

Management Response: Implementation Plan for Evaluation Recommendations

General Information

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Project Evaluation Title	Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project "Initial Steps for the Establishment of the National Protected Areas Network in Iraq GEF 5392
PIMS #	
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Project Manager/ Task Manager	Ersin Esen/Marieta Sakalian
Office/Division	Ecosystems Division
Branch & Unit	Biodiversity and Land Branch
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Implementation Plan finalized (if different from the date above)	08/12/2025

Implementation Plan

No	Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Type of Recommendation	Responsibility	Proposed Implementation time-frame	Acceptance	Reason if not Accepted or Partially Accepted	Management Action(s) to be taken
1	Institutional fragmentation and legal ambiguity (especially between MoE and MoWR) delayed site declaration and enforcement.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE) should lead the formalization of enforcement roles and legal mandates for Protected Areas (PA) governance across all relevant ministries. This includes initiating a cross-ministerial process to clearly define and document the respective responsibilities of institutions such as the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and others with	Critical	Partners	MoE with support from UNEP and Ministry of Justice	Within 12 months	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDLD Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.

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		overlapping mandates. The MoE should also ensure these roles are integrated into the national legal and regulatory framework governing biodiversity and PA management. This process should culminate in an official inter-ministerial agreement or directive to reduce ambiguity and strengthen compliance and accountability mechanisms.							
2	Financial sustainability is undermined by lack of predictable funding for PAN operations.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE), in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, should develop and operationalize a dedicated budget line for Protected Areas (PAs) within the national budget. This includes preparing a costed financing plan for PA management and submitting a formal budget proposal through the national budget cycle. The MoE should advocate for the institutionalization of this line item to ensure predictable and sustained government funding for PA operations, infrastructure, staffing, and ecological monitoring. This effort should be linked to the broader environmental policy and	Critical	Partners	Ministry of Finance, MoE, with UNEP support	Within 12 months.	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.
3	Inclusion was not tracked systematically and lacked structured benefit-sharing.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE) should integrate gender and social inclusion as a core component in the design and implementation of future phases of the PAN. This should include the development of gender-responsive guidelines, mandatory inclusion of women and marginalized groups in stakeholder consultations, and dedicated indicators to monitor social	Important	Partners	MoE, UNEP, with local NGOs and women's organizations	Integrated into GEF-7 implementation	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.

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		inclusion outcomes. The MoE should coordinate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and relevant civil society organizations to ensure inclusive access to benefits, participation in decision-making, and equitable livelihood opportunities linked to protected area management.							
4	Inter-agency collaboration was informal and reliant on individual relationships.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE), in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office, should lead the establishment of a cross-ministerial Protected Areas (PA) coordination platform with statutory authority. This platform should bring together key line ministries—such as Water Resources, Agriculture, Tourism and Antiquities, and Interior—under a formal governance structure to oversee national PA policy implementation, resolve mandate overlaps, and ensure coherent planning. The MoE should propose a legal framework (e.g., Council of Ministers decree or inter-ministerial by-law) that grants the platform decision-making and budget coordination authority. The platform's secretariat could be housed within the MoE's Biodiversity Directorate, with rotating leadership and regular reporting obligations.	Important	Partners	Prime Minister's Office / Cabinet Secretariat with MoE	18–24 months	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.
5	Capacity gains are at risk due to staff turnover and lack of institutional embedding of PA knowledge.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE), in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Planning, should integrate Protected Areas (PA) content into formal environmental education curricula and civil service training programs.	Important	Partners	Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Environment, UNEP	Within 18 months	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.

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		This includes updating university and technical institute curricula to reflect modern biodiversity conservation principles and PA governance models. Additionally, the MoE should work with the National Center for Administrative Development to embed PA-related modules into induction and in-service training for civil servants working in environmental, agricultural, and planning departments. These efforts will help institutionalize knowledge and build a pipeline of qualified professionals for sustainable PA management.							
6	Absence of formal mechanisms to manage community concerns or distribute benefits weakens trust and equity.	The Ministry of Environment (MoE), in collaboration with local authorities and relevant ministries, should establish formal grievance redress and benefit-sharing mechanisms for communities living in or near Protected Areas (PAs). This includes developing clear protocols for receiving, documenting, and addressing community complaints related to PA access, restrictions, or conflicts. Simultaneously, the MoE should design a benefit-sharing framework—such as co-management opportunities, livelihood support schemes, or eco-tourism revenue allocation—ensuring that local communities gain tangible socio-economic benefits from conservation. These mechanisms should be piloted at selected PA sites and embedded in future PA regulations, with monitoring conducted by an independent	Important	Partners	MoE, with support from UNEP and local CSOs	Piloted during early GEF-7 implementation phase	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.

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		body or multi-stakeholder committee.							
7	Missed opportunities for consolidation, scale-up, and institutional integration due to weak coordination across GEF funding cycles.	UNEP should proactively facilitate strategic coordination between the GEF-5 project outputs and the ongoing GEF-7 and GEF-8 programming in Iraq to ensure continuity, scaling, and synergy. This includes convening joint planning sessions with the Ministry of Environment (MoE), GEF Operational Focal Point, and executing partners to align future investments with the foundational work completed under GEF-5. UNEP should advocate for the incorporation of the National Protected Areas Plan, updated biodiversity baselines, and institutional frameworks developed under the current project into the design of GEF-7/8 interventions, particularly those addressing land degradation, climate adaptation, and biodiversity mainstreaming.	Critical	Project	UNEP project team in coordination with MoE and GEF Secretariat	Within 6 months (during GEF-7/8 programming cycles)	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	UNEP BDL has organized several discussions with the EA, including during the preparation of the Terminal Evaluation for the GEF ID5392 project, to emphasize the need for the integration of the results in the future project proposals in Iraq. In August 2025, during the PSC meeting for the ongoing GEF7 project in Iraq (ID10672), this information was communicated to the representatives of the key ministries, agencies and other stakeholders from Iraq. Knowledge and information generated within both GEF5 and GEF7 projects were used as input for the Briefing Note for the Bilateral Meeting of Ms. Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, and H.E. Mohammed Ali Tamim, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning in May 2025. In addition, the UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email.
8	Valuable practices and innovations risk being underutilized if not captured	UNEP should document and disseminate the project's model and lessons learned	Important	Project	UNEP project team in coordination	Within 12 months	Accepted	Recommendation is accepted	Information on the project's contribution to preserving

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	and shared with global peers.	through global biodiversity and GEF knowledge-sharing platforms. This should include preparing a synthesis brief, presenting at international forums (e.g., CBD COP events), and contributing to GEF's Good Practice Briefs. The documentation should highlight innovative aspects such as science-to-policy translation, the use of KBAs in PA planning, and adaptive coordination in fragile contexts.			with MoE and GEF Secretariat				biodiversity, improving practices on degraded lands, and combating desertification in fragile context of Iraq has been added to the 2024 UNEP Annual Report (November 2024). In addition, the UNEP BDL Unit will inform the EA of the recommendation by means of email and emphasize the need to include the project's lessons learned in good practice briefs and presentations.