only 30–50% completion due to logistical and climatic constraints, highlighting the need for streamlined monitoring and knowledge management.

Sustainability and Impact

The project demonstrates a high likelihood of sustaining results due to strong political visibility, national buy-in, and institutional alignment. National partners, including MEDD, MALF, MEAH, DREDD, DRAE, the National REDD+ Coordination Office, and COFAV, provide financial and policy continuity. Community ownership is promoted through participatory restoration, management of green spaces, and training of Local Village Trainers. Capacity-building impacts extend to households, local authorities, and technical institutions, creating conditions for systemic change and long-term environmental benefits. Risk factors include climatic hazards, knowledge retention challenges, and partial integration of NCA results into municipal plans, which are being mitigated through community repositories and technical training.

The project's scalable and replicable eco-village model, linked to national planning frameworks, and successful gender-inclusion demonstrate potential for expansion to additional regions in Madagascar and integration into broader landscape and biodiversity governance initiatives.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The project employs a comprehensive GEF-aligned monitoring framework, tracking outcome and output indicators, including progress against key performance targets such as reforestation, agroecological adoption, renewable energy uptake, and protected area coverage. Indicators are gender-disaggregated, with 57% of beneficiaries being women and key roles in ecovillages such as Local Village Trainers (50% women), ecovillage leaders (30% women), and patrol officers (25% women) monitored regularly to ensure inclusivity. Knowledge

management is supported through a variety of tools, including newsletters, videos, technical reports, and social media content.

Despite comprehensive monitoring systems, feedback loops to UNEP remain limited. Reporting challenges arise from dual reporting requirements within UNEP, the PIR and the IPMR, which require duplicative data entry and occasionally result in inconsistencies or outdated information.

Cross-cutting Issues

Gender equality and social inclusion are embedded from the design stage through a Gender Action Plan and regular monitoring. Sex-disaggregated data show women constitute 50% of the Natural Capital Assessment team, 30% of ecovillage leaders, 40% of ecovillage management committees, over 50% of Local Village Trainers, and 50% of nursery workers, while 25% of forest patrol officers are women. Youth and vulnerable groups, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and households living in poverty, are actively engaged in capacity-building, participatory decision-making, and project activities such as agroecology, forest restoration, and green space development. These measures ensure equitable participation, enhance community ownership, and strengthen the social sustainability of the eco-village model (UNEP 2024, 2025).

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The Madagascar Natural Capital project illustrates UNEP's ability to leverage multi-stakeholder partnerships and international funding to advance integrated natural capital planning, sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. By embedding natural capital considerations into local and municipal planning, promoting community-led ecovillages, and fostering inclusive participation, the project provides a replicable model for nature-based solutions that link ecosystem restoration, livelihoods, and policy uptake.

The project demonstrates transformative approaches by combining restoration, livelihood diversification, and natural capital accounting, while integrating gender and social inclusion throughout its design and implementation. Communities and local leaders are actively engaged, and capacity-building efforts support long-term sustainability and equity, enabling the project's benefits to extend beyond immediate project interventions.

Key challenges remain (at the UNEP level) limited cross-divisional integration constrains coordination and adaptive learning. Dual reporting systems (PIR and IPMR) create duplication and outdated data, hindering timely decision-making and knowledge retention; and (at the Country level) sustaining results is challenged by climate hazards, operational constraints, and incomplete institutionalization of outputs. Knowledge loss post-project and limited private sector engagement remain risks, though community ownership and emerging knowledge repositories help mitigate these.

Looking forward, the project offers a strong foundation for scaling up and replication. Enhancing cross-divisional coordination, strengthening learning and feedback systems, expanding knowledge management, and fostering broader stakeholder engagement will be essential to embed natural capital approaches in national development frameworks. The Madagascar project highlights UNEP's capacity to deliver transformative Nature Action results through strategic partnerships, integrated planning, and community-led solutions, while emphasising the need for adaptive management and institutional mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability and systemic impact.

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8. Environmental Education and Youth Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The UNEP Environmental Education and Youth (EEY) project (PIMS No 02007) was implemented from October 2018 to July 2023, with a total actual cost of US\$5.97 million, exceeding the initial approved budget of US\$2.25 million. Coordinated by the Environmental Education and Training Unit within UNEP's Economy Division, the project engaged a global network of partners spanning Europe, West Asia, Asia-Pacific, Latin America & Caribbean, Africa, and North America. Key implementing and education partners included GRID-Arendal, the Global University Partnership network, World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), Junior Achievers Worldwide, Centre for Environment Education (CEE) India, WWF India, EAUC, Second Nature, SOS-International, Tongji University, and the University of Oxford. Collaborations with UN agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNOPS, and the UNEP- Technical University of Denmark (Danmarks Tekniske Universitet) (DTU) Partnership were leveraged to extend youth-focused environmental education interventions and build capacities across diverse institutional and geographic contexts (UNEP, 2024).

The project directly supported UNEP's mandate under the Nature Action Subprogramme by advancing environmental education as a means to achieve sustainable development outcomes. It aligned closely with SDG 4.7 (education for sustainable development), SDG 12.8 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13.3 (climate action education), and GBF Target 21, contributing to the integration of biodiversity, sustainability, and global citizenship into national curricula, teacher training, and assessments. The project also responded to UNEA resolutions calling for investment in human capacity for sustainable development, advancing mainstreaming of environmental education through youth engagement (UNEP, 2024).

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The project was coordinated by the Environmental Education and Training Unit within UNEP's Economy Division with support from regional offices, enabling both local adaptation and broad dissemination of environmental education interventions. Institutional mechanisms included structured partnerships with universities, youth networks, and private sector actors (notably gaming companies). These mechanisms facilitated capacity building, knowledge sharing, and outreach through formal education, non-formal youth initiatives, and digital platforms. Tailored approaches, such as the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge in India, allowed youth to lead campaigns on plastic reduction, recycling, and community engagement, demonstrating flexible translation of global into national and local contexts (CEE, 2021; UNEP 2025) .

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

The project leveraged strong multi-stakeholder networks, including youth organizations, eco-clubs, schools, colleges, NGOs, universities, UN agencies, and private enterprises. Partnerships were strategically expanded through initiatives such as Playing for the Planet Alliance and the Green Collar Jobs program. Private sector engagement included integration of environmental education content on gaming platforms and the development of innovative eco-products (biodegradable plant pots, DIY recycled materials, eco-bricks). Coordination with UN sister agencies (UNICEF, International Labour Organization (ILO)) strengthened cross-sectoral collaboration, though some sub-interventions operated in silos. Gender equality, human rights, and inclusion were central to engagement, with over 70% of interviewed participants being female and curricula adapted to support vulnerable youth.

Operations

The project achieved its planned outputs and outcomes at a high level: youth-led advocacy initiatives influenced local practices such as single-use plastic bans and recycling programs, and eco-club networks enabled sustained community engagement. Quantitative performance indicators were largely exceeded, particularly in partnerships with gaming companies, youth groups, and global alliances. Innovations included digital challenges, community campaigns, and experiential learning tools. However, gaps were observed in knowledge management, monitoring, and unified strategic planning across interventions. Efficiency was constrained by staff shortages, funding delays, and bureaucratic processes, further exacerbated by the need to adapt activities to COVID-19 restrictions.

Sustainability and Impact

Socio-political sustainability was highly satisfactory, underpinned by strong youth engagement, ambassador networks, and partnerships. Financial sustainability was moderately unsatisfactory, with most activities relying on ad hoc funding from external sources, except for the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge, which had reliable support. Institutional sustainability was moderately satisfactory, reflecting strong partner networks but limited government ownership and coordination. The project delivered measurable behavioural changes, including recycling adoption, eco-club establishment, and youth advocacy, creating a foundation for long-term stewardship. Capacity was built at multiple levels, including youth leaders, teachers, and partner institutions, while scaling potential was demonstrated through replication of digital platforms and youth-led initiatives across multiple countries. Key risks affecting sustainability included funding gaps, high staff turnover, reliance on third-party partners, and limited institutional ownership. The project has paved the way for a new initiative, *One UNEP Youth and Education* (UNEP 2023)

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

Monitoring and reporting systems were partially in place, with structured data collection in initiatives like the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge, but inconsistent monitoring across other interventions. Feedback mechanisms, indicator standardization, and integration of cross-cutting issues (gender, youth, inclusion, human rights) were limited. Partners often lacked clarity on reporting expectations, and learning loops were minimal.

Cross-cutting Issues

Gender, human rights, and youth inclusivity were embedded in project design and implementation, with curricula adapted to diverse contexts and attention to vulnerable groups. Participation was generally balanced, with women comprising over 70% of interviewees. Nevertheless, more systematic guidance and monitoring were required to strengthen these dimensions across partner organizations.

Context for the future of the NA-SP.

The Environmental Education and Youth project has demonstrated UNEP's capacity to mobilize youth, educational institutions, and multi-sectoral networks to advance environmental education globally. Its experience highlights the potential for scaling youth-led advocacy, integrating environmental curricula into formal and non-formal education, and leveraging digital platforms to reach large audiences. Future efforts under the NA-SP should prioritize institutionalized knowledge management, structured cross-sectoral coordination, multi-year financial planning, and stronger integration of youth initiatives into national policies

and GBF-related targets. The follow-on phase, One UNEP Youth and Education Project (2024–2027), is positioned to consolidate gains, strengthen monitoring systems, and expand both private sector engagement and country-level impact in environmental education and sustainable development.

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9. Environmental Treaties Programme – Realizing Synergies for Biodiversity (PIMS ID 01988)

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The UNEP Environmental Treaties Programme , Realizing Synergies for Biodiversity (PIMS ID 01988) was launched in November 2017 with a total approved budget of USD 2.08 million and aimed at promoting synergies across biodiversity-related conventions globally, covering Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, and West Asia. Initially scheduled for 36 months to align with the expected adoption of the KM-GBF, the project was extended to 67 months due to COVID-19, with four deadline extensions, and concluded in June 2023. UNEP served as the implementing agency, overseeing execution and coordination, while a steering committee comprising convention secretariats, donors, and international organizations including CBD, Ramsar/IUCN, EU, FAO, CMS, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), UNESCO, International Whaling Commission (IWC), etc provided guidance. Technical subgroups were formed for each output, involving external experts where relevant. Reported expenditures totaled USD 2.23 million as of June 2023, with the last extension granted without additional funding, and a mid-term review covering November 2017–December 2021 was completed in April 2022 (UNEP 2017, 2020, 2021, 2023, 2025).

The Environmental Synergies project is strongly aligned with UNEP's mandate and the Environmental Governance subprogramme, contributing directly to the MTS 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 outcomes. It advances PoW Direct Outcome 3.5 by enhancing institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments and delivers PoW Outputs on advisory services for system-wide coherence and knowledge products supporting synergistic MEA implementation. The project contributes to SDGs 15.9, 16.6, 16.8, and 17.14, while directly supporting CBD COP Decision XIII on cooperation with other conventions and international organizations. Country ownership varied, with some nations demonstrating strong leadership, though cross-ministerial engagement was inconsistent, reflecting both demand-driven relevance and areas for strengthened institutional uptake (UNEP, 2025).

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The Environmental Synergies project was led by UNEP's Law Division through the Environmental Conventions and Policy Branch, with UNEP-WCMC providing core technical and implementation support. Contributions from other divisions such as Ecosystems, Policy and Programmes, and Communications helped ensure that outputs like advisory services, knowledge products, and reporting tools were technically robust and well disseminated. Regional Offices across Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, and West Asia played a vital role in contextualizing these outputs, drawing on their political and cultural knowledge and government networks to engage countries effectively. While this structure enabled coherence between global guidance and country needs, the centralization of resources at headquarters sometimes limited the ability of regional offices to provide sustained on-the-ground support, affecting uptake of tools like DaRT. The project's experience highlights the value of balancing headquarters' strategic leadership with stronger regional delivery capacity to maximize country-level impact.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

The project leveraged UNEP's internal expertise through UNEP-WCMC, alongside collaboration with GEF Early Action Support, UNDP, and Party-led mechanisms such as the Bern Process to

support coherent implementation of the GBF. This included strengthening cooperation among MEA National Focal Points, MEA Secretariats, and stakeholders, improving alignment of MEA reporting, and supporting country-level application of tools such as DaRT.

Cooperation among MEAs was reinforced, though full interoperability remained constrained by technical challenges, communication gaps, and coordination limitations. Engagement with national and local stakeholders was moderate: while the project provided valuable guidance and knowledge products, uptake at the country level remained uneven, reflecting limited resources and the voluntary nature of adoption. Private sector involvement was strategically targeted but limited due to procedural requirements and resource constraints. Strategic use of champion countries, such as Cameroon, China, Nigeria, and Cambodia, helped demonstrate successful approaches to MEA implementation and knowledge tool adoption.

Operations

Most planned outputs were delivered, with Outputs 1, 3, and 4 completed on time and to high standards. Output 2 encountered internal staffing and communication challenges but achieved substantial progress, while Output 5 faced adoption limitations due to resource constraints. The project engaged 30 countries, mobilized significant funding, and contributed to MEA alignment and KM-GBF support.

Innovation was demonstrated through the DaRT knowledge tool, policy tracker, guidance documents, collaboration with public information officers, and the Meltwater media monitoring platform. DaRT, while recognized in multiple MEA decisions, faced low national adoption due to political, technical and structural barriers. The tool with AI-driven features is expected to function as both a reporting and research alignment platform. Efficiency was satisfactory, leveraging vertical funds (GEF, GCF, AF), optimizing resources, and using remote activities to minimize costs. Financial management was highly satisfactory, with timely adjustments to project frameworks and timelines maintaining alignment despite delays (UNEP, 2024).

Sustainability and Impact

Project outcomes are moderately likely to be sustained. Strong commitment from governments and stakeholders, coupled with institutional engagement by biodiversity-related organizations, provides a solid foundation. Financial sustainability has been strengthened through Treaties II funding and the preparation of DaRT Phase 3 for three-year continuity. Long-term adoption of tools like DaRT remains uncertain, given reliance on voluntary participation, small project teams, political shifts, and limited fragmented resources for sustained maintenance and support. Addressing these constraints would require DaRT to be strategically repositioned and redeveloped, informed by the 2025 DaRT evaluation recommendations and aligned with the UNEP Digital Transformation Subprogramme. Continued engagement through national biodiversity committees and integration of outputs into institutional workflows will be critical for sustaining achievements and driving behavioral and systemic change.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The Environmental Synergies project established a monitoring and reporting system aligned with UNEP standards, which was rated satisfactory. While indicators, baselines, and targets were defined, the overemphasis on process-focused measures limited the ability to track broader impact, and outcome-oriented indicators were insufficiently developed. Greater alignment with the full scope of environmental conventions, including the UNFCCC, UNCCD, and

chemicals and waste conventions, would have strengthened the system's relevance. Reporting on project implementation was comprehensive but inconsistencies in documentation hindered actionable learning. Although adaptive management was applied effectively, lessons learned were not fully captured or centralized, and knowledge generated through tools like DaRT and the Bern Process was not systematically integrated into UNEP-wide systems or strategic planning, constraining institutional learning and uptake.

Cross-cutting Issues

The Environmental Synergies project actively integrated cross-cutting considerations, particularly gender and inclusivity, into MEA implementation (UNEP, 2017). It guided the development of gender mainstreaming roadmaps for the NBSAPs of Lao PDR and Myanmar and produced three guidance materials to support CBD gender mainstreaming, including CBD/WG2020/3/INF/10 (2022) and CBD/COP/15/INF/20 (2022). The project also promoted inclusivity by engaging a diverse range of stakeholders: women, indigenous peoples, subnational governments, and the private sector, in MEA processes, ensuring that these groups were not only invited but actively participated in implementation. These efforts strengthened the integration of social dimensions into environmental governance and provided practical tools for Parties and stakeholders to mainstream gender considerations in biodiversity-related decision-making. Although progress was made in gender equality, the project did not fully integrate human rights and indigenous knowledge considerations.

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The project established a solid foundation for advancing MEA coherence and capacity building at the country level, engaging 30 countries -well above the initially planned 11- and mobilizing significant funding to support alignment with the KM-GBF. Its successes were driven by innovative tools such as the DaRT knowledge platform, the policy tracker concept, and the Media Monitoring Tool (Meltwater), as well as the production of gender mainstreaming guidance for NBSAPs in Lao PDR and Myanmar. Inclusive engagement of women, indigenous peoples, subnational governments, and the private sector further enhanced the relevance and uptake of project outputs. Presentations at international conventions and advisory services strengthened policy coherence and institutional frameworks. However, these achievements were facilitated by strong UNEP coordination, committed national counterparts, and external partnerships with GEF, and other co-financing partners, factors that also highlight the project's reliance on motivated stakeholders and sufficient funding, suggesting that replicability and sustainability may be constrained in contexts lacking these enabling conditions.

Enhancing the usability and adoption of the DaRT platform, including customization options and incentives for countries, would help translate project outputs into measurable impacts. Integrated strategic planning, early stakeholder engagement, and closer coordination with MEAs, UN agencies, and other actors will be essential to maximize effectiveness.

The Environmental Synergies project underscores how UNEP can achieve high-impact results through strategic partnerships and targeted capacity building for MEA coherence. Key lessons include the need to align interventions with national priorities, improve adoption of tools like DaRT, and embed outputs such as the policy tracker into country systems. UNEP can enhance its institutional approach by scaling successful innovations, centralizing knowledge management, mainstreaming gender and social inclusion, fostering sustained stakeholder engagement, and implementing adaptive, impact-focused monitoring to scale innovations and strengthen long-term MEA implementation globally. The project's experience also highlights the

value of balancing headquarters' strategic leadership with stronger regional delivery capacity to maximize country-level impact.

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10. GBF Early Action Support Project

Contribution to UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme

The GBF Early Action Support (EAS) project was launched in August 2022 with GEF financing of US\$1.5 million. The project is implemented by the Ecosystems Division together with UNEP-WCMC in collaboration with partners including the CBD Secretariat, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, and others. The project was designed through an Expression of Interest received from 70 countries interested in accelerating alignment of their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the KM-GBF. It focuses on policy and institutional alignment, development of monitoring systems, and biodiversity finance planning, while leveraging additional resources such as the IKI programme (€45m) and in-kind support from partners. The project is scheduled for completion in June 2025 (UNEP 2023).

The EAS project is tightly aligned with UNEP's mandate and the NA-SP, responding directly to COP15 Decision 15/6 on NBSAP updates. It supports the MTS goals and the NA-SP objectives of strengthening biodiversity planning and governance, mainstreaming biodiversity into national development processes, mobilizing finance for nature, and enhancing monitoring and reporting systems and contributes to SDGs 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. The project is demand-driven, filling urgent gaps in biodiversity policy alignment, monitoring frameworks, and finance planning. This positions the project within the NA-SP as a facilitator of preparation for GBF implementation and demonstrates UNEP's leadership in strengthening governance and accountability for biodiversity in line with the GBF.

Institutional structure and mechanisms

The EAS project demonstrates strong coordination within UNEP, linking with the Law Division, the MEA Secretariats and other Units in the Ecosystems Division as the need arises according to country demand for support. The programme officers actively coordinate between countries, across UNEP and with external partners to support specific requests. The institutional anchoring of the project has been enhanced by the creation of the Nature Frameworks Support Unit in 2024, which has provided coherence between the NA-SP, UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy, and country-level implementation. The Unit was also established to ensure continuity of UNEP's support on nature frameworks beyond the project's timeline. Regional Offices have supported logistics, communications, and dissemination of tools. Tailored approaches have strengthened national ownership: for example, Nicaragua chose to conduct its alignment internally, with UNEP's guidance, to retain capacity within the Ministry. Such flexibility illustrates the project's role in translating NA-SP objectives into tangible country-level results on governance, mainstreaming, and financing.

Coherence, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

The project has mobilized an extensive network of partners, including CBD, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, BIOFIN, and NGOs, ensuring cross-UN and multi-stakeholder coherence. Partnerships are strategically managed, linking countries to expertise through cooperation agreements with UNEP divisions (e.g., Law Division) and centers such as UNEP-WCMC. Engagement with governments, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), women's groups, IPLCs, and the private sector has been extensive. UNEP FI's involvement in piloting biodiversity credit and nature-positive finance initiatives highlights innovation and forward-looking private sector engagement, aligning with NA-SP's objective to mobilize diverse actors for transformative action.

Operations

The project has been effective in delivering outputs and outcomes at scale. By mid-2024, it had supported each of the 70 countries with 80% of planned activities completed. The project has helped to develop a range of technical tools and guidance products that are being shared/adjusted across the countries in line with their specific needs. The project supported the NBSAP Forum 2.0 and regional knowledge sharing events. Using the DaRT platform and other knowledge platforms has contributed to improved collation of data and knowledge sharing. This does assist with progress monitoring, compliance and reporting in some countries, but other countries still lack national data for effective reporting. While some delays arose from consultation and procurement processes, financial utilization is on track, with 80% of resources expended and most countries expected to complete activities within the project period. Strategic leveraging of IKI funds and co-support from BIOFIN has amplified impact relative to the modest GEF core budget.

Sustainability and Impact

The project's sustainability rests on embedding outputs into institutional processes. By anchoring results in NBSAPs and national monitoring systems, the project ensures that gains extend beyond the life of the intervention. Early policy impacts are evident in Uganda and Nigeria, for instance, submitted updated NBSAPs informed by project support. Institutional capacity has been built through training, regional dialogues, and peer exchanges, enabling systemic change across governance and monitoring. The project's approaches are replicable and scalable through existing platforms for implementation. Long-term financial sustainability may also be supported through mechanisms such as the Cali Fund, launched at COP16, which earmarks resources for IPLCs.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

The project has specific progress indicators as part of the GEF requirements. A coherent monitoring framework, aligned with GBF indicators, has been disseminated to countries. However, data availability across countries is very varied. While tools such as DaRT require further orientation to be fully user-friendly, innovations like sandbox areas within DaRT are starting to show uptake in countries such as Cameroon and Ghana. An important feature of the project is that assessment of country-level data system gaps are systematically fed into project planning, creating a virtuous cycle of adaptive management and that contributes to development of the next phase. Regular coordination meetings and regional dialogues have strengthened transparency and cross-learning, with lessons now feeding into design discussions for the next GEF cycle.

Cross-cutting Issues

The project incorporated gender equality and inclusivity at the design stage, with a Gender Action Plan and guidance on IPLC engagement. Sex-disaggregated data collection does occur but there is limited evidence progress on human rights and equity dimensions across the operational components.

Context for the future of the NA-SP

The GBF EAS project is expected to make a critical contribution to the GBF process, linked to the NBSAPs at the country level. The project's support for knowledge platforms, monitoring tools, and financing pilots will continue to support capacity building and policy coherence. By embedding GBF alignment into national systems, the project provides a foundation for countries to transition from planning to full-scale implementation of the GBF. The planning for a follow-on phase is already in progress and will turn attention more towards

effective mechanisms for country-level GBF implementation, mainstreaming and sustainable resourcing.

The GBF EAS project illustrates how UNEP can work in partnership with GEF to leverage limited resources to deliver strategically important, high-impact results for the objectives of the NA-SP. Future efforts need to consolidate gains by addressing data gaps, ensuring continued technical support beyond 2025, and deepening collaboration with government and private sector actors to close the biodiversity finance gap for GBF implementation.

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Annex VII. Summarised Survey Analysis

NOTE: The full survey analysis will be provided to the Division and GSPC and is available, primarily to UNEP staff members, from the UNEP Evaluation Office upon request.

As part of the evaluation of UNEP's Nature Action Subprogramme (2014–2025), a confidential online survey¹¹ was conducted with UNEP colleagues (Project Managers, Task Managers, Regional Subprogramme Coordinators, and others) involved in managing or overseeing Nature Action projects. The survey, open from 4 September until 16 September 2025, aimed to collect insights on project design, implementation, monitoring, partnerships, and results. Respondents were asked to reflect on their own roles and experiences, and the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A total of 37 respondents out of 75 participated, mostly Project/Task Managers, with a smaller group of coordinators, directors, advisors, and support staff. Their work spanned multiple countries, regions, and global-level engagement, with overlapping scopes. Collaboration was reported most frequently to be between national governments and NGOs, followed by UNEP offices, global institutes, and the GEF, while the private sector and specific UN agencies appeared less frequently. Most respondents worked across several projects and were heavily involved in the design and planning stages.

Overall highlights include:

- A total of 68% of participants recorded that the objectives of the project that they were responsible for implementing were generally clear, though 32% noted partial clarity or issues in older designs.
- While a majority (57%) found goals realistic, a significant share (35%) found the project's goals and expected results as 'partially realistic'. Only a small percentage (~5%) reported overambitious donor frameworks and limited contextual adaptation.
- Overall, guidance from UNEP on priorities for project design is seen as moderately clear, with 75.6% participants rating above 4 on a scale of 1-6.
- Most respondents (89.1%) rated alignment with national and regional biodiversity strategies above 4 on a scale of 1-6.
- Almost half of the respondents (51.3 %) felt stakeholder voices were reasonably well reflected in project design, with an average score of 4.3 on a scale of 1-6.

Project Implementation and Partnerships

- In response to the question on how well project activities were implemented as planned, only 22% gave a perfect 6 rating (on a 1–6 scale). The rest of the participants rated it between 3 and 5.

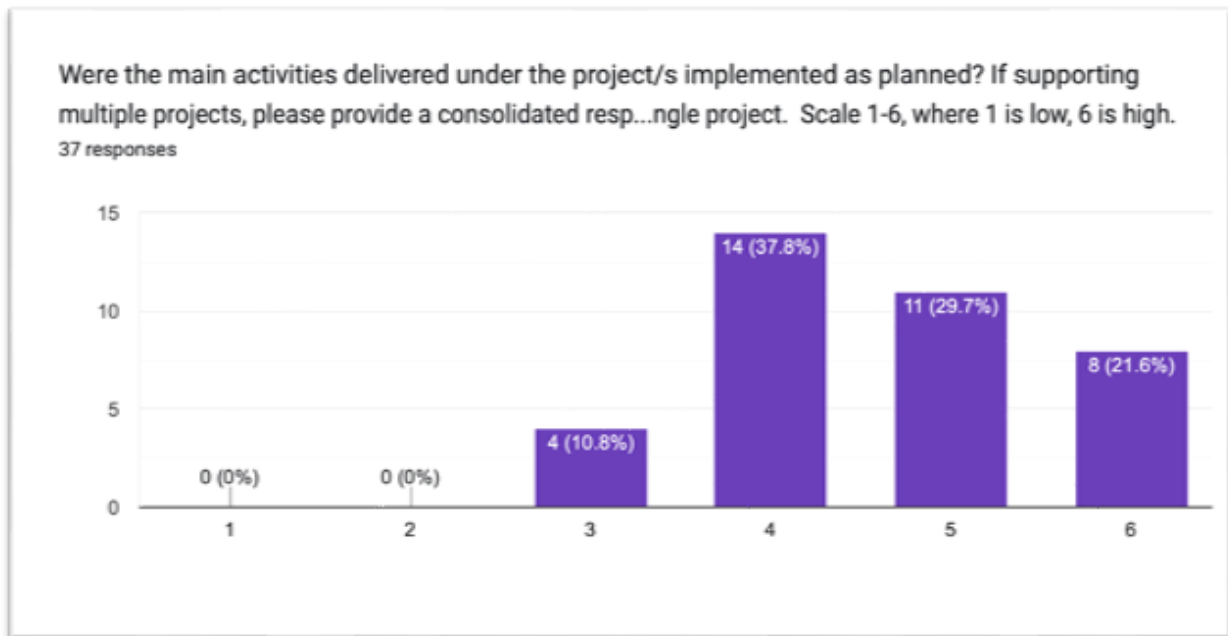


Figure 1: Project delivery

- For partnerships, respondents most often named governments, NGOs, and UN agencies as complementary partners, with other actors such as the private sector, academia, and civil society mentioned less frequently.
- Respondents highlighted strong local partnerships, capable staff, and clear planning as the key enablers to get project activities done, supported by UNEP's technical/administrative support and adequate financial resources.
- Respondents most frequently cited approval and administrative bottlenecks as the main challenges or delays during project implementation, followed by procurement/recruitment delays, funding issues, government capacity constraints, and disruptions from complex designs or external shocks.
- Respondents rated UNEP's internal processes as the most difficult aspect to work with for Nature Action projects, government support as moderately easy, and implementing partner support as the easiest to work with (Fig 2).

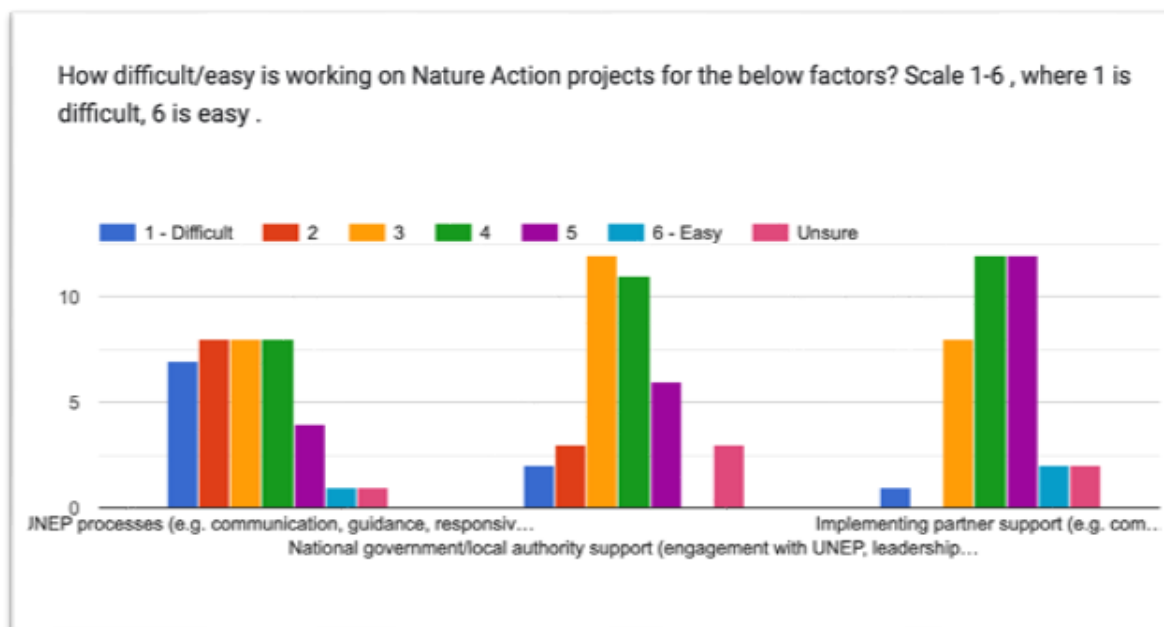


Figure 2: Level of difficulty in working on Nature Action Projects

- Respondents reported a moderate-to-high level of engagement on the extent to which they support UNEP Nature Action activities beyond their direct projects, with only 8% confirming support to a great extent.
- Respondents highlighted administrative delays, capacity gaps, funding issues, unclear roles and alignment, and coordination challenges as factors that most affect the effectiveness of their work with the subprogramme. Comments included calls for streamlined processes, stronger leadership, and better communication.
 - **Short-term recommendations** to enhance effectiveness focused on streamlining approvals, procurement, and reporting; providing clearer guidance on alignment and concept submission; improving coordination across units; strengthening staff capacity (technical and managerial); and enhancing knowledge-sharing through retreats and internal exchanges.
 - **Long-term recommendations** to enhance effectiveness emphasized rethinking the Nature Action subprogramme design for greater flexibility and complementarity with climate and pollution work; aligning authority with responsibility; deepening integration with MEAs and governments; and investing in partner capacity. Respondents also called for clearer strategic communication, more reliable and transparent data systems, and a well-resourced, motivated team supported by strong, field-oriented leadership over bureaucracy.

Monitoring, Reporting and Results

- In response to the question about the frequency of reporting to UNEP, about 40% respondents indicated monthly reporting to UNEP, followed by quarterly (22%), six-monthly (19%), and annual (5%), with the remaining noting overlapping reporting platforms and requirements.

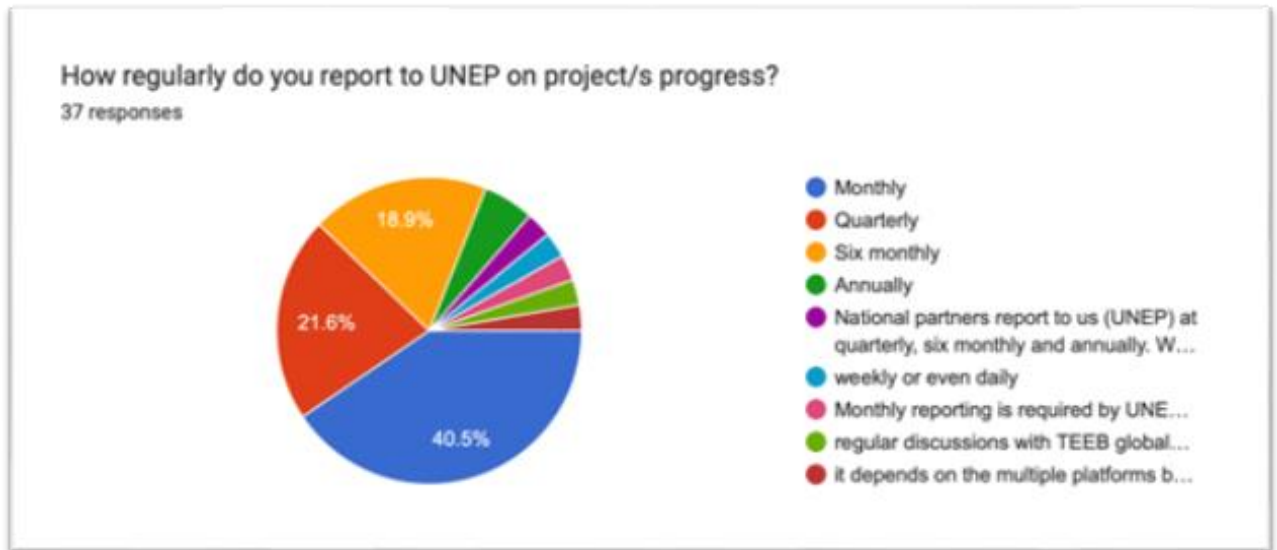


Figure 3: Reporting

- Respondents identified major monitoring and reporting challenges such as differing donor/partner requirements, insufficient staff capacity, and limited time for data analysis (each 17 mentions), along with lack of credible data (16), weak data systems (12), and poor uptake of lessons (13).
- Less frequent issues included limited training, unrealistic expectations, technical glitches, and redundant systems, with overall reporting described as frequent but fragmented due to staffing gaps, inconsistent data, and overlapping requirements.

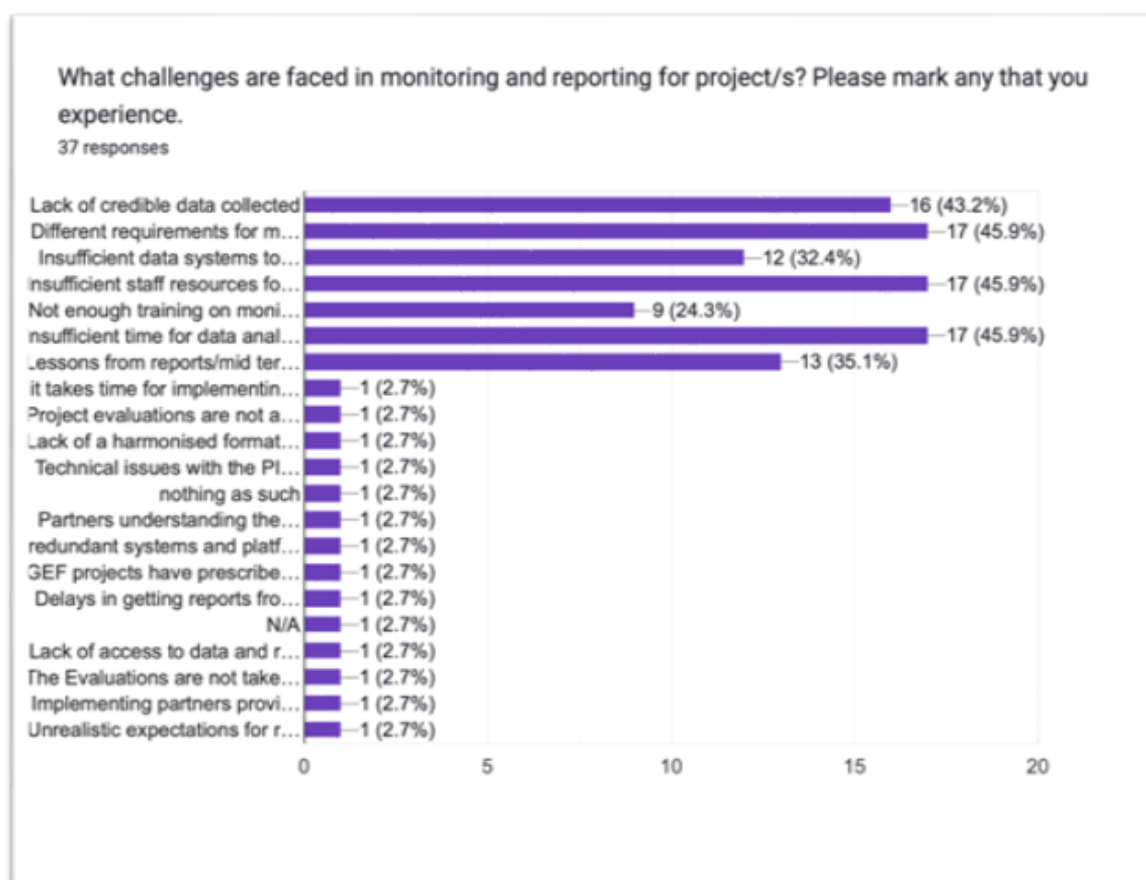


Figure 4: Monitoring and Reporting Challenges

- Respondents said monitoring and reporting can be improved by building staff and partner capacity, simplifying and harmonizing reporting systems, and ensuring adequate resources and leadership accountability. They emphasized streamlined platforms, stronger knowledge management and feedback loops, better training, dedicated M&E resources, and clearer indicators and planning supported by engaged, accountable leadership.

Effectiveness

- In response to the question on the extent to which projects achieved expected results with UNEP Nature Action's contribution (1–6 scale), respondents rated performance as moderately strong (averaging 3.8 to 4.6), highlighting the best results in innovation and knowledge sharing, as well as mainstreaming sustainable management of nature into development frameworks, while the weakest in cross-subprogramme synergies.

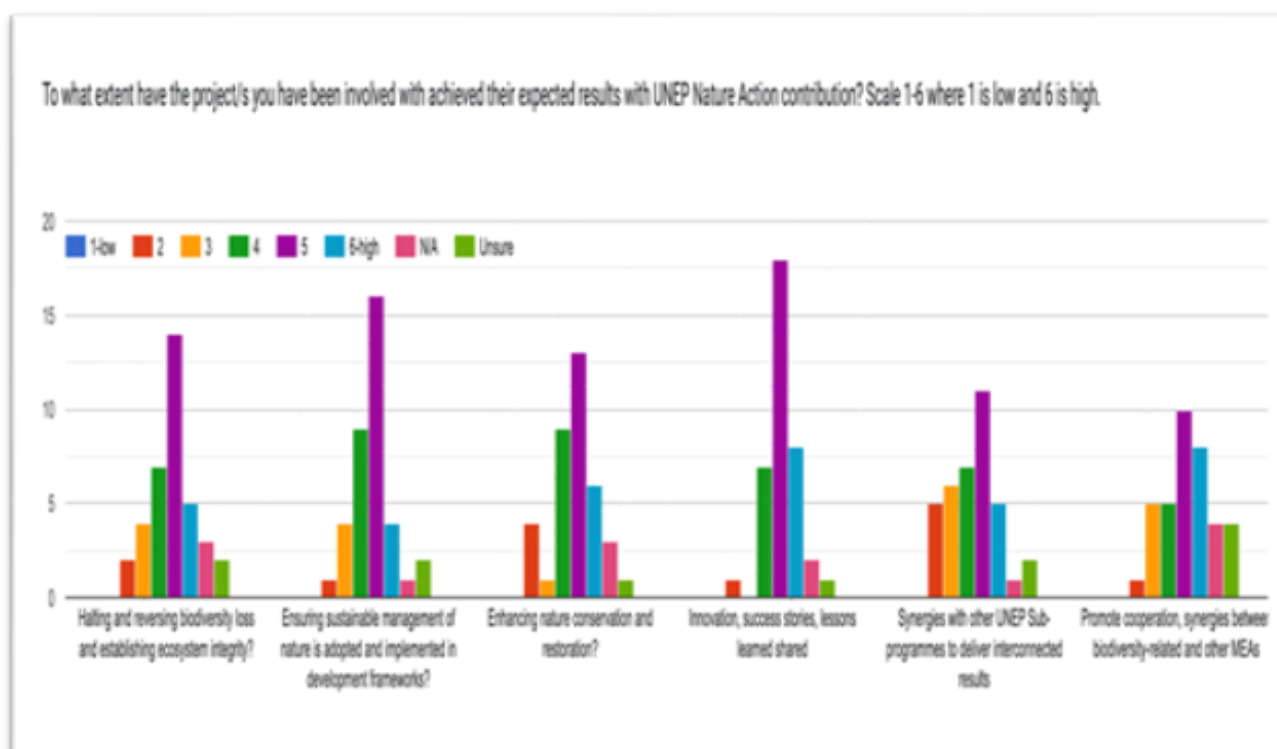


Figure 5: Achievement of expected results with UNEP Nature Action Contribution

- In response to the question on what would improve the level of results contributed by the UNEP Nature Action Subprogramme, respondents highlighted the need for stronger coordination and integration across units, better knowledge exchange, timely funding and staffing support, clearer and more accountable leadership, deeper policy mainstreaming, and streamlined and more flexible processes that allow UNEP to focus on strategic guidance rather than heavy implementation.
- In response to the question on how likely project results supported by UNEP Nature Action are to be sustained (1–6 scale), respondents gave moderately positive ratings (3.8–4.4), with the strongest outlook for long-term environmental benefits (4.35) and weaker prospects for governance, community ownership, and especially financial sustainability (3.77), which remains the biggest concern.

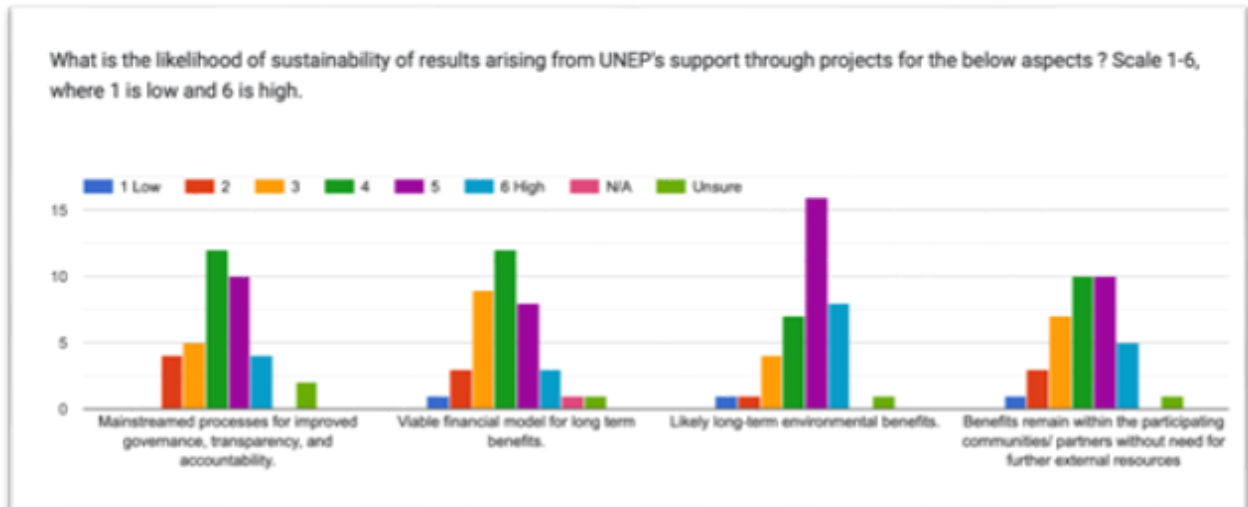


Figure 6: Likelihood of Sustainability

- Survey respondents explained that lasting results depend on alignment with national priorities, strong government buy-in, policy and governance integration, and long-term programmatic support with adequate financing and capacity. However, limited resources, weak field presence, practical implementation gaps, and uneven uptake of tools continue to constrain sustainability.
- They pointed to persistent bureaucracy and delays, limited capacity and field presence, and weak cross-division coordination, while also noting UNEP/GEF's technical reliability; some called for a more unified, systemic, and less fragmented project approach.

Annex VIII. Annex VIII. Evaluation Consultation Group

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