

**Validated Terminal Review of the UNEP/GEF Project
“Establishing a Functional Environmental Information
System for the Synergistic Implementation of
Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for
Iraq” GEF ID 9744
(2018 – 2024)**

برنامج الأمم
المتحدة للبيئة



EISIRAQ
ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

**UNEP Climate Change Division
Validation Date: January 2026**



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Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic
Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq
Project GEF ID 9744
(06/2024)
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The review consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this report will contribute to future project phases and to the continuous improvement of similar initiatives in other countries and regions.

BRIEF EXTERNAL CONSULTANT(S) BIOGRAPHY

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Review team

Elaine P. Varela Alberte – Reviewer

ABOUT THE REVIEW

Joint Review: No

Report Language(s): English.

Review Type: Terminal Review

Brief Description: This report is a management-led Terminal Review of a UNEP/GEF project implemented between 2018 and 2024. The project's overall development goal was to enhance Iraq's capacity to monitor and report on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) through a well-integrated and functional environmental information system. The review sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency) and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The review has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, GEF, and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

Source(s) of Funding by Country: Iraq

Source(s) of Funding by Institution Type: GEF Trust Fund

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

Key words¹: Multi-lateral Environment Agreements; Cross-Cutting Capacity Development, Knowledge and information management; Governance; Environmental Information System; Indicators.

Primary data collection period: 01 April 2025 to 15 July 2025

Field mission dates: Not applicable

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

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCCD	Cross-Cutting Capacity Development
CEO	Chief Operating Officer
CEWCB	Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
EA	Expected Accomplishments
EA	Executing Agency
EF	Environment Fund
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIP	Environment Information Portal
EIS	Environmental Information System
EOU	Evaluation Office of UNEP
ESERN	Environmental, Social, and Economic Review Note
ESS	Environmental and Social Safeguards
EU	European Union
EWAD	Early Warning and Assessment Division
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FMO	Fund Management Officer
GE	Green Economy
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEF-EAS	GEF Early Action Support Programme
IA	Implementing Agency
ICA	Internal Cooperation Agreement
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPLC	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
IRIS	International Reference Information System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MLTR	Management Led Terminal Review
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid Term Review
MTS	Medium Term Strategy
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

NCSA	National Capacity Self-Assessment
NEMS	National Environmental Management Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCR	Operational Closure Report
PCA	Programme/Project Cooperation Agreement
PIRs	Project Implementation Reports
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project Management Unit
PoW	Programme of Work
PRC	Project Review Committee
Prodoc	Project document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RC	Review Consultant
SC	Sustainable Consumption
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	Standard operating procedure
SP	Sub-programme (UNEP)
SSFA	Small Scale Funding Agreement
TM	Task Manager
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNSCF	Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WAO	West Asia Office
XB	Extra-Budgetary Funds

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

Table 1. Project Identification Table

GEF Project ID/SMA ID ² :	GEF Project ID 9744	SMA ID: 36856	
Implementing Agency (UNEP Division/Branch/Unit):	UNEP EWAD – Early Warning and Assessment Division (formerly Science Division, now Climate Change Division; hereafter referred to as UNEP EWAD) ³	Executing Agency:	UNEP ROWA - Regional Office for West Asia (hereafter referred to as UNEP West Asia Office), and Government of Iraq - Ministry of Environment / Ministry of Planning, Central Statistics Organization - CSO (executing partner/agency)
Sources of Funding (Co-finance):	Country ⁴ (ies): Iraq	Institution ⁵ Name/Type:	GEF/Multilateral
Relevant SDG(s):	SDG 13 (13.2, 13.3); SDG 16 (16.10); and SDG 17 (17.14; 17.16, 17.18)		
MTS (at approval):	MTS 2018-2021	UNEP approval date:	08 May 2018 ⁶
POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference (<i>applicable for projects approved from 2022</i>): OR POW Output(s) number/reference (<i>applicable for projects approved pre-2022</i>):	<i>POW Direct Outcome:</i> MTS 2022-2025: 1.1 Policymaking and decision making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based analysis and data generation. 2.7 Natural assets are valued, monitored and sustainably managed 2.9 Institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced and accountability frameworks are strengthened 3.13 Sound science, data and statistics, analysis, information and knowledge are generated and shared	MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference (<i>applicable for projects approved from 2022</i>): OR POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference (<i>applicable for projects approved pre-2022</i>):	MTS 2025 Outcome: MTS 2022-2025: 1B: Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on the adaptation and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement. 1C: State and non-State actors adopt the enhanced transparency framework arrangements under the Paris Agreement. 2B: Sustainable management of nature is adopted & implemented in development frameworks
	<i>POW Output:</i> SP (i): MTS 2018-2022: 716. National and regional reporting systems based on shared EIS principles generating open access to information		<i>POW Expected Accomplishment:</i> MTS 2018-2022: SP7 EA(a): Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses and participatory processes that strengthen the science- policy

² SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023.

³ The division formerly known as the UNEP Science Division has recently been renamed to the Climate Change Division. However, for consistency and clarity throughout this report, the original designation (UNEP EWAD) will be maintained when referring to the division's role and contributions. This ensures alignment with documentation and stakeholder references used during the review process.

⁴ Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.

⁵ Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund.

⁶ UNEP (2024) UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2024. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq. Reporting from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

			interface to generate evidence- based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues and foster policy action.
Sub-programme:	Previous Sub-programme: SP7: Environment Under Review (MTS 2018-2021) Current Sub-programme: Foundational Science-Policy (MTS 2022-2025)	Programme Coordination Project:	
UNEP approval date:	08 May 2018	GEF approval date:	23 March 2018
GEF Operational Programme #:	Not applicable (GEF-6)	GEF Strategic Priority:	Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD-1 and CCCD-2)
Project type:	Medium Size Project	Focal Area(s):	Multi Focal Areas (MFAS)
Expected start date:	16 May 2018	Actual start date:	15 October 2018 ⁷
Planned completion date:	30 May 2022	Actual operational completion date:	30 June 2024
Planned total project budget at approval:	1,745,000	Actual total expenditures reported as of 30 June 2024:	901,734 ⁸
GEF grant allocation:	1,135,000	GEF grant expenditures reported as of 30 June 2024:	901,734 ⁹
Expected Medium-Size Project/Full-Size Project co-financing:	Cash: 0 In-kind: 610,000	Secured Medium-Size Project/Full-Size Project co-financing:	Cash: 0 In-kind: 610,000
No. and dates of formal project revisions:	0 (3 no cost extensions)	Date of last approved project revision:	30 May 2023 (2 nd extension)
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	Three (3)	Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:	29-30 April 2024
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation budgeted:	- At design: Y - At revision: Y	Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):	April 2024
Terminal Evaluation (planned date):	December 2024	Terminal Review (actual date):	April 2025
Coverage - Country(ies):	Republic of Iraq	Coverage - Region(s):	West Asia
Dates of previous project phases:	Not Applicable	Status of future project phases:	Not Applicable

⁷ GEF–UN Environment Information Project: Inception and Planning Workshop, held from 15 to 18 October 2018 in Amman, Jordan.

⁸ UNEP (2024) UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2024. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq. Reporting from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

⁹ UNEP (2024) UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2024. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq. Reporting from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project background

1. The GEF-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) project “Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq” (GEF Project ID 9744) aimed to enhance Iraq’s capacity to monitor and report on MEAs through a well-integrated and functional environment information system¹⁰.
2. Since 2009, Iraq has ratified several MEAs related to climate change (UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement), biodiversity (CBD, Biosafety, Ramsar, CITES & CMS), chemicals (Basel, Stockholm, Rotterdam, Minamata), and desertification (UNCCD). However, the country has faced challenges in fulfilling these obligations due to limited capacity for knowledge management, weak information-sharing systems, and insufficient coordination among relevant agencies. At the same time, Iraq faces growing environmental pressures, including ecosystem degradation, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and high vulnerability to climate change, which threaten both human and natural resources.
3. Therefore, the project supports the country in fulfilling key obligations as a Party to these agreements, particularly in ensuring consistent and transparent reporting. It also facilitates the effective use and communication of environmental data to support monitoring, analysis, decision-making, and public awareness on national and global environmental issues. The initiative aligns with the UNEP Foundational Science-Policy Subprogramme and contributes to the synergistic implementation of MEAs, helping the country meet its international commitments and enhancing environmental governance at all levels.

This Review

4. Following the UNEP Evaluation Policy¹¹ and the UNEP Programme Manual¹², this report presents the results of a Management Led Terminal Review (MLTR), which has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned. It involved several phases, including an initial review of project design and stakeholder analysis, development of a reconstructed Theory of Change at evaluation, desk review, extensive interviewing and survey with a wide range of project actors, data triangulation, and analysis. In 2024, a Mid-Term Review (MTR) was conducted to assess the project’s interim progress, covering the period from March 2018 to November 2023.

Key findings

5. The project demonstrated highly satisfactory strategic relevance, being fully aligned with UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategies (MTS) 2018–2021 and 2022–2025, and corresponding Programmes of Work. It contributed to environmental governance, data transparency, and ecosystem management, supporting UNEP’s priorities through improved reporting systems, open data access, and institutional capacity building. It also aligned with donor and partner priorities, particularly GEF and the SDGs, by strengthening environmental monitoring and integrating gender considerations. At the national level, it addressed key frameworks in Iraq, including SDGs 13, 16, and 17,

¹⁰ GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744 (2018). GEF6 Request for Project Approval.

¹¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/policies-and-strategies>

¹² <https://wecollaborate.unep.org>

NBSAPs, and the UNSDCF. While moderately complementary to existing interventions, it built on previous UNEP and GEF efforts, though the MTR noted missed opportunities for deeper integration.

6. The project design was strong in strategic alignment, planning, governance, and financial management, but showed weaknesses in learning, communication, sustainability, and replication. Improvements are needed in communication strategy, inclusive stakeholder engagement, sustainability and exit planning, Theory of Change refinement, and realistic risk mitigation.
7. The external context posed major challenges, with delays caused by political instability, civil unrest, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite poor internet, power outages, and institutional restructuring, the project adapted well—requiring only three no-cost extensions—and maintained core activities through remote coordination. A more realistic initial schedule could have mitigated some delays.
8. In terms of effectiveness, all 12 outputs and four outcomes were achieved, including workshops, technical meetings, and the operational Iraq EIS, supported by strong national leadership and over 60% female participation. The project laid a foundation for improved environmental governance, though challenges remain in data availability, institutional capacity, and integration into national processes. The impact is rated as “Likely,” depending on continued leadership, capacity-building, and system integration.
9. Financial management was highly satisfactory, with strong adherence to UNEP policies, transparent reporting, and budget reviews. Despite delays in fund transfers to the Ministry of Environment, expenditures remained aligned with plans. Financial documentation was generally complete, and the Umoja system ensured certified reporting and real-time budget tracking. Coordination between financial and project teams was exemplary.
10. Efficiency was moderately satisfactory. The project received three no-cost extensions totaling 25 months due to external disruptions but achieved its outputs and outcomes within the revised timeline. Adaptive management, cost-effective strategies, and a 98% budget utilization rate supported delivery, though some design gaps in risk mitigation and communication affected efficiency.
11. Monitoring and reporting were satisfactory, guided by a results-based approach with SMART indicators and a participatory framework. The system tracked 24 indicators but relied heavily on process metrics, limiting its ability to assess long-term outcomes and gender impacts. Despite gaps, the system was maintained throughout implementation, with strong team ownership and regular reporting. Language barriers and limited translation resources were mitigated by bilingual staff.
12. Sustainability is rated moderately likely. Long-term viability depends on political will, institutional integration, and financial commitment. The EIS was integrated into national structures and supported by a UNEP–CIMA agreement for post-handover technical assistance. However, the absence of legal mandates, contingency planning, and detailed funding pose risks. Institutional sustainability was supported by training and open-source tools, but gaps remain in policy adoption and inter-ministerial coordination. Reframing the EIS as a permanent national function is essential to ensure its long-term relevance and impact.
13. The factors affecting project performance were rated as ‘Satisfactory’. The project demonstrated strong preparation and readiness, with key activities—such as legal agreements, stakeholder consultations, and workplan development—completed within six months of approval, despite external challenges. UNEP provided strategic oversight and adaptive leadership, while UNEP WAO and Iraq’s MoE coordinated

implementation effectively, though limited inter-ministerial integration and bureaucratic hurdles affected performance. Stakeholder participation was inclusive and well-structured, supported by formal and informal engagement, though political instability and limited internet access occasionally disrupted involvement. Gender and human rights were positively addressed, with notable female participation and leadership, despite the absence of a formal gender action plan. Environmental and social safeguards were well-managed under UNEP's ESES framework, with low risk and efforts to reduce the project's footprint. Country ownership was strong, with institutional integration and capacity-building reinforcing sustainability, although gaps in coordination and indicator knowledge remain. Communication efforts were responsive and localized, but broader public outreach and feedback mechanisms were limited, affecting inclusive engagement and visibility.

Conclusions

1. Based on the findings from this review, the project demonstrates performance at the 'Satisfactory' level (Table 7 found in the Section VI.B Summary of project findings and ratings presents the ratings against all review criteria). The project has demonstrated good performance in the areas of Strategic Relevance, Quality of Project Design, Effectiveness, Financial Management, Monitoring and Reporting, and Factors affecting performance. Areas that would have benefited from further attention are Sustainability and Efficiency.
2. The initiative significantly advanced environmental governance in Iraq through the launch of the country's first integrated Environmental Information System (EIS), supported by technical, regulatory, and capacity-building efforts. It also promoted interinstitutional coordination and alignment with international environmental commitments and the SDGs. Despite these achievements, the project faced challenges such as political instability, administrative delays, technical limitations, and weak institutional adoption. Issues with data governance, IT infrastructure, and inter-ministerial interoperability further hindered long-term sustainability.
3. Regarding the first strategic question—**what approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the EIS**¹³— the project showed that technical solutions must be complemented by ongoing investment in digital infrastructure, data governance, formal data-sharing agreements, and institutional integration. National ownership was strengthened through early stakeholder engagement, Arabic-language training materials, and a train-of-trainers approach. A more centralized and flexible system, with multisectoral involvement and legal alignment, would have improved data consistency and reporting. Enhancements such as data visualization, WebGIS functionality, and AI integration, along with continuous capacity-building and interministerial coordination, are key to long-term impact.
4. Regarding the second strategic question—**how future projects can strengthen adaptive management in fragile or complex contexts**¹⁴— adaptive management depends on flexible planning, hybrid engagement models, and strong local presence. The project team responded to political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic by adjusting timelines and shifting to virtual engagement, though digital tools could not fully replace in-person interaction in low-infrastructure settings. The presence of a national project manager was crucial for maintaining trust and coordination. The

¹³ Refers to the Strategic Question: What approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the Environmental Information System (EIS), especially in challenging contexts?

¹⁴ Refers to the Strategic Question: How can future projects strengthen adaptive management to respond more effectively to political, security, and institutional disruptions during implementation in fragile or complex contexts?

review also highlighted the limitations of relying on process-based indicators without updated baseline data or effective monitoring systems. Another key lesson was the importance of a robust, inclusive, and context-specific communication strategy to enhance stakeholder engagement and collaboration. Finally, gender integration was only partial, underscoring the need for systematic gender mainstreaming through early analysis, disaggregated data, and inclusive outreach.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Data Governance and Digital Infrastructure Are Essential for the Effective and Sustained Use of Environmental Information Systems

Lesson 2: Continuous Technical Improvement Is Critical to Ensure Long-Term Usability and Impact of Environmental Information Platforms

Lesson 3: Interinstitutional Cooperation and National Leadership are Key Elements for the Sustainability of Knowledge Management Tools

Lesson 4: Structured, Inclusive, and Locally Anchored Capacity-Building Is Essential for Sustained Ownership and Long-Term Institutional Sustainability

Lesson 5: Flexibility and Advance Planning Are Essential for Effective Implementation in Fragile and Complex Contexts

Lesson 6: Hybrid Approaches, and In-Country UNEP Presence Are Critical for Effective Project Implementation in Fragile Environments

Lesson 7: Overemphasis On Process-Focused Indicators at the Expense of Impact-Focused Indicators Undermines the Project's Ability to Monitor the Achievement of Its Broader Objectives

Lesson 8: Strategic Communication Planning Is Crucial to Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement in Complex Governance Contexts

Lesson 9: Embedding Gender-Responsive Design, Monitoring, and Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms Enhances the Inclusiveness and Long-Term Impact of Environmental Data and Policy Projects

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Support and encourage the establishment of interinstitutional EIS governance committees by promoting structured collaboration among key ministries and technical departments to enhance data coordination, shared ownership, and long-term sustainability

Recommendation 2: Promote the development of legal frameworks and formal data-sharing agreements to institutionalize responsibilities for environmental data collection, validation, and integration into national systems

Recommendation 3: Encourage the engagement of local and regional non-governmental institutions—such as universities, data centers, and research organizations—to support the long-term sustainability, technical maintenance, and contextual relevance of the EIS

Recommendation 4: Support the mobilization and coordination of resources to enhance the usability of the EIS Iraq to maximize its effectiveness, utilizing AI when possible

Recommendation 5: Design and implement a long-term, locally anchored capacity-building strategy to ensure institutional retention, promote continuous use of the EIS, and support its integration into national reporting and policy processes

Recommendation 6: Promote early, comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement, early risk-informed planning, and adaptive implementation strategies in fragile contexts to enhance responsiveness, ensure timely delivery, and strengthen project resilience

Recommendation 7: Strengthen existing monitoring mechanisms in future projects by establishing an impact-focused monitoring and evaluation system at project level to measure long-term results and enhance sustainability

Recommendation 8: Adopt a structured hybrid engagement model and promote in-country presence to strengthen coordination, stakeholder trust, and implementation effectiveness in fragile contexts

Recommendation 9: Integrate inclusive and context-specific communication strategies into project design, with dedicated resources for implementation

Recommendation 10: Integrate gender-responsive and socially inclusive design, monitoring, and engagement strategies from the outset to ensure equity, relevance, and long-term impact of environmental information systems

Validation

The report has been subject to an independent validation exercise performed by UNEP's Evaluation Office. The performance ratings for the project, set out in the [Conclusions and Recommendations section](#), have been adjusted as a result. The overall project performance is validated at the 'Satisfactory' level. In addition, the Evaluation Office has found the overall quality of the report to be Satisfactory (see Annex XIII).

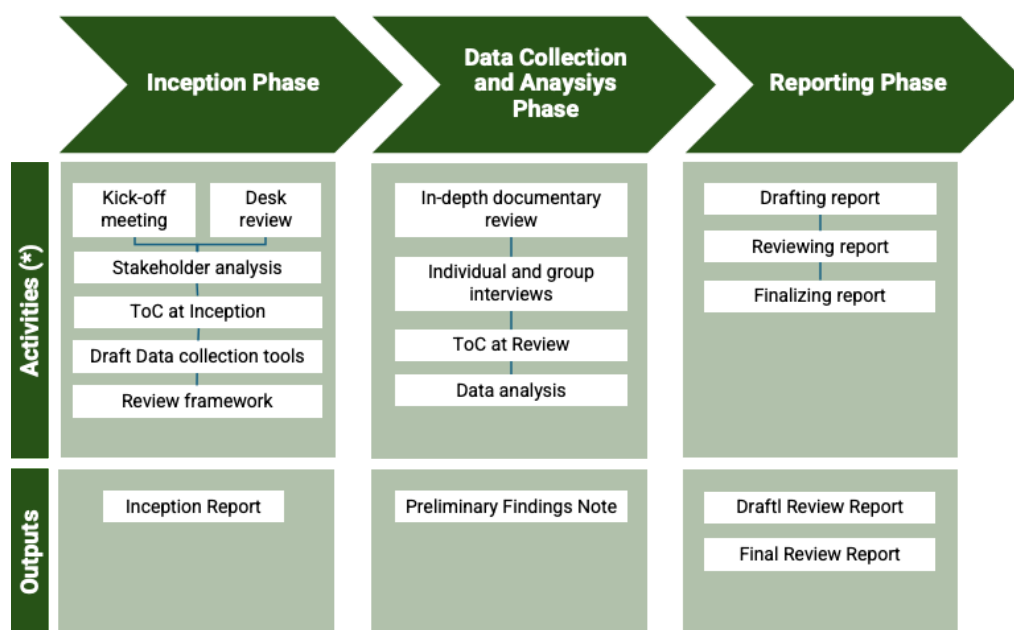
I. INTRODUCTION

5. This report presents the results and findings of the MLTR of the GEF-funded CCCD project "Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of MEAs for Iraq" (GEF Project ID 9744), - which was carried out between October 2018 and June 2024.
6. Initially approved by UNEP in March 2018, the project was scheduled to run for 36 months. However, it extended to 69 months, with three no-cost extensions: May 2023, December 2023, and June 2024, granted due to external factors such as COVID-19 disruptions and political instability. Due to the extensions, a mid-term review was completed in April 2024, covering the project period from October 2018 and November 2023. The approved total project budget was USD 1,745,000, with reported expenditures totalling USD 901,734 as of June 2024, excluding in-kind contributions.
7. The project aimed to enhance Iraq's capacity to monitor and report on MEAs by establishing a well-integrated and functional EIS. This initiative supports the Republic of Iraq (hereafter referred to as Iraq) in strengthening its capabilities under the Rio Conventions and other MEAs. Iraq has ratified several key environmental conventions, including those related to climate change (UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement), biodiversity (CBD, Biosafety Protocol, Ramsar Convention, CITES, and CMS), chemicals (Basel, Stockholm, Rotterdam, and Minamata Conventions), and desertification (UNCCD). These agreements, combined with Iraq's unique geographical location and climatic conditions, underscore the country's significance in managing global environmental assets, as recognized by the GEF.
8. The UNEP Early Warning and Assessment Division (formerly Science Division; now Climate Change Division, hereafter referred to as UNEP EWAD) served as the GEF implementing agency, providing supervision and coordination in accordance with its established policies and procedures. The project management unit consisted of a national project coordinator, IT manager, national project officer, and administrative and financial support, with external experts consulted as needed. A steering committee included representatives from the Ministry of Health and Environment (MoE), UNEP EWAD, UNEP Regional Office for West Asia (hereafter referred to as UNEP West Asia Office), and other ministries. Technical working groups focused on indicators, data flow and procedures, system design, and product and quality control.
9. This MLTR was conducted upon the project's operational completion to evaluate its performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. It also assessed the outcome and impact resulting from the project, focusing on its sustainability. This MLTR had two main objectives: (i) to provide evidence of the project's results to meet accountability standards, and (ii) to support operational improvements, learning, and knowledge sharing among UNEP, GEF, and partners. The review also highlighted lessons of operational significance for future project planning and implementation.
10. The main target audiences for the review findings were UNEP project and programme management, UNEP regional offices, various divisions (such as the Evaluation Office), the GEF Secretariat, current and potential donors, national governments, Secretariats of the MEAs, and implementing partners.

II. REVIEW METHODS

11. The MLTR was conducted through activities organized across the following phases: Inception Phase, Data Collection and Analysis Phase, and Reporting Phase (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Flowchart of activities



(*) Ongoing communication with the Task Manager and Team will occur throughout all stages to ensure alignment, address any emerging challenges, and facilitate collaboration and timely feedback.

12. This MLTR followed a participatory approach. The Review Consultant (RC), in coordination with the UNEP Task Manager (TM), ensured regular communication with project stakeholders to promote collaboration and ownership of the findings. From the inception phase onward, there was ongoing communication with the TM and project team, providing updates on progress and discussing any challenges.
13. This MLTR upheld integrity, honesty, confidentiality, systematic inquiry, and cultural sensitivity. It strove to represent both mainstream and marginalized groups, ensuring appropriate gender and Indigenous and local community representation. Data collection adhered to ethical standards and human rights, with informed consent obtained for all photos and information. Discussions remained anonymous, and interviewees and survey respondents were treated confidentially. All data were collected and managed following relevant UNEP guidelines and UN standards of conduct. All written outputs were thorough, coherent, and aligned with the UNEP Evaluation guidelines in both substance and style.
14. The MLTR adhered to the review criteria specified by the Evaluation Office and outlined in the Terms of Reference (Annex X).
15. The **Inception Phase** aimed to establish the foundation for the review. This phase involved an initial review of key project documents, including the project documents and reports, the Mid-Term Review, and relevant guidelines. Meetings and regular communication with the TM and project team were maintained to clarify details. The quality of the project design was assessed using the Evaluation Office's standard template, with a formal rating of the project's key aspects. A stakeholder analysis was completed. The Theory of Change at Inception was reconstructed based on the project results framework. The main elements of the review framework were

established, including draft data collection tools and the review framework itself (Annex II).

16. **The Data Collection and Analysis Phase** explored how the project's change process has unfolded, focusing, for instance, on progress toward the stated outcome. This phase gathered evidence of results and impacts through primary and secondary methods (in-depth documentary review, individual and/or in-group interviews, and surveys).
17. The in-depth document review focused on identifying evidence of project achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, with a particular emphasis on progress toward outcomes and impact. Documents (Annex IV) were organized, categorized, and evaluated to assess the project's alignment with its original goals and its adaptation to emerging challenges or changes in context.
18. Individual and in-group interviews were conducted with organizations and individuals listed in Annex III. Interviewees and respondents were selected based on their roles in the project and their availability and/or interest in contributing to this MLTR. Efforts were focused on engaging relevant stakeholders and representing gender and social groups. A total of 10 individuals were initially contacted to participate in the review. Among them, some were interviewed individually, while others chose to promote group interviews. As a result, the total number of participants interviewed reached 17. The response rate was approximately 100%, considering that all contacted individuals contributed to the data collection, either directly or by facilitating group interviews. Gender distribution among participants was relatively balanced, with approximately 59% identifying as male and 41% as female, as shown in Table 1. The process followed the Evaluation Office's guidelines to ensure both inclusivity and accuracy.

Table 1: Respondents' Sample

Stakeholder		# entities involved	# entities contacted	# people involved* (M/F)	# people contacted (M/F)	# respondent (M/F)	% respondent
Project team (those with management responsibilities during the project implementation period)	UNEP EWAD (Implementing agency)	01	01	3/3	2/3	2/3	100
	UNEP WAO (Executing agency)	01	01	4/1	2/0	2/0	100
	MoE (Executing agency)	01	01	17	0/1	4/4	100
Project (implementing/ executing) partners (receiving funds from the project) ¹⁵		02	02	2/0	2/0	2/0	100
Project (collaborating/contributing ¹⁶) partners (not receiving funds from the project)		03	00	13	0/0	0/0	100
Beneficiary**		-	-	-	-	-	-

* People identified

** A significant share of the entities/individuals already included in the respondent's sample are considered direct or indirect beneficiaries; therefore, no entry has been recorded under this item.

19. Interviews used a semi-structured approach with pre-determined open-ended questions and flexibility for deeper exploration based on participant responses. The

¹⁵ The implementing/executing partners were CIMA Research Foundation and eSite Information Technology & Delivery Services LLC.

¹⁶ Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc.). UNDP and Ministry of Planning are examples of this type of project partners

interview guide, informed by the review framework matrix (Annex II), was tailored to each interviewee/group, averaging five questions (up to ten) and designed to last under one hour. Questions were shared in advance when requested to help participants prepare, fostering thoughtful responses and respect for their time. Ethical considerations were addressed at the start of each interview, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and participants' consent for transcription was obtained to accurately capture responses for analysis. The communication strategy with stakeholders was adapted to the most appropriate platform, with Teams being the sole platform used. In addition to in-person and virtual meetings, email communication was used to gather further evidence. An adaptive approach was applied during the meetings. The interviewer aimed to build a trusting relationship and make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible to provide relevant information/evidence for the evaluation.

20. The selection of interviewee respondents for each subject was based on the review framework matrix (Annex II). The goal was to involve stakeholders actively engaged in the project implementation phase and the proposed tool, facilitating an in-depth study of the ToC causality in various relevant scenarios.
21. The decision to exclude field missions from the project review process was primarily informed by the nature and scope of the initiative, which focuses on enhancing the capacities of the country for monitoring and reporting on MEAs through an EIS, rather than on-ground activities. Virtual engagements were selected as a more efficient and strategic approach, allowing for broader stakeholder participation, optimized use of time and resources, and an expanded dataset through a greater number of meetings and interviews. This methodology also contributes to reducing the project's environmental footprint by minimizing air travel, in alignment with sustainability principles.
22. During the Data Collection and Analysis Phase, the ToC at Inception - based on the project design document - was refined, reviewed, and validated with the project team. The ToC at Review was then developed, reflecting the causal logic of project implementation actions, and used to assess the project's output delivery, outcome achievement, and likelihood of impact.
23. Data analysis involved transcribing, translating, coding, and organizing findings using a thematic analysis approach. Triangulation of data from all sources provided evidence for the review, identifying what occurred in the project and explaining underlying issues influencing performance. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods assessed achievements against expected outputs, outcome, and impact, considering baseline conditions, trends, and counterfactuals. The analysis was systematic, ensuring that all findings, conclusions, and recommendations were evidence-based, using tools like a data analysis matrix to organize information and data collected from various sources and methodologies.
24. At the end of the data collection and analysis phase, the RC presented preliminary findings to the UNEP project team and stakeholders. This presentation supported the review's participatory approach by confirming that all information sources were accessed and verifying emerging findings. It also allowed the project team to engage with lessons learned, contribute to recommendations, and take ownership of the results.
25. The **Reporting Phase** involves drafting, revising, and finalizing the report. The final report includes an executive summary, a detailed analysis of findings by review criteria with supporting evidence, lessons learned, recommendations, and an annotated rating table. As outlined in the ToR (Annex X), this phase included multiple reviews, from the initial draft to the final report. The RC submitted the zero draft to the

TM, who reviewed it and provided feedback. Based on the TM's input, a first draft was then shared with a broader group of stakeholders for their comments. Stakeholders were able to correct factual errors and provide feedback on the conclusions and recommendations (Annex I). The RC consolidated all feedback, incorporating it into the final report.

26. Some limitations faced during the review process included:

- i. **Delays in Receiving Responses:** There were occasional delays in receiving responses to interview requests. Several stakeholders were engaged in other professional commitments, and the timing of the review—coinciding with holiday periods—likely contributed to scheduling challenges and postponed meetings. To mitigate these delays, proactive engagement and relationship-building strategies were implemented to foster timely participation and maintain momentum throughout the review process.
- ii. **Language Barriers and Group Interviews:** Some potential interviewees were not fluent in English, which limited the feasibility of conducting individual interviews with them. To address this, group interviews were organized, allowing bilingual participants to support communication and interpretation. While this approach enabled broader inclusion, group interviews have inherent limitations—such as reduced speaking time per participant and, consequently, less opportunity for in-depth contributions. Additionally, unequal participation was observed, as not all individuals were able to express their views with the same emphasis or level of detail. On the other hand, group interviews provided a collaborative environment where participants could collectively build responses and reflections. This format encouraged the exchange of experiences, stimulated collective memory, and allowed ideas to be complemented and expanded upon by others.
- iii. **Time Gap in Project Implementation:** The project spanned from 2018 to 2024, and several key stakeholders involved in earlier phases were no longer available or had difficulty recalling specific details from past activities. To address this, the review relied heavily on a thorough analysis of written documentation, particularly the Mid-Term Review, to reconstruct the project's trajectory and validate findings.
- iv. **Critical Reflections on Beneficiary Engagement and Project Sustainability / Limited Evidence from Stakeholder Perspectives:** While the review aimed to capture insights on beneficiary engagement and the sustainability of project outcomes, these dimensions were not prominently reflected in the interviews or available documentation. Perspectives on what could have been done differently, the long-term impact of the project, and UNEP's role in scaling up support were only marginally addressed. Although these issues did not emerge strongly during data collection, internal discussions within UNEP have acknowledged their relevance. The review therefore sought to incorporate these aspects through contextual analysis and interpretation of observed data, generating recommendations to inform future initiatives—particularly in contexts such as Iraq, where political instability may pose challenges to the sustainability and institutionalization of project achievements.

III. THE PROJECT

A. Context

27. The project aimed to enhance Iraq's capacity to monitor and report on MEAs by developing a well-integrated and functional EIS. This initiative addressed critical challenges arising from the country's unique geographic position and vulnerable climatic conditions, characterized by declining precipitation, rising sea levels, and increasing climate variability. These environmental stressors have caused widespread land degradation, desertification, and biodiversity loss, especially in semi-arid areas previously affected by prolonged conflict. In 2023, the Climate Change Department reported that desertification had reached nearly 70% of the national territory, driven by water scarcity and pressures on shared transboundary resources. These conditions have diminished agricultural productivity, threatened biodiversity, and increased the population's vulnerability to climate-induced disasters.
28. While the Government of Iraq committed to reversing these trends through frameworks such as the National Environment Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP, 2013) and the National Development Plan (2013–2017), progress has been limited by systemic capacity challenges. Key barriers include the absence of an integrated environmental information system, poor coordination among ministries, limited awareness of global environmental issues and MEAs, and inadequate knowledge-sharing mechanisms. These gaps have hindered the country's ability to effectively monitor, report, and respond to environmental challenges, as well as to align national planning with global environmental goals.
29. This CCCD project was built on the findings of the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA), which highlighted the urgent need to strengthen national capacities for MEA coordination and reporting. The project aimed to contribute to the following objectives of the GEF CCCD strategy: Integrating global environmental needs into management information systems and monitoring (CCCD-1) and strengthening consultative and management structures and mechanisms (CCCD-2). The project supported the establishment and development of the Environmental Information System (EIS)—formerly known as the Environment Information Portal (EIP)—to serve as a centralized platform for data collection, management, and dissemination.
30. At the project's inception, the Information Technology Department of MoE had limited technical capacity, with some ability to produce software-based environmental data such as GIS maps. However, significant gaps remained regarding system integration and inter-agency collaboration. Therefore, the project aimed to play a vital role in reinforcing the institutional, technical, and informational foundations necessary for sound environmental governance and sustainable development.
31. During its implementation, the project faced several significant external challenges, primarily the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. These factors disrupted operations at UNEP and among stakeholders, causing delays in key project activities and requiring adjustments to the implementation timeline. Additionally, more time was needed to conduct the MTR and implement the necessary follow-up actions based on its recommendations, as the project extended well beyond its initially planned 36-month duration, ultimately lasting more than four years.

B. Objectives and components

32. As outlined in the GEF6 Request for Project Approval¹⁷ and confirmed/maintained in later revisions, the project aimed to achieve its goals through 2 components and four main outcomes, each with three specific outputs, totalling 12. No changes were made to them during project implementation (Table 2).

Table 2: Project outcome and outputs

Component	Outcome	Output	Description
Component 1: Development of a coordinated environmental knowledge and information management system	Outcome 1: Streamlined and integrated data and information system at the national level that takes into consideration the decentralized governance system in Iraq for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting.	Output 1.1: In-depth analysis of the current management of environmental information, data sources and flows, environmental statistics and reporting mechanisms related to the Rio Conventions, other MEAs, and other relevant processes, including a mapping of relevant stakeholders.	This outcome focuses on establishing an Environmental Information System (EIS) to support MEAs and relevant SDGs. The project will analyse existing indicators and systems to inform the EIS design, develop agreements and SOPs for coordinated data management among stakeholders, and equip the Ministry's IT Department with the necessary tools and systems to serve as the central repository for environmental information. It will also design and implement an information portal and provide capacity building for user groups.
		Output 1.2 Endorsed agreement and standard operating procedures among key line ministries and agencies on the streamlining of data collection and sharing to fill data gaps and reduce unnecessary duplication.	
		Output 1.3 Systems and portal established to manage and access environmental data, information and geospatial information (e.g. GIS).	
	Outcome 2: Improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system	Output 2.1 Definition, update and improvement of nationally appropriate environmental indicators, baseline data and targets based on MEAs, SDGs and other sources for use in different reporting and assessment processes.	This outcome focuses on improving and harmonizing environmental indicators and data collection across relevant agencies. The project will identify and implement measures to update and align indicators, baseline data, and targets with MEA and SDG requirements. It will also prepare for and conduct data collection to address identified gaps and provide training on tools for managing complex datasets to support informed decision-making on environmental policies and actions.
		Output 2.2 Collection and validation of environmental data, information and maps through a streamlined indicator-based monitoring and reporting system to MEAs, indicators for the environmental dimension of SDGs and other relevant mechanisms, including the Indicator Reporting Information System (IRIS).	
		Output 2.3 Guidance and training on the use and application of tools to handle complex data sets and results-based, impact oriented environmental actions that cut across MEAs and relevant SDGs.	
Component 2: Enhancement of institutional coordination and technical capacities to mainstream, develop, and utilize policies for the effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs	Outcome 3: Regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for sustainable and transparent sharing of environmental information	Output 3.1 Enhanced consultative and decision-making processes for mainstreaming of obligations under Rio Conventions, other relevant MEAs and related SDGs, including shared environmental information systems, collaborative and endorsed institutional inter and intra ministerial mechanisms, collaborative mechanisms with major groups and stakeholders.	This outcome aims to establish regulatory and collaborative mechanisms to improve knowledge and information sharing. The project will institutionalize measures to enhance coordination and information exchange in support of MEA and SDG implementation, develop a mechanism to monitor and evaluate progress using the EIS, and implement actions to ensure the sustainability of the system and related collaborative processes.
		Output 3.2 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism established, targeted to compliance monitoring of state policies, programmes, and plans.	
		Output 3.3 Sustainability strategy for continued implementation of MEAs and the environmental dimension of SDGs	
	Outcome 4: Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact oriented policies, plans and programmes integrating MEAs and related SDG	Output 4.1 Training programme developed and executed to enable the integration of environmental management into planning, monitoring and reporting processes.	This outcome focuses on building capacity and raising awareness for the implementation of MEAs and related SDGs. The project will provide training on integrating environmental management into planning, monitoring, and reporting processes, support the updating of sectoral strategies using data from the EIS, and produce knowledge products to promote awareness of sustainable development and MEA-related goals.
		Output 4.2 At least 2 pilot sectors updating their strategies/plans to mainstream the environmental dimension/MEAs.	
		Output 4.3 Environmental education for Sustainable Development and awareness raising activities	

33. Section IV, " Theory of Change at review, " describes the causal pathways linking the project outputs and outcomes to higher-level expected results (intermediate state and

¹⁷ GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744 (2018). GEF6 Request for Project Approval.

impact). Table 3 (Section IV) reformulates results statements, aiming to frame the wording of the expected results in line with the Theory of Change and UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions.

C. Stakeholders

34. The Annex O of the Request for Project Approval includes a detailed stakeholder analysis, identifying key stakeholders, their project-related priorities, and expected roles in implementation, supported by a stakeholder analysis matrix. Building on this, the MLTR produced a stakeholder matrix at inception (Table 3), following the UNEP's Stakeholder Analysis Guidance.
35. Stakeholders were categorized considering the project document's classifications, based on their role- project lead/direct collaborators (PL/DC)¹⁸, data/information providers¹⁹ and generators²⁰ (DPG), and data users (DU)²¹, technology and information regulators (TIR)²², and technology and information system platforms (TISP)²³, and by type, including regional and international organizations, government, private sector, civil society, and academia.
36. This review identifies several regional and international organizations and national and local government organizations as key players, defined as stakeholders with medium to high influence and interest. Regarding regional and international organizations, this review highlights the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNEP West Asia Office (WAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and CIMA Research Foundation as key players, among other organizations. Regarding national and local government, this review identifies the Ministry of Health and Environment (MoE), the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Ministry of Planning (MoP), the Directorates of Environment in the Governorates, and several other organizations as key players.
37. Other stakeholder groups-such as additional regional and international organizations (e.g.; International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Intergovernmental Science- Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and Convention Secretariats), other national and local government entities (e.g.; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), and civil society individuals and organizations (including NGOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth), academia -are classified as subjects ("show consideration"), meaning they have low influence but medium to high interest in the project's outcomes.
38. In the private sector, including national and international petroleum companies, other industries, and small and medium-sized businesses, most entities are considered subjects. However, eSite Information Technology & Delivery Services LLC stands out as a local project partner and is recognized as a key player.

¹⁸ Entities responsible for managing and implementing the project, including coordination, oversight, and day-to-day execution of activities (Ministry of Health and Environment, Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Ministry of Planning).

¹⁹ Institutions or agencies that supply existing environmental data and reports relevant to MEAs and SDGs (Line ministries such as the Ministry of Water Resources, Agriculture, and Industry and Minerals)

²⁰ Stakeholders that produce new environmental data through monitoring, research, or fieldwork, such as research centres, academia, monitoring centres, environment offices within governorates, etc.

²¹ Government bodies, CSOs, private sector, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders, including youth and women who utilize environmental data for decision-making, planning, or reporting.

²² Authorities or institutions responsible for establishing and enforcing policies, standards, and regulations related to technology use, data protection, cybersecurity, and digital governance to ensure the integrity and legality of environmental information systems (Ministry of Communication, and Higher Education and Research)

²³ Regional and global hubs (UNEP Live, MEAs Portals, WHO, Yale University, WCMC, etc.), responsible for developing, maintaining, and operating the digital infrastructure that supports data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination.

Table 3: TR Stakeholder Matrix

Type	Main stakeholder role					Power (H/M/L)	Interest (H/M/L)
	PL/DC	DPG	DU	TIR	TISP		
Regional and international organizations	X	X	X		X	L - H	M - H
National and local government	X	X	X	X		L - H	M - H
Civil Society		X	X			L	M - H
Academia	X	X	X	X		L	H
Private sector	X				X	L - M	M - H

D. Project implementation structure and partners

39. The project was implemented through a structured arrangement involving several key actors (Figure 3):

- I. **Implementing Agency (IA):** UNEP, through its Early Warning and Assessment Division (formerly Science Division), managed the project according to GEF's requirements, reported to GEF, and oversaw overall delivery.
- II. **Executing Agency (EA):** The Ministry of Health and Environment of Iraq (MoE) led project execution with support from the UN Environment West Asia Office (WAO). MoE coordinated activities, monitored progress, and managed the national budget, while UNEP/WAO handled technical and financial operations, including procurement and contracting under UN Environment rules. The EA was accountable to the IA.
- III. **Project Steering Committee (PSC):** The PSC met annually or as needed. It guided project implementation, reviewed progress, approved workplans and budgets, and provided strategic advice to ensure alignment with national priorities and ongoing initiatives.
- IV. **MEA Focal Points Advisory Group:** This group provided technical input to ensure the project, and the system design met MEA requirements, convening upon request of the National Project Coordinator, at least once a year and whenever necessary.
- V. **Working Groups:** Four thematic working groups supported the delivery of project outputs under the guidance of the project staff and consultants and in close collaboration with the Technical Assistance Partner.
- VI. **Technical Assistance Partner:** CIMA Research Foundation was an international partner responsible for the technical development and implementation of the EIS solution, including designing the system architecture, developing software modules (GIS, dashboards, etc.), integrating various data sources, ensuring the system is robust and user-friendly, and providing training and workshops to MoE teams responsible for managing the system.
- VII. **IT Company:** eSite Information Technology & Delivery Services LLC, a local partner, ensured the successful migration of the system and its sustainability by providing ongoing local support after the handover. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the contracting, procurement, and logistics processes, including facilitating the engagement of the local partner and assisting with the procurement and delivery of IT hardware.

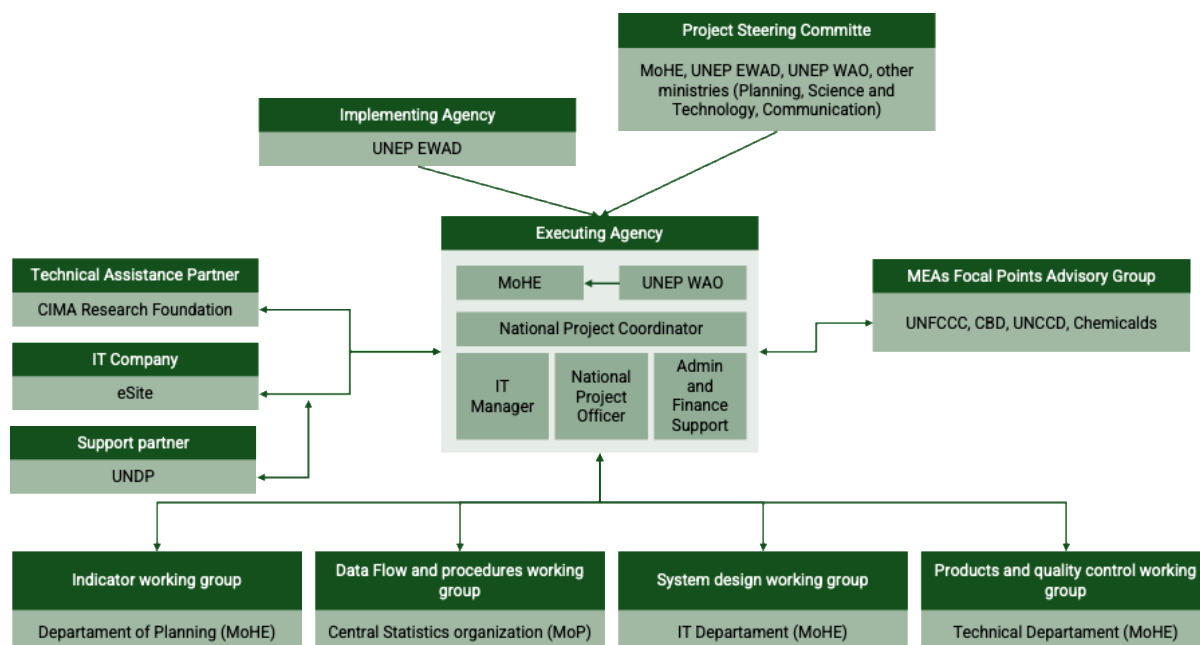


Figure 2: Organigram of the Project with key project stakeholders

E. Changes in design during implementation

40. Although the project was initially designed to span 36 months beginning in May 2018, implementation activities effectively started in October 2018 with the Inception and Planning Workshop²⁴, following the entry into force of the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between UNEP EWAD and the UNEP WAO²⁵. However, in-country operations were interrupted by many factors, including ongoing national demonstrations and civil unrest that culminated in the resignation of the national government and caused delayed elections and political instability. As a result, the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between UNEP WAO and the MoE²⁶ was only signed in May 2019, after which the first disbursement was made, and an international expert was recruited to develop the EIS framework.
41. Therefore, considering October 2018 (the ICA entry into force), the effective project start date, the 36-month implementation period would have concluded by October 2021. However, the formal request for a one-year project extension was submitted only in May 2022. This suggests that May 2019 (PCA entry into force) may have been adopted in practice as the project's operational start date, thereby extending the implementation timeline through May 2022. The approximately six-month gap between the ICA and PCA was due to procedural, administrative, and bureaucratic processes required to finalize the agreement at the national level during a period of political instability, thereby enabling full implementation on the ground.
42. During implementation, the project also experienced several delays due to external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges disrupted operations, delayed meetings, limited stakeholder engagement, and necessitated a shift to online

²⁴ GEF–UN Environment Information Project: Inception and Planning Workshop, held from 15 to 18 October 2018 in Amman, Jordan.

²⁵ UNEP. (2018). Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division, and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2018).

²⁶ UNEP. (2019). Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA). UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq.

formats. As a result, three no-cost extensions were granted, extending the project timeline to June 2024. No changes were made to the ToC or results framework. Each extension addressed specific circumstances, as detailed below:

- i. **First Extension (May 2022)**²⁷: Extended to May 2023 due to COVID-19 disruptions. This allowed for the completion of delayed activities.
- ii. **Second Extension (May 2023)**²⁸: Extended to December 2023 to address delays caused by political instability. It also allowed time for the Medium-Term Review (MTR) and implementation of its recommendations.
- iii. **Third Extension (December 2023)**²⁹: Extended to June 2024 due to organizational restructuring within MoE. This final extension enabled the completion of outstanding activities and integration of findings from the delayed MTR.

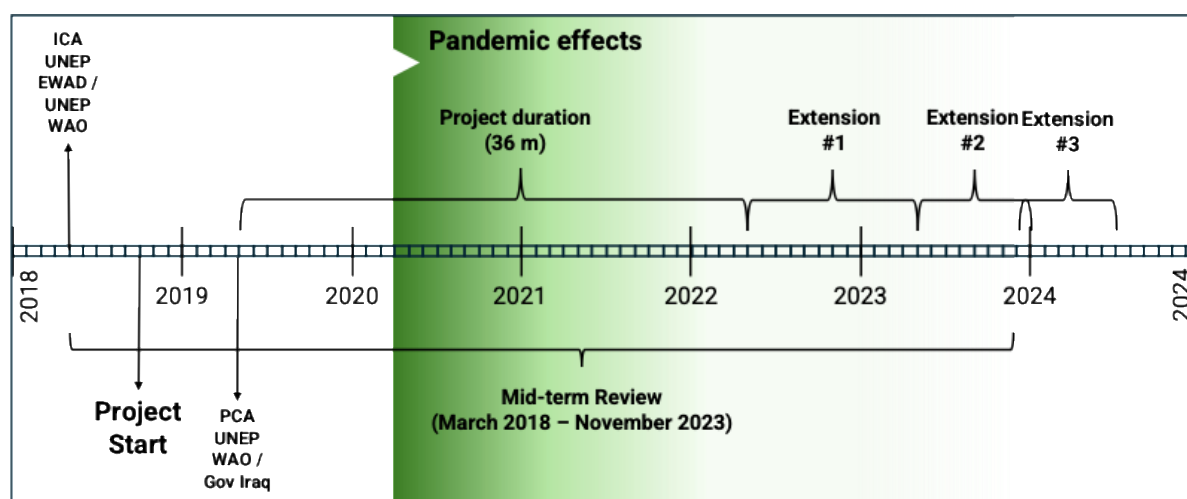


Figure 3: Project Timeline - Key Revisions and Updated Deadlines

²⁷ UNEP. (2022). Amendment No. 1 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2022).

²⁸ UNEP. (2023). Amendment No. 2 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2023).

²⁹ UNEP. (2023). Amendment No. 3 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (December 2023).

F. Project financing

43. According to the UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2024³⁰, the project reported a total planned funding and contributions of USD 1,745,000. Of this, GEF financing accounted for USD 1,135,000. Thus, approximately 65% of the secured funding came from cash contributions, nearly all of which originated from extra-budgetary sources. The remaining 35% of the secured funding (USD 610,000) was provided through in-kind co-financing contributions.
44. The estimated project cost at the design stage was USD 1,745,000. As of June 2023, the actual expenditure amounted to USD 901,734.
45. When analysing the budget distribution by component, excluding Project Management Costs (PMC), the GEF project financing at the design stage allocated USD 720,000 to Component 1 and USD 320,000 to Component 2, representing approximately 63% and 28% of the total GEF budget, respectively. At the outcome level, Outcome 1 received the largest share of the total financing (52.5%), followed by Outcome 4 (18.5%), Outcome 2 (10.9%), and Outcome 3 (9.7%). This distribution reflects the project's strategic emphasis on a streamlined and integrated data and information system for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting, as outlined in Outcome 1.
46. Annex VI (Project Budget and Expenditures) includes Table 7, which details the project funding sources, and Table 8, which provides a breakdown of expenditures by outcome/output. Annex VII (Financial Management) contains Table 9, presenting an overview of financial management.

³⁰ UNEP. (2024). Project Implementation Review Fiscal Year 2024. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. ((1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024).

IV. THEORY OF CHANGE AT REVIEW

47. The Theory of Change (ToC) presented at the GEF6 Request for Project Approval³¹ is well defined, outlining the assumptions, outputs, outcomes, and impact of the project. The mid-term review confirmed the validity of it, adopting it as the 'ToC at Review'. However, the project would benefit from a more detailed ToC diagram explicating an intermediate state, detailed key pathways and stakeholders, aligning as much as possible with UNEP guidelines³².
48. Figure 5 presents the reconstructed ToC at Review of this MLTR, depicting the sequence from outputs to outcome through intermediate states and leading to the desired impact. It explains the change process by outlining the major causal pathways throughout the intervention. These changes are mapped as a set of interrelated pathways, illustrating how the required outcome is logically connected. Table 4 reformulates results statements, aiming to frame the wording of the expected results in line with the Theory of Change and UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions³³.

Table 4: Justification for Reformulation of Results Statements

Formulation in original project document(s)	Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Review Inception (RTOC)	Justification for Reformulation
(LONG LASTING) IMPACT		
Effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs in Iraq for enhanced global environmental benefits	Same as original	-
INTERMEDIATE STATES		
-	Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting	The original project document does not present an intermediate state. It reflects the necessary step where country start working in a coordinated way for monitoring and reporting on MEAs through the proposed EIS. Without it, the MEAs and relevant SDGs may be implemented in isolation or inconsistently, limiting their effectiveness in addressing global environmental benefits.
PROJECT OUTCOME		
Outcome 1: Streamlined and integrated data and information system at the national level that takes into consideration the decentralized governance system in Iraq for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting	Same as original	-
Outcome 2: Improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system.	Same as original	-
Outcome 3: Regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for sustainable and transparent sharing of environmental information.	Same as original	-

³¹ GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744 (2018). GEF6 Request for Project Approval.

³² UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 13 TR Use of Theory of Change in Reviews Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EQU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>

³³ UNEP (2023) Glossary of Results Definitions (version 8)

Formulation in original project document(s)	Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Review Inception (RTOC)	Justification for Reformulation
Outcome 4: Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact oriented policies, plans and programmes integrating MEAs and related SDG.	Same as original	-
OUTPUTS		
Output 1.1: In-depth analysis of the current management of environmental information, data sources and flows, environmental statistics and reporting mechanisms related to the Rio Conventions, other MEAs, and other relevant processes, including a mapping of relevant stakeholders.	Same as original	-
Output 1.2 Endorsed agreement and standard operating procedures among key line ministries and agencies on the streamlining of data collection and sharing to fill data gaps and reduce unnecessary duplication.	Same as original	
Output 1.3 Systems and portal established to manage and access environmental data, information and geospatial information (e.g. GIS).	Same as original	
Output 2.1 Definition, update and improvement of nationally appropriate environmental indicators, baseline data and targets based on MEAs, SDGs and other sources for use in different reporting and assessment processes.	Same as original	
Output 2.2 Collection and validation of environmental data, information and maps through a streamlined indicator-based monitoring and reporting system to MEAs, indicators for the environmental dimension of SDGs and other relevant mechanisms, including the Indicator Reporting Information System (IRIS).	Same as original	
Output 2.3 Guidance and training on the use and application of tools to handle complex data sets and results-based, impact oriented environmental actions that cut across MEAs and relevant SDGs.	Same as original	
Output 3.1 Enhanced consultative and decision-making processes for mainstreaming of obligations under Rio Conventions, other relevant MEAs and related SDGs, including shared environmental information systems, collaborative and endorsed institutional inter and intra ministerial mechanisms, collaborative mechanisms with major groups and stakeholders.	Same as original	
Output 3.2 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism established, targeted to compliance monitoring of state policies, programmes, and plans.	Same as original	
Output 3.3 Sustainability strategy for continued implementation of MEAs and the environmental dimension of SDGs.	Same as original	
Output 4.1 Training programme developed and executed to enable the integration of environmental management into planning, monitoring and reporting processes.	Same as original	
Output 4.2 At least 2 pilot sectors updating their strategies/plans to mainstream the environmental dimension/MEAs.	Same as original	
Output 4.3 Environmental education for Sustainable Development and awareness raising activities.	Same as original	

49. It was expected that the delivery of 12 outputs (see Section III.B) would lead, during the life of the project, to the achievement of 4 outcomes (see section 2), which in turn would place the process of change in an intermediate state (Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting) towards the desired impact (Effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs in Iraq for enhanced global environmental benefits). These expected changes would be effectively

achieved if the three drivers³⁴ and four assumptions³⁵ were met (Table 5). All five stakeholder groups were expected to be involved in the change process: project lead/direct collaborators (PL/DC), data/information providers and generators (DPG), and data users (DU), technology and information regulators (TIR), and technology and information system platforms (TISP), see section III.C.

50. Output 1.1 comprehensively analyses existing indicators and systems to inform the system design. Output 1.2 focuses on developing stakeholders' agreement and SOPs for coordinated data management. Output 1.3 provides the IT infrastructure to serve as the main repository for environmental data, including designing and launching an information portal and training for user groups. The delivery of these three outputs supports Outcome 1, which aims to establish an environmental information system (EIS) and related processes that facilitate the implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs. The successful delivery of Outcome 1 depends on Political and Security Stability (Assumption A1) and Operational Feasibility and Stakeholder Mobilization (Driver D1).
51. Output 2.1 defines and secures agreement on updated indicators, baseline data, and targets aligned with MEA and SDG requirements. Output 2.2 prepares and implements environmental data collection to fill gaps identified under Outputs 1.1 and 2.1. Output 2.3 provides training in tools for managing and analysing complex datasets to support evidence-based environmental decision-making. The completion of these three outputs contributes directly to Outcome 2, focused on strengthening and harmonizing environmental indicators and data collection among key agencies. Effective implementation of Outcome 2 depends on Operational Feasibility and Stakeholder Mobilization (Driver D1) and the Effectiveness of the Training Programme (Assumption A5).
52. Output 3.1 identifies and institutionalizes measures to enhance collaboration, consultation, and information exchange to support MEA and SDG implementation. Output 3.2 develops a mechanism to monitor and evaluate progress in implementing MEAs and related policies, plans, and programmes using the EIS. Output 3.3 focuses on ensuring the system's sustainability and associated processes. These three outputs collectively drive progress toward Outcome 3: the establishment of regulatory and collaborative mechanisms for improved information and knowledge sharing. The achievement of Outcome 3 requires Effective Inter-Agency Collaboration (Assumption A3).
53. Output 4.1 delivers training on incorporating environmental data into planning, monitoring, and reporting processes to support policy and decision-making. Output 4.2 identifies options to revise and align sectoral strategies/plans supporting the MEAs and related SDGs using insights from the EIS in two pilot sectors. Output 4.3 generates and shares knowledge products to promote understanding of the EIS, sustainable development, and the MEAs and SDGs. The delivery of these three outputs supports Outcome 4, which aims to build capacity and raise awareness for implementing MEAs and related SDGs. The successful implementation of Outcome 4 relies on the Effectiveness of the Training Programme (Assumption A5), Effective Inter-Agency Collaboration (Assumption A3), and Leveraging Synergies with Existing Initiatives (Driver D3).

³⁴ A driver is a significant external factor that, if present, is expected to contribute to the realization of the intended results of a project. Drivers can be influenced by the project and its partners.

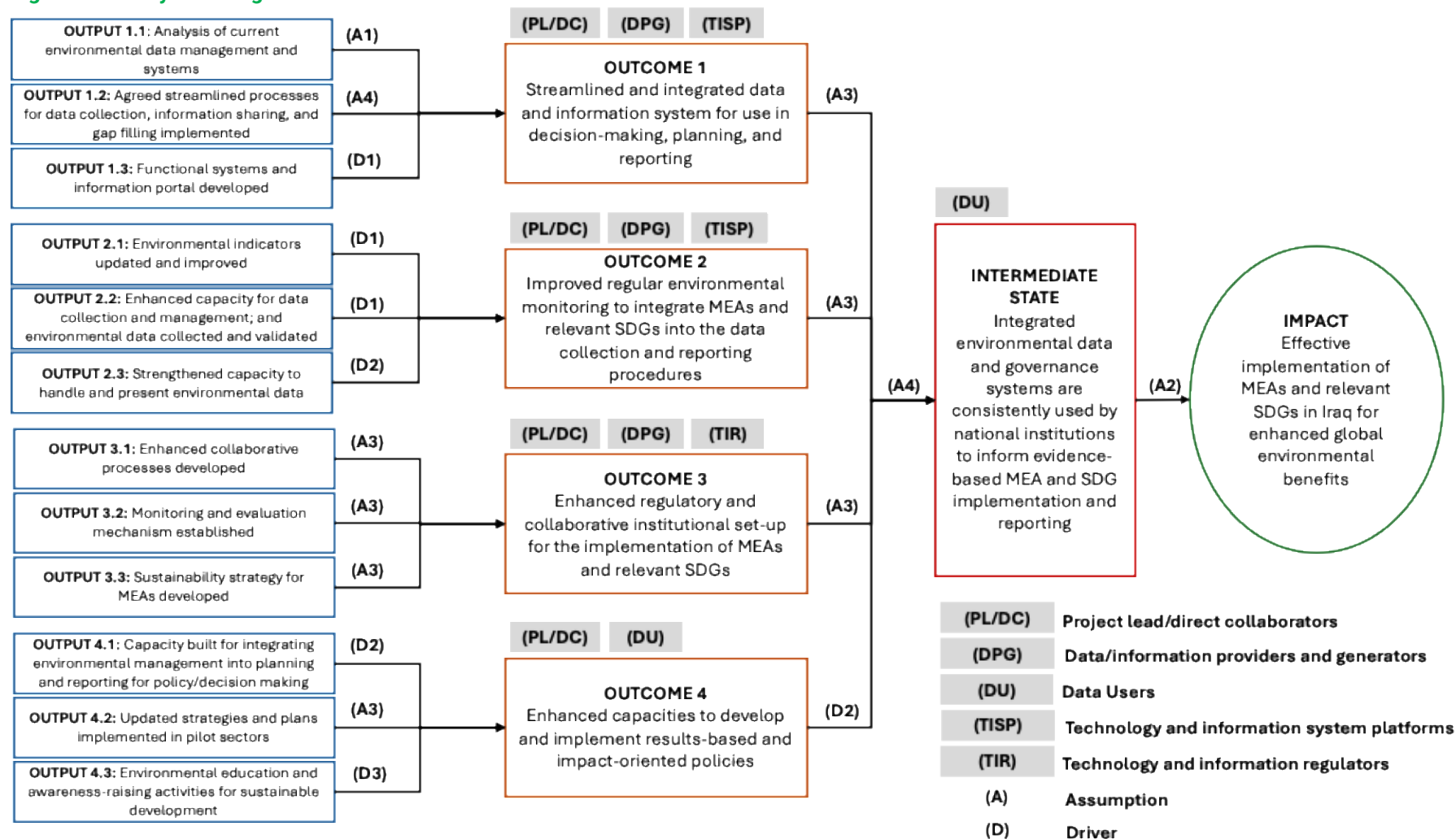
³⁵ An assumption is a significant external factor or condition that needs to be present for the realization of the intended results but is beyond the influence of the project and its partners. Assumptions are often positively formulated risks.

54. The achievement of the project outcomes was expected to lead to the intermediate state where “Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting”. To reach this intermediate state, two contributing conditions largely outside the project’s sphere of influence were anticipated: Effective Inter-Agency Collaboration (Assumption A3) and Effectiveness of the Training Programme (Driver D2).
55. Ultimately, the overall impact of the project— “Effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs in Iraq for enhanced global environmental benefits”—would be realized through this intermediate state and a Sustained Government Commitment (Assumption A2).

Table 5: Drivers and assumptions of the project

DRIVERS		DESCRIPTION
Driver 1	D1	Operational Feasibility and Stakeholder Mobilization: The available time and budget are adequate to achieve the expected results despite operational complexities. SOPs and indicators can be developed in parallel with planned outputs, and a sufficient number of stakeholders can be mobilized for training and data collection.
Driver 2	D2	Effectiveness of the Training Programme: The training programme successfully builds the capacity of relevant stakeholders, and participants are able to apply the knowledge gained in practical and relevant ways following the training.
Driver 3	D3	Leveraging Synergies with Existing Initiatives: Synergies with existing programmes and initiatives can be used to increase impact
ASSUMPTIONS		DESCRIPTION
Assumption 1	A1	Political and Security Stability: The political and security situation in the country remains stable enough to allow project activities to proceed as planned, without major disruptions.
Assumption 2	A2	Sustained Government Commitment: The government of Iraq maintains its political and institutional commitment to the project’s goals, actively supporting implementation through policies, resources, and ongoing collaboration.
Assumption 3	A3	Effective Inter-Agency Collaboration: Participating agencies share sufficient common interests and are committed to enhanced collaboration and coordination; they are willing and able to participate in the process, share data, implement agreed collaborative processes, and adopt joint standard operating procedures (SOPs)
Assumption 4	A4	Supportive Context for Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Inclusion: The broader social, political, and institutional context supports the promotion of human rights, gender equality, and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and local communities, enabling these principles to be integrated throughout the project.

Figure 4: Theory of Change



56. During the review process, it is essential to clarify the specific contributions of PL/DC across all Outputs, the roles of DPG in Outputs related to Outcomes 1, 2, and 3, and the roles of TISP in Outputs under Outcomes 1 and 2. It is also important to assess how TIR and DU influence the Outputs related to Outcomes 3 and 4, respectively. The validity of assumptions regarding stakeholder commitment and willingness to act should be assessed, along with the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and its contribution to achieving project goals, especially in the case of the key beneficiary stakeholders (Government officials / national focal point).
57. Indigenous peoples, local communities, youth, and women are identified as DU. To ensure equitable project outputs, it is essential for the broader social, political, and institutional context to support the promotion of human rights, gender equality, and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and local communities (Assumption A7). Data collection mechanisms targeting these groups will be instrumental in assessing the project's impact on their needs.

V. REVIEW FINDINGS

A. Strategic Relevance

Alignment to UNEP's UNEP Medium Term Strategy³⁶ (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities

58. The project's implementation strategies and expected contributions were closely aligned with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategies (MTS), Programmes of Work (PoWs), and strategic priorities under which the project was approved. This alignment was achieved by addressing core UNEP objectives in environmental governance and ecosystem management, promoting policy coherence, and strengthening institutional capacities.
59. For MTS 2018-2021, the project implementation reports show that the project contributed directly to the Sub-programme 7 (Environment Under Review), particularly through the following expected accomplishments (EA) and PoW indicators for 2018-2019³⁷ and 2020-2021³⁸:
- i. SP7 EA(a): Governments and other stakeholders use quality open environmental data, analyses, and participatory processes that strengthen the science-policy interface to generate evidence-based environmental assessments, identify emerging issues, and foster policy action.
 - ii. SP7 EA(a)(ii): Increase in the number of countries reporting on the environmental dimension of sustainable development through shared environmental information systems (SEIS) with country-level data made discoverable through UNEP.
60. The project was aligned with the following PoW Output under *PoW 2018-19 and PoW 2020-2021*: National and regional reporting systems based on shared environmental information system principles, generating open access to information.
61. Under MTS 2022-2025, the project sustains its relevance to UNEP's Science-Policy foundational subprogramme, which aims to provide credible data and policy-relevant analysis to strengthen the science-policy interface and support informed environmental decision-making. The project contributed particularly through the following expected accomplishments (EA):
- i. 1B Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on the adaptation and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement.
 - ii. 1C: State and non-State actors adopt the enhanced transparency framework arrangements under the Paris Agreement.
 - iii. 2B: Sustainable management of nature is adopted & implemented in development frameworks.
62. Under PoW 2022-2023³⁹, the project contributes to the following direct outcomes:

³⁶ UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) is a document that guides UNEP's programme planning over a four-year period. It identifies UNEP's thematic priorities, known as Sub-programmes (SP), and sets out the desired outcomes, known as Expected Accomplishments (EAs), of the Sub-programmes. <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/our-evaluation-approach/un-environment-documents>.

³⁷ Indicators of achievement of Sub-programme 4 Environmental Governance (UNEP PoW 2018-2019) can be found on <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7707>

³⁸ Indicators of achievement of Sub-programme 4 Environmental Governance (UNEP PoW 2020-2021) can be found on <https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/28411>

³⁹ Indicators of achievement of Science-Policy foundational subprogramme (UNEP PoW 2022-2025) can be found on <https://www.unep.org/resources/unep-programme-work-and-budget-2022-2023-pow-annex-1-people-and-planet>

- i. 1.1 Policymaking and decision-making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based analysis and data generation.
 - ii. 2.7 Natural assets are valued, monitored, and sustainably managed
 - iii. 2.9 Institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced, and accountability frameworks are strengthened
 - iv. 3.13 Sound science, data, statistics, analysis, information, and knowledge are generated and shared.
63. Under PoW 2022-2023⁴⁰, the project also contributes to two key indicators:
- i. SP (i): Number of countries and national, regional, and subnational authorities that, as a result of UNEP support, have strengthened capacity to develop sound environmental data, statistics, scientific assessments, and early warning systems.
 - ii. SP (ii): Number of relevant global, regional, and national forums, institutions, and Governments using data, statistics, scientific assessments, and early warning and foresight systems provided by UNEP for catalyzing policymaking and action.
64. The project's strategies—from strengthening national frameworks to facilitating MEA synergies—were designed to fulfil UNEP's strategic vision for empowering governments and other stakeholders with quality assessments and open access to data and information to deliver the environmental dimension of sustainable development.
65. Although the project does not explicitly reference the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP), it supports its objectives by strengthening national capacity through knowledge and information management systems, including elements of capacity building, technology support, and environmental mainstreaming. Similarly, while South-South cooperation is not explicitly mentioned, the Project Approval Request notes that experiences from other countries in the region, such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, would inform the system design. Nonetheless, the document could more clearly emphasize its alignment and relevance with these strategic priorities.
66. Overall, the project's implementation strategies and contributions demonstrated alignment with UNEP's mandate and thematic priorities as outlined in the MTS cycles 2018-2021 and 2022-2025, along with their respective PoWs (2018-2019, 2020-2021, and 2022-2023). Alignment with UNEP's Capacity Building (BSP) and South-South Cooperation (S-SC) policies was evident. Contributions were also identified for PoW indicators (2018-2019, 2020-2021, and 2022-2023).

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

Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities

67. The project demonstrates strong alignment with the strategic priorities of GEF, national development needs, and SDGs, particularly through its focus on the implementation of MEAs and the integration of environmental considerations into policy and planning frameworks. The project contributes to key objectives of the GEF CCCD strategy, specifically: CCCD-1, which focuses on integrating global environmental needs into monitoring and information systems; and CCCD-2, which aims to strengthen consultative and governance structures and mechanisms.

⁴⁰ Indicators of achievement of Science-Policy foundational subprogramme (UNEP PoW 2022-2025) can be found on <https://www.unep.org/resources/unep-programme-work-and-budget-2022-2023-pow-annex-1-people-and-planet>

68. The project document also emphasizes that the implementation of this initiative is expected to generate multiple global environmental benefits across all GEF focal areas. By strengthening the implementation of MEAs, the project contributes to enhanced environmental governance in the domains of climate change, biodiversity conservation, land degradation, and chemical management.
69. Originally designed to contribute to GEF-6 Core Indicator 6— Enhance capacity of countries to implement MEAs and mainstream into national and sub-national policy, planning, financial, and legal frameworks —the project was also required, under GEF-7 operational guidance, to report contributions to additional indicators. Accordingly, it aligned with the following GEF-7 core Indicator Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment.
70. Stakeholder feedback confirmed that the project's implementation strategies and expected outcomes were well aligned with donor priorities. During the project design phase, UNEP ensured that the project fit within the GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) framework. This alignment was a prerequisite for project approval. Project results were primarily communicated to donors through PIRs, which provided updates on activities and progress. Additional communication channels included national consultations, regular project activities, and briefings involving the MoE, the MoP, and the UNEP WAO. In 2023, two key events further supported knowledge sharing and stakeholder engagement: (1) the “UNEP GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Knowledge Exchange Session” in Kenya, which brought together representatives from Iraq government and other countries, such as Mauritania and Benin, to exchange lessons learned and success stories⁴¹; (2) the project exit meeting held in Amman⁴², where national stakeholders discussed sustainability and future steps.
71. It can be affirmed that the project's implementation strategies and delivered contributions are fully aligned with the priorities of donors and partners, as well as the anticipated contributions to the reported results indicators.

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

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

72. The project demonstrated alignment with global, regional, and national environmental priorities by strengthening capacity to develop sound environmental data, statistics, scientific assessments, and early warning systems, as outlined in the project documents, MTR, PIRs, and feedback from interviews.
73. The project documents and PIRs highlighted the project's alignment with the SDGs and Agenda 2030, particularly through indicators SDG 13 (13.2⁴³, 13.3⁴⁴); SDG 16 (16.10.2⁴⁵); and SDG 17 (17.14.1⁴⁶, 17.16.1⁴⁷, 17.18.1⁴⁸). These indicators emphasize integrating climate action into national planning, strengthening institutional and human capacities, ensuring access to information, and enhancing

⁴¹ UNEP (2023). UNEP GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Knowledge Exchange Session. Naivasha, Kenya. January 17-19, 2023.

⁴² UNEP (2024) Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting. UNEP GEF-funded Iraq Crosscutting Capacity Development (CCCD) project. Kempinski Hotel Amman, Jordan, 29-30 April 2024.

⁴³ 13.2: Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

⁴⁴ 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

⁴⁵ 16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information

⁴⁶ 17.14.1 Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development (Tier II)

⁴⁷ 17.16.1 Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

⁴⁸ 17.18.1 Statistical capacity indicator for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring

statistical and policy coherence frameworks for effective and inclusive implementation of the SDGs.

74. At both national and regional levels, the project establishes a foundational framework to enable the country to generate global environmental and socioeconomic benefits through the effective implementation of MEAs and the environmental dimensions of the SDGs. The development of an Environmental Information System (EIS) is a central objective of the project, aimed at supporting national environmental monitoring, analysis, informed decision-making, and enhancing public awareness. The EIS aims to integrate key environmental indicators—disaggregated by gender where applicable—through a joint database with GIS capabilities, data visualizations, and links to relevant clearing-house mechanisms (CHMs).
75. Evidence in the project document, PIF and PIRs indicate that the project also aligns with national priorities articulated in strategic frameworks submitted to various conventions, including National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Technology Needs Assessments (TNAs), and Minamata Initial Assessments (MIAs), among others. It directly addresses capacity and information gaps highlighted in foundational national documents such as the State of Environment and Outlook, the National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP, 2013), the Initial National Communication (INC) to the UNFCCC, and the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA, 2016). These documents emphasize the critical need for enhanced ecosystem and biodiversity assessments and the establishment of a robust monitoring and reporting system, including an effective CHM.
76. Also, according to the PIRs, the project aligns with Strategic Priority 4 of the draft 2020–2024 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCF) for Iraq (under government review at the time), which focuses on promoting natural resource and disaster risk management and climate change resilience. This alignment reflects the project's potential to integrate global environmental priorities into national data and information systems and to strengthen consultative and management mechanisms for the coordinated implementation and reporting of MEAs and relevant SDGs.
77. Interview feedback indicates that the project's strategies and objectives were well aligned with Iraq's environmental priorities. The project supported the country's commitments under key Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These agreements are considered national priorities due to Iraq's dependence on natural resources and the need for consistent environmental reporting. The project was also directly aligned with the priorities outlined in Iraq's National Environmental Strategy. Notably, during the initial design phase, both the Iraqi government and UNEP made deliberate efforts to ensure this alignment, which served as a foundational element of the project's design.
78. Therefore, the project's implementation strategies and contributions aligned with global, regional, sub-regional, and national environmental priorities. Although not explicitly highlighted in the project document, the project's national context was indirectly aligned with the UN's "Leave No One Behind" policy by addressing development and human rights to foster an inclusive and equitable impact.

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

Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence

79. The intervention design and adjustments made during inception demonstrate full complementarity of results, without duplication, and reflect active engagement with recent UNEP interventions at the time. According to the Project Document, the CCCD project:
- i. promoted coordination and alignment with several other GEF-financed initiatives co-implemented by the MoE and UNEP/WAO (e.g., the Second National Communication and the Biennial Update Report to the UNFCCC, the National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention, the Protected Areas Network (PAN) project, etc.) and further aligns with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2015-2019 for Iraq.
 - ii. Built upon two predecessor projects, drawing on their experiences and outcomes: 1) the National Capacity Self-Assessment for Global Environment Management, and 2) the First NBSAP for Iraq and the Development of the Fifth National Report to the CBD.
 - iii. Considered regional experiences, including those from countries as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, in the design of the environmental information system. Additionally, the project design incorporated lessons learned from a GEF-financed initiative in Kenya (2015).
 - iv. Committed to coordination with the Special Programme on Chemicals (Special Programme Trust Fund) through the Synergies Committee at the Ministry of Environment (MoE), as well as alignment with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness Programme. It also sought opportunities for collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to enhance climate resilience in the agricultural sector.
80. However, the MTR noted that although the project was designed to build on ongoing initiatives led by MoE—such as enhancements to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), State of Environment reporting, and the environmental monitoring system—it did not anticipate synergies or potential collaboration with other recent, ongoing, or planned initiatives by UNEP or other stakeholders addressing similar issues in the country.
81. At the national level, interview feedback confirmed that there was a deliberate effort to ensure the system's compatibility with existing national frameworks, aiming to complement rather than duplicate current initiatives. A notable example was the inclusion of the Central Statistics Office, under the Ministry of Planning, as a key partner from the outset. On the other hand, no evidence emerged of collaboration during project implementation with other UNEP-led or stakeholder initiatives addressing similar themes within Iraq.
82. Overall, the design during inception showed moderate complementarity (but no duplication) and active knowledge of, or dialogue/engagement with, other recent, ongoing, or planned interventions by UNEP or partner initiatives in the project area. The design does not clearly anticipate any identified benefits of collaboration with other recent, ongoing, or planned interventions. Limited integration was observed during project implementation.

Rating for Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

B. Quality of Project Design

83. The following key sources of information were assessed for reviewing the project design quality: the approved project document⁴⁹, the project results framework, the GEF Review Sheet, and the Theory of Change (TOC) at the project design stage⁵⁰.
84. According to standard UNEP evaluation tools, approaches, and criteria, the project design quality was rated as “Satisfactory” (Table 6). Its major strengths were strategic relevance, logical framework, monitoring, governance and supervision arrangements, partnerships, and financial planning/budgeting.
85. The project was well-grounded in its **strategic relevance**, aligning with UNEP’s MTS 2018-2021 and MTS 2022-2025, PoW indicators for 2018-2019, 2020-2021, and 2022-2023, GEF priorities, national plans, and the SDGs, while supporting the Bali Strategic Plan objectives and leveraging regional experiences; its design demonstrated complementarity with ongoing UNEP interventions and coordination with other GEF-financed projects, ensuring alignment without duplication.
86. The **logical framework** provided a coherent structure aligned with its objectives, using SMART indicators and time-bound milestones to track progress for both outputs and outcomes. **Monitoring** responsibilities, activities, and timelines are clearly outlined, with a dedicated budget detailed.
87. **Project governance and supervision** arrangements were clearly defined in the project document, including detailed descriptions of the structure, roles, and interactions among the project management group, steering committee, and external stakeholders (Section A.6 of the Project Approval Request). Annex H provided a comprehensive outline of UNEP’s roles and responsibilities, offering insight into their functions within the project. Regarding partnerships, Annex H also detailed the roles and responsibilities of external partners, which were well-aligned with their institutional capacities. The stakeholder analysis presented in Annex O identified key groups— including government entities, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, and academia—and highlighted relevant ministries and agencies across national, governorate, and local levels. However, the analysis did not specify stakeholder roles in each causal pathway, and gender and minority groups were not identified as stakeholders. While a gender analysis was not conducted during project preparation, the project includes a gender-responsive results framework with sex-disaggregated indicators.
88. The **financial planning / budgeting** was streamlined, with detailed cost breakdowns, and the resource mobilization strategy proved realistic, requiring no adjustments during implementation.
89. Areas with opportunities for enhancement included Learning, Communication and Outreach, Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects, and Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps.
90. While the stakeholder analysis provides a foundation for **learning, communication, and outreach**, the project would have benefited from a more detailed communication plan and targeted initiatives to enhance stakeholder engagement— particularly with gender and minority groups. Although the TE is identified as the primary mechanism for learning and knowledge sharing, complementary activities

⁴⁹ GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744 (2018). GEF6 Request for Project Approval.

⁵⁰ No formal project review was considered in the project design quality (PDQ) assessment, in accordance with the instructions in the Project Quality Table (08 and 08a_Quality_of_Project_Design_Assessment Template) provided by the Evaluation Office. This table states that for Terminal Evaluations/Reviews, if a revised project version is approved based on a Mid-Term Evaluation/Review, the revised design forms the basis of the assessment. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the current project was approved in April 2024, and no project revisions were made based on its observations.

such as workshops or online platforms could have further improved the dissemination of results and lessons learned.

91. Regarding **sustainability, replication, and catalytic effects**, the project emphasizes leveraging existing mechanisms and complementing related initiatives. While it outlines general sustainability considerations—addressing governance, financial efficiency, institutional support, and environmental collaboration—it lacks detailed strategies. A comprehensive sustainability strategy is planned for development during implementation to ensure long-term operation, but no exit strategy is provided. Although explicit plans for scaling up or replication are absent, the project's collaborative approach suggests potential for catalytic impact.
92. Finally, PRC's recommendations were incorporated into the project design and logframe, strengthening key aspects and producing a generally well-designed project (**Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps**). However, further improvements could be made by clarifying sustainability and exit strategies, refining the ToC diagram, and adopting a more realistic risk mitigation approach tailored to the national context.
93. The ToC was well-developed, clearly connecting outputs and activities to outcomes and the project's goal of strengthening MEA and SDG implementation in Iraq for global environmental benefits. Although the causal pathways and assumptions were well detailed in the results framework (Annex A of the Project Approval Request), the ToC diagram's visual presentation could be improved by explicitly linking assumptions to each pathway. The outcome was realistic given the original project context; however, meeting deadlines depends heavily on political stability, identified as a significant risk. While the project document includes a relevant risk analysis and mitigation table, it could better address the national context to strengthen risk management

Table 6: Overall quality of project design score

SECTION		SELECT RATING	SCORE (1-6)	WEIGHTING	TOTAL (Rating x Weighting/10)
A	Operating Context	Moderately Satisfactory	4	0,4	0,16
B	Project Preparation	Satisfactory	5	1,2	0,6
C	Strategic Relevance	Highly Satisfactory	6	0,8	0,48
D	Intended Results and Causality	Satisfactory	5	1,6	0,8
E	Logical Framework and Monitoring	Satisfactory	5	0,8	0,4
F	Governance and Supervision Arrangements	Satisfactory	5	0,4	0,2
G	Partnerships	Satisfactory	5	0,8	0,4
H	Learning, Communication and Outreach	Moderately Satisfactory	4	0,4	0,16
I	Financial Planning / Budgeting	Satisfactory	5	0,4	0,2
J	Efficiency	Moderately Satisfactory	4	0,8	0,32
K	Risk identification and Social Safeguards	Moderately Satisfactory	4	0,8	0,32
L	Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	Moderately Satisfactory	4	1,2	0,48
M	Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps	Moderately Satisfactory	4	0,4	0,16
TOTAL SCORE (Sum Totals)					4,68

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

Rating for Project Design: Satisfactory

C. Nature of the External Context

94. Project implementation was significantly affected by a combination of political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic⁵¹, both of which introduced substantial delays and required repeated adjustments to timelines and execution strategies.
95. First, following the project's official inception in October 2018, subsequent to the internal cooperation agreement (ICA) signed in May 2018 between the GEF Implementing Agency (UNEP EAWD) and UNEP WAO, progress was hampered by ongoing national demonstrations and civil unrest. These events culminated in the resignation of the national government and delayed key political processes. Consequently, the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between UNEP WAO and MoE could only be signed in August 2019. Following the agreement, the first disbursement was made, and an international expert was engaged to initiate the design of the EIS (see Section III.E).
96. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as an additional, unanticipated challenge. By the second quarter of 2020, its impact on implementation had become evident, resulting in further delays in the implementation of the GEF-approved work plan. According to the PIR 2020⁵²:
- i. The Iraqi government imposed a curfew in the capital, Baghdad, on 17 March 2020, preventing the COVID-19 virus from spreading, and restricting project staff to access to physical records and office-based resources.
 - ii. The inaugural Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was held virtually on 21 July 2020 to reassess the work plan and timelines and discuss adaptive measures to be adopted during the current COVID-19 pandemic period.
 - iii. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant risk to project delivery. However, project leadership rated this risk as low to medium, given that some activities could continue as planned. The Project Management Unit (PMU) adapted by holding key meetings via online audiovisual platforms.
 - iv. Nevertheless, activities requiring large gatherings or in-person engagement encountered substantial difficulties. Specific challenges included delays in major procurements (e.g., RFP processes), limited responsiveness from national partners, and obstacles to implementing components that required face-to-face interaction with stakeholders in the capital. Additionally, the negotiation of agreements with data providers required more time than anticipated.
97. Evidence shared during the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted that security and conflict-related challenges in the capital hindered face-to-face engagement with stakeholders, resulting in delays and disruptions in the delivery of key project components.
98. While activities amenable to remote execution, such as system design and selected stakeholder consultations, were able to proceed, others requiring in-person engagement experienced substantial setbacks. According to the HYPR 2020⁵³, the following key activities were notably impacted:

⁵¹ The COVID-19 pandemic officially began in December 2019, when the first cases were identified in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. While there is no official "end" to the pandemic, many countries began to gain better control in 2021, following mass vaccination campaigns. However, some regions continued to face restrictions in 2022 due to new virus variants and varying vaccination rates.

⁵² UNEP. (2024). Project Implementation Review Fiscal Year 2020. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. ((1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020).

⁵³ UNEP. (2024). Half Yearly Progress Report. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. (July 2020 to December 2020).

- i. Activity 1.1.2: Development of recommendations to harmonize data collection and address data gaps.
 - ii. Activity 1.1.3: Stakeholder consultation workshop to validate findings.
 - iii. Activity 1.1.4: Preparation of analytical report on findings and recommendations.
99. The combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing political and security situation posed a substantial risk to overall project implementation. As a result, the project was granted three no-cost extensions, with revised completion dates in May 2023, December 2023, and June 2024. The extensions were justified by: (i) disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affecting UNEP and stakeholders (first extension), (ii) delays resulting from national political instability (second extension), and (iii) the need to finalize pending activities following the reorganization and restructuring of the National Ministry of Environment (third extension) (see Section III.E).
100. Throughout implementation, the project encountered constraints related to limited stakeholder responsiveness, delays in procurement processes, and the need for prolonged negotiation with data providers. Capacity-building activities and stakeholder consultations had to be conducted virtually, frequently disrupted by electricity outages and poor internet connectivity.
101. The Mid-Term Review highlighted significant implementation delays resulting from prolonged civil unrest and public demonstrations, which led to the resignation of the national government. Additional contributing factors included the COVID-19 pandemic and an institutional reorganization following the separation of the Ministry of Health from the Ministry of Environment. These circumstances necessitated a shift to virtual modalities for most capacity-building activities and stakeholder engagement. However, frequent power outages and limited internet connectivity further disrupted the delivery of online training. Since the project's inception on 15 October 2018, the Project Steering Committee (PSC) convened only three times - virtually on 21 July 2020 and 12 July 2021, and in-person on 29-30 April in Jordan. Subsequent PSC meetings could not be held due to ongoing political instability and pandemic-related constraints.
102. Interview feedback confirmed that the project faced a highly challenging external environment, shaped by multiple structural, political, and operational factors. Key evidence from the interviews indicates that:
- i. The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct and prolonged impact, with multiple waves disrupting service delivery and causing temporary closures of ministries. In Iraq, this impact was exacerbated by the government's heavy reliance on physical processes and the limited adoption of remote work among public servants, which hindered the continuity of project activities. Additionally, technical issues such as power outages and low internet bandwidth further compromised the effectiveness of online meetings and training sessions.
 - ii. Institutional instability also affected the project, including the merger and subsequent separation of the Ministries of Environment and Health, periods without a formally appointed minister, and frequent changes in project leadership – with three different project managers over time. This instability disrupted implementation consistency, particularly since the project relied on working groups led by departmental managers.
 - iii. Another critical challenge was the contractual arrangement between UNEP and the Ministry of Environment. The electoral cycle played a significant role,

causing delays in cabinet formation and the appointment of the Prime Minister, which directly impacted budgetary and contractual processes. As a result, there were substantial delays in contract finalization and financial transactions, requiring a revision of the original agreement and the transfer of responsibilities to the UNEP West Asia Office to ensure implementation could continue.

- iv. Additionally, fluctuations in international market prices and supply chain disruptions necessitated a new procurement process for devices, laptops, and computers. This re-tendering process further delayed implementation, compounding the effects of the pandemic and financial bottlenecks.
 - v. Finally, the security situation in Iraq prevented in-country field missions and in-person meetings of the Project Steering Committee and with international partners, which had to be held outside the country. This limited the participation of local stakeholders and hindered monitoring and capacity-building efforts. The inability of international partners to travel to Iraq also created substantial communication challenges. Online meetings were held without video, which made it difficult to establish a closer, more personal connection between the Iraqi government and its international counterparts.
103. One interviewee, in particular, emphasized that the original project timeline was overly ambitious given Iraq's operational context and institutional challenges. These external factors significantly impacted project implementation and caused considerable delays. A more realistic assessment at the outset might have led to a more appropriate and achievable schedule for completing project activities.
104. Despite these setbacks, the project successfully adapted its work plan to respond to the evolving challenges posed by the pandemic and political instability. According to interview feedback, even with Iraq's political volatility and the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the project required only three extensions – a result considered commendable when compared to similar projects in more stable countries at that time.
105. In conclusion, the health and economic situation promoted by the COVID pandemic temporarily affected project staff and partners' operations to a moderate extent, and the political context intermittently or partially affected project operations to a moderate extent. Despite these adversities, the project demonstrated adaptive capacity by sustaining core activities, particularly those conducive to remote implementation, and by maintaining coordination through digital platforms (see Section V.I Quality of Project Management and Supervision).

Rating for Nature of the external context: Moderately Unfavourable

D. Effectiveness

Availability of Outputs

106. Effectiveness was assessed against the Theory of Change at Review (Figure 4) and the project results framework⁵⁴. The review of output availability focused on the project's success in delivering planned outputs and achieving milestones based on the original project document, as no formal revisions were undertaken during implementation, only extensions of the implementation timeline. The

⁵⁴ UNEP (2018) GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744. GEF6 Request for Project Approval. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (Annex A).

assessment considered both the quantity and quality of outputs, their relevance and utility to intended beneficiaries, and the timeliness of their delivery. A brief explanation is provided regarding the factors contributing to the project's performance in meeting these criteria.

107. As its basis for review, the analysis considered the four project outcomes⁵⁵ and the intermediate state, 'Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting'.
108. The project delivered all planned activities within the adjusted timeframes, reflecting the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. All 12 outputs were fully achieved, fulfilling their purpose and contributing to the project's outcomes.⁵⁶ While several milestones were completed later than originally scheduled, the project ultimately met its targets.
109. Evidence from the PIRs, project documents, and interviews indicates that the project successfully delivered all planned outputs, despite operating in a highly challenging environment. Key deliverables included the sustainability strategy, standard operating procedures (SOPs) for data collection, workshops, training sessions, and capacity-building activities. Although these outputs were not delivered within the originally planned timeline, the delays were considered understandable and unavoidable due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, and the complex inter-ministerial dynamics of the Iraqi government, which were marked by fragmented processes and a lack of trust between departments.
110. The quality and utility of the project's outputs were assessed as satisfactory. Interview feedback highlighted that:
- i. Outputs were of high quality and met the needs of end users. Their practical utility was enhanced by the adaptation of content to the local context and by the integrated approach adopted by the project team, which optimized resources by linking activities across different outputs. This strategy enabled a more efficient and coherent implementation, even under time and resource constraints.
 - ii. Another key factor contributing to the successful delivery was the presence of national leadership. Having an Iraqi project coordinator from the outset helped build trust with the local government and facilitated institutional coordination. This leadership also played a crucial role in maintaining stakeholder engagement, particularly through the organization of workshops, which served as key moments for mobilization, capacity building, and validation of outputs. These events were essential for ensuring stakeholder ownership and maintaining project cohesion over time.

⁵⁵ The four project outcomes are:

Outcome 1: Streamlined and integrated data and information system at the national level that takes into consideration the decentralized governance system in Iraq for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting.

Outcome 2: Improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system

Outcome 3: Regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for sustainable and transparent sharing of environmental information.

Outcome 4: Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact oriented policies, plans and programmes integrating MEAs and related SDG.

⁵⁶ UNEP. (2024). Final Report. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (July 2024).

- iii. Although the delivery of outputs did not follow a linear path or meet the original deadlines, the project was ultimately successful in terms of completeness, relevance, technical quality, and user acceptance. During the early stages of the project, it became clear that aligning expectations among stakeholders was essential. Local stakeholders sometimes had expectations that were not fully compatible with the technical references and timelines initially established. The team's ability to adapt and implement context-sensitive strategies played a key role in achieving the positive outcomes.
 - iv. Data availability was a key challenge in addressing environmental issues in Iraq and, consequently, in achieving some of the project's outputs. Official datasets were often incomplete or discontinuous, limiting the development of reliable historical records. To provide a more comprehensive view, the project proposed using external sources such as satellite imagery, media, and international research. Initial hesitation reflected broader cultural and institutional preferences for nationally produced data, rooted in the government's concern with ensuring the reliability and sovereignty of information. Stakeholders generally favoured information from local ministries, such as Transport or Agriculture, even when these sources had significant gaps—for example, data from 2002 to 2007, with updates only resuming in 2012—making consistent monitoring difficult. Ongoing dialogue with Iraqi partners helped ensure the technical quality of these outputs.
111. It is worth noting that additional evidence offers a more balanced view of the system's implementation. Some feedback indicates that the system was initially well received by the Ministry, generating enthusiasm and expectations that it would support researchers and students. However, over time, its practical use appears to have declined. After the handover, the project team continued to monitor progress through monthly or biweekly calls, during which it became evident that the system was not being updated regularly. The Ministry's team frequently cited a lack of data, time, or available personnel as the main factors contributing to this situation. At the same time, complementary evidence suggests that the system is still being used, albeit with some limitations. While technical improvements and more effective management are needed, the system continues to fulfil, to some extent, its original purpose. There is a recognized need to strengthen work organization and improve the functioning of the groups involved in the project in order to ensure more consistent and effective use.
112. Evidence shared during the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted several actions that should have been taken to ensure the effective use of data for decision-making, planning, policy development, and reporting. Other sectors should have been involved in the EIS to broaden its applicability, through the identification of core datasets and data producers, with mechanisms to include additional contributors as the system evolved. A centralized system should have been used to ensure data consistency and validity, thereby strengthening the information management infrastructure. The system should have been designed with enough flexibility to accommodate emerging issues and evolving requirements. It also should have supported the country's reporting obligations by addressing identified data gaps and involving reporting focal points in its operational management. Establishing a standardized reporting format and an internal coordination mechanism—such as aligning SDGs with indicators and using digital deliverables—would have been essential to promote a shared understanding. Finally, the system should have been tailored to specific national

needs and operated within a legal framework that supported reporting obligations under MEAs, including the production of State of the Environment reports.

113. The following sub-sections provide a brief analysis of each project output, outlining the products developed and assessing output performance against the established indicators.

Output 1.1) In-depth analysis of the current management of environmental information, data sources and flows, environmental statistics and reporting mechanisms related to the Rio Conventions, other MEAs, and other relevant processes, including a mapping of relevant stakeholders

114. **Output 1.1** included four fully implemented activities: 1.1.1 (Conduct detailed analysis), 1.1.2 (Develop recommendations to streamline and harmonize data collection and address data gaps), 1.1.3 (Conduct stakeholder consultation workshop), and 1.1.4 (Prepare report on analysis and recommendations). Some activities were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, and security challenges. The detailed analysis, led by CIMA Research Foundation, engaged through an SSFA in close coordination with the MoE, MoP / CSO, and other stakeholders, involved mapping the existing EIS, identifying data gaps and indicators, collecting 10 years of local data, and conducting a stakeholder and institutional analysis. While the country lacked comprehensive national policies or legislation governing EIS or digital content, initial steps were taken under related agreements. These combined efforts resulted in an Indicator Report⁵⁷ and an Initial Analysis Report. The project proposed solutions for each indicator and outlined recommendations to improve data collection⁵⁸. A stakeholder consultation workshop was held in September 2022 to validate findings⁵⁹.
115. Considering the output performance against indicators:
- i. **Availability of a detailed report on existing systems, data and information, data gaps, areas of duplication, reporting requirements, existing data gathering processes stakeholders and national policies and legislation:** The project met the target of making one comprehensive report available; however, this was achieved later than initially planned (i.e., beyond the first 8 months of the project).
 - ii. **Number of stakeholder consultation workshops to validate findings, with adequate representation of all stakeholder groups:** The project met the target of conducting one consultation workshop; however, this was achieved later than initially planned (i.e., beyond the first six months of the project). Moreover, the workshop could have benefited from broader stakeholder representation, particularly including women and governorate representatives.

Output 1.2) Endorsed agreement and standard operating procedures among key line ministries and agencies on the streamlining of data collection and sharing to fill data gaps and reduce unnecessary duplication

116. **Output 1.2** comprised two fully implemented activities: Activity 1.2.1 (Elaborate agreement and SOPs), and Activity 1.2.2 (Multi-stakeholder workshop to

⁵⁷ CIMA research Foundation. Indicator Report. Development of a National Environmental Information System for Iraq. July 2021.

⁵⁸ UNEP WAO. Data Collection Enhancement and Recommendations EIS Iraq. April 2023.

⁵⁹ Capacity Building Workshop on Data Analysis and GIS Information Management. UN House, Beirut, Lebanon. 27-29 September, 2022.

seek endorsement of agreement). Building on the analysis from Output 1.1, and through a consultative process, the project developed a Data Management Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)⁶⁰, aligned with Outputs 1.3 and 2.1. The SOP structure and data flow were discussed in two consecutive workshops held in May 2023 in Beirut⁶¹ and Erbil⁶² with MoE and MoP members. The project also promoted meetings with stakeholders in June 2021 and September 2022 with representatives from MoE and MoP/CSO. The final endorsement occurred in November 2023, with broad stakeholder participation (MoE IT team, MoE Quality Assurance team, MoP CSO team, and Indicator team)⁶³, confirming agreement on the full data management process.

117. Considering the output performance against indicators:
 - i. **Number of agreements and SOPs elaborated and agreed upon by relevant agencies:** The project met the target of having one agreement signed among the main relevant agencies; however, this was achieved later than initially planned (i.e., beyond the first 18 months of the project).
 - ii. **Number of institutions/stakeholder groups represented in the agreement:** Broad stakeholder participation (MoE IT team, MoE Quality Assurance team, MoP CSO team, and Indicator team) was reflected in the agreement, although the number of institutions or stakeholder groups involved was lower than initially anticipated (i.e., fewer than the targeted five).

Output 1.3) Systems and portal established to manage and access environmental data, information and geospatial information (e.g. GIS)

118. **Output 1.3** included five fully implemented activities: 1.3.1 (Analyse system needs/requirements), 1.3.2 (Develop conceptual design of systems and porta), 1.3.3 (Implement systems and portal), 1.3.4 (Regular review and improvement of the systems and portal based on user feedback), and 1.3.5 (Capacity building for user groups).
119. Based on Outputs 1.1 and 1.2, the project identified the need to enhance the MoE IT Department's capacity to serve as a central environmental data repository. Analyses were conducted on infrastructure, user needs, and legal/IP frameworks. The IRIS reporting tool was found unsuitable; instead, dashboards were automated, and reports were produced manually. MoE lacks specific intellectual property legislation for digital content and the EIS. The project developed the conceptual design for the Environmental Information Portal (EIP), including servers, databases, applications, workstations, and network infrastructure. The system incorporated state-of-the-art tools for data capture, processing, analysis, and presentation, and was designed in both Arabic and English. The conceptual architecture and mock-up were developed and approved in close consultation with MoE and MoP/CSO.
120. The project implemented the full system, including hardware, software, network infrastructure, and a web-based portal, which was successfully deployed on the official cloud platform⁶⁴. Hardware was delivered and installed. UNEP WAO conducted three development reviews, resulting in Alpha and Beta versions, followed by a final system update and official migration by CIMA Research Foundation. Finally, CIMA Research Foundation developed and implemented a

⁶⁰ UNEP WAO. Data Management SOP & MEAs Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism. EIS in Iraq. December 2023 (in Arabic)

⁶¹ Workshop on Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. 23-25 May, 2023.

⁶² Workshop on Supporting Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and the State of the Environment Report (SoER). Erbil, Iraq. 30 May – 1 June 2023.

⁶³ Virtual meeting for SOP and Monitoring Processes Discussion and Agreement in November, 2023

⁶⁴ <https://eis-iraq.gov.iq>

national capacity-building programme targeting system users and the IT Department. Training covered system operation, network and database management, and data input/access. To support ongoing learning, eLearning materials were developed. A workshop was held in May 2023 in Beirut, Lebanon⁶⁵, to reinforce user training.

121. Regarding the output indicators:

- i. **Availability of necessary systems/infrastructure and a functioning Environment Information Portal (EIP), based on analysis of technical and legal requirements and on consultations with potential user groups:** The project completed the conceptual design and systems, as well as implemented the Environmental Information Portal (EIP); however, these milestones were achieved beyond the initial target deadlines of 18 and 24 months, respectively.
- ii. **Number of users (women/men) trained on the new systems:** The project trained 30 users, including women and local/governorate representatives, during a workshop held in May 2023 in Beirut, Lebanon. While the target was at least 40 participants, the training met participants' expectations and was considered successful.

Output 2.1) Definition, update and improvement of nationally appropriate environmental indicators, baseline data and targets based on MEAs, SDGs and other sources for use in different reporting and assessment processes

122. **Output 2.1** included two fully implemented activities: Activity 2.1.1 (Analyse environmental indicators) and Activity 2.1.2 (Workshop to consult and agree on indicators). Based on the analysis conducted under Output 1.1 and through a consultative process, the project identified measures to harmonize, update, and improve environmental indicators, baseline data, and targets in alignment with MEA and SDG requirements. CIMA Research Foundation produced a final indicator analysis report, mapping indicators to MEAs and SDGs⁶⁶. The report included a detailed table of all indicators and an automated mechanism (WASDI) capable of providing regular updates via satellite without human intervention. According to the project final report, a series of consultations and workshops⁶⁷ was held between May 2021 and September 2022 to agree on the updated indicators, covering definitions, units, methodology, frequency of collection, and responsible agencies.

123. The indicator for this output is the availability of updated and improved indicators elaborated and agreed upon by relevant stakeholders. A harmonized set of such indicators was developed and endorsed, but this was completed later than originally planned, occurring beyond the first 18 months of the project.

Output 2.2) Collection and validation of environmental data, information and maps through a streamlined indicator-based monitoring and reporting system to MEAs, indicators for the

⁶⁵ Workshop on Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. 23-25 May, 2023.

⁶⁶ CIMA Research Foundation. Development of a National Environment Information System for Iraq. Indicator Report. July 2021.

⁶⁷ Key events included: Meeting with the statistics group at the MoP/CSO office in May 2021; Meeting with the indicator group at the MoE office in May 2021; virtual consultation with the statistics group in June 2021; virtual consultation with the head of the indicator group in June 2021; consultation workshop with CIMA Research Foundation, the statistics group (MoP/CSO), and the indicators group (MoE) in July 2021; and a final stakeholder discussion during stakeholder meeting in Beirut in September 2022

environmental dimension of SDGs and other relevant mechanisms, including the Indicator Reporting Information System (IRIS)

124. **Output 2.2** included three fully implemented activities: 2.2.1 (Prepare training of trainers) and 2.2.2 (Conduct ToT workshop), and 2.2.3 (Lead data collection and validation). The project developed a Training of Trainers (ToT) program on data collection and management methodologies to support the validation and collection of environmental data, addressing gaps identified under Outputs 1.1 and 2.1. The training included guidance on global and regional platforms (e.g., IRIS and UNEP Live platform), definitions of relevant indicators aligned with international standards, and electronic data collection tools. Supporting materials and guidance documents were made available online. Additionally, a series of workshops⁶⁸ was conducted to strengthen the project team's capacity in data collection and management. ToT participants from relevant agencies and organizations lead the collection and validation of environmental data in accordance with the agreement, the SOPs and the newly defined indicators, with regular meetings to guide the process and validate the collected data. 10 years of data were collected, and workshops and meetings were conducted for data collection with relevant stakeholders, which produced an updated indicator file.
125. Considering the output performance against indicators:
- Number of stakeholders (women/men) participating in training of trainers on data collection and management methodologies and having access to training materials:** The project met the target of training at least 40 stakeholders, with nearly 90 participants trained; however, this was achieved after the initial 24-month timeframe.
 - Number of indicators agreed upon under output 2.1 for which environmental data has been collected and/or validated:** The project exceeded expectations by collecting and validating over 20 indicators by the end of the project. After multiple discussions during meetings and workshops with concerned parties, it was decided that the collection and validation of new data depends on the relevant ministries' need for new indicators. This activity will be organized internally at MoE on a need-to basis.

Output 2.3) Guidance and training on the use and application of tools to handle complex data sets and results-based, impact-oriented environmental actions that cut across MEAs and relevant SDGs.

126. **Output 2.3** involved two fully implemented activities: 2.3.1 (Prepare training on use of tools to handle complex data sets) and 2.3.2 (Conduct training). The project trained key staff from relevant ministries/agencies, including women, on tools for managing complex environmental data. A workshop facilitated by professors from the Lebanese American University and the American University of Beirut was held in September 2022⁶⁹, followed by in-country follow-up activities.

⁶⁸ Key events included: Workshop on Data collection and validation, MEAs, and SoER in Erbil, Iraq in May 2023 (30 participants); Workshop on Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. 23-25 May, 2023 (30 participants); Capacity Building Workshop on Data Analysis and GIS Information Management. UN House, Beirut, Lebanon. 27-29 September, 2022 (25 participants); and Capacity building sessions for EIS-Iraq management. In-person training at CIMA Research Foundation headquarters in Savona, Italy, in May 2024 (4 participants).

⁶⁹ Capacity Building Workshop on Data Analysis and GIS Information Management. UN House, Beirut, Lebanon. 27-29 September, 2022 (25 participants).

Training was integrated into MoE's regular programmes, with materials available on the EIS platform.

127. Regarding the output indicators:

- i. **Number of stakeholders (women/men) trained on the use and application of tools to handle complex data sets for environmental actions and policies:** The project exceeded expectations by training 25 users during the workshop held in September 2022.
- ii. **Availability of training materials that can be accessed by a wider audience:** The project met its target, with the training materials made available on the EIP by the end of the project.

Output 3.1) Enhanced consultative and decision-making processes for mainstreaming of obligations under Rio Conventions, other relevant MEAs and related SDGs, including shared environmental information systems, collaborative and endorsed institutional inter and intra ministerial mechanisms, collaborative mechanisms with major groups and stakeholders.

128. **Output 3.1** fully implemented its two planned activities: 3.1.1 (Identify regulatory and collaborative mechanisms and processes), and 3.1.2 (Institutionalize these mechanisms). Building on the agreement developed under Output 1.2, the project identified additional inter- and intra-ministerial measures to strengthen collaboration, consultation, and information sharing in support of MEAs and SDGs. This included the development of a comprehensive guide and framework. These measures were institutionalized through agreed regulatory and collaborative processes, such as consultation procedures for national report preparation and COP participation and improved interdepartmental collaboration. A conceptual system architecture and mock-up design were also produced and approved in close consultation with MoE and MoP/CSO.
129. The indicator for this output was the number of agreed consultative and decision-making processes related to MEAs. The project met its target by the end of implementation, with two mechanisms⁷⁰ formally agreed to enhance such processes.

Output 3.2) Monitoring and evaluation mechanism established, targeted to compliance monitoring of state policies, programmes, and plans.

130. **Output 3.2** successfully implemented its two planned activities: 3.2.1 (Elaborate M&E mechanism), and 3.2.2 (Workshop to discuss and adopt M&E mechanism). The project developed and approved a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanism⁷¹, led by MoE in collaboration with the MoP/CSO, to track progress in implementing MEAs and related environmental policies, programmes, and plans using the EIS. The mechanism was discussed during a Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting⁷².
131. The indicator for this output was the availability of a functional mechanism to monitor and evaluate environmental policies and actions related to MEAs through

⁷⁰ The two mechanisms were: (i) UNEP WAO. Data Management SOP & MEAs Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism. EIS in Iraq. December 2023, and (ii) UNEP WAO. A comprehensive guide to strengthening and institutionalizing cooperation, consultation, and information exchange measures for the implementation of multilateral environment agreements and sustainable development goals. EIS in Iraq. May 2024 (in Arabic).

⁷¹ UNEP WAO. Data Management SOP & MEAs Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism. EIS in Iraq. December 2023.

⁷² Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting. UNEP GEF-Funded Iraq Crosscutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Project. Kempinski Hotel Amman, Jordan, 29-30 April 2024

the EIS. The project met its target by the end of implementation, with the M&E mechanism in place and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Output 3.3) Sustainability strategy for continued implementation of MEAs and the environmental dimension of SDGs.

132. Output 3.3 included three planned activities: 3.3.1 (Identify clear owners of data, systems, and portal), 3.3.2 (Incorporate into operational guidelines and terms of reference), and 3.3.3 (Engage with local governments and line ministries). The project successfully identified clear owners of the data, systems, and portal through data collection activities, establishing a foundation for efficient data governance. A sustainability strategy⁷³ for the EIS was completed, with ongoing discussions with MoE and MoP/CSO to confirm adoption. Operational Guidelines⁷⁴ were developed, detailing the use and regular updates of the systems and portal to support the integrated implementation of MEAs and SDGs. The project also engaged local governments and line ministries to support scaling up at the governorate level. Key actions included: investment by UNEO in MoE, with the system and web portal developed by CIMA Research Foundation and funded by GEF; permanent staffing of the MoE IT Department to ensure continuity; and equipment delivery and installation of hardware/equipment in April 2024⁷⁵.
133. The indicator for this output was the availability of a sustainability strategy to support continued implementation of the EIS in alignment with MEAs and SDGs. The project met this target by the end of implementation, with the agreed and operational strategy in place.

Output 4.1) Sustainability strategy for continued implementation of MEAs and the environmental dimension of SDGs.

134. **Output 4.1** included two planned activities: 4.1.1 (Develop training programme) and 4.1.2 (Conduct training workshops). The project developed a training programme for key personnel in relevant agencies and organizations on integrating environmental management into planning and monitoring processes, as well as reporting for policy and decision-making, based on data provided through the EIS. One in-country training workshop⁷⁶ was conducted, with participants from federal and governorate-level ministries and agencies, NGOs, and academia. The training was incorporated into the regular training programmes of MoE, and materials were made available online via the EIP.
135. Regarding the output indicators:
- i. **Number of relevant stakeholders (women/men) from federal and governorate levels trained** on the integration of environmental management into planning, monitoring, and reporting processes: The project partially met expectations, training 23 participants during the workshop held in September 2023.

⁷³ UNEP WAO. System Sustainability Strategy. EIS in Iraq. May 2023. (in English and in Arabic)

⁷⁴ CIMA Research Foundation. EIS Platform Management and Administration Manual. User Guide. May 2023. (in English and in Arabic)

⁷⁵ The work was carried out by eSite IT and Delivery Services LLC at MoE and included the installation and setup of the following IT equipment: 40 desktop workstations with Windows 11, 1 MacBook Pro (13-inch), 20 HP LaserJet printers, 25 APC 1500VA SMC UPS units, and associated peripherals for each desktop PC (mouse, Lenovo keyboard, docking station, and monitor)

⁷⁶ Workshop on Integration of Environmental Management into Legislative, Planning, and Monitoring Processes in Iraq. ESCWA, UN House, Raid El Solh, Beirut, Lebanon. 11-13 September 2023.

- ii. **Availability of training programme and materials:** The project met its target, with materials made available in Arabic.

Output 4.2) At least 2 pilot sectors updating their strategies/plans to mainstream the environmental dimension/MEAs.

136. **Output 4.2** included two planned activities: 4.2.1 (Identify ways to update sectoral strategies/plans to incorporate knowledge from the information system) and 4.2.2 (Update at least two strategies/plans to mainstream environmental dimensions/MEAs). Activity 4.2.1 relied on reports from MoE and the MEAs reporting consultant, which led to delays. To avoid further setbacks, UNP coordinated with MoE to support the development of a strategy/plan. As a result, the project developed a broad guide for strategies/plans⁷⁷ across sectors at the federal and governorate levels to mainstream environmental dimensions and MEAs.
137. The indicator for this output was the number of sectoral strategies/plans updated to mainstream environmental dimensions. The project met the target—updating strategies/plans in at least two sectors—through the development of a broad guide applicable across multiple sectors, completed by the end of the project.

Output 4.3) Environmental education for Sustainable Development and awareness raising activities.

138. **Output 4.3** included two planned activities: 4.3.1 (Generate knowledge products) and 4.3.2 (Disseminate knowledge products through educational & awareness raising activities). The project produced various knowledge products—including reports, brochures, infographics, GIS maps, and awareness materials—focused on the environmental information system (EIS), relevant indicators, MEAs, and associated SDGs. These materials were disseminated through educational and awareness-raising initiatives targeting both relevant agencies and the public. Inter-ministerial discussions (MoE, MoP, and CSO) were held to enhance understanding of the EIS, emphasizing its analytical capabilities and relevance to MEAs and SDGs. Four Arabic-language infographics were developed in Q4 2023 on the topics of air, land, rivers, and water challenges in the country, and made available via <https://eis.iraq.gov.iq/>. Three key workshops further supported awareness-raising efforts: (1) Capacity building for user groups⁷⁸, (2) Capacity building on data collection, validation, MEAs, and SOER⁷⁹, (3) Capacity building on GIS, indicators, data analysis, and validation⁸⁰. MoE was responsible for publishing the awareness materials.
139. Regarding the output indicators:
- i. **Number of knowledge products produced:** The project exceeded expectations, producing and disseminating multiple knowledge products by the end of the project (with at least two completed by mid-term).
 - ii. **Number of people reached:** There is no record available to confirm whether the target of reaching 1,000 people was achieved by project end.

⁷⁷ UNEP WAO. Sectoral Strategy for Integration Knowledge from EIS. May 2024. (in Arabic).

⁷⁸ Workshop on Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. 23-25 May, 2023.

⁷⁹ Workshop on Data collection and validation, MEAs, and SoER in Erbil, Iraq in May 2023

⁸⁰ Capacity Building Workshop on Data Analysis and GIS Information Management. UN House, Beirut, Lebanon. 27-29 September, 2022

140. Overall, most programmed outputs were successfully delivered to the intended beneficiaries. The most critical outputs for achieving outcomes were made available on time. Among the delivered outputs, the most important ones for achieving outcomes were deemed to be of good quality and utility by users and reviewers. The lack of wide-scale adoption and effective use of the tool by the country highlights the need for improvements in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, strengthened training and technical support, and greater integration between the tool and processes. However, there were good levels of user ownership, with key users actively involved in preparing the outputs.

Rating for Availability of Outputs: Satisfactory

Achievement of Project Outcomes

141. The achievement of the four project outcomes⁸¹ was assessed as performance against the outcome as defined in the reconstructed Theory of Change at Review. These outcomes were intended to be achieved by the end of the project timeframe and within the project's resource envelope. This MLTR also analyzed to what extent the assumptions for progress from project outputs to outcomes were held, and the drivers to support the transition from outputs to outcomes were in place.
142. An overview of outcome progress indicates that the project progressed steadily from its inception in 2018 through 2024, achieving key milestones at various stages. It is important to note that delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability significantly impacted initial deliverables, requiring deadline extensions. In 2019, civil unrest and political instability delayed the establishment of project structures. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic further hindered progress; however, key milestones were reached, including the formation of the project management team and the signing of the Project Cooperation Agreement. By 2021, the project gained momentum with the hiring of a National Officer, the development of the EIS conceptual framework, and the drafting of the capacity-building plan. In 2022, despite delays related to data availability and hosting logistics, the alpha version of the system and the indicator mapping were completed. In 2023, significant progress was made through system enhancements and capacity-building workshops, resulting in the release of a Beta version of the EIS. Between 2023 and 2024, the project concluded successfully with the deployment of the system on the official domain, delivery of advanced IT training, and the development of key strategic documents to ensure sustainability and institutional integration—these included the Sustainability Strategy, Data Management SOP, Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism, Comprehensive Guide for Collaboration and Information Sharing for MEAs and SDGs, and the Sectoral Strategy.
143. The project measured achievement of the four project outcomes using one outcome-level indicator per outcome, as defined in the GEF-6 Request for Approval. Below is a brief analysis of each outcome, based on performance against these indicators:
- i. **Outcome 1. Streamlined and integrated data and information system at the national level that takes into consideration the decentralized governance system in Iraq for use in decision-making, planning and reporting**

⁸¹ An outcome is a change at the institutional level, or changes in behaviors, attitudes or conditions achieved from the use (i.e., uptake, adoption, application) of outputs by intended beneficiaries.

Indicador “Availability of a functional environmental information system (technology and processes)”: The project successfully met its target. A fully functional EIS and its related processes were developed and successfully tested by the end of the project. The complete system—including hardware, software, network infrastructure, and the web-based portal—was implemented and deployed on the official cloud platform⁸². All hardware and equipment were delivered, installed, and set up for use by MoE’s personnel.

ii. **Outcome 2. Improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system**

Indicador “Availability of streamlined monitoring and data collection processes”: The project successfully met its target. By the end of the project, streamlined monitoring and data collection processes were in place and fully functional. These included: (a) a final Indicator Report mapping indicators to MEAs and SDGs, featuring a detailed table of all indicators⁸³; (b) an automated mechanism (WASDI), developed within the system, capable of providing regular updates from satellite data without human intervention; and (c) several capacity-building workshops on data collection and validation, held between May 2021 and September 2022⁸⁴, to finalize the updated indicators. These sessions addressed indicator definitions, units, methodologies, data collection frequency, and the roles of responsible agencies.

iii. **Outcome 3. Regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for sustainable and transparent sharing of environmental information**

Indicador “Number of enhanced regulatory and collaborative mechanisms (including M&E mechanisms) to support the implementation of MEAs and related SDGs”: The project successfully met its target of having at least three mechanisms or processes agreed upon and under implementation by the end of the project. Specifically, it delivered: (a) A Data Management SOP and an M&E mechanism⁸⁵, developed by MoE in collaboration with the MoP/CSO, to track progress in implementing MEAs and related environmental initiatives through the EIS; (b) Operational Guidelines⁸⁶, created through discussions and workshops with MoE and MoP/CSO, detailing the use and regular updates of the system and portal; and (c) A finalized sustainability strategy⁸⁷ for the EIS, with continued consultations to secure institutional adoption.

iv. **Outcome 4. Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact-oriented policies, plans, and programmes integrating MEAs and related SDGs**

⁸² <https://eis-iraq.gov.iq>

⁸³ CIMA Research Foundation. Development of a National Environment Information System for Iraq. Indicator Report. July 2021.

⁸⁴ Key events included: Meeting with the statistics group at the MoP/CSO office in May 2021; Meeting with the indicator group at the MoE office in May 2021; virtual consultation with the statistics group in June 2021; virtual consultation with the head of the indicator group in June 2021; consultation workshop with CIMA Research Foundation, the statistics group (MoP/CSO), and the indicators group (MoE) in July 2021; and a final stakeholder discussion during stakeholder meeting in Beirut in September 2022

⁸⁵ UNEP WAO. Data Management SOP & MEAs Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism. EIS in Iraq. December 2023.

⁸⁶ CIMA Research Foundation. EIS Platform Management and Administration Manual. User Guide. May 2023. (in English and in Arabic)

⁸⁷ UNEP WAO. System Sustainability Strategy. EIS in Iraq. May 2023. (in English and in Arabic)

Indicador “Number of training and educational programmes developed, executed and made available online”: The project successfully met its target of developing, executing, and making available online at least one training programme by the end of the project. A total of five in-person workshops⁸⁸ were conducted to strengthen environmental monitoring, reporting, and decision-making processes, while supporting the integrated implementation of MEAs and SDGs. Additionally, eLearning modules were developed to support continuous knowledge transfer and broader accessibility.

144. According to interview evidence, all outputs were delivered with quality and within the adjusted timeframes, and initial feedback—particularly from the Ministry—was positive. However, the achievement of outcomes was mixed. While implementation was strong, there is limited evidence of sustained use, institutional uptake, or policy impact.
145. A broad analysis of the interviews suggests a consistent appreciation for the delivery of the project's planned outputs, with particular emphasis on the distribution of devices — such as computers and laptops — the implementation of the digital platform, and the delivery of related training sessions. The accounts indicate that all components were completed in line with the original scope, reflecting an objective and positive perception of the results achieved. However, explicit references to the national-level impact of these results were not always identified, which may indicate a stronger focus on the technical execution of the project rather than on the assessment of its medium- and long-term effects.
146. This gap between output delivery and outcome realization underscores the importance of post-project engagement, national ownership, and institutional readiness. Below is a detailed analysis of each outcome:
 - i. **Outcome 1:** The project successfully developed, integrated, and delivered a national environmental information system, meeting the technical requirements. While the system was initially well-received and publicly promoted, concerns emerged regarding its long-term sustainability, with reports of limited updates due to a lack of data, time, and personnel. However, further evidence indicates that the platform is currently being used by national institutions. There is ongoing data integration and continuous efforts to enhance technical functionalities, although challenges remain in terms of work organization, management, and institutional capacity. As such, while the output was delivered, the outcome—defined as a functional, integrated system used for decision-making and planning—was only partially achieved, with persistent challenges and a clear need for continued progress toward effective and sustainable use.
 - ii. **Outcome 2:** The project provided tools, processes, and training to support regular environmental monitoring, including the integration of MEAs and SDGs into data collection. However, like Outcome 1, the consistent and effective implementation of monitoring practices remains uncertain. This is primarily due to ongoing challenges related to the platform's technical functionalities, as well as limitations in institutional work organization, management, and

⁸⁸ The events were: (a) Workshop on GIS, indicators, data analysis, and collection, and data validation, held in Beirut, Lebanon in September 2022 (25 participants); (b) Workshop on system use, administration, and platform updating, held in Beirut, Lebanon in May 2023 (30 participants); (c) Workshop on data collection and validation, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), and the State of the Environment Report (SoER), held in May 2023 (30 participants); (d) Workshop on Integration of Environmental Management into Legislative, Planning, and Monitoring Processes in Iraq, held in Beirut, Lebanon in September 2023 (16 participants), and (e) Advanced technical workshop on managing and maintaining the EIS platform, held in Savona, Italy on May 2024 (4 participants).

capacity. These factors have likely hindered the full achievement of the outcome. Interviewees noted that the realization of this outcome depends on the government's ability to address these structural and operational barriers.

- iii. **Outcome 3:** This outcome received considerable attention during implementation. The project promoted institutional coordination through the Steering Committee, inter-agency meetings, and training sessions, including engagement with parliamentarians to strengthen the regulatory framework. Evidence also points to collaboration among technical workgroups and the transfer of the platform to the Council of Ministers, reinforcing the establishment of a collaborative institutional structure. However, interviewees indicated that the success of this outcome is closely tied to the operationalization of Outcome 2. While collaboration was encouraged and achieved, the long-term sustainability and transparency of environmental information sharing remain unclear.
 - iv. **Outcome 4:** The project invested significantly in capacity-building, delivering data, tools, and training to support the development of results-based, impact-oriented policies. These efforts extended to schools and various stakeholder groups. Although there is limited evidence that these capacities have fully translated into concrete policy implementation, feedback indicates ongoing efforts to integrate performance indicators and improve environmental management strategies. Therefore, the achievement of this outcome is in progress, with a solid foundation established and actions underway that depend on continued engagement and commitment from national authorities.
147. The three assumptions related to outcomes outlined in the project were partially held throughout its implementation, with each playing a pivotal role in achieving the desired outcome:
- i. **Assumption 1 (Political and Security Stability):** This assumption primarily relates to Output 1.1 and was only partially upheld. Political instability and security challenges significantly impacted the initial phase of the project. In 2019, Iraq experienced ongoing civil unrest and widespread public demonstrations, which ultimately led to the resignation of the national government. These events disrupted government functions and delayed coordination and decision-making processes crucial to the project's launch. Further compounding the situation, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the latter half of 2020 led to additional delays in the implementation of the GEF-approved work plan. The combined effect of political upheaval and public health restrictions hindered progress and limited stakeholder engagement during a critical stage of project rollout.
 - ii. **Assumption 3 (Effective Inter-Agency Collaboration):** This assumption, linked to Outputs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 4.2, and Outcomes 1, 2, and 3, was partially upheld. While challenges, such as missing GIS shapefiles, affected the delivery of the alpha version of the system, strong inter-agency collaboration helped mitigate risks and advance project goals. Agencies demonstrated their commitment through a collaborative approach involving regular meetings, workshops, consistent communication, joint decision-making, capacity-building sessions, PSC discussions, and the incorporation of stakeholder feedback to refine the Environmental Information System (EIS). Additionally, interview feedback noted that inter-agency collaboration in Iraq traditionally faced structural challenges, with ministries often operating in silos and requiring multiple procedural steps to coordinate across departments. While this dynamic posed some limitations, the project contributed positively by fostering more regular interaction, building

trust, and creating practical opportunities for collaboration, which helped strengthen institutional relationships and laid the groundwork for more integrated environmental governance.

- iii. **Assumption 4 (Supportive Context for Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Inclusion):** This assumption applies to all outcomes. Throughout implementation, the project upheld the principles of human rights, gender equality, and inclusion. Although it did not adopt a formal gender action plan, project activities were designed with a gender-sensitive lens and emphasized inclusive stakeholder engagement. Deliberate measures were taken to ensure women's active participation at every stage. This included prioritizing female representation in PSC meetings, workshops, and training sessions. According to PIRs, over 60% of the implementation team were women—including the project manager appointed by the MoE and the heads of key working groups—demonstrating a strong commitment to gender balance in both leadership and technical roles. In the final phase, the project placed particular emphasis on promoting women's participation and empowerment. Gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries was included in project reports, reflecting efforts to monitor and report on gender inclusion. However, the absence of gender-disaggregated indicators in key analytical outputs limits the ability to fully assess the long-term impact of these efforts (see Section I: Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality).

148. The three drivers were partially held throughout the project's implementation, with each playing a crucial role in achieving the intended outcomes:

- i. **Driver 1 (Operational Feasibility and Stakeholder Mobilization):** This driver, linked to outputs 1.3, 2.1, and 2.2, was partially upheld. The available budget was sufficient to achieve the expected results despite operational challenges. However, the project timeline was affected by unforeseen circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. To mitigate delays, SOPs and indicators were developed in parallel with other planned outputs, allowing adjustments to the overall schedule. The draft indicator report was completed in June 2021, based on a combination of local data, satellite imagery, and international databases. The final report was completed following stakeholder consultations. The final report was completed following stakeholder consultations, in parallel with activity 2.1.1 (analysis of environmental indicators). This activity focused on identifying ways to harmonize, update, and improve environmental indicators, baseline data, and targets, with the inclusion of gender-disaggregated data where relevant. A considerable number of stakeholders were mobilized for training and data collection, although workshop attendance occasionally fell short of expectations.
- ii. **Driver 2 (Effectiveness of the Training Programme):** This driver relates to Outputs 2.3 and 4.1 and was successfully achieved. The training programme effectively built the capacity of relevant stakeholders, enabling participants to apply the knowledge gained in practical and meaningful ways. Training reports indicated that participants were highly engaged with the content and actively participated in hands-on exercises and collaborative activities. Several reports noted that participants felt comfortable with the material, and practical sessions were consistently highlighted as the most engaging. A survey conducted during one of the workshops showed that participants' expectations were met and that they were satisfied with the overall training experience.

- iii. **Driver 3 (Leveraging Synergies with Existing Initiatives):** This driver relates to Output 4.3 and refers to the promotion of synergies between the project and existing programmes or initiatives to enhance overall impact. There is no record of specific actions undertaken to promote such synergies. While workshops were conducted within the scope of the project to support awareness-raising efforts, the review did not identify concrete steps that linked these activities with existing initiatives.
149. Based on the achievement of indicators, interview feedback, and the fact that the assumptions and drivers were partially validated, it can be concluded that the project partially enhanced Iraq's capacity to monitor and report on MEAs by establishing a well-integrated and functional EIS.
 150. All milestones related to the outcomes were achieved within the adjusted timeline. It is important to note, however, that the outcome-related indicators used were not well-suited to measure the intended changes. An outcome indicator measures the effects or changes that occur because of the use or application of the project outputs. It reflects short- or medium-term results that demonstrate progress toward the project's objective. In this case, the outcome-related indicators could have been more specific and measurable, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative dimensions to better capture the project's impact. For example, instead of measuring the "Number of training and educational programmes developed, executed and made available online" (Outcome Indicator 4), a more appropriate outcome indicator could have been: "Percentage of training participants who apply the knowledge gained in their institutional context." The original indicator is more consistent with an output-related indicator, as it measures the immediate deliverables of the project rather than the effects resulting from their use.
 151. Finally, it is important to emphasize that refining certain indicators does not mean the project lacked positive results and impact. On the contrary, the project achieved relevant results, especially considering its issues with the pandemic and political instability. Having better indicators could have clearly highlighted the project's key successes and provided clearer direction for future initiatives.
 152. Thus, it can be stated that the achievement of the project outcome was moderately satisfactory. The project outcomes most important for reaching the intermediate state were partially achieved. Assumptions for progress from project outputs to project outcomes were partially held, and drivers to support the transition from outputs to outcomes were partially in place.

Rating for Achievement of Project Outcomes: Moderately Satisfactory

Likelihood of Impact

153. The likelihood of the intended impacts of the project becoming a reality was assessed based on the articulation of longer-term effects in the reconstructed ToC, specifically from outcome, through the intermediate state, to impact. As outlined in the ToR for this review, the Excel-based flow chart, "Likelihood of Impact Assessment Decision Tree," guided the review process. This approach follows the 'Likelihood Tree' from output to impact, considering whether the assumptions identified in the reconstructed ToC were upheld. No new drivers were identified in this assessment.
154. The intermediate state, which envisions "Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform

evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting," was expected to be achieved by realizing the four project outcomes.

155. The project achieved notable success in implementing several key components:
- i. A functional Environmental Information Portal (EIP), comprising hardware, software, network infrastructure, and a web-based interface, along with its associated processes.
 - ii. Streamlined monitoring and data collection mechanisms, including a final Indicator Report that maps relevant indicators; the development of an automated system capable of regularly updating data from satellite sources without human intervention; and the delivery of multiple capacity-building workshops focused on data collection and validation.
 - iii. A structured training programme, consisting of several workshops tailored to target stakeholders.
 - iv. The establishment of a regulatory and collaborative institutional framework, encompassing SOPs, a M&E mechanism, Operational Guidelines, and a Sustainability Strategy.
156. However, to assess whether the intermediate state has been achieved, it is essential to examine whether national institutions are regularly using the EIP, with documented evidence of data access, use, and updates integrated into institutional workflows. Additionally, the extent to which EIS-generated data is informing environmental policy, national planning, and MEA/SDG reporting should be verified. Institutional capacity must also be considered, including the availability of trained staff, clear operational processes, and functioning inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. Finally, the application of the Sustainability Strategy, SOPs, and M&E mechanisms, along with the allocation of institutional budgets to maintain the system, are key indicators of sustainability and institutionalization.
157. Available evidence suggests potential obstacles to achieving the intermediate state in the near term. Findings from the MTR, along with stakeholder interview feedback, revealed concerns among executing partners regarding the functionality of the EIS. A critical challenge identified is the difficulty in obtaining the requisite data to populate the EIS, which may limit its operational effectiveness and, consequently, hinder progress toward intended outcomes. According to interview feedback:
- i. There are encouraging signs that the project's expected intermediate state – the effective and sustained use of the EIS by national institutions – may be achieved soon, although it cannot yet be confirmed with certainty. The system is technically operational and has undergone phases of testing, data input, and technical adjustments. An interviewee indicated that the EIS has been practically applied, including in the preparation of Iraq's CBD report. To support MEA compliance, indicator mappings and reporting templates were developed and validated for agreements such as CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, and Ramsar. Local data sources were analysed and used to produce a Final Indicator Report aligning national data with MEA requirements. Data is currently being shared through the platform, and all planned components have been delivered. However, further development is needed to enhance its usability and integration.
 - ii. Feedback indicates that improvements are required in areas such as data visualization (e.g., graphical outputs), back-end functionality for system

managers, and the WebGIS component, which would benefit from greater user-friendliness and interoperability. Enhancing the presentation and analysis of data – including modifications to maps and simplification of procedures – has also been suggested. Additionally, the inclusion of artificial intelligence features has been proposed, such as analytical tools for identifying pollution hotspots, tracking pollutant distribution, and generating early warnings for environmental risks. Beyond technical aspects, the organization of workflows within and across ministries – particularly in relation to data exchange with entities such as the Ministry of Planning – remains an important factor for ensuring consistent and coordinated use of the system.

- iii. The system has been in operation for less than a year, and delays in the project timeline prevented its full utilization during the implementation period. There is also uncertainty regarding the consistency and frequency of its current use by national institutions – something that can only be verified directly with the government. A critical issue raised was the lack of institutional ownership. While the IT team was cooperative, other departments responsible for providing environmental data did not engage. Without a senior official or sector actively promoting the system, there is a risk it will be treated as a one-off initiative, used only occasionally.
- iv. Within the institutional context, there is a noticeable tendency to prioritize tasks that are closely aligned with formal job descriptions, which may, at times, influence the regularity of system updates and overall engagement. To fully achieve the intermediate state, it will be essential to ensure institutional leadership, clearly assigned responsibilities, and integration of the system into the routine operations of relevant agencies.
- v. The platform has strong potential to support the MEAs—biodiversity, climate change, and desertification—by enabling the extraction of targeted information aligned with their monitoring requirements, and to contribute to the SDGs. However, to fully realize its intended impact, regular updates and a long-term data management plan are essential.

158. It is important to note that this issue is primarily related to timing. Assumption 2—Sustained Government Commitment—was upheld. According to the MTR and interview feedback, the Government of Iraq acknowledges the EIS as a critical foundation for advancing science-based policy formulation and decision-making within its national planning framework. The EIS represents a transformative shift from a paper-based system to an integrated, streamlined online data platform. Consequently, the potential impact of the EIS on national policy and governance is considered significant.

159. Interview feedback indicated that the likelihood of the intended impact becoming a reality is generally viewed as positive, but with varying degrees of optimism among respondents. According to interview feedback:

- i. There is a strong likelihood that the project's intended impact will be achieved, with one interviewee estimating the probability at around 90%. This optimism is grounded in the fact that the EIS is currently the only operational tool available in Iraq for coordinating and streamlining reporting to MEAs. Its structured and integrated design, along with the alignment of national indicators to MEA data requirements, enhances its relevance and utility. The system is already being promoted by UNEP as a pilot and demonstration model for other countries in the region, further underscoring its potential for broader replication and influence.

- ii. National interest in addressing critical environmental issues—such as land degradation, water resource management, and agriculture—also supports the system’s long-term relevance. If consistently implemented and used, the EIS could significantly improve evidence-based decision-making in areas like public health, biodiversity conservation, and environmental protection. It could also serve as a valuable resource for NGOs, research institutions, and academia by providing access to reliable and structured environmental data.
 - iii. However, the realization of this impact is contingent on several key factors. One is the assumption of political and institutional stability, which is essential for sustained system use and integration. Another is the need for stronger government ownership. Interviewees expressed concern that public institutions may lack the readiness or willingness to take full responsibility for the system. There is a prevailing tendency to expect external, ready-made solutions rather than investing in internal capacity-building for data generation and reporting. This reflects broader systemic challenges, including limited awareness of the importance of environmental data and a lack of accountability mechanisms within the public sector.
 - iv. Additionally, it is important to strengthen the integration between platforms, promote public awareness, and establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating implementation progress. Achieving the intended goals also depends on ensuring the active implementation of relevant environmental conventions. Improved coordination within and across ministries — including access to data from key institutions — will be essential to support these efforts and maximize the impact of the system.
160. During the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session, persistent challenges hindering the effective implementation of EIS were highlighted. These include the continued reliance on paper-based data management, the lack of digitized and accessible data, and the fragmentation of existing information. Incompatibilities between IT systems and the absence of integrated and centralized databases further limit the efficiency of data collection, sharing, and use. Additionally, evidence noted that there was a need to mainstream EIS into the operations of various ministries, ensuring that the system infrastructure can accommodate data from multiple sectors. Building an EIS under the responsibility of a single institution is unsustainable, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach. This evidence underscores the importance of collaborative design and implementation of EIS to support more integrated and effective reporting to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). These limitations should have been addressed during the project planning phase, and the efficiency, sustainability, and impact of EIS implementation could be significantly enhanced by adopting context-sensitive approaches and investing in digital infrastructure and system interoperability.
161. According to the MTR, to mitigate the risk associated with insufficient data availability, it is recommended that the project establish an automated and decentralized data collection system across the country. This approach would enhance the sustained functionality of the EIS and should be implemented in close collaboration with international partners. Furthermore, it is advisable for the UNEP WAO project team to explore mechanisms for providing consistent, ongoing training to system users to ensure data quality and facilitate effective knowledge transfer beyond the project’s duration.

162. The project did not produce any significant unintended negative effects. According to key stakeholders interviewed, there were no known adverse outcomes, as the project focused primarily on data management and intergovernmental capacity building—areas considered to carry minimal risk. On the contrary, the project played a catalytic role in modernizing the country's data management systems, transitioning from a paper-based approach to a more streamlined, scientifically grounded methodology, particularly within the environmental sector. Furthermore, during the project's exit meeting, national stakeholders expressed interest in scaling up the initiative, indicating both its perceived value and potential for long-term impact through replication.
163. Based on the "Likelihood of Impact Assessment Decision Tree" flow chart used by the Evaluation Office, the likelihood of achieving the intended impact was rated as "Likely." It can be stated that the aspects of the project outcome that were most crucial for attaining the intermediate state were achieved. Other aspects of the project outcomes were still in progress by the time of the project's conclusion. As noted in previous sections, assumptions and drivers to support the transition from outputs to project outcomes were partially in place, and the intermediate state had been partially achieved. Assumptions for the change process from the intermediate state to the impact are still valid.

Achievement of Likelihood of Impact: Likely

Rating for Effectiveness:	Satisfactory
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E. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

164. The project demonstrated good application of financial management standards and consistent adherence to established financial policies. Overall, expenditures were relatively aligned with the project's financial planning, despite delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, restrictions, governmental processes, and bureaucratic procedures. Evidence from project documentation, the Mid-Term Review, and financial reports (including budget, co-financing, and expenditure reports), supports these observations:
- i. Approval and disbursement of cash advances to project partners partially occurred in a timely manner. The UNEP WAO Office received US\$1,090,000 in GEF funding. Initially, the project allocated US\$588,600 to MoE from the UNEP WAO Office; however, this amount was revised to US\$212,600 in May 2021 through an amendment⁸⁹ to the PCA⁹⁰, citing challenges in disbursement. Specifically, it was noted that all funds transferred to the MoE were subject to processing through the Iraq Federal Budget, causing delays and adversely affecting the project's ability to fulfill its obligations to the GEF Council. A delay in disbursement between UNEP EWAD to UNEP WAO was attributed to postponed financial reporting and lower-than-expected expenditure rates, which may have contributed to implementation delays. In accordance with UNEP's financial guidelines, disbursements from the Implementing Agency are

⁸⁹ Amendment No. (1.0) to the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between The Ministry of Health and Environment of Iraq and The United Nations Environment Programme on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (April 2021).

⁹⁰ UNEP. (2019). Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA). UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq.

contingent upon the Executing Agency meeting the required expenditure benchmarks.

- ii. Expenditure reports appear to have been submitted on a six-monthly and annual basis, reflecting a degree of financial transparency and accountability. And there is evidence of regular analysis comparing actual expenditures with the approved budget and work plan, which supports effective financial oversight. Only three half-yearly expenditure reports (June 2021, December 2022, and December 2023) and one yearly expenditure report (2012) were identified. However, as most project funds were managed by the UNEP WAO, and given the limited disbursement to MoE, compliance with UNEP's internal financial policies and procedures is considered highly probable.
 - iii. Project expenditures remained within the approved annual budget, and no formal budget revisions were deemed necessary. Instead, no-cost extensions were granted to accommodate delays resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability.
165. No significant financial issues were reported that adversely affected the timely delivery or overall quality of project performance. The project demonstrated good financial governance, evidenced by regular budget reviews and timely adjustments, which reflect a responsive and adaptive management approach. This ensured sound financial management throughout the project. While delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability posed challenges, the project's ability to manage resources effectively and revise timelines accordingly underscores its strong financial oversight.
166. Records of key financial practices, such as timely disbursements, regular reporting, and budget monitoring, were identified, but not enough to confirm their consistent application throughout the project. However, feedback from interviews highlighted that the project was internally executed by UNEP and the West Asia Office, both of which are well-versed in UN financial rules and regulations. The project key practices included: compliance with UNEP financial policies; due diligence in financial oversight; shared financial management systems, which facilitated tracking of expenditures and implementation progress; timely disbursement of funds, triggered when 70% of previous allocations were utilized; and budget analysis and reporting, including appropriate handling of revisions and expenditure variations. Although there were occasional delays due to internal processes (e.g., sub-allotments), both teams were aligned and responsive. New staff were easily onboarded thanks to shared systems and internal capacity-building.
167. In summary, it is possible to consider that the project consistently demonstrated sound financial practices, including timely approval and disbursement of cash advances, regular expenditure analysis against budget and work plan, six-monthly and annual reports.
168. A detailed financial summary is provided in Annex VI (Project Budget and Expenditures). This includes Table 7, which outlines the Project Funding Sources, and Table 8, which presents a disaggregated breakdown of Expenditures by Outcome and Output. Further financial management details are included in Annex VII (Financial Management), specifically in Table 9, which offers a comprehensive overview of the project's financial administration.

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

Completeness of Financial Information

169. The financial documentation for the project was partially complete, accurate, and accessible, as evidenced by the MTR and financial reports (including budget, co-financing, and expenditure reports):
- i. Co-financing and project costs were clearly presented during the design phase. The project provided high-level budgets with breakdowns by funding type (cash or in-kind), funding source, and at the output, outcome, and component levels. These details were reflected in the financial documentation, offering transparency regarding financial commitments.
 - ii. Budget revisions were reportedly conducted on an annual basis to align expenditures with planned outcomes. However, the MTR only found evidence of a single budget revision, supported by email correspondence from the FMO requesting a revised budget for record-keeping purposes (emails dated 20 February 2019 and 31 March 2019). No formal revised budget documents were identified or made available for review.
 - iii. This review identified co-financing reports covering the period from July 2018 to June 2022, while the MTR confirmed the availability of such reports for the period from July 2020 to June 2023.
 - iv. Project expenditure reports appear to have been prepared regularly on an annual and semi-annual basis, with summary budgets at the component level. However, a partial summary of expenditures over the life of the project was identified: only three half-yearly expenditure reports (June 2021, December 2022, and December 2023) and one annual report (2012) were located.
 - v. Several legal agreements related to project implementation were identified—one ICA and three amendments, as well as one PCA and one amendment—demonstrating due diligence in financial documentation management, despite delays attributed to bureaucratic procedures. Overall, these documents appear to be complete and accurate.
 - vi. According to the MTR, transfers between UNEP EWAD and UNEP WAO were internal transactions and therefore did not require documentation of fund transfers. Most financial information managed by the Implementing Agency was complete, with minor information gaps on the side of Executing Agencies. While Executing Agencies were not required to submit all documentation to the Implementing Agency, such documents should be made available upon request.
170. Additional insights were gathered through interviews. According to stakeholders' feedback, the UNEP WAO is currently finalizing the project closure, and documentation is being compiled, including co-financing reports and semi-annual expenditure reports. All financial data is tracked using Umoja, the UN-wide financial management system, ensuring transparency and certified expenditure reporting. This system allows for real-time monitoring of budgets, disbursements, and expenditures. As of now, the resource use rate is at 98%, with the remaining 2% pending finalization of the terminal review. Once that is complete, the project will reach full financial closure. Regarding in-kind contributions—primarily staff time and technical support—the interviewee confirmed that these were properly documented throughout the project. Because the project was internally executed, no external audits were required. The legal agreement was between UNEP and the West Asia Office, which simplified compliance and documentation. The budget was results-based, and expenditures were clearly linked to specific outputs and outcomes, ensuring transparency and alignment with project goals.

171. In summary, there is sufficient evidence to confirm that the project's financial documentation was generally complete and accurate, although only a portion was made available to this review. Documents reviewed include detailed project budgets, disbursement records, expenditure reports, in-kind contribution records, and partner legal agreements and amendments. The review identified proof/report of delivery of in-kind contributions. The detailed project budget was presented at the outcome level and was signed and stamped by FMO.
172. A financial summary is provided in Annex VI (Project Budget and Expenditures), which includes Table 7 (Project Funding Sources) and Table 8 (Expenditures by Outcome/Output). Annex VII (Financial Management) includes Table 9, which outlines financial management requirements and the availability of documentation.

Rating for Completeness of Financial Information: Highly satisfactory

Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff

173. The level of communication between the PM, TM, and the FMO was exemplary and significantly contributed to the effective delivery of the project while supporting a responsive and adaptive management approach. MTR evidence and interviews provided clear evidence of the FMO's strong awareness of the project's financial status, complemented by regular, proactive communication with the project management staff.
174. Feedback from interviews indicated that communication and collaboration between the project and financial management teams were effective, characterized by quarterly coordination meetings and ad hoc interactions. The quarterly meetings involved UNEP and the West Asia Office and were held regularly, especially before the COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID, meetings became more ad hoc but remained responsive to emerging needs. For example, when the West Asia Office required funding before reaching the 70% expenditure threshold, joint calls were held to review justifications and approve disbursements. This flexibility ensured that implementation was not delayed. The team also collaborated closely on budget revisions, expenditure tracking, and preparation for PSC meetings, including agenda setting and documentation review. The collaboration was fluid, well-documented, and solution-oriented, ensuring that both financial and programmatic aspects of the project were aligned and effectively managed.
175. Overall, evidence indicates strong financial and project management, with the project manager and FMO demonstrating clear awareness of financial status and project progress. Regular communication between them ensures proactive resolution of financial issues. Reports are jointly reviewed by the finance and project teams. The strong communication between the TM and FMO positively influenced project implementation, enabling the effective delivery of the planned project within budget (see para. 182.i).

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

Rating for Financial Management: Highly Satisfactory

F. Efficiency

176. The project underwent three no-cost extensions totalling 25 months, extending its timeline to June 2024. These extensions were well-justified, and no changes were made to the Theory of Change or Results Framework. The primary reasons were:
- i. COVID-19 Pandemic (12-month extension): This unprecedented global disruption delayed meetings, limited stakeholder engagement, and forced a shift to online formats. Capacity-building activities and consultations were conducted virtually but were often disrupted by power outages and poor connectivity. The transition to remote methods reduced the effectiveness of certain engagements.
 - ii. Political Instability (7-month extension): In 2019, national demonstrations and the resignation of the government disrupted project activities, slowed procurement, and delayed negotiations with data providers due to limited stakeholder responsiveness.
 - iii. Institutional Restructuring (6-month extension): Reorganization within MoE led to communication delays, affected Project Steering Committee meetings, and hindered system migration to the MoE official website and the implementation of the capacity-building plan. Delays in equipment delivery and onboarding of a local partner UN2UN agreement with UNDP Iraq also contributed.
177. While these extensions delayed the timeline, the project successfully met its outputs and outcomes within the revised schedule. It delivered expected results cost-effectively by leveraging existing institutions, environmental conventions, in-kind contributions, and established networks. Remote work models adopted during the pandemic reduced operational costs, and activities were efficiently sequenced to align with revised milestones.
178. The project consequently adopted several strategies to enhance cost-efficiency: (1) Transitioned to remote implementation, cutting travel and accommodation costs, and supporting UNEP's emissions reduction goals; (2) Collaborated with implementing partners for shared resources and co-benefits, increasing overall efficiency. These measures not only supported the achievement of targets but also underscored the potential for UNEP to adopt sustainable working models in future projects, further minimizing its carbon footprint.
179. The original timeline could not foresee the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global event that affected all GEF projects. Extensions were a necessary and pragmatic response. However, some design limitations influenced project efficiency:
- i. Communication and Engagement: The project would have benefited from a more robust, context-specific communication strategy, especially to enhance engagement with gender and minority groups.
 - ii. Risk Management: Although political instability was correctly identified as a major risk, mitigation strategies (e.g., electronic communication and external workshops) could have been strengthened. Additional measures, such as formal contingency protocols or diversified engagement methods, would have helped maintain momentum during national disruptions.
180. The MTR also noted that longer no-cost extensions might have reduced administrative burden and provided more certainty for outcome achievement. Despite delays, adaptive management enabled the timely delivery of most outputs,

supported by strong partnerships and efficient use of existing structures and mechanisms.

181. According to evidence shared during the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session, advance planning was essential to accommodate the lengthy and complex in-country approval and implementation processes.
182. Regarding efficiency, interview feedback highlighted that:
- i. The project demonstrated a high level of efficiency in resource utilization, institutional integration, and adaptive management. Financially, it was considered extremely efficient, with 98% of the total budget of USD 1.135 million utilized, and no reported waste. Strategic decisions—such as not allocating project funds to the regional coordinator’s salary—freed up additional resources for core activities like training and coordination.
 - ii. Despite operating in a challenging context marked by political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, the project required only three extensions—fewer than similar projects in more stable countries. Delays were largely due to external factors, such as slow inter-ministerial responses, and were managed effectively through continuous support from UNEP’s West Asia Office.
 - iii. From an institutional standpoint, the project was deliberately designed to complement existing national systems rather than duplicate them. A key example was the early and sustained involvement of the Central Statistics Office under the Ministry of Planning, which played a central role in system design, implementation, and testing. The EIS was embedded within the Ministry of Environment’s IT department, with existing staff trained to manage it, enhancing both efficiency and long-term sustainability.
 - iv. The decision to implement the project through this regional office, led by an Iraqi Task Manager, also improved stakeholder engagement and trust. Additionally, the project leveraged strategic partnerships, including with the CIMA Foundation, which brought regional experience and technical expertise. A dedicated sustainability strategy further reinforced long-term impact, focusing on capacity building, institutional ownership, and targeted funding for post-project continuity.
183. Overall, the project’s efficiency is rated as Moderately Satisfactory. The project had three no-cost extensions (totaling 25 months), where two of them were individually justified. The initial 12-month extension due to COVID-19 was part of a broader GEF policy response and not counted as an individual project decision. However, evidence suggests that the application of cost-effective approaches supported achieving project targets. Activities and events were frequently sequenced efficiently, and the project operated within existing roles, mechanisms, or institutions, expanding them in an effective and efficient manner when necessary.

Rating for Efficiency: Moderately satisfactory

G. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring Design and Budgeting

184. The GEF6 Request for Project Approval (item C) included a Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) plan based on a results-based management approach and

incorporating SMART indicators for outputs and outcomes. Annex G of the project document detailed the M&R activities, responsibilities, budget, and timeframe.

185. The plan emphasized a participatory and consultative approach to ensure the delivery of project outputs and the achievement of defined targets. The review focused primarily on implementation status, gap identification, and assessing impacts and the success of best practice application.
186. M&R activities included organizing meetings and producing reports (inception, progress, Project Steering Committee, and implementation), measuring indicators (outcome, progress, and performance indicators, plus GEF tracking tools) at the national level, and publishing lessons learned and other project documents. Although it was a three-year implementation plan, the M&R plan also scheduled a mid-term review and a terminal evaluation, under the responsibility of UNEP, with active participation from the National Project Coordinator and partners.
187. Data collection, guided by the logical framework's means of verification, tracked progress against outputs, milestones, deliverables, and indicators. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, with UNEP WAO holding overall responsibility for project execution.
188. Throughout implementation, the indicator system was maintained through project revisions to reflect changes in scope and ambition. Interview feedback suggested that the project team had a strong sense of ownership over the monitoring plan.
189. This review identified weaknesses in the logical framework, particularly in the outcome and output-related indicators, all of which were process indicators. Process indicators monitor activity execution (e.g., organizing events or producing materials) and provide data on implementation, but not on results or changes generated. Given the project's objectives, it would have been more appropriate to include impact indicators—these assess long-term effects and the extent to which objectives were achieved, including the real impact on social, economic, or environmental conditions. Unlike process indicators, which focus on project operations, impact indicators evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of the changes achieved.
190. For instance, Outcome Indicator 2, which measured the availability of streamlined monitoring and data collection processes, did not effectively demonstrate "improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system." This was because the indicator focused only on the existence of streamlined processes, not their actual implementation or use. It failed to assess whether these processes were consistently adopted, institutionalized, or led to better data quality or frequency. Moreover, it did not evaluate the integration of MEAs and SDGs into reporting procedures. This limitation was found across all outcome indicators, reducing their ability to reflect real improvements.
191. These findings highlight the need for more precise and relevant indicators. The lack of clear attribution and focus on tangible results made it difficult to assess project progress accurately.
192. The following sections discuss monitoring within the scope defined in the project framework. Despite the challenges, the M&R plan was generally robust. According to the GEF6 Request for Project Approval and the PIRs, the project tracked 24 indicators—one for the objective/impact, four for outcomes, and 19 for outputs. These indicators measured the delivery of mechanisms, tools, reports,

information, and capacity-building activities. However, the plan did not include any gender-specific indicators to ensure inclusivity.

193. Overall, while the indicators could have been refined to improve attribution and outcome measurement (see “Availability of Outputs” and “Achievement of Outcome”), the M&R plan aligned with results-based management principles and allowed for adaptive implementation. It covered essential components such as indicator coverage, data collection methods, frequency, and a dedicated monitoring budget, but lacked gender-disaggregated data.

Rating for Monitoring Design and Budgeting: Moderately satisfactory

Monitoring of Project Implementation

194. The assessment of the monitoring system during project implementation indicates that it was generally functional and enabled timely tracking of results and progress toward project objectives. As outlined in the GEF6 Request for Project Approval, half-year progress reports, project implementation reports (PIRs), and the final report, a detailed monitoring plan was in place. This plan appropriately tracked outputs, milestones, deliverables, and indicators as defined in the logical framework. It also specified data collection methods and established appropriate frequencies for data gathering, in line with the plan’s requirements. Evidence from the project document and PIRs showed that a work plan, broken down by outputs and outcomes, was created and updated regularly throughout the project’s implementation. Although the project timeline was adjusted, there was no need to revise the plan’s scope or structure.
195. Project expenditure reports indicate that funds were specifically allocated to monitoring activities.
196. Baseline data were collected during project design for each output and outcome. However, the baselines tended to be broad and general, aligned more with the indicators’ focus on processes than on specific conditions. For example, the baseline for Outcome 2 was: “Limited coordination and harmonization of environmental monitoring. Data collection and availability is inconsistent.” This description, while relevant, lacked the precision typically associated with well-defined baselines.
197. MTR also highlighted that the project document presented a general overview of the baseline scenario and included the Capacity Development Scorecard (Annex J of GEF6 request for project approval) as a tool to track institutional progress.
198. However, the Scorecard had not been updated to reflect the progress achieved during project implementation. During implementation, progress reports updated baseline data using information collected throughout the project. In practice, progress was reported as a percentage of completion for each output or outcome at the reporting date. In the final report, outputs and outcomes were simply marked as “completed,” without additional detail on actual results or changes achieved.
199. The overemphasis on process indicators, such as the timely delivery of reports, limited the project’s capacity to assess its broader objectives. The absence of indicators focused on tangible outcomes hindered the project’s ability to systematically monitor and demonstrate real-world change. The indicators lacked the quality and specificity needed for a comprehensive review of the project’s long-term impact. While outputs, such as the number of stakeholder workshops held or reports produced, were well documented, indicators for outcomes and impacts were missing. As a result, it was difficult to assess whether

the project led to improvements in national environmental knowledge, information management systems, institutional coordination, or technical capacity.

200. In summary, a basic monitoring system was implemented, and it successfully tracked progress toward outputs. Monitoring data were collected and reported regularly, offering a useful overview of project performance. Thus, although areas for improvement were identified in the construction of indicators (see “Monitoring Design and Budgeting”), the data collected was generally complete and useful, but only partially relevant for tracking progress toward intended results. According to the MTR, monitoring was primarily conducted through progress reports, submitted every six months to the Implementing Agency, and through quarterly team meetings. The MTR also noted that although the Project Document included a baseline summary and a Capacity Development Scorecard, the scorecard had not been updated to reflect progress, highlighting the difficulty of objectively assessing the project’s impact.
201. Data were not disaggregated by vulnerable or marginalized groups, which limited the ability to assess inclusive participation. While the project emphasized female participation, prioritizing women’s involvement in PSC meetings, workshops, and trainings, this commitment was not supported by appropriate indicators. For instance, there was no gender-specific indicator to track the number of women benefiting from capacity-building activities. The 2023 PIR reported 220 beneficiaries (110 women and 110 men), but workshop reports often lacked gender-disaggregated participant lists. Where such summaries were provided, the data often showed a male majority. This undermines confidence in the reported gender balance.
202. Evidence suggests that tools and methodologies tailored to different stakeholder groups were used during implementation. The monitoring plan incorporated a range of instruments, including inception workshops and reports, quarterly and annual review reports, mid-term and terminal evaluations, and qualitative discussions during PSC meetings. A post-workshop survey was also conducted after the Iraq EIS System Training Workshop in May 2023. MTR highlighted that project stakeholders participating in the “UNEP GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Knowledge Exchange Session”⁹¹ provided key updates, shared implementation challenges, and reflected on lessons learned.
203. According to interview feedback the project established a solid and adaptive monitoring system that supported ongoing oversight and informed decision-making. A monitoring plan was developed early in the project, with indicators aligned to the logical framework. These indicators guided the tracking of progress and identification of implementation bottlenecks. From 2022 onward, monitoring efforts intensified, including regular coordination calls with the UNEP West Asia regional office and internal quarterly reviews. UNEP WAO, national government, and project management unit all played active roles in monitoring. Internally, the project supervisor conducted monthly meetings with the team to assess progress and apply corrective measures when needed. Although not all monitoring activities were formally documented, the project was under continuous supervision. Monitoring missions were also conducted to complement remote tracking, ensuring that implementation remained on course despite contextual challenges.
204. Therefore, despite the availability of indicator data, there is no evidence that it was systematically analyzed or used beyond basic progress tracking. There is no clear indication that monitoring information was used to inform decision-making,

⁹¹ UNEP (2023). UNEP GEF Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) Knowledge Exchange Session. Naivasha, Kenya. January 17-19, 2023.

adapt project activities, or improve sustainability. While the monitoring system effectively documented progress, it appears that opportunities to use this data for adaptive management were missed.

205. Overall, evidence indicates that a basic monitoring plan and a completed work plan were in place. Tools and methodologies responsive to the needs of different stakeholder groups were employed, and funds allocated for monitoring appear to have been appropriately spent. However, baseline data collection was limited, and no disaggregated data were gathered for vulnerable or marginalized groups, including by gender. Of the baseline data collected, only some was relevant and useful for tracking progress. Furthermore, the data collected during project implementation lacked the level of detail necessary for meaningful analysis and were neither effectively used nor disseminated throughout the project's duration.

Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation: Moderately satisfactory

Project Reporting

206. The project demonstrated substantial documentation of progress throughout its lifecycle:
- i. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Documents Repository. (2018-2024). Project reports (Inception Report, Quarterly Expenditure Reports, Half Yearly Progress Reports, Half-Yearly Expenditures Reports, Project Implementation Reviews, Technical reports, Workshop/ training reports, presentations, and notes), including six-month progress and financial reports, and progress reports.
 - ii. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Deliverables. (2018-2024). Reports, presentations, recommendations, and publications (Components 1 and 2).
207. The review was able to access and analyse half-year progress reports for the periods July to December in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023, as well as PIRs for 2020 through 2024, covering the periods July 2019–June 2020, July 2020–June 2021, and July 2021–June 2022, July 2022–June 2023, July 2023–June 2024. The PIRs were thorough and informative, including gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries reached, along with detailed accounts of project activities, challenges encountered, and risks identified. It is worth noting, however, that the inclusion of gender-disaggregated data was not explicitly defined in the monitoring plan outlined during the project design phase (See “Monitoring Design and Budgeting”).
208. Evidence and interview feedback suggested that:
- i. The documentation of project progress was thorough and of high quality, with monitoring and reporting consistently completed on time and in line with established templates and procedures. Reports to donors were submitted regularly and without interruption. The annual PIRs, submitted to the GEF, served as the official progress report for the project.
 - ii. These reports were used to track indicator progress, document success stories, and highlight contributions to SDGs and gender equality. Reporting exercises were conducted regularly—typically in June and December—and served as key moments for reflection and planning.
 - iii. Subcontracted partners, such as the CIMA Research Foundation, also fulfilled their reporting obligations punctually and in accordance with contractual terms.
 - iv. Regular bilateral communication and ongoing contact throughout the year further complemented formal reporting, contributing to donor satisfaction

- and effective project oversight. Evidence confirmed collaboration and communication among UNEP colleagues.
- v. The Project Steering Committee convened three times during the project cycle, providing a platform for sharing updates and receiving strategic feedback. Reports were not limited to technical outputs; they also contributed to knowledge management by capturing lessons learned and showcasing achievements.
 - vi. The use of Umoja, the UN's enterprise resource planning system, ensured transparency and certified financial reporting throughout the project.
209. The project consistently presented and collected GEF Core indicators, although the process used to obtain the reported values was not clearly explained:
- i. The 2023 PIR included two key GEF indicators. The first, related to GEF-6, focused on strengthening countries' capacity to implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and integrate them into national and subnational frameworks for policy, planning, finance, and legislation. The expected target was the establishment of functional environmental information systems to support decision-making in at least one country. According to the report, this target was achieved in the Republic of Iraq, where the system was developed, tested, and underwent final revisions. The second indicator, linked to GEF-7, measured the number of direct beneficiaries – disaggregated by gender – as a co-benefit of GEF investments. The goal was to reach 100 beneficiaries by the project's midpoint and 350 by its conclusion. By 2023, the number of beneficiaries had been steadily increasing as the system began to be used by ministry personnel.
 - ii. The 2024 PIR reported only the indicator related to the number of direct beneficiaries, also disaggregated by gender. The report indicated a total of 110 male and 110 female beneficiaries by the end of the project. According to the Executing Unit, during the final phase – which included the last modifications, testing, and approval – there was a slight increase in the number of beneficiaries compared to the 2023 update. However, a significant increase is expected once the system becomes fully operational.
210. The Mid-Term Review identified language barriers as a recurring challenge that contributed to delays in report submissions. Specifically, project reports required translation from Arabic into English, yet no budget had been allocated for professional translation services. As a result, the project relied heavily on bilingual staff from UNEP WAO, who were responsible for translating documents prepared by the Iraqi Government into English. This approach placed a significant burden on UNEP WAO personnel and increased the risk of content loss or misinterpretation during translation.
211. Project reporting supported the monitoring of project performance; however, due to the absence of more relevant and specific indicators and methodologies, reporting was limited in its ability to capture and reflect outcome-level results or broader impacts.
212. Overall, evidence indicates that substantial documentation of project progress was available, with substantial collaboration and communication among colleagues. Donor reporting was consistent and timely, with no identified gaps. Reports submitted through PIMS and to donors accurately reflected the project's scope of work, and their content aligned with supporting evidence. Monitoring

reports were either gender-neutral—equally reflecting the experiences of all gender groups—or, where appropriate, gender-sensitive, capturing differentiated experiences. However, disaggregation of data by vulnerable and marginalized groups, including gender, was only partially achieved.

Rating for Project Reporting: Satisfactory

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting:	Satisfactory
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H. Sustainability

Socio-political Sustainability

213. The sustainability and further development of project outcomes depend heavily on political will and stakeholder ownership. Continued interest and commitment from government representatives to use the Iraqi EIS are essential. The tool and mechanisms promoted by the project must clearly demonstrate their utility in enhancing institutional coordination and technical capacities to mainstream, develop, and utilize policies for the effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs.
214. According to the GEF6 Request for Approval, the project was designed to promote strong socio-political sustainability by aligning with existing national mandates and fostering collaboration across government entities. It was anticipated that the government's legal obligation to report on environmental conditions and coordinate data management with other ministries would provide a solid political foundation for the continuation of project outcomes. Positioning the environment information system as a joint government-led initiative was expected to foster stakeholder ownership and enable complementarity and scalability. In addition, the project document proposed the engagement of local governments and line ministries to support system expansion at the governorate level, thereby strengthening political support and stakeholder commitment at both national and subnational levels.
215. Evidence from the final report and PIR 2024 asserted strong socio-political sustainability of the project, highlighting efforts to foster local ownership, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. According to these reports, national stakeholders were equipped with the skills to operate and maintain the EIS through targeted training and knowledge transfer. These efforts strengthened national capacity, fostered collaboration, and promoted long-term stakeholder engagement in environmental data management. Furthermore, the project reportedly engaged international and local organizations in a collaborative approach, supporting long-term commitment to environmental monitoring and decision-making. However, while these intentions are clearly articulated, the report's indicators and supporting documentation do not provide concrete evidence of sustained behaviour change, institutional uptake, or stakeholder-driven initiatives during the project implementation period. Additionally, although the report suggests the EIS could serve as a model for regional replication, this remains a prospective outcome rather than a demonstrated result.
216. The MTR highlighted a strong level of ownership, interest, and commitment to the project among government entities and stakeholders. However, this ownership appeared to be sensitive to political transitions, including changes in government and shifts in key focal points. Notably, the absence of a legally binding agreement mandating the use of the EIS by the relevant institution limits the assurance of long-term utilization. Moreover, the EIS did not appear to be a strategic priority

within the current governmental agenda, posing additional challenges to its socio-political sustainability. Nevertheless, the MTR noted a growing interest among government officials in managing the EIS, particularly as the perceived relevance and utility of the system's data became more evident, suggesting that continued engagement may be contingent on the system's demonstrated value.

217. Interview feedback confirmed that:

- i. The sustainability of the project outcomes significantly depended on social and political factors. Changes in political leadership and the prioritization of environmental issues by governments can directly impact the continuity of the project's results. Political shifts, especially within ministries, may lead to changes in responsibilities, undermining the expected impact of the project outcomes. Furthermore, without strong political support, the project's results may not be fully valued or integrated into national agendas.
- ii. Stakeholder engagement was generally strong during project implementation, with evidence of meaningful participation from key national institutions, particularly the MoE and the MoP / Central Statistics Office. Ownership was actively fostered through capacity-building efforts, the development of a sustainability strategy, and the integration of the EIS into existing institutional structures (Iraqi National Data Centre). Workshops, technical trainings, and the formation of national trainers (ToTs), including a training in Italy, contributed to building local capacity and promoting long-term use.
- iii. Post-project, there are signs of continued engagement, such as the Ministry's autonomous resolution of technical issues after project closure and the system's ongoing accessibility. The core team involved in the system's design and operation is still in place, supporting operational continuity.
- iv. The EIS is being promoted by UNEP as a pilot initiative in regional forums, increasing its visibility and encouraging continued use by the Iraqi government. A sustainability strategy was also presented and validated during a dedicated workshop in Amman, fostering institutional buy-in.
- v. However, the long-term sustainability of stakeholder engagement will depend on political and institutional stability, as well as leadership commitment, and demand for the system's outputs. Without high-level support, the system risks being deprioritized. While mechanisms were put in place to support ownership and continuity, sustained use will require further integration of the EIS into national workflows and planning processes, as well as continued reinforcement of its relevance through regional promotion and reporting obligations.
- vi. Stakeholder engagement has shown gradual progress, with signs of increasing national ownership and continued use of the EIS. Workshops played an important role in encouraging initial engagement, and MoE continues to use the platform. However, there are still areas that require improvement, such as limitations in the system's current functionalities and the lack of strategies to promote behavioral and organizational change. The sustainability of the project's outcomes partly depends on public awareness—especially among target groups—regarding the importance of the platform and the environmental issues it addresses. This process involves social and political factors, such as public engagement, inter-institutional communication, and support for environmental legislation. The

active implementation of environmental conventions was also highlighted as essential to ensure the legitimacy and continuity of project actions.

218. Regarding the project's socio-political sustainability, evidence shared during the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted the importance of fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder ownership in the development and implementation of EIS. Participants emphasized that EIS should be designed to meet the needs of various ministries and sectors, enabling them to track progress on national and international commitments such as the SDGs. Ensuring that the system was open, user-friendly, and accessible to all relevant stakeholders could help build institutional capacity, promote data sharing, and distribute benefits across government entities. Moreover, aligning the EIS with the interests and mandates of different ministries could have enhanced political buy-in and long-term engagement, which are essential for the system's sustainability and impact.
219. Participants in the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session emphasized that ensuring the sociopolitical sustainability of the EIS requires more than technical robustness—it demands responsiveness to evolving national and regional priorities. They highlighted the importance of actively seeking intelligence, innovation, and foresight to keep the system aligned with current environmental concerns and policy debates. This proactive approach—described as “keeping an ear to the ground”—can help position the EIS as a dynamic and relevant tool, capable of informing timely decisions and maintaining its legitimacy and utility over time.
220. Mechanisms for adapting to socio-political changes are considered within the project's sustainability strategy. Developed during the implementation phase, the strategy broadly outlines the steps and responsibilities required to ensure the long-term viability of the EIS and to prevent its obsolescence over time. The document includes the key components of a sound sustainability strategy and cites, for example, a support agreement established between UNEP and the CIMA Research Foundation. Under this agreement, CIMA committed to providing one day of technical support per month to the MoE team for three years following project handover. However, the strategy could benefit from more detailed guidance in certain areas, such as systematic stakeholder engagement and contingency planning—both of which are critical to enhancing resilience in the face of political or institutional change.
221. In conclusion, the sustainability of the project's outcomes is significantly influenced by social and political dynamics. While evidence points to strong ownership and commitment from the government and key stakeholders—particularly at critical institutional levels—this ownership remains vulnerable to potential changes in government and shifting institutional priorities. Although several mechanisms were established to support sustainability, they were assessed as moderate in scope. For instance, while a sustainability strategy was developed, it could have been more detailed and operationalized to better guide long-term implementation. Despite commendable efforts to promote local ownership, accountability, and stakeholder engagement, systemic challenges persist. To ensure socio-political sustainability, it will be essential to secure continued political support, clearly assign responsibilities, and reinforce the system's relevance through its use in regional and international reporting frameworks.

Rating for Socio-political Sustainability: Moderately Likely

Financial Sustainability

222. The maintenance and development of project outcomes are heavily reliant on future funding. Key activities requiring ongoing financial support include EIS maintenance, continuous capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. Regular updates, technical improvements, and integration with national systems are essential to keep EIS relevant. Long-term financial sustainability remains uncertain as continued funding will depend on sustained country commitment, demonstrated utility, and strategic planning.
223. According to the GEF6 Request for Approval, to address financial sustainability, the project would include the development of a comprehensive sustainability strategy that aimed to ensure adequate budgetary allocation for the post-project operation and maintenance of the information system. This strategy would cover costs related to system operation, ongoing development, capacity building, and training. The project also intended to explore opportunities for mobilizing investment at the local level, particularly through engagement with local governments to support infrastructure development and system scaling. These planned measures were intended to reduce long-term financial dependency and support the durability of project benefits.
224. The final report and PIR 2024 do not provide evidence of specific funding mechanisms, budgetary commitments, or financial planning to ensure the long-term operation, maintenance, and updating of the EIS. However, the emphasis on knowledge transfer and training of national staff suggests a strategy to reduce long-term reliance on external expertise and funding. This evidence indicates a potential area of vulnerability, as the continued functioning of the system may depend on the availability of future funding without a clearly defined financial strategy.
225. The sustainability strategy presents a financial component underscoring that the long-term operation of the EIS depends on adequate and sustained funding to support its maintenance, updates, and continuous improvement. It recommends that the MoE allocate internal resources, considering that staff hold permanent, non-project-specific positions, and establish a dedicated funding mechanism to ensure continuity beyond the project's duration. The strategy notes that UNEP has fully financed the EIS, reflecting a financial commitment. It also highlights the need for periodic assessments of the system's sustainability, including financial stability, resource availability, and stakeholder engagement, to safeguard the EIS's functionality and effectiveness over time.
226. Interview feedback corroborates the need for sustained local financial support to ensure the continued use and enhancement of the platform. Technical maintenance, the development of new features (such as charts, GIS, and artificial intelligence), and the strengthening of institutional capacities rely on adequate and sustainable resources. Without dedicated funding, there is a risk of discontinuity or diminished impact of the tool.
227. Participants in the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted that environmental issues are often not prioritized in national budgets, which can limit the financial sustainability of systems like the EIS. To address this, participants recommended demonstrating the economic and non-economic value of environmental data. For example, in Iraq, an environmental impact assessment on industrial water discharge into rivers revealed damages estimated at USD 5 billion. Such evidence illustrates the potential of the EIS to inform cost-benefit analyses and support more economically grounded policy decisions. Framing

environmental information in terms of its financial implications can be a powerful strategy to mobilize political will and secure long-term funding.

228. Interview feedback reinforced that the financial sustainability was mainly addressed through cost-saving measures and clear institutional responsibilities:
- i. The project promoted the migration of the EIS to national infrastructure. Initially hosted on a paid cloud service, the system was later transferred to the Iraqi National Data Centre, eliminating recurring hosting costs and ensuring long-term access through a government-to-government arrangement.
 - ii. The sustainability strategy clearly identifies the ministry responsible for funding the system's maintenance and operations.
 - iii. The project supplied essential hardware (laptops, monitors, printers) to the ministry, ensuring the necessary infrastructure was in place post-project.
 - iv. The project demonstrated strong financial efficiency, with nearly 100% of the budget utilized effectively and no reported waste.
229. Overall, the sustainability and long-term success of the project outcomes are closely tied to the availability of future funding and consistent financial support. Some financial needs have been partially addressed—such as through cost-saving measures like migrating the system to the Iraqi National Data Centre — and an exit strategy has also been developed. The project's sustainability strategy includes a clear financial component, emphasizing the need for ongoing funding to maintain the EIS beyond the project's lifespan. Although it lacks operational details such as specific funding sources or budget plans, it outlines institutional roles, underscores the importance of financial stability, and indicates the need of periodic reviews and evaluations of sustainability that include financial aspects. Therefore, despite its more declarative than technical nature, the strategy provides a legitimate foundation for the financial component.

Rating for Financial Sustainability: Moderately Likely

Institutional Sustainability

230. The sustainability of project outcomes was highly dependent on institutional frameworks and governance structures. Institutional support mechanisms provided a robust framework to sustain and institutionalize some projects' results.
231. According to the GEF6 Request for Approval, the sustainability of the institutional framework would be supported by anchoring the project within the MoE's existing IT Department, specifically utilizing the GIS Unit as a foundation for system development. By building on established structures, rather than creating new or parallel systems, the project proposal aimed to enhance institutional integration and long-term viability. Planned collaboration with the Technical Department and the Department of Planning and Follow-up was expected to further strengthen institutional coordination. The project also intended to formalize data ownership and included system management responsibilities in the operational guidelines or terms of reference of the relevant authorities. These measures were expected to embed the project within existing governance frameworks and promote institutional continuity.
232. The final report indicated that the project successfully embedded the EIS within the national institutional framework by aligning its functionalities with ongoing policy and governance processes. The system was described as enabling evidence-based policymaking and supporting proactive environmental

management, thereby contributing to the institutionalization of data-driven decision-making. Moreover, the integration of the EIS into existing governance structures was presented as a factor likely to enhance the long-term sustainability of its outcomes.

233. Evidence on PIR 2024 also showed that the alignment of the MoE project team and key stakeholders with technical and operational aspects of the system, combined with the training of personnel on integrating environmental management into planning and monitoring, and the implementation of a knowledge strategy with documentation and continuous training, all indicate deliberate efforts to institutionalize the EIS within national workflows and capacities.
234. Nevertheless, while the narrative suggests alignment with institutional priorities, these reports provide limited verifiable evidence, such as indicators demonstrating formal policy changes, dedicated budgetary allocations, or updates to institutional mandates, that would confirm systemic adoption or integration during the project's operational period. Thus, although the potential for institutional sustainability is acknowledged, the extent to which it was achieved remains uncertain in the absence of supporting data or validated indicators.
235. Institutional capacity-building efforts under the project, including a Training of Trainers (ToT) program (Output 2.2), enhanced the skills and knowledge of key individuals and organizations, increasing the likelihood of sustained support. Stakeholders involved in implementing the EIS within the MoE were, in principle, equipped with the necessary competencies to maintain and effectively utilize the tool. These individuals, given their expected retention in relevant positions, were well-positioned to continue contributing to the project's outcomes.
236. Interview feedback highlighted that the institutional sustainability mechanisms in place were among the project's strongest aspects, supported by capacity building, comprehensive documentation, and integration into existing government structures:
- i. The project prioritized capacity building through formal workshops and hands-on technical support. Four ministry staff were trained as trainers (ToTs) during an intensive two-week program in Italy, ensuring local technical autonomy.
 - ii. The ministry received a full set of operational materials, including manuals, SOPs, user guides, and the sustainability strategy, supporting institutional memory and continuity.
 - iii. The EIS was delivered with open-source code, enabling the ministry's IT team to update or adapt the system independently.
 - iv. The CIMA Research Foundation committed to providing technical support for up to three years post-project. Additionally, direct relationships were established between the ministry and both international (CIMA Research Foundation) and local (eSITE) technical partners, ensuring continued support without UNEP's mediation.
 - v. The system was embedded within the Ministry of Environment's IT department, avoiding the creation of new units and reinforcing sustainability through existing institutional capacity.
237. Additional interview evidence emphasized the critical importance of having a clear institutional framework and dedicated personnel to manage, oversee, and sustain the project's results. Long-term success was seen as closely tied to the presence of committed leadership and clearly defined roles within the responsible

institutions. Establishing committees would help ensure that diverse stakeholders remain engaged and that institutional support for the EIS is maintained. Conversely, the absence of clear ownership and responsibility for the data was identified as a barrier to sustainability, particularly given the decentralized nature of the EIS. Strong institutional support, including capacity-building initiatives and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, is critical to ensuring the tool remains relevant and operational in the long term.

238. Other respondents also pointed to the need for improved work organization within the ministry and across government agencies, especially in relation to data collection and daily usage:
 - i. Technical enhancements were recommended, such as the development of charts, improvements to the WebGIS, and, where feasible, the integration of artificial intelligence to support environmental monitoring and early warning systems. Interview feedback further emphasized the need for better data presentation and analysis, streamlined procedures for system managers, and stronger integration of WebGIS functionalities. Suggestions also included leveraging AI to identify pollution hotspots, track pollutant distribution, and generate early alerts.
 - ii. Beyond technical upgrades, reinforcing inter-ministerial coordination, embedding the EIS into national workflows, and securing high-level institutional commitment were seen as key steps toward making data more accessible and actionable and were vital to sustaining stakeholder engagement and ensuring long-term adoption and ownership.
 - iii. It is also essential to periodically assess institutional factors and verify that the system continues to operate effectively within its organizational context. This can include evaluating the roles and responsibilities of involved institutions, monitoring stakeholder engagement, and ensuring that data is consistently sourced from its original and most reliable providers. Regular reviews help maintain the integrity of the platform, support informed decision-making, and reinforce institutional commitment to environmental monitoring and data-driven governance.
239. Regarding the project's institutional sustainability, the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session underscored the need for a strong legal and policy framework to support the establishment and long-term maintenance of EIS. Participants noted that formal agreements, such as MoUs between ministries, are critical to ensuring the regular provision of high-quality data. Integrating the EIS into formal government structures and processes can enhance its visibility, legitimacy, and operational effectiveness. Institutional sustainability can be strengthened through the formalization of roles and responsibilities. Legal frameworks, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and inter-ministerial memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were identified as key instruments to secure long-term engagement, clarify institutional mandates, and ensure that the EIS is maintained as a core government function. Additionally, linking the EIS to broader planning instruments, such as environmental sector investment plans, can facilitate resource mobilization and institutional anchoring. The use of appropriate communication channels and interactive interfaces was also highlighted to ensure that information reaches the intended audiences and remains relevant for decision-making.
240. Participants in the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session also noted that branding the EIS as a time-bound "project" may unintentionally weaken its institutional sustainability. To address this, they recommended reframing the

project's tools and mechanisms as permanent national functions, embedded within government structures and supported by domestic systems. This shift in perception—from a donor-funded initiative to a nationally owned platform—is essential to foster long-term commitment, institutional integration, and continuity beyond the project cycle.

241. It is important to note that the project's sustainability strategy included an institutional component that emphasized actions to promote continuous learning and support, with the aim of institutionalizing the critical knowledge and expertise necessary to ensure the system's continuity after handover.
242. In conclusion, the sustainability of project outcomes was highly dependent on institutional support. A robust mechanism was in place to support the institutionalization of project outcomes. However, ensuring the project's sustainability requires addressing persistent barriers related with limited institutional incentives for continued system use, dependence on external technical support, and the need for stronger integration of the EIS into national planning and reporting workflows. The capacity of relevant individuals was enhanced, and they were likely to remain in positions where they could sustain these outcomes. Additionally, an exit strategy with an institutional component was developed to guide the transition and ensure the continuation of project benefits.

Rating for Institutional Sustainability: Moderately Likely

Rating for Sustainability (Likelihood):	Moderately Likely
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I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Preparation and Readiness

243. The inception and mobilization phase of the project spanned from March 2018 (CCCCD project approval) to June 2018 (first disbursement). During this period, the ICA between UNEP EWAD and UNEP WAO was operationalized. This agreement, signed in May 2018, established the terms and conditions for project execution.
244. No significant measures were identified to strengthen the project design, address known weaknesses, or adapt to changes that occurred between the approval, fund disbursement, and mobilization phases. PCR recommendations were addressed during the design stage.
245. Evidence suggests that a comprehensive inception meeting was convened in October 2018 with the participation of government representatives and UNEP WAO⁹². According to the mission report, this meeting allowed project leaders, management, and senior government officials to assess risks, identify design weaknesses, explore cooperation opportunities, and align strategic project objectives.
246. However, political instability and delayed national elections led to a substantial delay in formalizing the PCA between UNEP and the Iraqi MoE, which was ultimately signed in May 2019, nearly a year later. Although the inception meeting had the potential to establish a strong foundation for implementation, project activities in the country only commenced following the PCA's signature. It

⁹² UNEP. (2018) Mission Report. Inception workshop of the GEF Iraq project and GCF board meeting. Amman, Jordan, and Manama, Bahrain, 15-19 October 2018.

is reasonable to assert that legal agreements were signed in a timely manner, considering the unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. Nonetheless, these delays hindered a seamless transition into implementation, although they were eventually resolved.

247. An annual costed work plan was developed with sufficient detail, consistent with the financial management provisions described in Section E (Financial Management) of this report.
248. Several spreadsheets included in the project documentation were identified as part of a detailed procurement plan. This plan outlined the procedures for acquiring goods, services, or works required for project implementation, thereby ensuring timely, efficient, and cost-effective procurement aligned with budgetary and policy frameworks.
249. The project included a UNEP Environmental, Social, and Economic Review Note (ESERN), which served as an Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) assessment (Annex M of the GEF6 Request for Project Approval). Stakeholder consultations were conducted during project design through a tailored questionnaire and a workshop held in Amman, Jordan. However, there is no direct evidence indicating stakeholder participation specifically in the ESS assessment process.
250. The project document presented a comprehensive and relevant stakeholder analysis. No evidence was found of its subsequent review or update. The primary stakeholders identified were government ministries and agencies responsible for key sectoral policies and legislation. The analysis confirmed partners' capacities and clearly defined their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in Sections A.3, A.6, and Annex O of the GEF-6 Request for Project Approval.
251. Governance arrangements were generally adequate. A Steering Committee was established with representation from implementing and executing agencies MoE, MoP, and line ministries (Annex H of the GEF6 Request for Project Approval). However, the Steering Committee convened only three times during the project's lifespan. The initial meeting, held in July 2021, focused on presenting the project's objectives, value chain, working groups, progress updates, challenges, and necessary support for successful implementation.
252. The period between project approval and the initial disbursement of funds was six months or less, indicating an efficient early-stage timeline. Staffing mobilization was conducted promptly, and the project team demonstrated effective management of personnel transitions to minimize disruptions to project execution.
253. In conclusion, the period between project approval and the first disbursement (less than 6 months) was marked by effective preparatory actions and institutional arrangements that laid a good foundation for implementation, despite delays motivated by political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. Key processes—including the inception meeting, development of a costed annual workplan, preparation of a compliant procurement plan, and the establishment of a well-represented Steering Committee—were carried out. The project also ensured timely legal agreements, Environmental and Social Safeguards assessment, stakeholder analysis, confirmation of partner capacities, and appropriate governance structures. Staffing mobilization occurred without delay, and all relevant recommendations from the PRC, as well as contextual changes, were addressed in a timely and good-quality manner.

Rating for Preparation and Readiness: Satisfactory

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

254. In general, project management and supervision (UNEP Implementing Agency; Executing Agency) demonstrated overall effectiveness in guiding the project towards achieving its planned outcomes, managing team structures, fostering productive partner relationships, and ensuring adaptability to changing external and strategic contexts.
255. The Steering Committee played an important role in providing oversight and strategic guidance throughout the project. However, it is noteworthy that only three PSC meetings were convened since the project's inception. These meetings took place virtually in July 2020 and July 2021, and in person in April 2024 in Jordan. Although the official minutes from the July 2020 meeting were not made available, the MTR noted that the agenda indicated that the PSC was consulted on key issues, including proposed data indicator categories for the EIS, implementation budgets, procurement approaches, and subsequent steps. The agendas of the other two meetings confirm that relevant topics were discussed, and key decisions were reached.
256. The MTR highlighted that key discussions were held regarding the use of cloud versus hardware servers, the EIS system location, and data collection challenges. The PSC identified concrete measures to address these issues, including scheduling a follow-up technical meeting to decide on the server solution and allocating office space for the project. Additionally, the PSC recommended collaborating with UNDP to support the onboarding of a local partner and finalize the equipment procurement process.
257. Implementation teams were managed very well, with a constructive and effective working relationship between the project manager and project partners. Staff turnover at UNEP was managed with minimal disruption due to systematic and thorough handover processes supported by documentation and information exchange. Moreover, all staff demonstrated the necessary capacity to meet project requirements and were strategically located to ensure efficient implementation.
258. The roles and responsibilities of the implementing and executing partners were clearly defined and generally well understood (UNEP EWAD, UNEP WAO, and Iraq MoE). UNEP WAO, as the executing agency, was responsible for overall coordination and management of the project, including monitoring progress against the approved work plan and administering the activity budget. MoE, in its capacity as executing partner, was tasked with the delivery of project outputs and the mobilization of necessary operational resources. UNEP WAO maintained accountability to UNEP EWAD for the effective and timely achievement of project results, while UNEP EWAD ensured compliance with GEF procedural and reporting requirements and provided strategic oversight of implementation. Focal points from UNEP EWAD and UNEP WAO maintained regular engagement with MoE, providing adaptive, problem-solving support to address operational risks, emerging challenges, and performance bottlenecks. This collaborative arrangement fostered coherence across institutions and enabled agile response mechanisms critical for effective project delivery in a dynamic implementation context.
259. Communication and collaboration among the project team, TM, PM, colleagues, and implementing partners were generally regular, to the extent possible given the context, and were constructive in fostering alignment on project objectives and activities. Adaptive management was a defining feature of the project's implementation approach, as reflected in the timely and effective responses to operational challenges, financial constraints, and external disruptions, notably the COVID-19 pandemic. The project management team

exhibited good prioritization and strategic reallocation of resources to sustain implementation progress while ensuring accountability and compliance with institutional requirements. In general, the team demonstrated agility in responding to pandemic-related disruptions and political instability, which affected field operations, delayed planned engagements, and required modifications to the implementation strategy. Using virtual meetings and remote capacity development modalities, the project partially mitigated delays and maintained implementation momentum. Although the overall implementation timeline experienced some adjustments due to these external factors, such delays did not significantly compromise the achievement of the project's objectives.

260. Interview feedback highlighted several strengths in project management and supervision, including the dedication and active involvement of the management teams, effective communication, and consistent technical support:

- i. Collaboration among UNEP, Cima Research Foundation, eSITE, and other technical partners was described as well-coordinated, fast, and efficient, with regular meetings ensuring alignment and smooth implementation of activities. UNEP played a key role in facilitating negotiations, exchanges, and problem-solving among local and international stakeholders. While its leadership was essential, one interviewee noted that it also created some distance between the international and local partners. Still, UNEP's support – including several in-person missions to Baghdad – was critical to the project's success.
- ii. The teams also demonstrated resilience and adaptability in responding to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, although Iraq's reliance on paper-based systems made remote work particularly inefficient, especially within government institutions.
- iii. Additionally, the lack of integration between ministries and government agencies, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited technological infrastructure were cited as barriers. These factors negatively affected data collection and updates, as well as the overall implementation and performance of the EIS, ultimately constraining its expected impact. This evidence emphasized the need for stronger inter-institutional coordination, greater stakeholder engagement, and more strategic planning to overcome these systemic challenges.

261. Overall, evidence suggests that the PSC was established and functioned effectively. Implementation teams were well-managed, and the working relationship between the PM/TM and project partners was largely constructive and effective. While there was some staff turnover, the handover processes were generally well-structured, supported by good documentation, which helped maintain continuity. Most project staff, including key personnel, possessed capacities aligned with project requirements and were appropriately located to support efficient implementation. Regular and constructive communication took place between the project team, PM/TM, and UNEP colleagues, contributing to coordinated execution. UNEP and UNEP WAO demonstrated strong leadership in driving progress toward planned outcomes. Adaptive management practices were evident, although the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic delays occasionally slowed response times to implementation challenges and contextual changes. Management responses to financial shortfalls were adequate, showing clear prioritization and reallocation of funds to meet implementation needs and accountability standards. The frequency and relevance of advice provided by the PM/TM were appropriate and responsive to emerging risks and challenges.

Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision: Satisfactory

Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

262. The effectiveness of stakeholder participation and cooperation in the project was mixed, reflecting both strengths and areas for improvement. Stakeholder engagement encompassed a broad spectrum of participants (all those who are affected by or could affect this project), including project partners, duty bearers, target users of outputs, and external collaborators. Implementation began and was undertaken with a strong analysis of stakeholder groups. The project's governance and management structure was clearly defined, with roles and responsibilities articulated in key documents such as Section A.6, Annex H, and Annex O of the Project Approval Request. The Project Steering Committee, comprising representatives from key ministries, UNEP EWAD, and UNEP WAO, provided oversight and monitored execution. External partners' roles were well-aligned with their capacities, and a formal stakeholder analysis ensured the inclusion of relevant actors across government, private sector, civil society, and academia at national and subnational levels.
263. The Project Team made strong efforts to promote stakeholder ownership of the process and outcomes, with mixed effectiveness. Additionally, the team provided good support for collaboration, particularly through sharing plans, pooling resources, and exchanging expertise. Communication with stakeholders was mostly effective, thanks to the promotion of PSC meetings, several stakeholder consultations, and capacity-building workshops. However, it was occasionally irregular or poorly timed due to external factors such as political instability.
264. The Steering Committee, composed of key stakeholders, was a focal point for participation. A total of three Steering Committee meetings were identified and analyzed. Attendance and engagement at Steering Committee meetings were increasing over the time, reflecting sustained interest. Attendance records indicate the presence of 14 and 22 participants, respectively, in the last two Steering Committee meetings (The attendance list for the first meeting was not identified.) These meetings primarily served as forums for information exchange and coordination, strategic steering and design refinement.
265. In addition to formal meetings, informal stakeholder discussions were actively encouraged and supported. Between May 2021 and May 2024, the project facilitated over 10 initiatives, including meetings, discussions, virtual and in-person consultations, and capacity-building workshops, where stakeholders had the opportunity to share their perspectives, collaborate on solutions, and strengthen their capacities. However, it is important to highlight that a significant portion of capacity building and stakeholder engagement had to be conducted online, which posed a major challenge in ensuring effective participation. The MTR noted that this challenge was further exacerbated by frequent power outages and low internet connectivity, which disrupted the flow of training sessions.
266. Linkages to poverty alleviation and economic livelihoods were only moderately addressed in the project. While the project document briefly acknowledged human rights concerns, it lacked a thorough and formal analysis. There was no clear mechanism to assess or mitigate potential negative impacts on the sustainability of livelihoods, equity of opportunities, or the protection of human rights for populations directly or indirectly affected by the project. Although the SDGs were integrated into the project's outcomes, this was primarily through the lens of public governance, with limited direct emphasis on natural systems or human rights.

267. Feedback from stakeholders indicates that there were consistent and well-structured efforts to promote stakeholder participation and cooperation:
- i. Collaboration among international and local partners—including UNEP, Cima Foundation, and eSITE—was effective, well-coordinated, and free of conflict. Each stakeholder clearly understood their roles, contributing to the project’s timely and successful delivery.
 - ii. The national government, particularly the MoE, showed strong engagement and a clear sense of ownership over the project. The ministry had prior experience with GEF-funded initiatives, which facilitated their understanding of project processes and responsibilities. Both the leadership and key staff were actively involved, despite facing structural and institutional capacity limitations. To support implementation, the project was organized around working groups, which collaborated closely to ensure integration and coherence across activities. Toward the end of the project, the MoE made efforts to transfer the platform’s oversight to the Council of Ministers. As a result, the platform will continue to operate under the Council’s supervision for an additional three years. After this period, new funding will be required to ensure its continued operation. The ministry has expressed its willingness to contribute to future financing efforts, reinforcing its commitment to the platform’s sustainability.
 - iii. The project fostered ownership through meetings, training sessions, and post-implementation follow-up, aiming to ensure the system’s continued use and maintenance. Formal engagement strategies were implemented, such as PSC meetings, bilateral and inter-ministerial consultations, a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, and involvement of stakeholders from multiple ministries (environment, planning, and statistics) through consultations and coordination meetings. In-person meetings were highlighted as key moments for engagement, during which important issues were raised, such as the acquisition and use of official data, brought forward by representatives from various local government bodies.
268. Despite these efforts, challenges remained in achieving full institutional integration and long-term commitment, largely due to Iraq’s complex political and institutional context. A lack of interdepartmental coordination within the MoE, particularly with departments responsible for providing environmental data, was identified as a key obstacle to full ownership and sustained system use.
269. In conclusion, the project was initiated with a solid stakeholder analysis and demonstrated consistent efforts to engage stakeholders throughout its implementation. While stakeholder ownership was promoted through discussions, training sessions, and meetings, its effectiveness varied because political and institutional context. Communication and consultation were generally good, though at times irregular, poorly timed, and hindered by the reliance on online platforms. The project fostered meaningful collaboration among stakeholder groups by encouraging shared planning, resource pooling, and knowledge exchange. Finally, linkages to poverty alleviation and economic livelihoods were only moderately addressed, as no direct mechanisms were in place to assess and mitigate potential negative impacts on the sustainability of livelihoods, equity of opportunities, and the protection of human rights for affected populations.

Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation: Moderately Satisfactory

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

270. The project demonstrated a mixed performance in addressing inequalities, vulnerabilities, and the role of disadvantaged groups in environmental management. While there is evidence that human rights and gender considerations were incorporated into project implementation, interpretation of results, and expenditure, certain limitations constrained the overall impact.
271. The project design incorporated baseline commitments related to gender, such as promoting balanced representation in events and discussions on the gender-biodiversity nexus. However, it fell short of embedding gender perspectives in a comprehensive or transformative way:
- i. The project's stakeholder analysis (Annex O) provided a general overview of key actors but failed to specifically identify gender-based or minority groups as relevant stakeholders, thereby limiting opportunities for targeted inclusion.
 - ii. Sustainable development was integrated through alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Human rights considerations were addressed in Section A.4 of the Project Approval Request and further supported by the Environmental, Social, and Economic Sustainability (ESES) Principles and Safeguard Checklist (Annex M). While no gender analysis was undertaken during the project preparation phase, the document indicated the intention to apply a gender-responsive results framework with sex-disaggregated indicators and to promote gender-sensitive environmental indicators. Consultative and decision-making arrangements were intended to reflect gender perspectives in the implementation of the Rio Conventions.
 - iii. The project document did not assign a gender marker score, and the MTR noted the absence of a gender action plan, which was not required at the time of project formulation.
272. The commitments made during project design were partially realized during implementation. Regarding project implementation, interpretation of results, and project expenditure, gender-related inequalities were addressed through some activities:
- i. Under Activity 1.1.1, the project assessed data gaps and potential overlaps, while also identifying environmental data needs and priorities, including those related to gender.
 - ii. Under Activity 2.1.1, the project analysed environmental indicators and identified opportunities to harmonize, update, and enhance baseline data and targets aligned with MEAs and SDG requirements. Gender-disaggregated indicators were considered in the Indicator Report in support of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).
 - iii. The 2023 Project Implementation Report (PIR) stated that recent workshops averaged more than 50% female participation (female: 43; male: 42). However, this figure was not substantiated by monitoring data or output indicators, indicating a gap in the project's M&E system. The MTR recommended developing and applying a structured M&E tool to capture such data. No evidence was found in subsequent reports to confirm follow-up on this recommendation, and most workshop reports lacked gender-disaggregated participant lists.

- iv. According to the 2024 PIR, greater emphasis was placed on promoting female participation during the project closure phase. This included intentional prioritization of female involvement in PSC meetings, workshops, and training sessions. PSC meeting minutes from April 2024 confirmed that women's participation in that session reached 50%. While this progress in female engagement is notable, no indicators were collected to strengthen the monitoring of gender balance and ensure transparency in participation and representation across all levels of project implementation (e.g., number of full-time project staff and number of PSC members, both by gender).
273. Interview feedback highlighted that:
- i. Project reports consistently included gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries.
 - ii. While most meeting participants were men, a woman held a key leadership role in project implementation within the Government of Iraq. Specifically, the Director General of the Planning and Monitoring Department, a PhD holder, played a central role in overseeing and guiding the project. Her leadership contributed to the project's strategic direction and reinforced the commitment to gender-responsive governance.
 - iii. Although the project did not have a formal gender action plan, as it was not a requirement, its activities were designed with a gender-sensitive approach and with stakeholder engagement in mind.
 - iv. Additionally, given the project's focus on environmental data, the content was inherently neutral – not differentiated by gender, race, age, or education. While applying a human rights or gender lens to raw environmental data can be challenging, the project actively promoted inclusive participation throughout its implementation.
274. Despite limitations, the project contributed meaningfully to gender mainstreaming and awareness-raising at the national level. Its efforts to incorporate gender considerations into environmental policy and institutional frameworks, while not exhaustive, reflect a positive step toward inclusivity. Nevertheless, addressing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities requires a more systematic and comprehensive approach. Future initiatives should prioritize the identification and engagement of disadvantaged groups, strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms for gender and inclusion, and embed human rights and equity considerations throughout both design and implementation phases. This would enhance the overall impact and inclusiveness of such projects, leveraging the lessons learned from this intervention.

Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality: Satisfactory

Environmental and Social Safeguards

275. The project demonstrated a thoughtful approach to risk management in its design and implementation phases, though there were areas where improvements could have been made to align more closely with UNEP's safeguarding standards and environmental goals.
276. Regarding project design, the project document includes a risk analysis and a mitigation measures table (Section A.5). While the identified risks and measures are relevant, there could have been further consideration of the national context to strengthen the risk mitigation strategy. Annex M includes a completed Safeguards Checklist (UNEP ESERN - Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note),

indicating that the project is categorized as low risk, with no activities likely to produce environmental or social impacts. Given the project's focus on supporting environmental and social outcomes, it reasonably demonstrates alignment with environmental and social safeguards, particularly at the policy development level. However, the lack of clarity around what constituted "significant" impacts raises questions, especially given that cumulative environmental impacts, such as carbon emissions from travel, were not explicitly addressed. The project also incorporates activities to optimize resource use. To strengthen this approach, it would be helpful to clearly outline specific measures for minimizing environmental impacts, especially those related to UNEP partner activities.

277. During project implementation, the management demonstrated adaptability and a commitment to minimizing environmental impacts, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. The shift to an online working modality for meetings and capacity-building workshops not only kept the project on track but also reduced the carbon footprint associated with air travel, a significant contributor to emissions in projects of this nature. These measures highlighted the potential for adaptive management to align project activities with broader environmental sustainability goals.
278. It is also worth noting that UNEP replaced the Environmental, Social, and Economic Review Note (ESERN) in 2019 with the Safeguard Risk Identification Form (SRIF) to enhance project design. While the SRIF does not apply to the project in question, as it was developed in 2017, the SRIF improves upon the ESERN by incorporating more detailed standards related to carbon footprint. For example, Section 3, Safeguard Standard 2 on "Climate Change and Disaster Risks," explicitly asks whether a project increases greenhouse gas emissions, black carbon emissions, or other drivers of climate change. However, a simple "yes" or "no" response is insufficient for effectively operationalizing UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework. It emphasized the need for comprehensive and quantified assessments. The absence of quantified carbon emission estimates or a framework to evaluate the environmental footprint of project-supported activities, such as travel, suggests an area for improvement. Future projects provide an opportunity to integrate quantifiable data on carbon emissions into risk assessments and consider applying emission caps at the project level. These measures would strengthen UNEP's leadership in achieving net-zero emissions and promoting environmental responsibility within the UN system.
279. The 2024 PIR includes a comprehensive project management risk table and a risk log (Section 4), which documents the systematic risk monitoring conducted throughout project implementation. The risk log appropriately analyzes risks identified at CEO endorsement, including those flagged during safeguards screening, as well as those identified in previous and current PIRs and the MTR.
280. Finally, this review acknowledges that the project did not present any major environmental or social risks, given its focus on capacity-building and the absence of activities likely to pollute or degrade the environment, or to physically disrupt ecosystems, wildlife, or other life forms. Nonetheless, environmental and social considerations remained relevant throughout implementation. Greater attention could have been given to potential indirect risks associated with the use and application of tools and information generated by the project, particularly in relation to the potential misuse or misinterpretation of data that could inadvertently support unsustainable action.
281. Overall, safeguarding considerations were addressed to a good level of quality and consistency in areas such as management, risk reviews, monitoring,

response to issues, and reporting. Environmental and social impacts, especially on vulnerable groups, were considered to a good extent. UNEP and its partners made frequent efforts to minimize the project's environmental footprint.

Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards: Satisfactory

Country Ownership and Driven-ness

282. The engagement of government and public sector agencies in the project was variable, impacting the forward momentum of the intended project results, particularly in terms of moving from outputs to outcomes and from outcomes to intermediate states. While there were several positive efforts, there were some weaknesses in country ownership, which affected the long-term sustainability and impact of the project.
283. One notable positive aspect was the stakeholders' representation and participation in the Project Steering Committee, promoting strategic guidance for the project delivery and increasing the potential for embedding changes in national institutions. The Steering Committee had representation from MoE, UNEP EWAD, UNEP WAO, and sectors beyond the MoE, such as MoP, CSO, or other relevant ministries.
284. The project effectively fostered national ownership by actively engaging government representatives in key discussions and decision-making processes. This was achieved through inclusive consultation mechanisms, capacity-building workshops, and targeted training activities that supported institutional strengthening and policy alignment⁹³.
285. These efforts enabled government ministries and public sector agencies to assume a leadership role in promoting transformative change, validating project outcomes, and initiating complementary activities essential to sustaining project momentum. For instance, government representatives played an active role in training activities related to the EIS, thereby facilitating its integration into national decision-making processes. Moreover, the project-supported training-of-trainers initiatives contributed to institutional capacity-building within MoE, further reinforcing national ownership of the project's results.
286. However, despite these efforts, the project encountered limitations in fostering comprehensive country ownership. This was primarily due to the necessity of conducting several key initiatives virtually in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. These conditions constrained opportunities for sustained in-person engagement and cross-sectoral collaboration.
287. The MTR observed that, based on the PIRs and the 2021 PSC meeting minutes, all project stakeholders actively engaged in the implementation process. A notable example of this collaborative engagement is the exit strategy proposed by the Iraqi government to facilitate the migration of the EIS to a local server. The

⁹³ Key events include: meeting with the statistics group at the MoP/CSO office in May 2021; meeting with the indicator group at the MoE office in May 2021; virtual consultation with the statistics group in June 2021; virtual consultation with the head of the indicator group in June 2021; consultation workshop with CIMA Research Foundation, the statistics group (MoP/CSO), and the indicators group (MoE) in July 2021; Capacity Building Workshop on Data Analysis and GIS Information Management. UN House, Beirut Lebanon. September 27th, 2022 – September 29th, 2022; final stakeholder discussion during stakeholder meeting in Beirut in September 2022; Workshop Report Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut (Lebanon) 23-25 May 2023. Workshop on Data collection and validation, MEAs, and SoER in Erbil, Iraq in May 2023; Workshop on Integration of Environmental Management into Legislative, Planning, and Monitoring Processes in Iraq. ESCWA, UN House, Raid El Solh, Beirut, Lebanon. 11-13 September 2023; and Advanced technical workshop for the MoE IT team in Savona, Italy, in May 2024.

government committed to hosting the EIS within the Iraqi National Data Centre, the central repository for managing national data and state resources. Under this arrangement, the MoE would assume primary responsibility for the implementation and long-term sustainability of the EIS, while the MoP would act as a key partner, tasked with collecting and validating data from multiple sectors and official sources.

288. Interview feedback suggested that the project put relevant effort into fostering a strong commitment to national ownership, with a clear focus on technical capacity-building, institutional autonomy, and government-led decision-making. Most capacity-building efforts centered on transferring technical knowledge from the Cima Foundation to the MoE's project team, through hands-on training sessions, workshops, and comprehensive documentation in Arabic. Four IT specialists from MoE were trained directly in Italy, receiving detailed guidance on system reinstallation and data migration. MoE was also provided with the system's open-source code, enabling its IT team to independently update and maintain the platform. A key decision was the shift from external cloud hosting to the Iraqi National Data Centre, eliminating recurring costs and ensuring sustainable, long-term hosting through a government-to-government arrangement.
289. The project also benefited significantly from having a national project manager from Iraq. His familiarity with the local context and institutional landscape helped build trust with government counterparts and facilitated smoother coordination during the early stages of implementation. Initially contracted as a national officer, he later transitioned to UNEP's WAO. Although his relocation reduced UNEP's physical presence in the country, his ongoing involvement ensured continuity and maintained strong institutional relationships. This experience highlights the value of having locally rooted leadership and suggests that maintaining at least one UNEP officer in-country can further strengthen trust, responsiveness, and national ownership of project outcomes.
290. Evidence gathered during the UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted the importance of national ownership and physical presence in Iraq. It emphasized the need for the Ministry to assume ownership of the project from an early stage, as well as the importance of having the Project Manager and the Project Management Unit (PMU) physically present in the country to support implementation and strengthen institutional engagement.
291. Additional feedback revealed a clear need for improved management and work organization among the groups involved in the project. Respondents emphasized that all teams—particularly those responsible for indicators and quality control—require strengthening to function more effectively. There is also a recognized gap in knowledge regarding the use of performance indicators, which are essential not only for assessing progress following the implementation of the project and the EIS platform, but also for understanding current pollution levels. These insights point to the importance of additional capacity-building efforts and actions to promote better coordination, to enhance the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative.
292. Evidence indicates that key government ministries and public sector agencies played a leadership role in advancing the project from outputs toward outcomes. Their contributions included providing strategic guidance for project delivery, advocating for systemic change to support higher-level results, formally endorsing project outputs, and offering in-kind support, all of which were instrumental in sustaining project momentum and fostering national ownership.

Rating for Country Ownership and Driven-ness: Satisfactory

Communication and Public Awareness

293. The project concept presented on the GEF6 Request for Approval emphasizes knowledge management, aiming to establish a coordinated environmental knowledge and information management system and to produce a range of knowledge products, including reports, brochures, infographics, GIS maps, and awareness materials (Section A.8). Section A.6 outlines the knowledge base informing the project design, incorporating experiences from other countries and lessons learned from previous GEF projects.
294. However, the communication plan or strategy presented in the project document is limited. While the stakeholder analysis (Annex O) provides a clear overview of roles, responsibilities, and approaches for engaging stakeholders—and offers a strong foundation for developing a learning, communication, and outreach plan—the project document would have benefited from a more detailed and inclusive communication strategy, particularly to guide engagement with minority and gender groups.
295. The project document identifies the Terminal Evaluation (TE) as the primary mechanism for promoting learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing among stakeholders and executing partners. Nonetheless, additional mechanisms such as workshops, policy briefs, or online platforms could have been explicitly planned to strengthen the dissemination of results and lessons learned.
296. During implementation, the project made substantial efforts to communicate and share experiences with partners and stakeholders through PSC meetings, consultation mechanisms, capacity-building workshops, and targeted training activities. Key audiences were generally well-informed about the project's core messages. Communication activities were well-targeted, frequent, and responsive to feedback, which helped foster collaboration and facilitate knowledge dissemination.
297. These efforts were adequately funded. However, they were not systematically monitored for impact. The project's monitoring and reporting system focused primarily on process indicators, such as timely delivery of reports, limiting the ability to evaluate progress toward broader outcomes like improvements in the country's environmental knowledge system, institutional coordination, or technical capacities (see Monitoring and Reporting Section).
298. Throughout the project, significant experience-sharing took place. The MTR highlighted that most capacity-building efforts to date focused on the transfer of knowledge and skills from CIMA Research Foundation to the MoE project team. Through ongoing training sessions, workshops, hands-on guidance, and proper documentation of activities, MoE project team members acquired the skills needed to effectively manage the EIS. The goal was to develop a self-sufficient team capable of independently handling EIS operations and future upgrades.
299. Communication activities slowed during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of political instability, which impacted the consistency and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.
300. Communication and public awareness efforts were moderately effective in generating results beyond immediate outputs. Capacity-building activities focused primarily on technical training for the use and maintenance of the EIS, with few workshops or initiatives dedicated to the dissemination and communication of project results to all relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the broader community and civil society were not fully engaged, in part due to the lack of a comprehensive communication strategy that addressed the needs of marginalized and gender

groups. Limited feedback mechanisms also restricted the project's ability to assess the effectiveness of its communication, particularly among underrepresented populations. The absence of differentiated communication strategies to meet the specific needs of these groups resulted in gaps in outreach and inclusion. Only one workshop was identified as having conducted a feedback survey to evaluate the results of the initiative⁹⁴.

301. The MTR emphasized the need for workshops that would further enhance project visibility and raise public awareness, helping ensure that additional stakeholders and potential partners are motivated to contribute data to populate the EIS. Consequently, the MTR recommended that more communication and public awareness activities be conducted during the remainder of the project implementation to support its long-term sustainability.
302. In general, stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the project's communication efforts. Feedback indicates that, although the project's primary focus was on technical capacity-building, it incorporated several targeted initiatives to promote communication and public awareness. While fewer workshops were dedicated specifically to outreach, awareness materials—such as posters in Arabic—were developed for schools to engage younger audiences and raise environmental awareness. The project's exit meeting served as a public awareness event, and all project results were published on the Iraqi Ministry of Environment's official news website, ensuring transparency and broad accessibility. Although limited in scope, these actions contributed meaningfully to stakeholder understanding and enhanced the project's visibility at the national level.
303. Interview responses further emphasized that the platform's open access—enabling students, researchers, and the general public to explore shared information—reinforces its inclusive nature and its potential to educate and empower, while also highlighting that public awareness is a cornerstone of effective environmental work.
304. It is important to note that the EIS is actively being used; however, it continues to face challenges related to its maintenance and long-term sustainability. The main limitations include the lack of regularly updated data, the need for technical improvements, and stronger integration with national workflows. Although the system was successfully implemented from a technical standpoint, inconsistent data input from government sources may limit its full functionality. These challenges can affect the platform's effectiveness as a tool for continuous environmental monitoring and evidence-based decision-making.
305. Overall, evidence indicates that some key audiences driving the desired change were aware of the project's main messages. Communication activities were well-targeted, frequent, interactive, and responsive to feedback, but with no regular monitoring to assess impact. The efforts were adequately budgeted and partially effective in driving change beyond outputs. Substantial experience sharing took place among project partners and stakeholders. Finally, a communication plan/strategy was developed and implemented, though it was somewhat limited in scope. Future efforts should prioritize inclusive communication strategies and strengthen the institutional commitment to the EIS to ensure their continued relevance and impact.

Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: Moderately satisfactory

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance: Satisfactory

⁹⁴ Iraq EIS System Training Workshop. Radisson Blu Martinez Hotel, Beirut (Lebanon). 23-25 May 2023.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions⁹⁵

306. The GEF-funded CCCD project, “Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of MEAs for Iraq,” made significant strides in strengthening Iraq’s environmental governance, despite operating in a fragile and complex institutional environment. One of its most notable achievements was the development and launch of Iraq’s first fully integrated EIS, now operational within the MoE. This system is supported by monitoring and data collection mechanisms, a comprehensive training program, and a regulatory framework—including SOPs, a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, operational guidelines, and a sustainability strategy. Available in both English and Arabic, the EIS represents a major technical and institutional milestone for Iraq (paras. 119, 120, 143.i, 155, and 158).
307. The project also fostered inter-institutional coordination by uniting various government entities under a shared MEA implementation framework. This collaboration helped identify national environmental priorities and develop performance indicators aligned with MEA obligations and the SDGs. Capacity-building efforts were extensive and well-received, with training sessions and an international exposure visit enhancing technical skills and institutional confidence (paras. 110, 124, 125.i, 126, 235, 236.i, 288). The EIS has already proven useful in supporting national assessments and informing policy decisions (para. 157.i).
308. However, several challenges limited the project’s overall effectiveness and sustainability. Political instability and administrative bottlenecks disrupted project continuity, delayed disbursements, and limited in-country engagement, with all PSC meetings held outside Iraq (paras. 95, 96, 97, 176, and 246). Although the EIS is technically operational and has already been used in practices such as the preparation of environmental reports, its full and sustainable adoption by national institutions still faces technical, organizational, and institutional engagement challenges. The EIS became fully operational only near the project’s end, reducing its utility for MEA reporting during implementation (para. 157). Delays stemmed from technical complexities, institutional fragmentation, and the time needed to define indicators and clarify roles (paras. 102 and 103).
309. The broader data ecosystem posed additional challenges, including outdated information, bureaucratic delays, platform’s technical constraints, and limited interoperability between ministries. Technical and infrastructure issues such as cybersecurity risks, software compatibility, and weak IT infrastructure further complicated implementation (paras. 30, 147.ii, 160, and 260iii). There is also a recognized need for technical enhancements to the EIS — including improvements in data visualization, system management tools, and WebGIS usability — as well as improved workflow coordination across ministries to ensure consistent and effective use of the system. Although the IT team was trained to manage the system, they were not responsible for data collection, and the environmental monitoring department did not consistently provide updated data (paras. 157). This underscores the need for stronger data governance, improved institutional coordination, and greater alignment of the EIS with ministerial mandates to ensure political buy-in and long-term engagement (paras. 159iv, 218, 238ii and 239).

⁹⁵ The main conclusions presented are based on the assessment, guided by two strategic questions developed collaboratively with the project manager and team during the data analysis phase. These questions were formulated in response to the absence of predefined evaluation questions in the Terms of Reference (ToR) and were designed to reflect UNEP’s interests and align with the project’s expected contributions.

310. In response to the first strategic question—**what approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the EIS**⁹⁶— The project demonstrated that technical solutions alone are insufficient. Continued investment in digital infrastructure and legal frameworks is essential. Sustainability requires robust data governance, formal data-sharing agreements, cross-sectoral leadership, and integration of the EIS into national institutional structures (paras. 218, 237, and 239). National ownership was best fostered through inclusive system design, early stakeholder engagement, and the appointment of a national project coordinator (para. 110). Arabic-language training materials, the open-source nature of the system, and a training-of-trainers model helped build local capacity and autonomy (paras. 124, 218, 236.iii, and 288). Involving national institutions in validating outputs reinforced institutional relevance and legitimacy (para. 110.ii).
311. However, a more centralized yet flexible EIS should have been developed with multi-sectoral involvement to identify core datasets and data producers. The system needed to ensure data consistency, address reporting gaps, involve focal points in management, and operate within a legal framework aligned with MEA obligations. Standardized reporting formats and internal coordination mechanisms tailored to national needs would have further enhanced its impact (para. 112). Formalizing data-sharing agreements, ensuring regular updates from key departments, and involving data collectors early on are high-potential actions for strengthening institutionalization and sustainability (paras. 112, 216, and 239). Additionally, implementing structured, context-specific capacity-building strategies—such as staff retention and succession planning, recurring locally tailored training programs, and encouraging the setup of multi-stakeholder committees—would help maintain long-term engagement and institutional support for the EIS (para. 237). Finally, enhancing the EIS with better data visualization, backend improvements, WebGIS functionality, and AI integration is essential to make it more accessible, user-friendly, and capable of supporting predictive environmental analysis and early warning systems (paras. 157ii, 226, and 238i).
312. In response to the second strategic question—**how future projects can strengthen adaptive management in fragile or complex contexts**⁹⁷— The project highlighted the importance of flexible planning, hybrid engagement models, and in-country presence. The team adapted to political instability, administrative delays, and the COVID-19 pandemic by adjusting timelines, shifting to virtual platforms, and maintaining stakeholder communication (paras. 102, 104, 109, 177, and 178). However, more realistic timelines, early risk assessments, and context-sensitive planning during the design phase could have reduced the need for extensions and improved responsiveness (paras. 92, 103, 160, 179, 180, and 181). While digital tools supported continuity, they could not replace in-person engagement in a context with limited digital infrastructure (paras. 101, 102, 176, 265, and 286). The presence of a national project manager in Iraq was crucial for maintaining trust and coordination, emphasizing the value of local leadership and UNEP’s physical presence (paras. 289 and 290). Additionally, a robust, inclusive, and context-specific communication strategy would strengthen stakeholder engagement and facilitate effective collaboration with partners (paras. 102v, 179, 260i, and 294).
313. The project also revealed the limitations of relying primarily on process-based indicators. Although the monitoring framework followed results-based management

⁹⁶ Refers to the Strategic Question: What approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the Environmental Information System (EIS), especially in challenging contexts?

⁹⁷ Refers to the Strategic Question: How can future projects strengthen adaptive management to respond more effectively to political, security, and institutional disruptions during implementation in fragile or complex contexts?

principles (paras. 184, 185, 186, 187, and 188), the absence of updated baseline data and limited use of monitoring information for adaptive management hindered the demonstration of long-term results (paras. 196, 197, 198, and 204). Future projects should include a clear ToC (para. 93), outcome-level indicators (paras. 189, 190, and 199), and mechanisms to institutionalize capacity-building (para. 285), and monitoring efforts aligned with long-term strategies (paras. 238iii and 291).

314. Finally, gender considerations, though partially integrated, were not fully embedded in the project's design or M&R systems. The lack of a gender action plan, gender-specific indicators, and targeted engagement with vulnerable groups limited the project's inclusiveness and transformative potential (paras. 87, 90, 147.iii, 179.i, 192, 201, 212, 271.i-iii, 272.iii-iv, and 273). Future initiatives should adopt a more systematic approach to gender mainstreaming, including early gender analysis, disaggregated data collection, and tailored communication strategies (para. 274).
315. In conclusion, the project delivered a technically sound and strategically relevant outcome by establishing the foundation for improved environmental governance in Iraq. However, sustaining and scaling these gains will require stronger institutional commitment, formalized governance mechanisms, and adaptive strategies that align technical tools with political and operational realities.

B. Summary of project findings and ratings

316. The overall assessment of the project was rated as Satisfactory, based on the 'weightings table for review criteria rating' following the Evaluation Office of UNEP guidelines. The project performed well in areas such as Strategic Relevance, Quality of Project Design, Effectiveness, Financial Management, Monitoring and Reporting, and Factors affecting performance. It received moderate ratings in Sustainability and Efficiency. The table below summarizes the ratings and key findings discussed in Chapter V.

UNEP Evaluation Office Validation of Performance Ratings:

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

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

- That what is being assessed is the contents of the report and the extent to which it makes a consistent and justifiable case for the performance ratings it records.
- That the consultant has, within the report, presented all the evidence that was made available to them.
- That the Review has been based on a robust Theory of Change, reconstructed where necessary, which reflects UNEP's definitions at all levels of results.
- That the project team and key stakeholders have already reviewed a draft version of the report and provided substantive comments and made factual corrections to the Review Consultant, who has responded to them. The Evaluation Office assumes, therefore, that it has received the Final (revised) version of the report.

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

Table 7: Summary of project findings and ratings⁹⁸

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Strategic Relevance		HS	The rating is validated.	HS
1. Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and strategic priorities	The project was fully aligned with UNEP's mandate and thematic priorities under MTS 2018–2021 and 2022–2025, as well as the corresponding PoWs for 2018–2019, 2020–2021, and 2022–2023. It contributed to key subprogrammes and expected accomplishments related to environmental governance, data transparency, and ecosystem management. The project supported UNEP's strategic priorities by enhancing national and regional reporting systems, promoting open access to environmental data, and strengthening institutional capacities for evidence-based policymaking. Although it did not explicitly reference the Bali Strategic Plan or South-South Cooperation, it indirectly supported their objectives through capacity building and regional knowledge exchange.	HS	The rating is validated.	HS
2. Alignment to Donor/Partner strategic priorities	The project was strongly aligned with GEF priorities, national development needs, and the SDGs by supporting MEA implementation and integrating environmental considerations into policy frameworks. It contributed to GEF's CCCD-1 and CCCD-2 by strengthening environmental monitoring systems and governance structures. Initially designed under GEF-6 to enhance MEA implementation capacity, it also met GEF-7 requirements by reporting on gender-disaggregated direct beneficiaries. Feedback confirmed alignment with donor expectations. Results were communicated through regular reporting and key events held in Kenya and Amman.	HS	The rating is validated.	HS
3. Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities	The project was well aligned with global, regional, and national priorities, including SDGs 13, 16, and 17, and Iraq's strategic frameworks such as NAPAs, NBSAPs, TNAs, MIAs, NESAP, INC, and NCSA. It also aligned with Strategic Priority 4 of Iraq's draft UNSDCF, which focuses on natural resource management and climate resilience. Stakeholder feedback confirmed its relevance to Iraq's environmental commitments under the UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC. While not explicitly stated, the project also supported the UN's "Leave No One Behind" principle by promoting inclusive and equitable environmental governance.	HS	The rating is validated.	HS

⁹⁸ Most criteria will be rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated, also on a six-point scale, from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU) and Nature of External Context is rated from Highly Favourable (HF) to Highly Unfavourable (HU).

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
4. Complementarity with relevant existing interventions/coherence	The project's design demonstrated moderate complementarity with other initiatives, avoiding duplication and building on previous UNEP and GEF-financed projects such as Iraq's NCSA and First NBSAP. It aligned with other GEF-financed ongoing efforts and considered regional experiences (Kuwait, UAE, and Kenya). MTR noted limited integration during implementation and missed opportunities for synergy with other initiatives. Nonetheless, national-level coordination was evident, particularly through early involvement of the CSO to ensure compatibility with existing frameworks.	MS	The rating is validated.	MS
Quality of Project Design	The project showed strong performance in key areas such as strategic relevance, logical framework and monitoring, governance and supervision, and financial planning. However, areas like learning, communication, outreach, sustainability, replication, and catalytic effects require improvement. Opportunities include developing a more detailed communication plan, enhancing stakeholder engagement—especially with gender and minority groups—clarifying sustainability and exit strategies, planning for scale-up, refining Theory of Change pathways, and adopting more realistic, context-specific risk mitigation measures.	S	The rating is validated.	S
Nature of External Context	Project implementation faced significant delays due to political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted timelines, stakeholder engagement, and procurement. Civil unrest and government changes postponed key agreements, while the pandemic forced a shift to virtual operations, hindered by poor internet and power outages. Institutional restructuring and contractual delays further impacted progress. A more realistic schedule could have mitigated delays. Despite these challenges, the project showed commendable adaptability—requiring only three extensions—and sustained core activities through remote implementation and digital coordination.	MU	The rating is revised to Unfavourable. The assessment found the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing political and security situation posed a substantial risk to overall project implementation. Note that the nature of external context does not count towards the weighted performance rating. However, in the case of Unfavourable or Highly Unfavourable contexts, the performance assessment may lean towards a more positive rating in recognition of the external and unanticipated challenges – in this case political and security challenges.	U
Effectiveness		S	The rating is revised as result of the revised rating of likelihood of impact.	MS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
1. Availability of outputs	All 12 project outputs were fully achieved despite delays from COVID-19, political instability, and institutional challenges. The project delivered over 10 workshops and training sessions with around 130 participants, and more than 10 technical meetings with national and international partners. Activities focused on data analysis, geospatial information management, and training on the Iraq EIS. Outputs were of good quality, relevant to users, and adapted to the local context, supported by strong national leadership and stakeholder engagement. However, limited data availability and post-handover resource gaps affected system consistency and monitoring. While the EIS continues to function, improvements are needed in integrating with national processes and strengthening data and infrastructure for long-term sustainability.	S	The rating is validated.	S
2. Achievement of project outcomes	According to project indicators, all four outcomes were achieved, with key outputs and foundational structures delivered—including a national EIS, monitoring tools, coordination mechanisms, and capacity-building efforts. However, sustained use and full policy implementation remain challenged by limited data, technical issues, and institutional capacity. Key assumptions (political stability, inter-agency collaboration, and inclusion) were only partially upheld. Gender inclusion was actively promoted, with over 60% female participation in the implementation team. Drivers such as training effectiveness were strong, but stakeholder mobilization and synergies with existing initiatives were limited.	MS	The rating is validated	MS
3. Likelihood of impact	The project's impact is rated as "Likely," with essential foundations in place and key aspects of the intermediate state achieved—such as the operational Iraq EIS, supporting MEA reporting. However, consistent institutional use depends on leadership, integration into routine operations, and sustained capacity-building. Government commitment was strong, and the Iraq EIS is recognized as a transformative tool for science-based policymaking. No unintended negative effects were reported, and while assumptions and drivers were only partially upheld, they remain valid for continued progress toward long-term impact.	L	The rating is validated with some reservation. Outcomes' indicator targets were met, however, the assessment found that the achievement of outcomes was mixed and there was a lack of evidence supporting outcome realization. The assumption of sustained government commitment was upheld but other relevant assumptions have been assessed to partially hold. The functionality of the EIS is contingent on regular updates and further integration of data, a data management plan and allocation of institutional budgets to maintain the system.	L

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Financial Management		HS	The rating is validated.	HS
1. Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures	The project demonstrated strong financial governance, consistently adhering to UNEP policies and maintaining transparency through regular reporting and budget reviews. It was internally executed by UNEP and the West Asia Office, both well-versed in UN financial regulations. Despite delays caused by COVID-19, political instability, and bureaucratic hurdles, expenditures remained aligned with financial plans, with no-cost extensions used in place of formal budget revisions. While disbursements were generally timely, challenges—particularly in transferring funds to the Ministry of Environment—resulted in some implementation delays. Effective internal execution, shared financial systems, and capacity-building efforts supported adaptive and responsive financial management.	HS	The rating is validated.	HS
2. Completeness of project financial information	The project's financial documentation was generally complete, accurate, and transparent, with reviewed records including detailed budgets, disbursement logs, expenditure reports, in-kind contribution records, and legal agreements. The budget was presented at the outcome level and formally validated by the FMO. While high-level planning and regular reporting were evident, only a portion of the documentation was made available for review—such as a single confirmed budget revision and limited expenditure reports—indicating some gaps. Nonetheless, financial data managed by the Implementing Agency was accessible and tracked through Umoja, ensuring certified reporting and real-time budget monitoring. There is sufficient evidence to confirm sound financial documentation, despite incomplete access during the review.	HS	The rating is revised to Satisfactory. The financial documentation for the project was partially complete and only a portion of was made available for the review. Legal agreements and their amendment appeared to be complete and accurate. Overall, the reviewer found sufficient evidence to confirm that the project's financial documentation was generally complete and accurate (para. 171)	S
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	The project benefited from exemplary communication between the PM/TM, and FMO, which supported responsive and adaptive management. Regular coordination meetings—especially before COVID-19—and ad hoc interactions during the pandemic ensured timely financial decisions, such as early disbursements and budget revisions. Evidence from MTR and interviews confirmed strong collaboration, with joint review of reports and alignment between financial and programmatic aspects. This effective communication contributed significantly to the successful delivery of the project within budget.	HS	The rating is validated.	HS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
Efficiency	The project underwent 3 well-justified no-cost extensions totaling 25 months, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, and institutional restructuring. Two out of three no-cost extensions (totaling 13 months) were individually justified. The initial 12-month extension due to COVID-19 was part of a broader GEF policy response and not counted as an individual project decision. Despite these delays, the project delivered its outputs and outcomes within the revised timeline, demonstrating high efficiency in resource use, adaptive management, and institutional integration. Cost-effective strategies—such as remote implementation, leveraging existing systems, and strategic partnerships—helped maintain momentum and minimize operational costs. While some design limitations affected efficiency, such as gaps in risk mitigation and communication strategies, collaboration, planning, and a 98% budget utilization rate supported implementation.	MS	The rating is validated noting the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and unfavourable external context that led to an extended project timeline and three no-cost extensions.	MS
Monitoring and Reporting		S	The rating is validated.	S
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	The M&R plan adopted a results-based management approach with SMART indicators and a participatory framework to ensure effective project delivery. Detailed in Annex G of the project document, it outlined responsibilities, budget, and timelines, including mid-term and terminal evaluations led by UNEP. While the plan tracked 24 indicators and supported adaptive implementation, it relied heavily on process indicators that measured activities rather than actual impacts, limiting its ability to assess long-term outcomes or integration of MEAs and SDGs. The lack of gender-specific indicators and weaknesses in the logical framework further hindered accurate progress evaluation. Nonetheless, the M&R system was robust and maintained throughout implementation, with strong ownership from the project team.	MS	The rating is validated.	MS
2. Monitoring of project implementation	The monitoring system implemented during the project was generally functional and enabled consistent tracking of outputs and milestones, supported by a detailed plan, regular progress reports, and allocated funding. While tools and methodologies were adapted to stakeholder needs and monitoring intensified over time, the system relied heavily on process indicators and broad baseline data, limiting its ability to assess real-world impacts or long-term outcomes. Gender and vulnerability considerations were insufficiently integrated, with no disaggregated data or gender-specific indicators despite stated commitments. Although monitoring data were regularly collected and reported, they were not systematically analyzed or used to inform adaptive management or decision-making.	MS	The rating is validated.	MS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
3. Project reporting	The project maintained extensive and high-quality documentation throughout its lifecycle, including inception, progress, financial, and technical reports, as well as workshop materials, all submitted consistently and in line with donor requirements. Although gender-disaggregated data were included in reports, this was not explicitly embedded in the original monitoring plan, and data disaggregation for vulnerable groups remained limited. Tools like Umoja ensured financial transparency, and strong collaboration among UNEP teams and subcontracted partners supported timely and accurate reporting. Despite language barriers and the absence of a translation budget, bilingual staff ensured continuity, though this added strain and risked content loss. However, the reliance on process indicators and the lack of clear methodologies limited the reports' ability to capture outcome-level results and broader impacts.	S	The rating is validated.	S
Sustainability		ML	The rating is revised as result of the revised rating of financial sustainability.	MU
1. Socio-political sustainability	The sustainability of the project's outcomes is closely tied to political will, stakeholder ownership, and institutional integration. While the project fostered strong engagement through capacity-building, collaboration, alignment with national mandates, and integration into existing structures like the Iraqi National Data Centre, its long-term viability remains vulnerable to political transitions and shifting priorities. A sustainability strategy, ongoing technical support, and regional promotion have helped reinforce commitment. Mechanisms for adapting to socio-political changes were considered in the project's sustainability strategy, which also includes a UNEP–CIMA Research Foundation agreement providing monthly technical assistance to the MoE for three years post-handover. However, the absence of legally binding mandates, limited contingency planning, and insufficient evidence of institutional uptake or behavioral change pose risks to continuity. Stakeholder engagement has shown gradual progress, with signs of continued use and national ownership, but further integration into planning processes and responsiveness to evolving priorities are needed to ensure the EIS remains relevant, resilient, and impactful over time.	ML	The rating is validated.	ML

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
2. Financial sustainability	The long-term sustainability of the EIS project depends heavily on future funding to support system maintenance, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. A sustainability strategy was developed, including adaptive mechanisms, a UNEP–CIMA agreement for post-handover technical support, and a financial component to ensure continued operation. Cost-saving measures—such as migrating the system to the Iraqi National Data Centre and assigning institutional responsibilities—have reduced dependency, but gaps remain in contingency planning and resource mobilization. Interviews and reports highlight the need for sustained local investment, especially for technical upgrades and institutional capacity. Demonstrating the economic value of environmental data, such as damage assessments, was recommended to strengthen political will and secure funding. Without dedicated financial mechanisms, the EIS risks reduced impact and eventual discontinuity.	ML	The rating is validated with some reservation. The application of cost-saving measures like migrating the system to the Iraqi National Data Centre, the development of an exit strategy and a clear financial component in the sustainability strategy may weigh up for the lack of operational details such as specific funding sources or budget plans in the sustainability plan and uncertain long-term financial sustainability in the prevailing context.	ML
3. Institutional sustainability	The institutional sustainability of the EIS project was supported by its integration into existing government structures, particularly the MoE's IT department, and reinforced through capacity-building, formal documentation, and strategic partnerships. The system was embedded within national workflows, enabling evidence-based policymaking and enhancing long-term viability. Training programs, including a ToT in Italy, equipped ministry staff with the skills to maintain and adapt the system independently. Cost-saving measures, such as migrating the EIS to the Iraqi National Data Centre, and open-source delivery further strengthened institutional autonomy. However, gaps remain in formal policy adoption, inter-ministerial coordination, and legal frameworks, which are essential for systemic uptake. Feedback emphasized the need for clearer mandates, MoUs, and integration into national planning instruments to ensure continuity. Reframing the EIS as a permanent national function, rather than a time-bound project, was seen as critical to securing long-term institutional commitment and ownership.	ML	The rating is validated.	ML
Factors Affecting Performance		S	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
1. Preparation and readiness	The period between project approval and the first disbursement (March–June 2018) was under six months and marked by effective preparatory actions that laid a solid foundation for implementation. Despite delays due to political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, key activities—including legal agreements, stakeholder consultations, a costed workplan, procurement planning, and the formation of a Steering Committee—were successfully completed. The project was anchored within existing MoE structures, supported by prompt staffing mobilization, environmental and social safeguards assessment, and a stakeholder analysis confirming partner roles. PRC recommendations and contextual changes were addressed, ensuring readiness for implementation despite external challenges.	S	The rating is validated.	S
2. Quality of project management and supervision		S	The rating is validated.	S
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	UNEP, as the Implementing Agency, provided strategic oversight and ensured compliance with GEF procedures and reporting requirements. It played a key role in guiding the project toward its planned outcomes, managing team structures, and fostering effective collaboration among international and national partners. UNEP demonstrated adaptability in responding to external challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability, through virtual engagement and resource reallocation. Its leadership was instrumental in facilitating negotiations and problem-solving, although some feedback noted a degree of distance between international and local actors. Staff transitions were well-managed, and UNEP maintained regular, constructive communication with project teams, contributing to coordinated and responsive implementation.	S	The rating is validated.	S
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	UNEP WAO, as the Executing Agency, was responsible for overall coordination, activity budget management, and monitoring progress against the work plan, while the Iraq MoE led the delivery of project outputs and mobilized operational resources. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined and generally well understood across partners. The Steering Committee, though convened only three times, provided strategic input on key issues such as data indicators, server solutions, and procurement. The project teams demonstrated strong collaboration, technical capacity, and resilience, particularly in adapting to operational constraints. However, challenges such as limited inter-ministerial integration, bureaucratic hurdles, and technological limitations affected data collection and system performance, highlighting the need for stronger coordination and institutional planning to sustain impact.	S	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	The project demonstrated a well-structured and inclusive approach to stakeholder participation, beginning with a good stakeholder analysis and clearly defined governance mechanisms. Engagement efforts included formal structures like the Project Steering Committee and informal consultations, fostering collaboration among government bodies, international partners, and civil society. While communication and coordination were generally effective—supported by meetings, training sessions, and shared planning—challenges such as political instability, limited internet access, and institutional fragmentation occasionally hindered consistent participation. The Ministry of Environment showed good ownership, and efforts were made to ensure sustainability through institutional integration. Finally, the project only moderately addressed poverty alleviation and human rights, lacking mechanisms to assess or mitigate potential negative impacts on livelihoods and equity.	MS	The rating is validated.	S
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	The project showed a generally positive performance in addressing inequalities and promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in environmental management. While gender and human rights considerations were not embedded in a fully transformative or systematic way, they were successfully integrated into both the design and implementation phases. Achievements included balanced female participation in workshops and decision-making forums, including a female-chaired Steering Committee, and the application of gender-sensitive approaches across key activities. The project faced gaps in monitoring and targeted inclusion due to the absence of a formal gender action plan and limited capacity within the M&E system to systematically track gender-related outcomes. Despite these limitations, the project demonstrated a good commitment to inclusive participation and made meaningful progress in promoting female engagement, reflecting a positive trajectory toward equity, sustainability, and institutional awareness.	S	The rating is validated.	S
5. Environmental and social safeguards	The project included a comprehensive risk analysis and mitigation strategy, aligned with UNEP's Environmental, Social, and Economic Sustainability (ESES) framework, and was categorized as low risk due to its focus on capacity-building and the absence of activities likely to cause significant environmental or social harm. Risk management primarily focused on political and organizational aspects, as the project was not expected to generate direct negative impacts. Notable efforts to reduce the environmental footprint included shifting to virtual modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, which minimized carbon emissions from travel. Risk monitoring was systematic and well-documented, with regular updates in project reports and a clear commitment to sustainability. Future projects could benefit from more detailed assessments of cumulative and indirect impacts, such as quantified carbon emissions.	S	The rating is validated.	S

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating	Justification for any ratings' changes due to validation (to be completed by the UNEP Evaluation Office – EOU)	EOU Validated Rating
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	The project made strong strides in fostering national ownership and institutional leadership, with active engagement from key government ministries and public sector agencies. Strategic participation in the Project Steering Committee, inclusive consultations, and targeted capacity-building supported alignment with national priorities and the long-term sustainability of the Environmental Information System (EIS). The migration of the EIS to the Iraqi National Data Centre and the training of MoE staff reinforced institutional autonomy. However, limited in-person engagement due to COVID-19 and political instability, gaps in coordination, and insufficient knowledge of performance indicators among project teams highlighted the need for stronger management structures and cross-sectoral collaboration.	S	The rating is validated.	S
7. Communication and public awareness	The project achieved success in knowledge management and communication through frequent, well-targeted, and responsive activities. Capacity-building efforts included effective knowledge transfer and documentation in Arabic, while awareness materials—such as posters for schools—and public events like the exit meeting helped increase visibility and stakeholder understanding. However, the communication strategy was limited in scope, with few initiatives focused on broader public outreach. The impact of communication activities was not systematically monitored, and COVID-19 and political instability disrupted consistent stakeholder engagement. Additionally, limited feedback mechanisms and insufficient outreach to civil society and marginalized groups hindered inclusive engagement.	MS	The rating is validated.	MS
Overall Project Performance Rating		S	The overall weighted rating is validated. Note that the Review refers to a performance rating of MS in para. 316 and S in the Executive Summary and Table 5.	S

C. Lessons learned

Lesson Learned #1:	Data Governance and Digital Infrastructure Are Essential for the Effective and Sustained Use of Environmental Information Systems
Context/comment:	The project demonstrated that the sustainability and impact of EIS depend not only on technical design but also on robust data governance and digital infrastructure. Structural limitations, such as reliance on paper-based systems, lack of digitalized and accessible data, fragmentation of available information, and lack of better integration between ministries, digital infrastructure, and interoperability, negatively affected data collection and updates, ultimately constraining the EIS's expected impact (para. 147.ii, 160, and 260). The UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session emphasized that several actions should have been taken to improve EIS effectiveness, including involving multiple sectors, using a centralized and flexible system, addressing data gaps, engaging reporting focal points, and aligning the system with national reporting obligations under a legal framework (para. 112). To mitigate these risks, the MTR recommended the establishment of an automated and decentralized data collection system, in collaboration with international partners, along with the provision of ongoing training to ensure data quality and effective knowledge transfer (para. 161). The long-term sustainability of an EIS depends on cross-sectoral ownership, inclusive system design, and effective communication strategies to ensure stakeholder engagement and relevance. It also requires the establishment of legal frameworks, formalized data-sharing agreements, and integration into government structures to strengthen legitimacy, coordination, and operational continuity (para. 218 and 239). Despite the challenges, the project demonstrated strong management practices, including team dedication, effective communication, and consistent technical support. Collaboration among UNEP, CIMA, eSITE, and other partners was described as efficient and resilient, particularly in response to the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (para. 260). However, the EIS has not yet been fully utilized due to the lack of consistently updated data from government sources (para. 303), reinforcing the need to align technical tools with institutional structures and promote sustained interinstitutional cooperation and leadership. The role of UNEP remains valuable in facilitating tools and capacity-building, while respecting the independent mandates of national institutions. However, actions that strengthen improved data governance, are essential to transforming technical solutions into sustainable instruments for informed decision-making. This lesson is related to Conclusion 1 (para. 310 and 311).

Lesson Learned #2:	Continuous Technical Improvement Is Critical to Ensure Long-Term Usability and Impact of Environmental Information Platforms
Context/comment:	The development and implementation of the EIS under the project revealed that technical completion alone does not guarantee sustained use or relevance. To ensure the platform remains functional, accessible, and impactful over time, a process of continuous technical improvement must be embedded from the outset. Due to delays in the project timeline, the system was operational for less than a year during implementation, limiting the opportunity to fully test its functionalities and identify areas for improvement (para. 160iii). As a result, important upgrades that could enhance efficiency, flexibility, and user-friendliness were not sufficiently explored or addressed within the project's duration (para. 157iii). Feedback from users and stakeholders emphasized the need for enhancements in several key areas: data visualization, backend functionality, WebGIS integration, and artificial intelligence features (paras. 157ii and 238i). These improvements aim to simplify workflows, improve user experience, and enable advanced environmental analysis, such as identifying pollution hotspots and generating early warnings. Currently, the platform requires manual editing and coding to generate charts, and backend limitations hinder the handling of complex datasets. The WebGIS component also needs upgrades to improve usability and interoperability (para. 157ii). Integrating AI models would allow predictive capabilities, supporting more proactive environmental management (para. 238i). Interview feedback further highlighted that technical maintenance and feature development depend on sustained financial and institutional support (para. 226). Without dedicated resources, there is a risk that the platform's functionality will stagnate, reducing its utility and long-term impact. This lesson underscores that digital platforms must be treated as evolving tools. A structured roadmap for technical upgrades—aligned with user needs and technological advancements—is essential to ensure usability, relevance, and effectiveness in supporting environmental governance. This lesson is related to Conclusion 1 (para. 311).

Lesson Learned #3:	Interinstitutional Cooperation and National Leadership are Key Elements for the Sustainability of Knowledge Management Tools
Context/comment:	The implementation of the EIS under the project provided valuable insights into the institutional conditions necessary for sustaining knowledge management tools in complex governance environments. The project's outputs were assessed as satisfactory, with their quality and utility enhanced by an integrated approach that optimized resources and adapted content to the local context. A key success factor was the presence of national leadership, specifically, the appointment of an Iraqi project coordinator from the outset—which helped build trust with the government, facilitated institutional coordination, and maintained stakeholder engagement through workshops. These workshops served as critical moments for mobilization, capacity building, and validation of outputs, contributing to stakeholder ownership and project cohesion over time (para. 110). However, although the system was technically completed and had demonstrated practical applicability, its use is still in the process of becoming more systematic and fully embedded within the institution. (para. 111 and 157). Evidence suggests that technical functionality alone does not ensure the effective and sustained use of the system. The absence of clear institutional leadership and the initial lack of engagement from other departments responsible for providing environmental data were identified as critical factors affecting the promotion and integration of the EIS within government structures (para. 157.iii). In the institutional context, there is a tendency to prioritize tasks that are clearly aligned with formal job descriptions, which may occasionally affect the regularity of system updates and engagement. (para. 157.iv). Structural limitations, such as lack of better integration between ministries negatively affected data collection and updates, ultimately constraining the EIS's expected impact (para. 147.ii, 160, and 260iii). The UNEP GEF CCCD Knowledge Exchange Session highlighted that key actions should have been taken during the project to improve the effectiveness of EIS. These include involving multiple sectors, using a centralized and flexible system, addressing data gaps, engaging reporting focal points, and aligning the system with national reporting obligations under a legal framework (para. 112). These findings underscore the importance of establishing a strong institutional framework with dedicated personnel and interinstitutional committees to maintain engagement and ensure long-term system functionality (para. 237). The long-term sustainability of a EIS depends on cross-sectoral ownership, inclusive system design, and effective communication strategies to ensure stakeholder engagement and relevance. It also requires the establishment of legal frameworks, formalized data-sharing agreements, and integration into government structures to strengthen legitimacy, coordination, and operational continuity (para. 218 and 239). This reinforces the need to align technical tools with institutional structures, promoting cross-sectoral cooperation, active leadership, and continuous engagement strategies. Actions that strengthen interinstitutional collaboration, combined with national leadership and improved governance, are essential to transforming technical solutions into sustainable instruments for informed decision-making. This lesson is related to Conclusions 1 and 2 (paras. 310 and 312).

Lesson Learned #4:	Structured, Inclusive, and Locally Anchored Capacity-Building Is Essential for Sustained Ownership and Long-Term Institutional Sustainability
Context/comment:	The project demonstrated that the training of trainers (ToT) approach is an effective strategy to promote national ownership and strengthen institutional capacities. The training of multipliers—including intensive international sessions (paras. 124, 235, 236.ii, 288)—enabled key MoE staff to acquire the technical skills needed to operate and maintain the EIS. The training of four MoE specialists in Italy, focused on technical autonomy, system maintenance, and data migration, marked a significant milestone for the EIS’s long-term sustainability (paras. 236.ii and 288). The availability of training materials in Arabic and the provision of the system’s open-source code was also essential to ensuring local technical autonomy and project sustainability (para. 288). Capacity-building efforts were broad and well-received, with nearly 90 participants trained and high levels of engagement reported during workshops (paras. 125.i and 148.ii). For example, the project delivered specialized training on tools for managing complex environmental datasets, in collaboration with local universities, and integrated the content into MoE’s regular programs (para. 126). This approach strengthened the technical capacity of ministries and agencies, including the active participation of women. The project also anticipated the institutionalization of technical knowledge by making training materials accessible through internal repositories, as evidenced by their publication on the EIP platform by the end of the project (para. 127.ii). The integration of the EIS into existing institutional structures and the active involvement of government representatives in training and strategic decision-making (paras. 217.ii, 284, and 285) were key to fostering national ownership. However, structural challenges remain—such as high staff turnover in government positions and the absence of a clearly defined financial mechanism to ensure the system’s continued operation (paras. 111, 224, and 225). Although the sustainability strategy recommended allocating internal resources and establishing a dedicated fund, there is no evidence that these measures were implemented. Additionally, language barriers and connectivity issues should be considered when designing action plans to ensure effective and sustainable capacity-building (paras. 209 and 265). In this context, sustained ownership requires structured and context-specific capacity-building strategies that include mechanisms for staff retention and succession, recurring and locally tailored training programs, and alignment with long-term financial and operational strategies. This integrated approach can help ensure that investments in capacity-building lead not only to high-quality technical outputs but also to continued use, institutional ownership, and sustainable impact. This lesson is related to Conclusion 1 (para. 310 and 311).

Lesson Learned #5:	Flexibility and Advance Planning Are Essential for Effective Implementation in Fragile and Complex Contexts.
Context/comment:	In fragile environments such as Iraq, marked by political instability, institutional restructuring, and external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic, advance planning and operational flexibility are critical to ensuring project continuity and effectiveness. This project encountered multiple disruptions, including civil unrest, changes in ministerial structures, and pandemic-related restrictions, which required frequent adjustments to timelines, implementation strategies, and stakeholder engagement methods (paras. 95, 96, 176, and 246). While the project team demonstrated adaptability, the experience revealed that a more realistic and context-sensitive planning process at the design stage could have led to a more achievable implementation schedule. This would have reduced the need for multiple extensions and improved the project's ability to respond proactively to emerging challenges (paras. 92, 103, 180, and 181). The project also highlighted the importance of anticipating lengthy in-country administrative processes, which often delayed approvals and implementation. Evidence from exchange session emphasized that early and detailed planning was necessary to navigate these bureaucratic complexities effectively (para. 181). Also according to insights shared during this exchange session, the development of a pre-inception report in Iraq played a key role in ensuring that the project work plan was aligned with national priorities. This example underscores the importance of thorough planning and oversight in project management, particularly in complex institutional contexts. Overall, this lesson underscores the need for future projects in similar contexts to incorporate: robust risk mitigation strategies; flexible and adaptive management models; realistic timelines based on local political and institutional realities; and advance planning that accounts for potential delays and disruptions. This lesson is related to Conclusion 2 (para. 312).

Lesson Learned #6:	Hybrid Approaches, and In-Country UNEP Presence Are Critical for Effective Project Implementation in Fragile Environments.
Context/comment:	In fragile environments marked by political instability, institutional fragility, and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid engagement models are essential for ensuring project continuity and achieving meaningful results. However, the project demonstrated that while digital tools were essential for maintaining continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not fully replace the value of in-person engagement, especially in fragile contexts with limited digital infrastructure. In Iraq, the predominance of paper-based systems and weak IT interoperability made remote work inefficient and constrained the effectiveness of virtual-only approaches (paras. 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 160, 260, and 286). Additionally, frequent power outages and poor internet connectivity significantly hindered the effectiveness of virtual training and stakeholder engagement (paras. 101, 102.i, 176.i, and 265). The shift to digital platforms did bring benefits—such as reduced operational costs, and alignment with UNEP’s sustainability goals (paras. 177, 178, 259, and 277). But the experience confirmed that a hybrid model, combining virtual and face-to-face engagement, is essential for: strengthening stakeholder relationships; facilitating the adoption of tools and practices; and supporting long-term institutional change. Crucially, the project benefited from the presence of a national Project Manager initially based in Iraq, which helped build trust with government counterparts and facilitated smoother coordination. Interview feedback and implementation experience emphasized that the physical presence of at least one UNEP officer in-country is not only beneficial but often necessary to: maintain close relationships with national stakeholders; support day-to-day implementation; and reinforce government ownership and institutional commitment (para. 289 and 290). This lesson highlights that future projects in similar contexts should: ensure a UNEP presence on the ground to support coordination and trust-building; adopt hybrid engagement models that balance digital efficiency with the relational value of in-person interaction; and invest in digital infrastructure while recognizing its limitations in fragile settings. This lesson is related to Conclusion 2 (para. 312).

Lesson Learned #7:	Overemphasis On Process-Focused Indicators at the Expense of Impact-Focused Indicators Undermines the Project's Ability to Monitor the Achievement of Its Broader Objectives.
Context/comment:	Although the project established a comprehensive monitoring and reporting framework aligned with results-based management principles (paras. 184, 185, 186, 187, and 188), the overreliance on process-focused indicators limited its ability to assess the achievement of broader objectives and long-term impacts. Most indicators tracked the completion of activities, such as the number of reports produced or workshops held, rather than the actual changes these activities were intended to generate (paras. 189, 190, and 199). Outcome indicators, such as those related to improved environmental monitoring or institutional coordination, were not designed to capture whether new processes were adopted, institutionalized, or led to measurable improvements in data quality or decision-making (para. 190). As a result, while the project successfully documented outputs and implementation progress (paras. 194, 195, and 208), it struggled to demonstrate tangible results or systemic change (paras. 199, 200, and 211). Baseline data were collected during project design, but they were often broad and lacked specificity (para. 196). The Capacity Development Scorecard, intended to track institutional progress, was not updated during implementation (paras. 197 and 198), further limiting the ability to assess change over time. While the monitoring system was functional and adaptive, featuring regular reporting, coordination meetings, and stakeholder engagement (paras. 194, 202, and 203), there is limited evidence that monitoring data were systematically analysed or used to inform decision-making and adaptive management, whether in the context of project management (para. 204), or within the institutional sphere of the implementing stakeholders, where a knowledge gap regarding the use of performance indicators was noted (paras. 238iii and 291). These indicators are essential for assessing progress following the implementation of the project and the EIS platform. This represents a missed opportunity to enhance project effectiveness and sustainability. This evidence highlighted the importance of designing indicators that go beyond tracking activities to assess outcomes and impacts. It also underscored the need to use monitoring data not only for reporting but as a strategic tool for learning, adaptation, and accountability, including in the post-implementation phase of the project. Incorporating a detailed Theory of Change diagram from the outset could help clarify the causal pathways between activities and intended impacts, enabling the development of more meaningful indicators and a stronger foundation for evaluation. This lesson is related to Conclusion 2 (para. 313).

Lesson Learned #8:	Strategic Communication Planning Is Crucial to Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement in Complex Governance Contexts
Context/comment:	The implementation of the project in Iraq demonstrated the relevance of establishing a comprehensive and inclusive communication strategy from the outset, particularly in contexts marked by institutional complexity and external constraints. Several factors influenced the consistency and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement. The initial communication plan (para. 294) lacked detailed guidance, and the absence of differentiated approaches for engaging underrepresented groups (para. 300) limited outreach and inclusion. Although the stakeholder analysis offered a solid foundation, the strategy could have been further developed to better respond to evolving needs. Language barriers also emerged as a recurring challenge. Without dedicated resources for translation, the project relied on bilingual staff to translate official documents (para. 210), which increased workload and introduced risks of misinterpretation. This highlights how logistical aspects of communication—such as language accessibility—can affect the clarity and timeliness of exchanges. External disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability, impacted communication activities and stakeholder engagement (para. 299). These circumstances emphasized the importance of resilient and context-sensitive communication approaches, especially to maintain inclusion of marginalized groups (para. 179). While collaboration among technical partners was generally smooth (para. 260i), some dynamics created distance between international and local actors. Security constraints further limited in-person interactions, affecting opportunities for monitoring and capacity-building (para. 102v). Overall, the experience suggests that communication strategies should go beyond information dissemination. They should be designed to promote inclusion, build trust, and adapt to changing conditions. In complex governance environments, such strategies are essential to sustaining stakeholder engagement, facilitating collaboration, and ensuring that project outcomes remain relevant and accessible. This lesson is related to Conclusions 1 and 2 (paras. 310 and 312).

Lesson Learned #9:	Embedding Gender-Responsive Design, Monitoring, And Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms Enhances the Inclusiveness and Long-Term Impact of Environmental Data and Policy Projects
Context/comment:	Integrating gender considerations into environmental projects is essential to ensure equitable benefit distribution and that resulting policies reflect the needs of all social groups. This project demonstrated important progress in this area, while also revealing structural gaps that limited the potential for a truly transformative approach. From the outset, the project aligned with GEF-7 Core Indicator on direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender (para.69). Although no gender analysis was conducted during preparation (paras. 87 and 271.ii), a gender-responsive results framework was adopted, and women's participation was actively promoted in workshops, trainings, and the Project Steering Committee (paras. 147.iii, 272.iv, and 273). Female leadership was also highlighted, with a woman chairing the Steering Committee (para. 273). However, the absence of a gender action plan (para. 271.iii), gender-specific indicators in the monitoring plan (para. 192), and disaggregated data for vulnerable groups (paras. 201 and 212) limited the ability to assess the real impact of these efforts. While reports included sex-disaggregated data (paras. 208.ii and 273), the lack of a structured M&E system was identified as a critical limitation (para. 272.iii). Moreover, the project did not explicitly identify gender-based or minority groups as stakeholders (paras. 87 and 271.i), reducing opportunities for targeted inclusion. Communication with these groups could also have been more robust and context-specific (paras. 90 and 179). Despite these limitations, the project contributed to national-level gender mainstreaming and institutional awareness (para. 274). To maximize the impact of future initiatives, a more systematic and comprehensive approach could include conducting gender analysis during project design; identifying and actively engaging vulnerable groups; integrating gender-specific indicators into M&E systems; and adopting tailored communication strategies for diverse audiences. These measures not only strengthen equity and human rights but also enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of environmental project outcomes. This lesson is related to Conclusion 2 (para.314).

D. Recommendations

Recommendation #1:	Support and encourage the establishment of interinstitutional EIS governance committees by promoting structured collaboration among key ministries and technical departments to enhance data coordination, shared ownership, and long-term sustainability
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Although the project successfully developed a EIS, its long-term sustainability is at risk due to fragmented institutional responsibilities, limited coordination among ministries, and the absence of a formal governance structure. The lack of a dedicated platform for cross-departmental collaboration has hindered the regular updating of data, alignment of roles, and integration of the EIS into national reporting and policy processes. Also, treating the EIS as a time-bound project rather than a continuous government function can jeopardize its sustainability. Reframing the EIS as a long-term institutional commitment—rather than a temporary initiative—requires formal governance structures that ensure continuity beyond project cycles. Involve all relevant departments—such as IT, research, planning, and legal—through a structured mechanism is an important strategy to ensure shared accountability and continuous engagement. Without such coordination, the EIS risks becoming siloed, underutilized, or disconnected from national priorities. To address this, future projects can support and motivate the creation of interinstitutional EIS governance committees by: • Motivating working groups during project implementation that bring together representatives from key departments to discuss data governance, system use, and institutional needs. • Providing technical and strategic guidance on how to structure such committees, including draft Terms of Reference (ToR), role definitions, and reporting mechanisms. • Encouraging ministries to formalize these groups through internal agreements or decrees, embedding them into existing institutional frameworks. • Using capacity-building activities (e.g., training programs, workshops) as entry points to foster collaboration and build trust among departments. • Highlighting the benefits of shared governance, such as improved data quality, reduced duplication of efforts, and stronger alignment with MEA and SDG reporting obligations. These working groups can evolve into formal governance committees over time, ensuring that the EIS remains relevant, updated, and institutionally anchored.
Priority Level:	Important Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation.

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

- Section D. Effectiveness (paras. 110, 111, 112, 147ii, 157, and 160); Section H. Sustainability (paras. 218, 237, and 239); Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (para 260iii)
- Conclusion #1 and #2 (paras. 310 and 312), and Lessons Learned #3

Recommendation #2:	Promote the development of legal frameworks and formal data-sharing agreements to institutionalize responsibilities for environmental data collection, validation, and integration into national systems
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	EIS Iraq represents a significant advancement in country's environmental governance. To further enhance its effectiveness and ensure long-term sustainability, it is important to strengthen the legal and institutional framework for data governance. There is a recognized risk that the EIS may be perceived as a short-term project dependent on external support. To counter this, it is essential to embed EIS-related responsibilities into legal and institutional frameworks, reinforcing its role as a permanent function of government operations. Sustaining the EIS over time requires not only legal instruments but also a continuous commitment of resources. Institutionalization through memoranda of understanding, standard operating procedures, and formal mandates can help secure the long-term maintenance and use of the system. By establishing clear mandates and formal agreements among ministries and departments, roles in data collection, validation, and sharing can be clearly defined, leading to more consistent data updates, improved interoperability, and stronger institutional ownership. Formalizing these responsibilities through internal agreements and integrating them into the functional duties of public officials will help make data provision more systematic and reliable. This, in turn, will reinforce the EIS as a trusted and enduring tool for informed environmental decision-making. To address this, it is recommended that future projects support and encourage the development of legal and institutional mechanisms for data governance by: • Providing technical assistance to ministries to draft interministerial Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or internal agreements that define roles, responsibilities, and data flows. • Promoting the integration of data-related tasks into official job descriptions and institutional mandates to ensure accountability and continuity. • Encouraging the inclusion of EIS-related responsibilities in national environmental strategies, digital transformation plans, and MEA reporting frameworks. • Developing model legal provisions or templates that can be adapted by national institutions to accelerate the formalization process. These actions will help ensure that the EIS is not only technically sound but also institutionally embedded, with clear and enforceable mechanisms for data sharing and system maintenance.
Priority Level:	Critical Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation, with legal instruments drafted within the first year

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

- Section D. Effectiveness (paras. 110, 111, 112, 147ii, 157, and 160); Section H. Sustainability (paras. 218, 237, and 239); Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (para 260 and 303)
- Conclusion #1 (para. 310 and 311), and Lessons Learned #1

Recommendation #3:	Encourage the engagement of local and regional non-governmental institutions—such as universities, data centers, and research organizations—to support the long-term sustainability, technical maintenance, and contextual relevance of the EIS.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The long-term sustainability of the EIS is challenged by limited in-country technical capacity and over-reliance on international partners, some of whom faced restrictions in operating within Iraq due to security concerns. The project would have greatly benefited from partnerships with local or regionally based institutions, such as universities, research centers, and NGOs. These actors could have played a critical role in supporting system maintenance, data analysis, and capacity-building. The absence of such partnerships limited the project's ability to embed the EIS within the national knowledge ecosystem and to build a broader base of technical support beyond government structures. This also reduced opportunities for innovation, local ownership, and long-term institutional resilience. Engaging institutions from neighbouring countries or the broader region—particularly those with linguistic and cultural proximity—could help overcome language barriers, improve communication, and reduce operational costs. Such partnerships would also foster regional cooperation and knowledge exchange. Evidence also emphasized the importance of demonstrating the economic and non-economic value of environmental data to increase political and institutional support. Future partnerships with universities and research centres could include the development of case studies that quantify the economic impact of environmental degradation or the benefits of improved data use, such as the USD 5 billion impact identified in an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) in Iraq. To support this approach, it is recommended that future projects promote and facilitate the engagement of local and regional non-governmental institutions by: • Mapping and identifying potential partners—both within the country and in the surrounding region—during the project design phase. • Including these institutions in training programs, workshops, and technical consultations to build capacity and foster collaboration. • Encouraging the co-development of tools and methodologies to ensure contextual relevance and technical sustainability. • Leveraging local or regional institutions as training hubs or technical helpdesks, especially in areas with limited government presence. • Promoting research partnerships that use EIS data to generate policy-relevant insights, reinforcing the system's value and visibility. These actions will help diversify the institutional base supporting the EIS, reduce dependency on distant external actors, and strengthen national and regional capacity for environmental data management.
Priority Level:	Important Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation.

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

- Section D. Effectiveness (paras. 111, 125.i, 126, 127.ii and 148.ii), Section G. Monitoring and Reporting (para 209), Section H. Sustainability (paras. 217.ii, 224, 225), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (paras. 265, 284, 285)
- Conclusion #1 (paras. 310 and 311), and Lesson Learned #4

Recommendation #4:	Support the mobilization and coordination of resources to enhance the usability of the EIS Iraq to maximize its effectiveness, utilizing AI when possible.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Throughout the project, the EIS Iraq was recognized as a promising tool for managing and analysing environmental data. However, its limited operational timeframe during implementation constrained the opportunity to fully explore its capabilities and optimize its design. Consequently, several features that could enhance the platform's efficiency, flexibility, and user-friendliness were not fully developed or tested. These include challenges in data handling, limited visualization options, and the need for more intuitive user interfaces. These enhancements are essential to streamline workflows, improve user experience, and enable advanced environmental monitoring. They also ensure that users—from technical staff to decision-makers—can interact with the system effectively and derive meaningful insights. To maximize the platform's effectiveness, the following priorities should be addressed: (a) Improve usability by refining the user interface and simplifying data presentation and analysis tools, (b) Strengthen backend capabilities to manage complex datasets and streamline system operations, and (c) Enhance WebGIS functionality for seamless data integration and intuitive map editing. To elevate the platform's analytical capacity and responsiveness, AI integration also should be prioritized. AI can enable automated data analysis, spatial pattern recognition, and predictive modelling for environmental risks. Potential AI-driven solutions can include smart APIs for automatic data synchronization with external systems; machine learning models for spatial analysis and predictive alerts; and AI-powered dashboards to personalize user experience and support decision-making. Especially in fragile contexts, such as the one of this Project, AI integration should be guided by safeguards that ensure ethical use and protect sensitive data. To implement these improvements, it is recommended that the project team supports the government of Iraq to mobilize and coordinate resources—technical, financial, and institutional—through: (a) Exploring opportunities for complementary funding from national or international sources; (b) Facilitating strategic partnerships with academic or tech institutions for AI development; (c) Engaging user groups to co-design improvements based on practical needs; and/or (d) Supporting the review and prioritization of existing budgets to prioritize usability and innovation. Without sustained investment, the platform risks becoming obsolete or underutilized. Targeted efforts will help transform the EIS Iraq into a robust, user-centred system capable of delivering long-term value and supporting informed environmental governance.
Priority Level:	Important Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	One year after the approval of the terminal review

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

- Section D. Effectiveness (paras. 157, ii, and 157iii), and Section H. Sustainability (paras. 226 and 238i)
- Conclusion #1 (para. 311), and Lesson Learned #2

Recommendation #5:	Design and implement a long-term, locally anchored capacity-building strategy to ensure institutional retention, promote continuous use of the EIS, and support its integration into national reporting and policy processes
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	While the project delivered a broad and well-received capacity-building program, its long-term impact is threatened by high staff turnover, lack of institutional memory, and lack of an explicit strategy for knowledge retention and continuous learning. Although the ToT model and the availability of materials in Arabic were important achievements, there was no formal mechanism to ensure that trained individuals remained in relevant positions or that knowledge was institutionalized. Sustaining the EIS requires not only technical training but also long-term institutional commitment. Embedding EIS-related responsibilities into job descriptions and ensuring ongoing resource allocation are essential to maintain system use and institutional memory over time. Important actions also can include creating continuous demand for the EIS, including its use in national reports and policy development, and creating an internal system for use after project closure, which could be integrated into a broader capacity-building and institutionalization strategy. To address these challenges, it is recommended that future projects develop and implement a structured, long-term capacity-building strategy that includes: • A national capacity needs assessment to identify technical gaps, institutional priorities, and training needs across ministries and departments. • Recurring training programs tailored to national and local contexts, delivered through a mix of in-person and digital formats, and integrated into existing government training structures. • Staff retention and succession planning mechanisms, including the formal assignment of EIS-related responsibilities in job descriptions and internal mandates. • Creation of internal knowledge repositories, such as digital libraries or intranet platforms, to store training materials, manuals, and recorded sessions for future reference. • Post-project follow-up mechanisms, including periodic assessments of EIS usage, refresher trainings, and user feedback loops to adapt training content. This approach will help ensure that capacity-building efforts lead not only to short-term technical improvements but also to sustained institutional ownership, continuous system use, and long-term impact.
Priority Level:	Important Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and national training institutions
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation.

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

- Section D. Effectiveness (paras. 111, 124, 125.i, 126, 127.ii and 148.ii), Section G. Monitoring and Reporting (para 209), Section H. Sustainability (paras. 217.ii, 224, 225, 235, and 236.ii), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (paras. 265, 284, 285, and 288)
- Conclusion #1 (paras. 310 and 311), and Lesson Learned #4

Recommendation #6:	Promote early, comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement, early risk-informed planning, and adaptive implementation strategies in fragile contexts to enhance responsiveness, ensure timely delivery, and strengthen project resilience
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project made important progress under challenging conditions. However, it faced significant delays and implementation challenges due to political instability, administrative bottlenecks, and limited in-country access. While some adaptive measures were taken, the project would have benefited from a more realistic planning approach from the outset. The absence of early and inclusive stakeholder engagement, combined with a rigid implementation plan, limited the project's ability to respond effectively to the complex and fragile context in which it operated. The Iraq EIS became operational only near the end of the project, reducing opportunities for its use and evaluation during implementation. Additionally, the late identification of technical partners and the lack of mechanisms for phased disbursement and regional fund management constrained the project's flexibility and responsiveness. These factors, along with limited readiness and bureaucratic hurdles, slowed decision-making and reduced national ownership. Evidence also stressed the need to stay informed and forward-looking to ensure environmental information systems remain aligned with changing national and regional priorities. Integrating such approaches into project planning helps anticipate future needs, make timely adjustments, and improve the strategic impact of outcomes. To address these challenges, it is recommended that future projects in fragile or complex environments guarantee a proactive, inclusive, and adaptive planning and implementation model, including: • Early and inclusive stakeholder mapping and engagement, ensuring that all relevant ministries, departments, and local partners are involved from the design phase. • Conducting a comprehensive and realistic risk assessment during project formulation, identifying in close consultation with key stakeholders, political, institutional, and operational risks, and developing mitigation strategies. Risk management should be a priority issue during project implementation and closure. • Designing flexible workplans and timelines, with built-in contingencies and scenario-based planning to accommodate potential disruptions. • Identifying technical partners early, ideally during project formulation, to ensure readiness and avoid implementation gaps. • Implementing phased budgeting and disbursement mechanisms, with a portion of funds managed regionally (e.g., by UNEP West Asia Office) to allow for rapid adjustments during periods of instability. • Establishing adaptive management protocols, including regular reviews of risks, assumptions, and stakeholder feedback to revise strategies as needed.
Priority Level:	Important Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation.

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

- Section B. Quality of Project Design (para. 92), Section C. Nature of the External Context (paras. 95, 96, and 103), Section F. Efficiency (para. 176, 180, and 181), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (para. 246)
- Conclusion #2 (para. 312), and Lesson Learned #5

Recommendation #7:	Strengthen existing monitoring mechanisms in future projects by establishing an impact-focused monitoring and evaluation system at project level to measure long-term results and enhance sustainability
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework relied predominantly on process-oriented indicators—such as the number of workshops held or reports produced—which limited its ability to assess whether outputs led to meaningful institutional change or improved environmental governance. Outcome-level indicators were either missing or insufficiently defined to capture systemic improvements, such as enhanced data quality, interdepartmental coordination, or the actual use of the EIS in decision-making. The lack of robust, impact-focused indicators at the outcome level and outcome-focused indicators at output level made it challenging to measure the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives, to identify gaps or areas for improvement during implementation, and to capture the broader, long-term changes that the project aimed to achieve. Additionally, baseline data were overly general and not regularly updated, and the Capacity Development Scorecard was not used to monitor institutional progress over time. These limitations reduced the project's ability to adapt its strategy based on real-time learning and evidence. To address these gaps, future projects—especially those focused on institutional strengthening and digital systems—should establish and maintain an impact-oriented M&E system from the outset. This system should include: • A clear Theory of Change (ToC) that outlines the causal pathways from activities to intended outcomes and impacts. • Well-defined output and, especially, outcome indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, to assess institutional change, data use, and policy influence. • Systematic use of monitoring data to support adaptive management, including mid-course adjustments and strategic decision-making. • Clearly assigned roles, responsibilities, and timelines for indicator review and reporting, integrated into Project Steering Committee agendas. • PSC at least once a year to review the progress toward achievement of indicators. Additionally, long-term indicators could be incorporated into a comprehensive Sustainability Plan, co-developed and endorsed by all project partners as part of the Exit Strategy. This approach not only ensures continuity and accountability beyond the project lifecycle but also fosters ownership and alignment with national priorities. Embedding sustainability and impact measurement into the project's closure planning reinforces the commitment to lasting institutional change and the continued use of EIS for decision-making.
Priority Level:	Critical Recommendation
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP project Manager and M&E Specialist in future projects
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and maintained throughout the project lifecycle.

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

- Section G. Monitoring and Reporting (paras. 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 202, 203, 204, 208, 211, and 238iii), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (para. 291)
- Conclusion #2 (para. 313), and Lesson Learned #7

Recommendation #8:	Adopt a structured hybrid engagement model and promote in-country presence to strengthen coordination, stakeholder trust, and implementation effectiveness in fragile contexts
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project demonstrated that while digital tools were essential for maintaining continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not fully replace the value of in-person engagement—especially in fragile contexts with limited digital infrastructure. Iraq’s reliance on paper-based systems, frequent power outages, and poor internet connectivity significantly hindered the effectiveness of virtual-only approaches. Evidence emphasized that the physical presence of UNEP staff in-country was critical for building trust, facilitating coordination, and ensuring responsiveness to local needs. The absence of a consistent in-country presence limited daily follow-up and reduced the project’s ability to adapt to evolving realities. To maximize impact and ensure sustainability, future projects must balance the efficiency of digital tools with the relational and strategic value of face-to-face engagement. To address these challenges, it is recommended that future projects adopt a structured hybrid engagement model, complemented by strategic in-country presence, through the following actions: • Define which activities require in-person engagement, such as high-level consultations, consensus-building workshops, and technical trainings, and plan them accordingly. • Ensure the presence of at least one UNEP staff member or national coordinator in-country, even if junior, to maintain daily coordination, stakeholder relationships, and institutional visibility. • Use digital platforms strategically for routine meetings, broad consultations, and resource sharing, ensuring accessibility and usability for all stakeholders. • Invest in digital infrastructure and training, while recognizing its limitations in fragile settings and adapting formats to local capacities. • Establish clear protocols for hybrid engagement, including scheduling, participation guidelines, and feedback mechanisms to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness. This hybrid model will help projects remain agile, inclusive, and impactful, while reinforcing national ownership and trust in implementation processes.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and Regional Office, in collaboration with national counterparts
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and maintained throughout the project lifecycle.

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

- Section C. Nature of the External Context (paras. 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, and 102), Section D. Effectiveness (para. 160), Section F. Efficiency (paras. 176.i, 177, and 178), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (paras. 259, 260, 265, 277, and 286)
- Conclusion #2 (para. 312), and Lesson Learned #6

Recommendation #9:	Integrate inclusive and context-specific communication strategies into project design, with dedicated resources for implementation
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project encountered challenges related to stakeholder engagement and communication, particularly in a context marked by institutional complexity, security constraints, and external disruptions. The initial communication plan lacked sufficient detail and inclusivity, which limited outreach to underrepresented groups and reduced opportunities for feedback and participation. Language barriers also affected the clarity and timeliness of exchanges, as no budget had been allocated for professional translation services, placing additional pressure on project staff and increasing the risk of miscommunication. External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability further disrupted communication activities, highlighting the need for resilient and adaptable strategies. While coordination among partners was generally effective, some dynamics created distance between international and local actors, and security constraints limited in-person engagement. These conditions underscore the importance of communication strategies that are not only technically sound but also socially inclusive and contextually responsive. To address these challenges and strengthen implementation of future projects, it is recommended to: • Develop a robust, inclusive, and context-specific communication strategy during the project design phase, tailored to the governance environment and stakeholder landscape. In the inception phase, review and convert the Communication Strategy into a detailed and operational Communication Plan. This should be done in close collaboration with major projects stakeholders. • Ensure the strategy/plan includes differentiated approaches for engaging marginalized groups, including gender and minority groups. • Allocate dedicated resources and budget for communication activities, including translation services, outreach materials, and feedback mechanisms. Set aside enough funds to implement the Communication Plan. • Incorporate flexible tools and channels to adapt communication efforts in response to external disruptions or evolving stakeholder needs. Where digital access is limited, outreach efforts should also leverage local media and community radio to ensure inclusive communication. • Promote mechanisms that foster trust and mutual understanding between international and local partners through culturally sensitive engagement, such as co-development of project tools, use of local languages in communications, and deployment of mediators. By embedding these elements into project design/inception, initiatives can enhance stronger stakeholder participation and coordination.

Priority Level:	Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and maintained throughout the project lifecycle.

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

- Section C. Nature of the External Context (para. 102v), Section F. Efficiency (para. 179), Section G. Monitoring and Reporting (para. 210), and Section I. Factors Affecting Performance (paras. 260i, 279, 280, 294, 299, and 300)
- Conclusions #1 and #2 (paras. 310 and 312), and Lesson Learned #8

Recommendation #10:	Integrate gender-responsive and socially inclusive design, monitoring, and engagement strategies from the outset to ensure equity, relevance, and long-term impact of environmental information systems
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Although the project made efforts to promote gender equity—such as including women in workshops and leadership roles—it lacked a structured and measurable approach to gender mainstreaming and social inclusion. The absence of a gender action plan, gender-specific indicators, and disaggregated data limited the ability to assess the real impact of these efforts. Moreover, vulnerable groups, including women and marginalized communities, were not explicitly identified or engaged as stakeholders during project design or implementation. This gap reduced the inclusiveness and transformative potential of the EIS and related capacity-building activities. Evidence also noted that environmental issues often receive limited political attention unless their value is clearly communicated—particularly in economic terms. Inclusive engagement strategies should therefore include efforts to demonstrate how environmental data can support social equity and economic resilience, especially for vulnerable groups. To address these gaps, it is recommended that future projects adopt a comprehensive gender-responsive and socially inclusive strategy, including: • Conducting a gender and social inclusion analysis during project design to identify vulnerable groups and assess barriers. These measures will help ensure that EIS and related initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders, thereby enhancing their legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability.
Priority Level:	Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation	Project
Responsibility:	UNEP Project Manager and National Project Coordinator
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Initiated during project design of future projects and supported throughout implementation.

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

- Section A Strategic relevance (para. 69), Section B. Quality of Project Design (paras. 87 and 90), Section G. Monitoring and Reporting (192, 201, 208ii, and 212), Section I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues (para. 271, 272, 273, and 274)
- Conclusion #2 (para. 314), and Lesson Learned #9

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Table 5: Response to stakeholder comments received but not (fully) accepted by the reviewers, where appropriate

Page Ref	Stakeholder comment	Reviewer Response
	Xxx	Xxx

ANNEX II. REVIEW FRAMEWORK/MATRIX

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
A. Strategic Relevance		
To what extent were the project implementation strategies and expected contributions (results) aligned with the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (PoW) and Strategic Priorities?	In-depth desk review (IDR): Project document, PIR, UNEP MTS and PoW Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent were the project implementation strategies and expected contributions (results) aligned with the BSP ⁹⁹ and S-SC ¹⁰⁰ ?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, BSP and S-SC decisions Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent were the project implementation strategies and expected contributions (results) aligned with Donor/Partner strategic priorities?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, Steering Committee (SC) minutes and report Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent were the project implementation strategies and expected contributions (results) suited, or responding to, the stated environmental concerns and needs of the country where it is being implemented?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, National and regional policies/documents Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE)
To what extent was the project aligned with global priorities such as the Agenda 2030 and its SDGs?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, Agenda 2030 Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
How well did the project (either at design or inception) consider any ongoing and planned initiatives that address similar problems/issues?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE)
To what extent did the project (either at design or inception) ensure it was complementary to other interventions, optimized synergies and avoided duplication of efforts?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE)
A. Strategic Relevance		
To what extent was the project (either at design or inception) aware of, or in dialogue/engagement with, other ongoing or planned interventions on the same problem/issue (including UN Strategic Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF) or One UN programming for the country)?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, UN SDCF Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
B. Quality of Project Design		
To what extent was the approach adopted by the project the best possible to effectively implement MEAs and relevant SDGs in Iraq for enhanced global environmental benefits?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE)
Were project objectives realistic, given the time and budget allocated to the project, the baseline situation, and institutional context?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE)

⁹⁹ The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building (BSP) relates to the capacity of governments to comply with international agreements and obligations at the national level; promote, facilitate and finance environmentally sound technologies and to strengthen frameworks for developing coherent international environmental policies.

¹⁰⁰ South-South Cooperation (S-SC) is regarded as the exchange of resources, technology and knowledge between developing countries.

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
Project objective: To enhance capacities of Iraq for monitoring and reporting on Multilateral Environmental Agreements through a well-integrated and functional environment information system		
C. Nature of External Context		
To what extent was project performance affected by political disruption, natural disasters, security situation, and health and economic changes (i.e. COVID-19) and/or an unfavorable operating environment?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
D. Effectiveness		
D1. Availability of Outputs		
To what extent were the planned output made available for the intended users? Note: this question will be divided in sub-questions according to the ToC (12 outputs), targeting distinct respondent groups/stakeholders.	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries) Civil society and academia Private sector
D1. Availability of Outputs		
To what extent were the most important outputs to achieve outcomes delivered in time and fulfilled their intended use?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
How do users and reviewers rate (or consider) the quality and utility of the most important delivered outputs, i) poor, ii) good, or iii) excellent quality and utility?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries) Civil society and academia Private sector
What was the level of ownership of the intended users of key outputs? To what extent were the intended users of key outputs involved in / party to preparation of key outputs: i) not involved, ii) only peripherally involved, iii) partially and unevenly involved, iv) somewhat involved, v) meaningfully involved, or vi) closely involved?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries) Civil society and academia Private sector
D2. Achievement of Outcome		
To what extent were the project outcomes achieved?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee
To what extent were the assumptions for progress from project outputs to project outcome held?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
D2. Achievement of Outcome		
To what extent were the drivers to support transition from outputs to project outcomes in place?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
D3. Likelihood of Impact		

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
What is the likelihood that the intended impact become a reality? Intended impact: Effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs in Iraq for enhanced global environmental benefits.	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
Is there already any evidence that indicates that the project expected intermediated state has been or will be achieved soon? What is the likelihood that the project intermediated state will be achieved? Expected intermediate state: Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
To what extent were the assumptions for progress from projects outcomes through intermediate state towards the expected impact held?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
To what extent were the drivers to support transition from projects outcomes through intermediate state towards the expected impact in place?	NA	NA
Were there any unintended negative effects as a result of the project? What is the likelihood that the intervention may lead, or contribute to, unintended negative effects?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
D3. Likelihood of Impact		
To what extent has the project played a catalytic role or has promoted scaling up and/or replication ¹⁰¹ ? How these are likely to contribute to long-term impact?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
What is the likelihood of the project to make a substantive contribution to the long-lasting changes represented by the SDGs, and/or the intermediate-level result reflected in the Expected Accomplishments?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
E. Financial Management		
E1. Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures		
To what extent has the project applied proper financial management standards and adhered to UNEP's financial management policies? With what frequency was the cash advance to partners timely approved and disbursed? With what frequency was regular analysis of actual expenditure against budget and workplan done? How many regular expenditure reports (six-monthly and annual) were timely submitted? Were expenditures within the approved annual budget? If it was the case, were timely revision submitted/approved? Were regular budget revisions made when relevant and for expenditure variations of 10% and above?	IDR: Project document, MTR, financial documents (financial reports, audit reports, budget revisions, etc) Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)

¹⁰¹ Scaling up refers to approaches being adopted on a much larger scale, but in a very similar context. Scaling up is often the longer-term objective of pilot initiatives. Replication refers to approaches being repeated or lessons being explicitly applied in new/different contexts e.g. other geographic areas, different target group etc. Effective replication typically requires some form of revision or adaptation to the new context. It is possible to replicate at either the same or a different scale.

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
E. Financial Management		
E1. Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures		
Were there any financial management issues that have affected the timely delivery of the project or the quality of its performance	IDR: Project document, MTR, financial documents (financial reports, audit reports, budget revisions, etc) Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
E2. Completeness of Financial Information		
To what extent was the financial information complete, accurate and made available to evaluation, considering the following criteria/items? High level project budget (costs) for secured and unsecured funds. High level project budget by funding source(s) for secured and unsecured funds. Disbursement (funds transfer) document from funding source(s) to UNEP. Project expenditure sheet by output/outcome (to-date). Detailed project budget (by output/outcome) for secured funds. Proof/report of delivery of in-kind contributions. Partner legal agreements and documentation for all amendments exist. Where applicable: - Re-approved project budget by budget line for project extensions (both cost and no-cost extension). - Disbursement (Funds Transfer) documents (cash statement) from UNEP to partners. For GEF funded projects: - Proof/report of delivery of in-kind contributions exists. - For externally executed GEF projects, audit reports for the Executing Agency exist. - Management response to audit reports exists.	IDR: Project document, MTR, financial documents (financial reports, audit reports, budget revisions, etc) Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
E3. Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff		
How frequent, fluid and useful were communications between the project manager and FMO? Is there documentation to confirm it?	IDR: E-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)
What was the level of awareness of the project manager regarding the ongoing financial status of project during its implementation: i) no awareness, ii) little awareness, iii) moderate awareness, and iv) strong awareness?	IDR: MTR, progress, financial and final reports, and e-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)
What was the level of awareness of the FMO regarding overall project progress when financial disbursements were made (i.e. disbursements made against good quality financial and technical progress reports): i) no awareness, ii) little awareness, iii) moderate awareness, and iv) strong awareness?	IDR: MTR, progress, financial and final reports, and e-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)
Which of the following options better describe the project regarding how the communication affected project implementation? i) the lack of communication between financial and project staff members had negatively affected project implementation, or ii) good communication between financial and project staff members had positively affected project implementation (i.e. within budget, no extensions, more outputs than planned etc.).	IDR: MTR, progress, financial and final reports, and e-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)
Which of the following options better describe the project regarding raising and resolving financial issues/problems?	IDR: MTR, progress, financial and final reports, and e-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
i) financial issues/problems were only addressed retrospectively when identified by senior management/staff external to the project team, or ii) PM or FMO were proactive in raising and resolving financial issues.		
Which of the following options better describe the project regarding reviewing narrative and financial reports? i) Narrative reports were only reviewed by project manager and financial reports only by the FMO, or ii) All narrative and financial reports are reviewed by both finance and project staff members prior to submission.	IDR: MTR, progress, financial and final reports, and e-mails and other proof of communications Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO and UNEP TM)
F. Efficiency		
To what extent the project delivered maximum results from the given resources? To what extent has the project achieved its results at the lowest possible cost? How could the project be more efficient in the use of resources (time, funds, staff, partnerships, etc.)?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and deliverables Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
What were the major reasons to require the no-cost extension?	IDR: MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and PCA/ICA Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
To what extent were the project extension justified ¹⁰² or could they have been avoided through stronger project management?	IDR: MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and PCA/ICA Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
To what extent did the delays/extensions in project implementation affect the achievement of the project outcomes? What were the major implications of these delays/extensions?	IDR: MTR, PSC report, HYPR, final reports, and PCA/ICA Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
To what extent has the project applied any time or cost-saving mechanisms or cost-effective approaches to achieve results within the approved timeframe and budget? If yes, to what extent these mechanisms or approaches supported the achievement of project targets? If no, to what extent the lack of these mechanisms or approaches undermined the achievement of project targets?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, financial and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
Did the project face any obstacles (financial, administrative, managerial) and to what extent they affected output delivery and overall efficiency?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, financial and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
F. Efficiency		
How frequently were project outputs delivered according to expected timeframes? How frequently were project activities/events sequenced efficiently?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, financial and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM, FMO, and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
Which of the following options better describe the project regarding operation within existing roles or institutions? i) The project established unnecessarily duplicative roles, mechanisms, or institutions ii) The project operated within existing roles, mechanisms, institutions or expanded them in an efficient and effective manner	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, financial and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit

¹⁰² 'Justifications' for no cost extensions should involve increases in identified benefits and could include: changes in the timing or sequencing of activities to realize greater results (i.e. to take advantage of positive opportunities; donor-requested changes to better align with, or contribute to, their strategic results; re-scheduling of events to increase country-level ownership or leadership etc.).

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
To what extent the project, during its implementation, made use of/built upon pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives, programs and projects? To what extent this contributed to increase project efficiency?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, PSC report, HYPR, financial and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
To what extent the management of the project, or the method of carrying out activities by partners, minimized UNEP's carbon footprint?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, agreements, PSC report, HYPR, and final report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit
G. Monitoring and Reporting		
G1. Monitoring Design and Budgeting		
To what extent were the indicators of M&E Plan (at project launch) specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented (SMART)? To what extent were the methods designed for tracking progress against the indicators adherent with results-based management?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
At project launch, to what extent the project's M&E Plan: a. Covered all indicators appropriately in the logical framework b. Had data sources and data collection methods clearly defined c. Had appropriated data collection instruments in place d. Data collection frequency was appropriate e. Had a dedicated budget per monitoring activity f. Person responsible for monitoring progress against each indicator was identified g. Was disaggregated by relevant stakeholder groups including gender and minority/disadvantaged groups h. Additional gender specific indicators, if necessary, were developed i. Funds for mid-term and terminal evaluations/reviews were considered adequate by the UNEP Evaluation Office and were available to the evaluation	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
G2. Monitoring of Project Implementation		
To what extent was the monitoring system operational throughout the project implementation period? Did it facilitate the timely tracking of results and progress towards projects objectives?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent was baseline data collected and used to contribute to the project monitoring, knowledge management and final reporting?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent was monitoring data collected regularly in accordance with a monitoring plan and workplan? To what extent was it complete, relevant, and properly detailed?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
G2. Monitoring of Project Implementation		
To what extent was monitoring data analyzed and shared with appropriate project managers and steering partners?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, final reports, and SC minutes Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
What was the level of detail of the M&E data made available to the evaluators?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent was M&E data collected disaggregate by vulnerable/marginalized groups, including gender?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
To what extent were the tools and methodologies utilized during monitoring responsive to the needs of different stakeholder groups?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
How well were funds spent on monitoring in accordance with the planned expenditures or against budget lines identified for monitoring?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, and financial reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent was the information generated by the M&E used during the life of the project to adapt and improve project execution, achievement of outcomes and to ensure sustainability?	IDR: Project document, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, and progress and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
Was there a M&E Implementation Plan? What tools were used by the project to conduct M&E (i.e. indicators profile sheet, indicator dashboard, etc.)?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, monitoring and data collection tools, HYPR, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
G3. Project Reporting		
To what extent had both UNEP and donor reporting commitments been fulfilled?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, and HYPR, and financial and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
How complete and with what quality was documentation of project progress made available?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, and HYPR, and financial and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
What is the evidence available of collaboration and communication with appropriate UNEP colleagues ¹⁰³ ? How efficient was this collaboration and communication?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR, and financial, and final reports, and communication evidence (e-mails, meeting minutes) Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
Were there any gaps in PIMS/donor reporting?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, and HYPR, and financial and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
How well does the official records in PIMS/donor reports match available evidence?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, and HYPR, and financial and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent did the PIMS/donor reporting adequately reflect the project scope of work?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, and HYPR, and financial and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent were monitoring reports gender neutral (ie. reflecting gendered experiences equally) and/or, if appropriate, gender sensitive (ie. reporting experiences differentiated by gender groups)?	IDR: Project document, MTR, and progress, financial, and final reports Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
H. Sustainability		
H1. Socio-political Sustainability		
To what extent does the maintenance and further development of project outcomes after the closure of the project depend on social/political factors (i.e. changes in social-political context, interest and commitment among government	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy.	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit

¹⁰³ Appropriate UNEP colleagues mean other staff working on complementary projects or in the same sector/on the same topic/in the same country. The aim is to recognize efforts to work outside 'silos'.

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
representatives and other stakeholders to use the Environmental Information System)?	Interviews and/or surveys	Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
What is the level of ownership, interest, and commitment among government representatives and other stakeholders to take the project achievements forwards?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
What mechanisms are in place to adapt/respond to changes in the social/political context that may jeopardize the sustainability of the project outcomes?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
H2. Financial Sustainability		
To what extent does the maintenance and further development of project outcomes after the closure of the project depend on future funding / financial flows (i.e. maintenance of Environmental Information System, continuous capacity building, engagement with end users to promote Environmental Information System use for decision making)?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
H2. Financial Sustainability		
To what extent has the required future funding been secured?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee
Has an exit strategy with a financial component been developed? Has it been initiated already?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee
H3. Sustainability of the Institutional Framework		
To what extent is the maintenance and further development of project outcomes after the closure of the project depend on / sensible to institutional support?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PMU and PSC
What mechanisms are in place to sustain/support the institutionalization of the project outcome (i.e. governance structures and processes, policies, partnership agreements, legal and accountability frameworks are in place favoring data users to use the Environmental Information System to support decision making processes)? Is the institutional framework solid enough to guarantee that data users will use the tool?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PMU and PSC
To what extent has the capacity of relevant individuals been enhanced? What is the likelihood that these relevant individuals will stay in their position or in a position where they can continue to support the project outcome?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PMU and PSC
Has an exit strategy (with an institutional component) been developed? Has it been or will be discussed in the SC and agreed among project partners? Are the activities, roles and responsibilities clearly described and agreed upon? Does the exit strategy include timeframes and any mechanism to monitor its implementation? Has it been initiated already?	IDR: Final report, PSC minutes and reports, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PMU and PSC
I. Factors affecting Project Performance		

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
I1. Preparation and Readiness		
To what extent were appropriate measures taken to address weaknesses in project design or respond to changes that took place between project approval, securing funds and project mobilisation?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Inception Report, 1st Work Plan, MTR, and PSC minutes and report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
During the inception or mobilization stage of the project (i.e. the time between project approval and first disbursement) which of the following actions were done aiming at achieving a proper startup of the project: a. A comprehensive inception meeting was held and reported on. b. An annual, costed workplan was developed with appropriate detail c. A detailed and compliant procurement plan was developed. d. A Steering Committee was established with full, appropriate representation. e. A good ESE safeguards assessment was carried out, with stakeholder participation. f. Comprehensive and relevant stakeholder analysis was undertaken (complementing the one from Project document). g. All partner's capacity was confirmed/addressed. h. Legal agreements were signed with partners in a timely manner. i. Staffing mobilization was undertaken in a timely manner. j. Appropriate and adequate governance arrangements were established. k. All necessary measures were taken to respond to contextual changes that took place during the inception period. These were timely and of good quality. l. The period between project approval and first disbursement is 6 months or less. m. Measures were taken during the inception period that noticeably strengthened the project design (i.e. design of Communication Strategy and Plan, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, KM Strategy, Replication and Scaling-up Plan, etc.).	IDR: Project document, PIR Inception Report, 1st Work Plan, MTR, PSC minutes and report, procurement plans, ESS documents, communication strategy / plan, stakeholder engagement plan, KM strategy, replication and scaling-up plan, and agreements. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
I2. Quality of Project Management and Supervision		
How effective was the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping and supervision provided by UNEP?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR, MTR, and PSC minutes and report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PSC (MoE and other ministries)
How well was the Steering Committee functioning (frequent meetings, relevant issues discussed, leadership provided)?	IDR: PSC minutes and report Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PSC (MoE and other ministries)
How well managed were the teams involved in the implementation of the project?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR, final reports, MTR, and PSC minutes and report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) PMU and PSC
To what extent the working relationship between the PM/TM and project partners has been constructive and/or effective?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR, final reports, MTR, and PSC minutes and report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
How well were the turnover of staff handled? To what extent were there effective (i.e. systematized, complete and ensured smooth transition) handover processes and information exchange (supported by good documentation) between outgoing and incoming staff?	IDR: Handover notes Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU
To what extent the capacity of project staff, including some key members, was aligned with project requirements?	IDR: Project document, ToRs for the project staff, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU
To what extent were project staff, including some key members, located appropriately for efficient project implementation?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, MTR, and project's technical documents Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU
I2. Quality of Project Management and Supervision		
How regular and constructive information exchange between project team, PM/TM and UNEP colleagues had taken place?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, MTR, and project's technical documents Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent had the Executing Agency and the technical backstopping and supervision provided by UNEP provided strategic, timely and effectively leadership towards achieving the planned outcomes?	IDR: Project document, PIR, MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes and reports, project's technical documents, deliverables, and exit strategy. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
How fast and effective were the responses of project team to execution challenges or contextual changes? (adaptative management)	IDR: MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes, and email correspondence. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
How adequate was the management response to any financial shortfalls, changes and unforeseen situations (i.e. response shows clear prioritization and movement of funds to meet implementation and accountability requirements)? (adaptative management)	IDR: MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes, and email correspondence. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
How relevant and timely was the advice provided by PM/TM to deal with known problems, risks or challenges? (adaptative management)	IDR: MTR, HYPR and final reports, PSC minutes, and email correspondence. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (FMO, UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
I3. Stakeholders'¹⁰⁴ Participation and Cooperation		
To what extent did the implementation begin, and was undertaken, with a relevant and useful analysis of stakeholder groups?	IDR: Project document, PIR, inception and progress reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)

¹⁰⁴ Here the term 'stakeholder' should be considered in a broad sense, encompassing all project partners, duty bearers with a role in delivering project outputs and target users of project outputs and any other collaborating agents external to UNEP

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
What efforts were made by project team to promote stakeholder ownership (specially by national and local government) of processes and outcomes of the project? How effective were these efforts?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
How effective, regular, and timely were consultations and communication made with stakeholder groups during the life of the project?	IDR: Project document, progress and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries) Civil society and academia Private sector
How adequate (or relevant) was the support given by the project to maximize collaboration or collective action between stakeholder groups (e.g. sharing plans, pooling resources, exchanging learning and expertise)?	IDR: Project document, progress and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit Project Steering Committee (MoE and other ministries)
I3. Stakeholders'¹⁰⁵ Participation and Cooperation		
To what extent linkages to poverty alleviation or impact on economic livelihoods have been considered and addressed in the project to assess and mitigate negative effects on sustainability of livelihoods, equity of opportunities and the protection of human rights for populations directly or indirectly affected by the project	IDR: Project document, progress and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
I4. Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity		
To what extent has the project, during its implementation, applied the UN Common Understanding on the human rights-based approach (HRBA) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Gender Strategy, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent the project adheres to UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment (2015)?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Gender Strategy, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
To what extent the project takes into consideration possible inequalities (especially disadvantaged groups - i.e. women, and indigenous people) in its implementation?	IDR: Project document, PIR, HYPR and final reports, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Gender Strategy, Communication Strategy, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
I5. Environmental and Social Safeguard		
To what extent safeguarding considerations are demonstrated in the items below regarding quality, detail and consistency: a. management plan for addressing safeguarding b. review(s) of risk ratings	IDR: Project document, PIR, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, SRIF, technical reports, MTR, and Final Report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)

¹⁰⁵ Here the term 'stakeholder' should be considered in a broad sense, encompassing all project partners, duty bearers with a role in delivering project outputs and target users of project outputs and any other collaborating agents external to UNEP

REVIEW CRITERIA & GUIDING QUESTIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	TARGETED RESPONDENTS / FOCUS GROUP
c. monitoring of project implementation for safeguarding issues d. response (where relevant) to safeguarding issues e. reporting on safeguarding issues/reporting that no safeguarding issues arose		
To what extent the project considered and/or addressed environmental, social and economic impacts to the key stakeholders and, in particular, to the most vulnerable groups?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, SRIF, technical reports, MTR, and Final Report. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO)
I6. Country Ownership and Driven-ness		
To what extent did data providers, generators and users that were essential for moving from outputs to direct outcomes or from direct outcomes to intermediate states took a leadership role in: a. Strategic guidance of project delivery b. Driving or advocating for change to achieve higher level results c. Endorsing / accepting project results d. Initiating non-cost complementary or additional activities e. Provision of in-kind and / or cash co-financing contributions; making provisions in forward-looking budgetary plans or securing additional external resources	IDR: Project document, PIR, agreements, formal commitments from partners, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, progress and final reports, PSC minutes and report, technical reports, and MTR. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) Project Management Unit PSC (MoE and other ministries)
I7. Communication and Public Awareness		
What was the level of awareness that the key audiences (the ones driving desired change from outputs to impact) had about the project, its main messages and goals?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Communication Strategy, communication materials, papers and reports, MTR, and HYPR and final reports. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU PSC (MoE and other ministries) Civil society, academia and private sector
To what extent were communication activities and channels: a. Well-targeted towards all key audiences b. Continuous over the life of the project c. Always interactive / responsive to audience feedback d. Very well monitored for evidence of effect e. Fully budgeted/financed	IDR: Project document, PIR, Communication Strategy, communication materials, papers and reports, MTR, and HYPR and final reports. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU PSC (MoE and other ministries) Civil society, academia and private sector
How effectively were communication/public awareness efforts in driving change towards results beyond outputs?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Communication Strategy, communication materials, papers and reports, MTR, and HYPR and final reports. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU PSC (MoE and other ministries) Civil society, academia and private sector
How effective was the project in the communication of learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Communication Strategy, communication materials, papers and reports, MTR, and HYPR and final reports. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU PSC (MoE and other ministries) Civil society, academia and private sector
How solid and comprehensive was the communication plan/strategy? Was it fully financed, implemented and monitored during the life of the project?	IDR: Project document, PIR, Communication Strategy, communication materials, papers and reports, MTR, and HYPR and final reports. Interviews and/or surveys	GEF Implementing agency (UNEP TM and team) Executing agency (UNEP/WAO) and PMU PSC (MoE and other ministries) Civil society, academia and private sector

ANNEX III. PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE REVIEW

Table 6: People consulted during the Review

Organisation	Name	Position	Role in the project	Gender
UNEP / EWAD	Jochem Zoetelief	Senior Management and Programme Analyst	Portfolio and Task Manager	M
UNEP / EWAD	Sulastri Manik	Project Management Assistant	Project Management Assistant	F
UNEP / EWAD	Kevin Mtuweta	Senior Finance and Budget Assistant / Fund Management Officer	Financial management, Implementing agency	M
UNEP / EWAD	Ayda Maria Villalobos Castro	Associate Programme Management Officer / Project Associate	Project team member, Implementing agency	F
UNEP / EWAD	Florence Kahiro	Administrative Officer / Fund Management Officer	Financial management, Implementing agency	F
UNEP / WAO	Abdul-Majeid Haddad	Regional Deputy Director	Project Manager Supervisor, Executing agency	M
UNEP / WAO	Miraq AL-Jubouri	Programme Management Officer	Regional Project Manager, Executing agency	M
CIMA Research Foundation – International Partner	Enrico Ponte	CEO and Project Manager	Project Manager, International Partner	M
eSITE – Local Partner	Areeb Mohamed	Managing Director	Local Implementing Partner	M
Government of Iraq	Dr. Raghad Asad Al-Obaidi	Director General, Planning and Follow-up Directorate	Project Manager, Executing agency	F
Government of Iraq	Dhurgham Abed Ali	Information Technology Center - Director	IT Manager, Executing agency	M
Government of Iraq	Ruaa Khalid	Information Technology Center - IT Team Member	Workgroup member, Executing agency	F
Government of Iraq	Fadhaa Turki	Information Technology Center - IT Team Member	Workgroup member, Executing agency	M
Government of Iraq	Ahmed Abdul-Abbas	Information Technology Center - IT Team Member	Workgroup member, Executing agency	M
Government of Iraq	Shwan Hikmat Sedeeq Abdlwahaab Agha	Information Technology Center	Workgroup member, Executing agency	M
Government of Iraq	Ali Hussein	Information Technology Center	Workgroup member, Executing agency	M
Government of Iraq	Iman Khalil	Department of International Environmental Relations - Coordination Officer	Workgroup member, Executing agency	F
Government of Iraq	Areej Ibrahim	Planning Directorate - Planning and follow up Team	Workgroup member, Executing agency	F

ANNEX IV. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project and related documents:

- UNEP. (2017). GEF-6 Project Identification Form (PIF). Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq
- UNEP (2018) GEF-UNEP/CCCD/MSP/ GEF ID 9744. GEF6 Request for Project Approval. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (And Annexes).
- GEF (2018) UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. CEO Approved Letter.
- UNEP. (2018). Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division, and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2018).
- UNEP. (2018) Mission Report. Inception workshop of the GEF Iraq project and GCF board meeting. Amman, Jordan, and Manama, Bahrain, 15-19 October 2018.
- UNEP. (2019). Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA). UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq.
- Amendment No. (1.0) to the Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between The Ministry of Health and Environment of Iraq and The United Nations Environment Programme on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (April 2021).
- UNEP. (2021). Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting minutes. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (online), 12 July 2021.
- UNEP. (2024). Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting report. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. GEF-funded Iraq Crosscutting Capacity Development (CCCD) project. Kempinski Hotel, Amman, Jordan, 29-30 April 2024.
- UNEP. (2022). Amendment No. 1 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2022).
- UNEP. (2023). Amendment No. 2 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (May 2023).

- UNEP. (2023). Amendment No. 3 to the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between the United Nations Environment Programme, Science Division and the United Nations Environment Programme, West Asia Office on UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (December 2023).
- UNEP. (2024). Mid-term Review. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (October 2018 – November 2023).
- UNEP. (2024). Final Report. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (July 2024).
- UNEP (2025). Terms of Reference. Terminal Review. UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq.
- UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Documents Repository. (2018-2024). Project reports (Inception Report, Quarterly Expenditure Reports, Half Yearly Progress Reports, Half-Yearly Expenditures Reports, Project Implementation Reviews, Technical reports, Workshop/ training reports, presentations, and notes), including six-month progress and financial reports, and progress reports.
- UNEP GEF Project ID 9744. Deliverables. (2018-2024). Reports, presentations, recommendations, and publications (Components 1 and 2).

Review Documents:

- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00 TR List of TR Support Tools. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00a Review Consultants Agreement Form. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00b UNEP Glossary of Results Definitions. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00c Estimating Review Budgets. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00d Documents needed for Terminal Reviews. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2024, October 01). 00e TR Main TR Report Template (FOR USE BY CONSULTANTS). <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 00f_TR Quality Assess of TR Report Template FOR USE BY UNEP_18.06.24. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 01 TOR Terminal Review All Funders. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 02 TR Review Criteria Ratings Table. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>

- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 03 TR Criterion Rating Descriptions Matrix. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 04 TR Weighted Ratings Table. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 05 TR Inception Report Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 06 TR Main Review Report Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 07 TR TOC Reformulation Justification Template – use this table for when/if you reconstruct the TOC for review. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 08 and 08a_Quality_of_Project_Design_Assessment Template (Word and Excel versions). <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 09 TR Stakeholder Analysis Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 10 TR Review Methodology Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 11 TR Addressing Gender Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 12 TR Safeguards Assessment Template. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 13 TR Use of Theory of Change in Reviews Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 14 TR Financial Tables – these go into the main review report and will guide you on the evidence to look for under Financial Management Criteria. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 15 TR Likelihood of Impact Flow Chart. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 15a TR Likelihood of Impact Flow Chart Test Case. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 16 Recommendations Quality Guidance Note. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 16a TR Presenting Recs and LL Template– use these to formulate the recommendations and lessons learned. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>
- UNEP / Evaluation Office (2025, April 22). 17 TR Recommendation Impl Plan Template. <https://communities.unep.org/display/EOU/MANAGEMENT-LED+REVIEW+TOOLS>

ANNEX V. REVIEW ITINERARY

No field missions were conducted. All interviews were carried out through online meetings. The list of interviewees is provided in Annex III.

ANNEX VI. PROJECT BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Table 7: Project Funding Sources Table

Funding source	Planned funding	% of planned funding	Secured funding	% of secured funding
All figures as USD				
Cash				
Funds from the Environment Fund	0.00	0	0.00	0
Funds from the Regular Budget	0.00	0	0.00	0
Extra-budgetary funding (listed per donor):	1,135,000.00	100	1,135,000.00	100
Sub-total: Cash contributions				
In-kind				
Environment Fund staff-post costs	0.00	0	0.00	0
Regular Budget staff-post costs	0.00	0	0.00	0
Extra-budgetary funding for staff-posts (listed per donor)	0.00	0	0.00	0
Sub-total: In-kind contributions				
Co-financing*				
Co-financing cash contribution	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Co-financing in-kind contribution	610,000.00	100	610,000.00	100
Sub-total: Co-financing contributions				
Total	1,745,000	100	1,745,000	100

*Funding from a donor to a partner which is not received into UNEP accounts but is used by a UNEP partner or collaborating centre to deliver the results in a UNEP – approved project.

Table 8: Expenditure by Outcome/Output

Component/sub-component/output	Estimated cost at design ¹⁰⁶	Actual Cost ¹⁰⁷ / expenditure ¹⁰⁸
All figures as USD		
Component 1	720.000	606.877 / 429.536,94
Component 2	320.000	387.693 / 98.384,46

¹⁰⁶ Data identified in Annex F-1: Detailed GEF Budget.

¹⁰⁷ Data identified in Half yearly Expenditure Report from May 2018 to July 2023

¹⁰⁸ Data identified in Half yearly Expenditure Report from May 2018 to July 2023

ANNEX VII. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Table 9: Financial Management Table

Financial management components:		Rating	Evidence/ Comments
1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures:		HS	
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence ¹⁰⁹ to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		No	Evidence from project documentation, the Mid-Term Review, financial reports (including budget, co-financing, and expenditure reports), as well as stakeholder interviews, indicates that expenditures were relatively well aligned with the project's financial planning. However, the project experienced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, transfer restrictions, governmental processes, and bureaucratic procedures.
2. Completeness of project financial information¹¹⁰:			
Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below)		HS	
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	The tables highlighted in the project documents presented the co-financing and project costs at the design stage, broken down by type of funding (cash or in kind) and source.
B.	Revisions to the budget	Yes/No	According to the MTR, annual budget revisions were reportedly undertaken. However, the MTR only noted one instance of a budget revision, supported by email correspondence from the FMO requesting a revised budget for record-keeping purposes (emails dated 20 February 2019 and 31 March 2019). Nevertheless, no formal revised budget documents were identified or made available for review.
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	Several project legal agreements were identified—one ICA and three amendments, as well as one PCA and one amendment—indicating due diligence in managing this type of project financial documentation, despite certain delays caused by bureaucratic processes.
D.	Proof of fund transfers	N/A	According to the MTR, the transfers between UNEP EWAD and UNEP WAO are internal transactions and therefore do not require the proof of fund transfers.
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	Yes/No	This review identified records of co-financing reports covering the period from July 2018 to June 2022, while the

¹⁰⁹ If the review raises concerns over adherence with policies or standard procedures, a recommendation may be given to cover the topic in an upcoming audit, or similar financial oversight exercise.

¹¹⁰ See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference

Financial management components:		Rating	Evidence/ Comments
			MTR confirmed the availability of co-financing reports for the period from July 2020 to June 2023.
F.	A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes/No	Only three half-yearly expenditure reports (June 2021, December 2022, and December 2023) and one yearly expenditure report (2021) were identified.
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses (<i>where applicable</i>)	N/A	-
H.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):	N/A	-
3. Communication between finance and project management staff		HS	
Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status.		HS	MTR evidence and interviews clearly show that the Project Manager has a strong awareness of the project's financial status.
Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done.		HS	Emails and interviews showed that FMO used to be well-informed of project progress and disbursements, as funds were released based on detailed financial and technical reports, ensuring alignment between financial and project status
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager.		HS	Interviews and Mid-term review findings indicated that FMO, PM and TM collaborated effectively to identify and resolve financial issues through proactive communication, including regular meetings to monitor financial risks and corrective actions.
Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports.		HS	Interviews indicated FMO and PM maintain frequent communication during the preparation of reports, ensuring that both financial and project progress are accurately tracked and aligned.
Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the review process		HS	Interviews feedback indicated the project team and FMO used to respond promptly to financial requests, with regular and in-depth meetings ensuring swift identification and resolution of financial issues.
Overall rating		HS	

ANNEX VIII. COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH TOOLS



“Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of MEAs for Iraq” Project GEF ID 9744 2018 - 2024

Management-led Terminal
Review – Preliminary Findings
and Recommendations
September 2025

Summary

- Objective & Methods
- **Preliminary Findings**
- Conclusions, Lessons Learned & Recommendations
- The way forward
- Discussions

Objective



To support the participatory approach of the review



To share emerging findings with project stakeholders



To ensure access to all relevant information sources



To provide an opportunity to verify emerging findings before finalizing the draft report

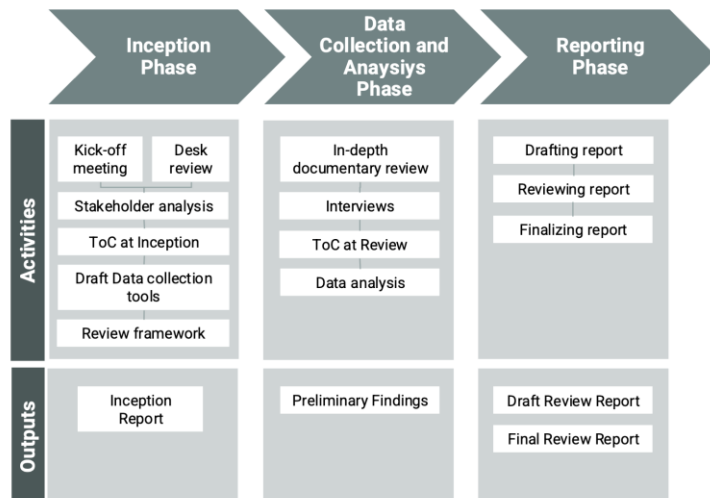


To enable project stakeholders to engage with lessons learned and contribute to recommendations

Method

- Based on the guidelines, criteria, methods, and tools presented by the UNEP Evaluation Office
- Participatory approach
- 17 responses (individual and group interviews) with key stakeholders (Implementing and executing agencies, partners, and working group members)

♂ 59% ♀ 41%



Preliminary Findings

A. Strategic Relevance

- Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW, and strategic priorities
- Alignment to Donor/Partner strategic priorities
- Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional, and national environmental priorities
- Complementarity with relevant existing interventions/coherence

B. Quality of Project Design

C. Nature of External Context

D. Effectiveness

- Availability of outputs
- Achievement of project outcomes
- Likelihood of impact

E. Financial Management

- Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures
- Completeness of project financial information
- Communication between finance and project management staff

F. Efficiency

G. Monitoring & Reporting

- Monitoring design and budgeting
- Monitoring of project implementation
- Project reporting

H. Sustainability

- Socio-political sustainability
- Financial sustainability
- Institutional sustainability

I. Factors Affecting Performance

- Preparation and readiness
- Quality of project management and supervision
- Stakeholders' participation and cooperation
- Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality
- Environmental and social safeguards
- Country ownership and driven-ness
- Communication and public awareness

A. Strategic relevance

- Fully aligned with UNEP's mandate and thematic priorities (MTS 2018–2021 and 2022–2025) and corresponding PoVs (2018–2019, 2020–2021, 2022–2023), supporting environmental governance, data access, and science-policy interface, and supporting Capacity Building (BSP) and South-South Cooperation (S-SC).
- Contributed to GEF CCCD priorities (CCCD-1, CCCD-2), and GEF-6 Core Indicator 6 and GEF-7 indicators, including gender-disaggregated direct beneficiaries.
- Aligned with global, regional, and national priorities, including SDGs 13, 16, and 17, and Iraq's strategic frameworks (NAPAs, NBSAPs, TNAs, MIAs, NESAP, INC, NCSA).
- Indirectly aligned with the UN's "Leave No One Behind" policy by fostering inclusive and equitable environmental impact.
- Demonstrated moderate complementarity with existing UNEP and partner initiatives (e.g., Environmental Performance Index and State of Environment reporting).
- Built on lessons from predecessor projects and regional experiences (e.g., Kuwait and United Arab Emirates) and engaged with national institutions such as the Central Statistics Organization (MoP).

B. Quality of Project Design

- Good performance in key review areas: Strategic Relevance, Logical Framework and Monitoring, Project Governance and Supervision, and Financial Planning/Budgeting.
- Areas for enhancement: Learning, Communication and Outreach, Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects, and Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps.
- Opportunities for improvement: more detailed communication plan, stronger stakeholder engagement (including gender/minority groups), clearer sustainability and exit strategies, plans for scaling up, improved Theory of Change pathways, and more realistic risk mitigation tailored to the national context.

C. Nature of External Context



Project operations were moderately affected by COVID-19 and political instability, leading to delays and requiring timeline adjustments.



Virtual formats enabled continuity for some activities but faced challenges due to limited internet, power outages, and low digital readiness among public institutions.



Despite external constraints, the project showed strong adaptability by revising its work plan and sustaining core activities remotely. Its ability to proceed with only three extensions, despite the country's complex context, was considered commendable.

D. Effectiveness (1/3)

AVAILABILITY OF OUTPUTS		
OUTPUT 1.1: Analysis of current environmental data management and systems	OUTPUT 1.2: Agreed streamlined processes for data collection, information sharing, and gap filling implemented	OUTPUT 1.3: Functional systems and information portal developed
OUTPUT 2.1: Environmental indicators updated and improved	OUTPUT 2.2: Enhanced capacity for data collection and management	OUTPUT 2.3: Strengthened capacity to handle and present environmental data
OUTPUT 3.1: Enhanced collaborative processes developed	OUTPUT 3.2: Monitoring and evaluation mechanism established	OUTPUT 3.3: Sustainability strategy for MEAs developed
OUTPUT 4.1: Capacity built for integrating environmental management	OUTPUT 4.2: Updated strategies and plans implemented in pilot sectors	OUTPUT 4.3: Environmental education and awareness-raising activities for sustainable development

- All 12 outputs were fully achieved, despite challenges.
- 10+ in-person and virtual workshops and training sessions (130 participants), focused on data analysis, geospatial information management, and training on the Iraq EIS. Key workshops included Beirut (Sept 2022 and May 2023), Erbil (May 2023), and Savona, Italy (May 2024).
- 10+ virtual meetings conducted with national and international partners (e.g. MoP, eSite and CIMA) to discuss indicators, monitoring processes, and data validation.
- Outputs were of good quality, relevant to users, and adapted to the local context. Strong national leadership and stakeholder engagement supported delivery and ownership.
- Limited data availability and post-handover resource gaps affected system consistency and monitoring, though it continues to serve its purpose with room for improvement.
- Opportunities for improvement: stronger integration with national processes, and enhanced data and EIS infrastructure.

D. Effectiveness (2/3)

Achievement of outcome

OUTCOME 1: Streamlined and integrated data and information system for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting

OUTCOME 2: Improved regular environmental monitoring to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures

OUTCOME 3: Enhanced regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for the implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs

OUTCOME 4: Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact-oriented policies

- According to project indicators, all 4 outcomes were achieved, with key outputs delivered and foundational structures established (e.g. national EIS, monitoring tools, coordination mechanisms, and capacity-building efforts).
- However, sustained use, institutional integration, and full policy implementation remain ongoing challenges in data availability, technical functionality, institutional capacity, and management.
- Key assumptions (political stability, inter-agency collaboration, and inclusion) were only partially upheld. Gender inclusion was actively promoted, with over 60% female participation in the implementation team.
- Drivers such as training effectiveness were strong, but stakeholder mobilization and synergies with existing initiatives were limited.

D. Effectiveness (3/3)

Likelihood of impact

Intermediate State

Integrated environmental data and governance systems are consistently used by national institutions to inform evidence-based MEA and SDG implementation and reporting.

- Project impact is rated as “Likely”, with key foundations in place
- The intermediate state was partially achieved: the EIS is operational and has supported MEA reporting, but consistent institutional use depends on leadership, integration into routine operations, and sustained capacity-building.
- Government commitment was upheld, and the EIS is recognized as a transformative tool for science-based policymaking.
- No unintended negative effects were reported.

E. Financial Management



Strong financial management ensured alignment with UNEP policies, timely disbursements, regular reporting, and adaptive responses to COVID-19 and political instability.



No major financial issues impacted performance; three no-cost extensions were approved in compliance with UNEP and donor guidelines.



Financial documentation was generally complete, accurate, and accessible, with expenditures tracked via Umoja and linked to specific outputs and outcomes.



Effective collaboration between TM and FMO, with regular and responsive communication, supported adaptive management and procedural adherence.



Final resource use rate reached 98%, with full financial closure pending terminal review.

F. Efficiency

- Three no-cost extensions (totaling 25 months): COVID-19, political instability, and institutional restructuring.
- Successfully delivered expected outputs within revised timelines, despite external disruptions.
- Adaptive management and strategic decisions (e.g., leveraging existing institutions and optimization of human resources) enhanced efficiency.
- Institutional integration (e.g., embedding EIS in the MoE IT department) supported long-term sustainability.
- 98% of the budget was utilized with no reported waste.
- Design limitations affected efficiency:
 - The communication strategy lacked contextual sensitivity.
 - Risk mitigation could have been stronger during political disruptions.

G. Monitoring & Reporting

Successes:

- M&R plan based on UNEP standards, with SMART indicators and a participatory approach.
- Functional monitoring throughout implementation, tracking 24 indicators regularly.
- Semi-annual reports, annual PIRs, and quarterly meetings ensured continuous oversight.
- Extensive and high-quality documentation: technical, financial, training reports, and presentations.
- Use of Umoja ensured financial transparency and compliance.
- GEF Core indicators were consistently reported, including gender-disaggregated data.
- Partners like CIMA fulfilled reporting obligations on time.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Process-focused indicators limited a comprehensive evaluation of the project's long-term impact ^(*)
- Baseline data were broad and imprecise; the Capacity Scorecard was not updated.
- Disaggregated data by vulnerable groups and gender were only partially collected.
- Lack of budget for translation caused delays and burdened UNEP WAO staff.
- Monitoring data were not systematically analyzed or used for adaptive management.

(*) Instead of measuring the "Number of training and educational programmes developed, executed and made available online" (Outcome Indicator 4), a more appropriate outcome indicator could be: "Percentage of training participants who apply the knowledge gained in their institutional context."

H. Sustainability



Socio-political sustainability

- Depends on political will, stakeholder ownership, and national integration.
- Engagement was built through capacity-building, collaboration, and integration into national systems.
- Post-project use reflects growing ownership and commitment.
- Sustainability remains vulnerable to political transitions and the absence of legal mandates.
- Awareness, coordination, and mandate alignment are key to sustaining long-term use.
- Strategy includes adaptive mechanisms and UNEP-CIMA post-handover technical support agreement but lacks clear guidance on engagement and contingency planning.



Financial sustainability

- Depends on continued funding for EIS maintenance, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement.
- While UNEP fully financed the system and cost-saving measures (e.g. migration to Iraqi National Data Centre) were implemented, long-term financial sustainability remains uncertain.
- Strategy recommends internal resource allocation and periodic assessments but lacks a detailed financial component.
- Feedback emphasized the need for funding to support technical upgrades and institutional capacity, strategic partnerships, and demonstrating the economic value of environmental data to mobilize long-term support.



Institutional sustainability

- Relies on institutional frameworks and governance structures.
- EIS was embedded within the MoE's IT department.
- Capacity-building efforts (e.g., ToT program in Italy), open-source code, and operational materials (manuals, SOPs, guides) supported institutional memory and autonomy.
- Post-project support from CIMA and direct partnerships with technical providers ensured continuity.
- Requires aligning with national systems, formalizing roles through legal frameworks, and reframing EIS as a permanent government function.

I. Factors Affecting Performance (1/3)

Preparation and readiness

- **Successes:** Project was launched within 6 months (Mar–Jun 2018), anchored in MoE structures, with timely legal agreements, stakeholder consultations, inception meeting, workplan, procurement plan, PSC w/ broad representation, prompt staffing mobilization, ESS assessment, and defined stakeholder roles.
- **Challenges:** Implementation delays due to late PCA, limited stakeholder engagement, infrequent PSC meetings, and an exit strategy lacking financial and institutional clarity.

Quality of project management and supervision

- **Successes:** Strong leadership, clear roles, and adaptive management ensured effective coordination and resilience, with timely oversight and minimal disruption considering external challenges.
- **Challenges:** Limited PSC engagement (3 meetings), bureaucratic hurdles, and limited inter-ministerial integration, and paper-based systems hindered strategic planning, data collection, and remote work efficiency.

Stakeholders' participation and cooperation

- **Successes:** Solid stakeholder analysis and collaboration, supported by PSC meetings and capacity-building initiatives, fostered engagement and national ownership, with MoE leading efforts to ensure platform continuity.
- **Challenges:** Stakeholder engagement was hindered by political instability, limited coordination, and reliance on online platforms.

I. Factors Affecting Performance (2/3)

Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality

- **Successes:** Gender and human rights considerations integrated into implementation, result interpretation, and resource allocation, with active female participation in workshops and meetings—some reaching 50%—use of sex-disaggregated indicators, and woman leadership.
- **Challenges:** Limitations in integrating gender and human rights comprehensively, with gaps in stakeholder identification, monitoring systems, and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Environmental and social safeguards

- **Successes:** Low-risk and adaptive approach to environmental and social safeguards, with risk monitoring and reduced carbon footprint through virtual implementation.
- **Comment:** Risk management focused mainly on political/organizational aspects because the project was not expected to generate any significant negative environmental and social impact.

I. Factors Affecting Performance (3/3)

Country ownership and driven-ness

- **Successes:** Inclusive consultations, capacity-building, and leadership in project activities, PSC active participation(*), with cross-sectoral representation. Iraqi government's commitment to host the EIS locally, Technical ToT and transfer of open-source tools to MoE. National project manager's local expertise facilitated trust and coordination.
- **Challenges:** Limited in-person engagement, gaps in coordination and performance indicator knowledge among project teams, need for stronger management structures and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Communication and public awareness

- **Successes:** Frequent, well-targeted, and responsive activities to feedback; capacity-building efforts included knowledge transfer and documentation in Arabic; awareness materials (e.g., posters for schools) and public events (e.g., exit meeting) helped increase visibility.
- **Challenges:** Limited communication strategy in scope; few initiatives focused on public outreach; the impact of communication activities was not systematically monitored; COVID-19 and political instability disrupted consistent stakeholder engagement; limited feedback mechanisms and outreach to civil society.

(*) Representation from MoE, UNEP EWAD, UNEP WAO, and sectors beyond the MoE, such as MoP/CSO and other relevant ministries

Conclusions

MLTR Strategic Questions:

1. “What approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the Environmental Information System (EIS), especially in challenging contexts?”
2. “How future projects can strengthen adaptive management in fragile or complex contexts?”

General conclusion

- The project successfully launched Iraq’s first integrated EIS, marking a major technical and institutional milestone.
- The project reinforced inter-institutional coordination by uniting various government entities under a shared MEA implementation framework.
- It built technical capacity, enabling the EIS to support national assessments and policy decisions.
- Political instability and administrative bottlenecks disrupted project continuity, delayed disbursements, and limited in-country engagement, with all PSC meetings held virtually or outside Iraq.
- Although the EIS is technically operational, its full and sustainable adoption by national institutions still faces technical, organizational, and institutional engagement challenges.
- It became operational only near the project’s end. Delays stemmed from technical complexities, institutional fragmentation, and the time needed to define indicators and clarify roles.
- Weak data governance, outdated information, bureaucratic delays, platform’s technical constraints, and limited interoperability between ministries challenged the EIS’s effectiveness and sustainability.

1st Question: “What approaches were most effective in encouraging national institutions to use and maintain the Environmental Information System (EIS), especially in challenging contexts?”

- **Beyond Technology:** Technical solutions alone are not enough. Long-term success requires investment in digital infrastructure, legal frameworks, and robust data governance.
- **Institutional Integration and Legitimacy:** Sustainability depends on formal data-sharing agreements, cross-sectoral leadership, and embedding the EIS into national structures. Involving institutions in validating outputs reinforced relevance and credibility.
- **National Ownership:** Inclusive design, early stakeholder engagement, and appointing a national coordinator fostered strong national buy-in.
- **Inclusive and Sustainable Capacity Building:** Arabic training materials, open-source tools, and tailored capacity-building strategies (e.g., training-of-trainers model) supported local autonomy and skills development.
- **Continuous System Enhancement:** A more centralized yet flexible system with multi-sectoral input could have improved regular updates, data consistency, and reporting. Improved data visualization, backend upgrades, WebGIS, and AI integration will be crucial for EIS usability and predictive capabilities.

2nd Question: “How future projects can strengthen adaptive management in fragile or complex contexts?”

- **Flexible Planning:** Local presence, hybrid engagement models, and adaptability to crises (e.g., political instability, COVID-19) were essential to project continuity. More realistic timelines, early risk assessments, and context-sensitive planning could have reduced delays and improved responsiveness.
- **Digital Engagement Limits:** Virtual tools supported continuity but couldn't replace in-person engagement in areas with limited digital infrastructure. The national project manager in Iraq played a key role in maintaining trust and coordination, highlighting the value of UNEP's in-country presence.
- **Strategic Communication:** A robust, inclusive, and context-specific communication strategy is vital for stakeholder engagement.
- **Efficient Monitoring System:** Relying mainly on process-focused indicators hindered the demonstration of long-term impact. Projects should include impact-focused indicators and mechanisms to institutionalize monitoring aligned with long-term strategies.
- **Gender Mainstreaming:** The lack of a gender action plan, specific indicators, and targeted engagement limits inclusiveness. It is important to adopt systematic gender mainstreaming through early gender analysis, disaggregated data collection, and tailored communication strategies.

		Conclusions	
Lessons learned		C1	C2
	L1	X	
	L2	X	
	L3	X	X
	L4	X	
	L5		X
	L6		X
	L7		X
	L8	X	X
	L9		X

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned (1/3)

- 1 Data Governance and Digital Infrastructure Are Essential for the Effective and Sustained Use of EIS.**
- 2 Continuous Technical Improvement Is Critical to Ensure Long-Term Usability and Impact of Environmental Information Platforms.**
- 3 Interinstitutional Cooperation and National Leadership are Key Elements for the Sustainability of Knowledge Management Tools.**

Lessons learned (2/3)

- 4** **Structured, Inclusive, and Locally Anchored Capacity-Building Is Essential for Sustained Ownership and Long-Term Institutional Sustainability.**
- 5** **Flexibility and Advance Planning Are Essential for Effective Implementation in Fragile and Complex Contexts.**
- 6** **Hybrid Approaches, and In-Country UNEP Presence Are Critical for Effective Project Implementation in Fragile Environments.**

Lessons learned (3/3)

- 7** **Overemphasis On Process-Focused Indicators At The Expense Of Impact-Focused Indicators Undermines The Project's Ability To Monitor The Achievement Of Its Broader Objectives.**
- 8** **Strategic Communication Planning Is Crucial to Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement in Complex Governance Contexts.**
- 9** **Embedding Gender-Responsive Design, Monitoring, And Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms Enhances The Inclusiveness And Long-Term Impact Of Environmental Data And Policy Projects**

		Conclusions	
Recommendations	RECOMMENDATIONS	C1	C2
	R1	X	X
	R2	X	
	R3	X	
	R4	X	
	R5	X	
	R6		X
	R7		X
	R8		X
	R9	X	X
	R10		X

Recommendations (1/4)

- 1** Support and encourage the establishment of interinstitutional EIS governance committees by promoting structured collaboration among key ministries and technical departments to enhance data coordination, shared ownership, and long-term sustainability.
- 2** Promote the development of legal frameworks and formal data-sharing agreements to institutionalize responsibilities for environmental data collection, validation, and integration into national systems.
- 3** Encourage the engagement of local and regional non-governmental institutions—such as universities, data centers, and research organizations—to support the long-term sustainability, technical maintenance, and contextual relevance of the EIS.

Recommendations (2/4)

- 4** Mobilize and pool resources to enhance the usability of the Iraq EIS to maximize its effectiveness, utilizing Artificial Intelligence when possible.
- 5** Design and implement a long-term, locally anchored capacity-building strategy to ensure institutional retention, promote continuous use of the EIS, and support its integration into national reporting and policy processes.
- 6** Promote early, comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement, early risk-informed planning, and adaptive implementation strategies in fragile contexts to enhance responsiveness, ensure timely delivery, and strengthen project resilience.

Recommendations (3/4)

- 7** Strengthen existing monitoring mechanisms in future projects by establishing an impact-focused monitoring and evaluation system at project level to measure long term results and enhance sustainability.
- 8** Adopt a structured hybrid engagement model and promote in-country presence to strengthen coordination, stakeholder trust, and implementation effectiveness in fragile contexts.

Recommendations (4/4)

- 9** Integrate inclusive and context-specific communication strategies into project design, with dedicated resources for implementation.
- 10** Integrate gender-responsive and socially inclusive design, monitoring, and engagement strategies from the outset to ensure equity, relevance, and long-term impact of environmental information systems.

The way forward



Thank you

Elaine P. Varela Alberte
Evaluation Consultant
UNEP



ANNEX IX. BRIEF CV OF THE REVIEWER

Elaine P. Varela Alberte

Profession	Enviromental specialist / civil engineer
Nationality	Brazilian / Spanish
Country experience	• Europe: Spain • Africa: Kenya • Americas: Brasil, Colombia, and Canada
Education	• Doctor of Philosophy - PhD, Enviromental Engineering • Postgrade - Recovery of Degraded Areas • Bachelor of Science - BS, Civil Engineering

Short biography

Dr. Elaine Varela is an independent evaluator with a Ph.D. in Environmental Engineering and over 20 years of experience in developing and evaluating complex environmental projects and programs across multiple countries. She has conducted in-depth analyses and evaluations using methodologies aligned with OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and UNEP Evaluation Policy, including the Theory of Change, sustainability indicators, and multi-criteria matrices. Her expertise spans designing quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, managing risks and results, and coordinating strategic plans and partnerships. She has authored multiple review reports, assessed over 150 project documents, and published more than 80 knowledge products.

Currently, she is a professor at the Federal University of Bahia, a board member and senior researcher at the UNESCO Chair on Sustainability, the Head of Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation at a Kenyan community-based organization, and an independent international consultant.

With a proven track record of leading over 30 environmental, development, engineering, and technology projects, as well as extensive collaboration with governments and international organizations, she brings professionalism, strong analytical and communication skills, and fluency in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Key specialties and capabilities cover:

- Results-Based monitoring and evaluation systems design and implementation
- Environmental-related programmes/ projects development and evaluation in national, regional, and global contexts, including least developed and developing countries
- Capacity building and training
- Data collection, analysis, and reporting (qualitative and quantitative methods)
- Environmental data management
- Sustainable development and SDGs
- Theory of Change approach

Selected assignments and experiences

Independent reviews/evaluations:

- Independent evaluator for the management-led Terminal Review of the UNEP project Environmental Treaties Programme – Realizing Synergies for Biodiversity (Treaties I) for UNEP Law Division.

ANNEX X. REVIEW TORS (WITHOUT ANNEXES)



Terms of reference

<i>Job Opening number</i>	:	25-United Nations Environment Programme-252815-Consultant
<i>Job Title</i>	:	Management-Led Terminal Review Consultant
<i>General Expertise</i>	:	Environmental Affairs
<i>Category</i>	:	Evaluation
<i>Department/ Office</i>	:	United Nations Environment Programme
<i>Organizational Unit</i>	:	UNEP ODED EWAD EWDAB CEW & CBU

Purpose

assessment of the projects' performance and will provide judgments on actual and potential results, their sustainability, the operational efficiency of implementation, and factors that affected performance. To achieve this, the MLTR will specifically focus on the 'theory of change' or 'impact pathways' used by the projects and review evidence of actual or potential achievements. In addition, it will identify lessons of operational relevance for future UNEP project design and implementation. The MLTR will be conducted in accordance with the GEF and UNEP requirements.

Duties and Responsibilities

Background and Organizational Settings

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. Its mandate is to coordinate the development of environmental policy consensus by keeping the global environment under review and bringing emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

This consultancy is managed by UNEP's Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit in the Early Warning and Assessment Division. The Early Warning and Assessment Division is responsible for analyzing the state of the global environment, providing early warning information, and assessing global and regional environmental trends to catalyze and promote international cooperation and action on the environment.

The consultant (International Consultant) will work to provide a Management-Led Terminal Review (MLTR) for 2 (two) projects under the UNEP GEF-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development Portfolio, with the following title and GEF ID:

1) Building core capacity for the implementation, monitoring and reporting of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in

Mauritania (GEF ID: 9747).

2) Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (GEF ID: 9744).

This MLTR will provide an assessment of the projects' performance and will provide judgments on actual and potential results, their sustainability, the operational efficiency of implementation, and factors that affected performance. To achieve this, the MLTR will specifically focus on the 'theory of change' or 'impact pathways' used by the projects and review evidence of actual or potential achievements. In addition, it will identify lessons of operational relevance for future UNEP project design and implementation. The MLTR will be conducted in accordance with the GEF and UNEP requirements. The MLTR must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The consultant will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the project preparation phase, legal agreements, technical reports, mid-term evaluation reviews, and others as relevant. The consultant is expected to follow a collaborative and participatory approach ensuring close engagement with relevant Executing Agencies, National Government focal points, UNEP, members of the project steering committee, and other key stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities. Additionally, the consultant is expected to conduct field missions to be decided in consultation with UNEP. The MLTR report should describe the full MLTR approach taken and the rationale for the approach, making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the review. The MLTR should be conducted in line with the "UNEP Evaluation Policy, October 2022", "UNEP Evaluation Manual", and other relevant policies and procedures.

Project Information:

GEF-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) projects have been designed to create an enabling environment and enhance the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of MEAs and all SDGs with an environmental dimension. UNEP serves as the Implementing Agency for the projects. In the context of these projects, the aim was to synergize with existing national baseline projects to enhance, increase, or strengthen the capacity of national institutions for the implementation and monitoring of international conventions and environmental management. This was intended to be done by institutionalizing identified tools and practices for environmental information and knowledge management and to use information and knowledge for both policy development and planning as well as for monitoring and evaluating environmental impacts and trends.

The individual project information is described as follows:

1) Building core capacity for the implementation, monitoring and reporting of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Mauritania

The project was approved by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2018 and completed on 31st December 2023, with a total implementation duration of 67 months and a budget of around

USD 1.3 million. The activities are executed by the Executing Agencies, which is the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Mauritania. The project aimed to strengthen national capacity for environmental information and knowledge management for the implementation, monitoring and reporting of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Mauritania.

Component 1: Development of a coordinated environmental knowledge and information management system, with an outcome of enhanced management of environmental information and knowledge for use in decision-making, planning and reporting.

Component 2: Enhancement of institutional and technical capacities to mainstream, develop, and utilize policies, plans and programmes for effective implementation of the Rio Conventions, other MEAs and relevant SDG, with an outcome of enhanced capacities to develop and implement policies, plans and programmes integrating MEAs and related SDGs.

2) Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq

The project was approved by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2018 and completed on 30th June 2024, with a total implementation duration of 69 months and a budget of around USD 1.7 million. The activities are executed by the Ministry of Health and Environment of Iraq and UNEP Regional Office for West Asia. The overall objective of the project was to establish a functional environmental information system to enhance the capacities of Iraq for monitoring and reporting on Multilateral Environmental Agreements through a well-integrated and functional environment information system.

Component 1: Development of a coordinated environmental knowledge and information management system, with the following outcomes:

1. Streamlined and integrated data and information system at the national level that takes into consideration the decentralized governance system in Iraq for use in decision-making, planning, and reporting.
2. Improved regular environmental monitoring by directorates of environment in the governorates and other relevant agencies to integrate MEAs and relevant SDGs into the data collection and reporting procedures and system.

Component 2: Enhancement of institutional coordination and technical capacities to mainstream, develop, and utilize policies for the effective implementation of MEAs and relevant SDGs, with the following outcomes:

1. Enhanced capacities to develop and implement results-based and impact-oriented policies, plans and programme integrating MEAs and related SDGs.
2. Regulatory and collaborative institutional set-up for sustainable and transparent sharing of environmental information.

Specific tasks and responsibilities

Under the general supervision of Jochem Zoetelief, Portfolio and Task Manager, Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit, in the Early Warnings and Assessment Division, the consultant will:

- Review and fully understand UNEP policies and procedures for Management-Led Terminal Evaluations.
- Desk review of:
 - ☐ Relevant background documentation;
 - ☐ Project design documents (including minutes of the project design review meeting at approval); Annual Work Plans and Budgets or equivalent, revisions to the project (Project Document Supplement), the logical framework and its budget;
 - ☐ Project reports such as six-monthly progress and financial reports, progress reports from collaborating partners, meeting minutes, relevant correspondence and any other monitoring materials etc.;
 - ☐ Project deliverables (e.g. publications, assessments etc);
 - ☐ Mid-Term Review or Mid-Term Evaluation of the project;
 - ☐ Evaluations/Reviews of similar projects.
- Interviews (individual or in group):
 - ☐ UNEP Task/Portfolio Manager (TM team);
 - ☐ Project management team;
 - ☐ UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO);
 - ☐ Portfolio Manager or Sub-Programme Coordinator;
 - ☐ Executing Agency;
 - ☐ National Government focal points; Relevant resource persons;
 - ☐ Representatives from civil society and specialist groups
- Inception report;
- Preliminary findings note;
- Draft and Final review report;
- Deliver virtual presentations to relevant stakeholders throughout the consultancy;
- Incorporate comments received from project beneficiaries, stakeholders, Executing Agency, Regional Technical Partners, and UNEP, when finalizing all documents mentioned above.

Ultimate result of service

Final Terminal Review Report for each GEF-funded CCCD project implemented in Mauritania and Iraq.

Travel Details

The assignment may involve travel to one or all countries where the projects are implemented to conduct interviews with stakeholders. Travel will be determined on an as-needed basis and as agreed upon with UNEP. Travel will be raised and organized separately from the contract, and the travel budget will be managed separately by UNEP.

Travel	Per Diem	Other	Total
0	0	0	0

Output/Work Assignments

- 1st payment - USD 10,875 upon submission of the approved inception report - May 2025
- 2nd payment of USD 21,750 upon submission of approved draft main review - August 2025
- 3rd payment of USD 10,875 upon submission of approved final main review - September 2025

Contract Duration

Overall Contract Duration: 6 months

Estimated amount of actual time to worked (days, weeks, months): 4.5 months

Regular Working Hours
(if applicable):

Total Remuneration: USD 43,500

Payment Terms: per deliverables

Qualification Requirements/Evaluation Criteria

Education:

Advanced university degree in environmental studies, environmental management, environmental protection, international development, environment, or related area is required.

Language:

English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. For the consultancy, fluency in both oral and written English is required, while knowledge of French is an advantage.

JFQ/JSQ:

At least 8 years of experience in environmental-related programmes/ projects development, monitoring and evaluation, environmental data management, or related areas is required.

Experience in evaluating complex national, regional or global programs, with demonstrated proficiency in the Theory of Change approach is desired. A broad understanding of countries in the least developed and developing countries is highly desirable. Experience evaluating projects in UN settings, Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects, or similar international organizations is desired.

Supervisor Name: _____

Title: _____

ANNEX XI. GEF PORTAL INPUTS (for GEF funded projects)

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

Table X: GEF portal inputs

Question: What was the performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets? (For projects approved prior to GEF-7¹¹¹, these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided¹¹²).
Response: At project completion, the performance against Core Indicator Targets was satisfactory. The project consistently tracked GEF Core Indicators, although the methodology used to obtain reported values was not always clearly explained. According to the 2023 and 2024 PIRs (Review Report para. 209): GEF-6 Indicator: The target of establishing a functional environmental information system to support MEA implementation was achieved in the Republic of Iraq. The system was developed, tested, and finalized, fulfilling the intended objective of strengthening national capacity for environmental data management. GEF-7 Indicator: The target of reaching 350 direct beneficiaries by project end was partially met. By 2024, 220 individuals (110 women and 110 men) had benefited from project activities. While this fell short of the final target, the number of beneficiaries increased steadily, and further growth is expected as the system becomes fully operational.
Question: What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program as evolved from the time of the MTR? <i>(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)</i>
Response: The project began with a solid stakeholder analysis and a clearly defined governance structure, including the Project Steering Committee (PSC), which brought together key ministries, UNEP units, and external partners. Roles and responsibilities were well-articulated in foundational documents such as Section A.6, Annex H, and Annex O of the Project Approval Request. Participation in PSC meetings increased over time, with 14 and 22 attendees in the last two sessions. Between May 2021 and May 2024, over 10 stakeholder engagement initiatives were conducted, including consultations, workshops, and both virtual and in-person meetings. Collaboration among international and national partners was well-coordinated, and the Iraqi Ministry of Environment (MoE) showed strong involvement, culminating in the transfer of platform oversight to the Council of Ministers for continued operation over the next three years (Review Report paras.262, 263, 264, and 265). Despite consistent efforts, the project faced some challenges in stakeholder engagement. Communication, although generally effective, was at times irregular and poorly timed due to external factors such as political instability and limited internet connectivity. The reliance on online platforms for capacity-building activities hindered full participation, especially during training sessions. Institutional integration was also constrained by a lack of coordination between

¹¹¹ The GEF is currently operating under the seventh replenishment period of the GEF Trust Fund covering the period July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2022. The GEF Portal Reporting Guide for FY20 Reporting Process indicates that GEF-6 projects that have yet to map existing indicators to GEF-7 Core Indicators need to do so at MTR stage or (if already there) at the time of the TE. (i.e. not GEF projects approved before GEF-6)

¹¹² This is not applicable for Enabling Activities

departments within the MoE, particularly those responsible for providing environmental data. Furthermore, the project lacked mechanisms to assess or mitigate potential negative impacts on livelihoods, equity, and human rights, which were only moderately addressed throughout implementation (Review Report paras. 266, 268, and 269). Regarding outcomes, the project fostered meaningful collaboration among stakeholder groups, promoting ownership through meetings, training sessions, and formal engagement strategies. The MoE demonstrated commitment to the platform’s sustainability, including a willingness to contribute to future financing. Engagement of multiple ministries—such as environment, planning, health, and statistics—through consultations and coordination meetings strengthened inter-institutional integration. The project contributed to improved public governance and knowledge exchange. The continuation of the platform under government supervision represents a tangible and promising outcome for the sustainability of project achievements (Review Report para. 267).
Question: What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas? <i>(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)</i>
Response: At CEO Endorsement/Approval (Section A.4, Annex M, Annex O), the project committed to integrating gender considerations throughout implementation. These included ensuring gender balance in activities, aiming for 50% female representation among beneficiaries, incorporating gender-sensitive indicators into the environmental information system, and applying UNEP guidelines for tracking gender metrics. Collaboration with the “Women for a Green and Safe Iraq” initiative was also planned. During implementation, these commitments were partially realized. Female participation was actively promoted in workshops, PSC meetings, and training sessions. The 2023 PIR reported over 50% female attendance in recent events (43 women, 42 men), and PSC meeting minutes from April 2024 confirmed 50% female participation. A woman held a key leadership role in the executing agency – the Director General of the Planning and Monitoring Department at the Ministry of Environment – reflecting high-level inclusion. Gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries were consistently reported, although most workshop records lacked detailed breakdowns (Review Report paras. 272 and 273). Despite these efforts, the project did not develop a formal gender action plan, nor were gender-sensitive indicators included in the results framework. Monitoring of gender outcomes remained limited due to the absence of a structured M&E tool. Nonetheless, the project contributed to gender mainstreaming and awareness-raising at the national level, laying a foundation for more inclusive environmental governance (Review Report paras. 272 and 274).
Question: What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. <i>(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)</i>
Response: At CEO Approval, the project was classified as low risk, with no activities expected to generate significant environmental or social impacts (Section A.5; Annex M – UNEP ESERN Checklist). The Safeguards Plan included a risk analysis and mitigation measures that were relevant and aligned with UNEP’s Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF) (Review Report paras. 275 and 276).

During implementation, the project consistently maintained its low-risk classification, as confirmed in the 2024 PIR. No new environmental or social risks were identified, and no complaints were received. The project focused exclusively on capacity-building activities, avoiding interventions that could harm ecosystems or vulnerable populations. Risk monitoring was systematic and documented through a comprehensive risk log, which tracked risks identified at CEO endorsement and throughout implementation (Review Report para. 279).

Management measures were adapted in response to external challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. The shift to virtual modalities for meetings and workshops ensured continuity while also reducing the project's carbon footprint. These adaptive strategies demonstrated a strong commitment to minimizing environmental impacts and aligning with UNEP's sustainability goals (Review Report para. 277).

Lessons learned, as highlighted in the 2024 PIR, include the value of centralized environmental data systems in supporting informed decision-making and risk mitigation. Stakeholder engagement and capacity-building efforts were essential to ensuring institutional ownership and long-term sustainability. These insights reinforce the importance of proactive safeguard strategies and robust monitoring frameworks for future initiatives.

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

Response:

The project successfully implemented a comprehensive Knowledge Management Approach, delivering 12 fully implemented outputs that supported environmental data governance, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement. Key achievements included the development and operational deployment of the Environmental Information System (Iraq EIS), a Data Management Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), a Monitoring & Evaluation mechanism, and a sustainability strategy. A total of 6 major technical reports were produced, including indicator analysis, operational guidelines, and sectoral strategy guides. The project conducted over 10 workshops and consultations, and trained more than 160 stakeholders, including women and governorate-level representatives, through targeted programs such as Training of Trainers (ToT), system operation, and data management. Twenty-four (24) environmental indicators were collected and validated, and several knowledge products—including reports, GIS maps, brochures, and—were disseminated. Four Arabic-language infographics were made available via <https://eis.iraq.gov.iq/> (Review Report paras. 114 - 139).

While the project achieved notable progress in knowledge generation and dissemination, several challenges affected the consistency and inclusivity of its Knowledge Management Approach. Communication activities slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of political instability, limiting stakeholder engagement and delaying events (Review Report para. 299). Although the project incorporated targeted communication efforts—such as PSC meetings, workshops, and awareness materials—there was no comprehensive communication strategy to guide outreach to marginalized and gender groups (Review Report paras. 294 and 300). Feedback mechanisms were limited, and only one workshop included a survey to assess impact (Review Report para. 300). The broader civil society and community actors were not fully engaged, and the lack of differentiated communication strategies resulted in gaps in outreach and inclusion (Review Report paras. 294 and 300).

Despite these limitations, the project generated valuable knowledge and built institutional capacity. Beneficiaries, particularly within the Ministry of Environment, acquired skills to manage and maintain the Environmental Information System (EIS), contributing to long-term sustainability

(Review Report para. 298). The open-access nature of the EIS enabled broader use by students, researchers, and the public, reinforcing its educational and inclusive potential (Review Report paras. 303 and 305). Key lessons learned include the importance of proactive stakeholder engagement, inclusive communication planning, and continuous data input to maintain system functionality (Review Report para. 304). The project demonstrated that targeted capacity-building, hands-on training, and transparent dissemination of results are essential for fostering institutional ownership and ensuring the long-term relevance of environmental information systems (Review Report paras. 296 and 302).

Question: What are the main findings of the evaluation?

Response:

The evaluation found that the project demonstrated high strategic relevance, being fully aligned with UNEP's Medium-Term Strategies (2018–2021 and 2022–2025), GEF priorities, and Iraq's national frameworks, including SDGs 13, 16, and 17 (Review Report para. 5). It effectively contributed to environmental governance, data transparency, and institutional capacity building. All 12 outputs and 4 outcomes were achieved, including the operationalization of Iraq's Environmental Information System (EIS), supported by strong national leadership and inclusive participation, with over 60% female involvement (Review Report para. 8).

Despite these successes, the project faced significant external challenges, including political instability, civil unrest, COVID-19 disruptions, poor internet connectivity, and institutional restructuring (Review Report para. 7). These factors caused delays and required adaptive management, including three no-cost extensions. Weaknesses were also noted in communication strategy, inclusive stakeholder engagement, sustainability planning, and replication (Review Report para. 6). Monitoring and reporting were satisfactory but relied heavily on process indicators, limiting the assessment of long-term outcomes and gender impacts (Review Report para. 11).

Financial management was highly satisfactory, with strong adherence to UNEP policies, transparent reporting, and a 98% budget utilization rate (Review Report para. 9). Efficiency was moderately satisfactory due to delays, though adaptive strategies ensured delivery within the revised timeline (Review Report para. 10). Sustainability is moderately likely, with the EIS integrated into national structures and supported by post-handover technical assistance, but risks remain due to the absence of legal mandates, contingency planning, and inter-ministerial coordination (Review Report para. 12).

Regarding factors affecting performance, the project benefited from strong preparation and readiness, with key activities—such as legal agreements, stakeholder consultations, and workplan development—completed within six months of approval. UNEP provided strategic oversight and adaptive leadership, while UNEP WAO and Iraq's Ministry of Environment coordinated implementation effectively. However, limited inter-ministerial integration, bureaucratic hurdles, and occasional disruptions to stakeholder participation due to political instability and poor internet access affected performance. Gender and human rights were positively addressed, with notable female leadership, though the absence of a formal gender action plan was a limitation. Environmental and social safeguards were well-managed under UNEP's ESES framework, with low risk. Country ownership was strong, supported by institutional integration and capacity-building, although gaps in coordination and indicator knowledge remain. Communication efforts were responsive and localized, but broader public outreach and feedback mechanisms were limited (Review Report para. 13).

Overall, the project laid a solid foundation for improved environmental governance in Iraq, but sustaining and scaling its impact will require ongoing institutional commitment, strategic follow-up, and strengthened intersectoral coordination.

ANNEX XII. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Title and Reference No.: Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq (GEF Project ID 9744)

Contact Person (TM/PM): Jochem Zoetelief

RECOMMENDATIONS	PLANS			
	ACCEPTED (YES /NO/ PARTIALLY)	WHAT WILL BE DONE?	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY
Support and encourage the establishment of interinstitutional EIS governance committees by promoting structured collaboration among key ministries and technical departments to enhance data coordination, shared ownership, and long-term sustainability	yes	The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit advised and supported the country to reframe the EIS from a project into a continuing national initiative, supported by a legal framework and integrated into formal government systems, to ensure its long-term sustainability. This guidance was communicated to the government during the GEF-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) 2023 Knowledge Exchange Session and reiterated at the Iraq 2024 PSC.	Completed in 2024	UNEP Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit
Promote the development of legal frameworks and formal data-sharing agreements to institutionalize responsibilities for environmental data collection, validation, and integration into national systems	Yes	The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit advised and supported the country to reframe the EIS from a project into a continuing national initiative, supported by a legal framework and integrated into formal government systems, to ensure its long-term sustainability. This guidance was communicated to the government during the GEF-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development (CCCD) 2023 Knowledge Exchange Session and reiterated at the Iraq 2024 PSC.	Completed in 2024	UNEP Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit
Encourage the engagement of local and regional non-governmental institutions—such as universities, data centres, and research organizations—to support the long-term sustainability, technical maintenance, and contextual relevance of the EIS	Yes	In 2023, UNEP’s Policy and Programme Division developed the corporate Programme and Project Management Manual , which details the processes involved in project development and implementation. The Manual highlights several key strategies, including the development of an intervention strategy informed by problem and stakeholder analysis, as well as the integration of stakeholder engagement and socio-economic benefits. In addition, UNEP stresses the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement throughout the program and project	Completed in 2024	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)

RECOMMENDATIONS	PLANS			
	ACCEPTED (YES /NO/ PARTIALLY)	WHAT WILL BE DONE?	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY
		management cycle, particularly with groups directly or indirectly affected by supported activities, such as NGOs, universities, and research institutes. This emphasis aligns with the human rights–based approach to programs and projects, as outlined in the UNEP GEF Operational Note (April 2024). Accordingly, the Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit incorporates this principle into all ongoing project development and implementation, as well as future projects.		
Support the mobilization and coordination of resources to enhance the usability of the EIS Iraq to maximize its effectiveness, utilizing AI when possible	Yes	The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit advised and supported the country to reframe the EIS from a project into a continuing national initiative. This guidance was communicated to the government during the 2023 Knowledge Exchange Session and reiterated at the 2024 PSC. The project has established a foundation for the EIS, and strong country ownership will be essential to sustaining and advancing this initiative. At the same time, UNEP remains committed to supporting resource mobilization to ensure that funding is available for the implementation of the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) and related Programmes of Work (PoW), as outlined in the Revised Resource Mobilization Strategy 2021 .	Completed in 2021; Further support to enhance the EIS in Iraq is subject to the availability of funding	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD) UNEP Corporate Services Division (CSD) UNEP Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit
Design and implement a long-term, locally anchored capacity-building strategy to ensure institutional retention, promote continuous use of the EIS, and support its integration into national reporting and policy processes	Yes	The Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit produced the 2023 Capacity Development Benchmarking Report to guide Science-Policy capacity development under the UNEP MTS 2022–2025 and beyond. The report recommends that capacity development activities be implemented at three levels: individual, organizational, and systemic. It also calls for improved coordination across similar activities within and outside UNEP to identify synergies and reduce overlaps, as well as the development of online tools that remain accessible over time. Additionally, the report highlights that capacity development outcomes can be strengthened by addressing language limitations and incorporating national and regional	Completed in 2023	UNEP Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit

RECOMMENDATIONS	PLANS			
	ACCEPTED (YES /NO/ PARTIALLY)	WHAT WILL BE DONE?	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY
		contexts into programme design. Strengthening partnerships with local implementation partners is also essential to better translate UNEP science into local contexts and ensure the long-term sustainability of UNEP's efforts in regions and countries. Aligned with these recommendations, the Unit has adopted locally anchored capacity-building approaches in project development and implementation.		
Promote early, comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement, early risk-informed planning, and adaptive implementation strategies in fragile contexts to enhance responsiveness, ensure timely delivery, and strengthen project resilience	Yes	In 2023, UNEP's Policy and Programme Division developed the corporate Programme and Project Management Manual , which details the processes involved in project development and implementation. These include stakeholder engagement, risk-informed planning—such as through the Safeguards Risk Identification Form (SRIF)—and adaptive management, all tailored to country or local contexts, among other aspects. Accordingly, the Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit follows this manual throughout all project cycle.	Completed in 2023	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)
Strengthen existing monitoring mechanisms in future projects by establishing an impact-focused monitoring and evaluation system at project level to measure long-term results and enhance sustainability	Yes	In line with the 2023 Programme and Project Management Manual , UNEP's projects adopt the Results-Based Management (RBM) approach. This includes the use of indicator tracking tools, which provide one of the strongest forms of evidence of project progress when the data comes from reputable sources and is accurate. The Manual also emphasizes that results-based reporting is a key component of monitoring, focusing on results rather than activities and describing changes in Behaviour, Action/Attitude, Condition, Knowledge, and Skills (BACKS).	Completed in 2023	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)
Adopt a structured hybrid engagement model and promote in-country presence to strengthen coordination, stakeholder trust, and implementation effectiveness in fragile contexts	Partially	As outlined in the Project Cycle Management (PCM) of the 2023 Programme and Project Management Manual , UNEP adopts a structured hybrid engagement model in all project cycles. If the project is rated a high-risk, site visit(s) are strongly recommended as a monitoring and management tool	Completed in 2023	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)

RECOMMENDATIONS	PLANS			
	ACCEPTED (YES /NO/ PARTIALLY)	WHAT WILL BE DONE?	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY
		to assess the magnitude of the potential risk, impact, and the nature of the foreseen risk. In fragile countries, the in-country presence of UNEP staff depends on the security environment. Where risks are high, staff deployment may be limited, conducted remotely, or subject to risk mitigation measures, including security protocols and evacuation plans.		
Integrate inclusive and context-specific communication strategies into project design, with dedicated resources for implementation	Yes	As outlined in the UNEP Project Cycle Management (PCM) section of the 2023 Programme and Project Management Manual , a project's communication strategy should be developed during the initial stages of the project cycle. This should be described in the Project Document (ProDoc) and the resources required to deliver communication activities allocated in the project budget. The strategy should cover all elements of a project's communication work, including awareness raising, planned publications, advocacy, social mobilization, social media and digital work, and behaviour change activities planned for the project.	Completed in 2023	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)
Integrate gender-responsive and socially inclusive design, monitoring, and engagement strategies from the outset to ensure equity, relevance, and long-term impact of environmental information systems	Yes	In 2023, the UNEP Policy and Programme Division developed a corporate Programme and Project Management Manual , with a strong gender component across all the project management life-cycle. Accordingly, the Climate Early Warning and Capacity Building Unit will continue to ensure responsiveness to gender equity and social inclusivity in project development and implementation, as outlined in the UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability (ESS) Framework and UNEP's Programme and Project Management Manual	Completed in 2023	UNEP Policy and Programme Division (PPD)

ANNEX XIII. QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE REVIEW REPORT

Review Title: Terminal Review of the UNEP/GEF Project “Establishing a Functional Environmental Information System for the Synergistic Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) for Iraq” GEF ID 9744 (2018 – 2024)

Consultant: Elaine Varela

All UNEP Reviews are subject to a quality assessment by the UNEP Evaluation Office. This is an assessment of the quality of the review product (i.e. Main Review Report).

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
Section A: Executive Summary	Assessment	
1. Does the <i>Executive Summary</i> act as a concise, accurate standalone section, especially to inform decision-making? Consider how clearly and concisely the report presents: - a clear summary of the evaluation object - evaluation objectives, scope and methodology - the overall project evaluation rating - a summary of main evaluation findings, including key features of performance (strengths and weaknesses) - summary responses to key strategic evaluation questions - summary of main conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements are addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The executive summary presents key findings and ratings of the evaluation criteria, and it responds to strategic questions of the evaluation; however, the former is done in a highly summarized format. The executive summary would have benefited from a more detailed description of the project’s outputs and the extent to which the outcomes were achieved. Some of the summarized lessons and recommendations are formulated as findings and do not clearly present a learning that can be replicated or an actionable recommendation. The presentation of findings related to gender representation and integration would have benefited from more coherence to consolidate findings of female participation, gender data monitoring needs and inclusive outreach.	4
Section B: The Project	Assessment	
2. Does the report clearly describe the <i>key parameters, scale and complexity of the evaluand</i>? Consider how well the report presents: - an overview of the main issue that the project is trying to address - timeline, including dates of project approval, duration and number of phases (where appropriate) - geographic coverage (regions/countries) - total secured budget and project financing, including a table with funding sources - implementing and funding partners - institutional context (i.e. UNEP sub-programme, Division, Branch etc) - implementation structure with diagram - UNEP results frameworks to which it contributes (e.g. PoW Direct Outcome)	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements are addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The results framework is presented in a table with a description. There is a detailed overview of the project implementation structure and partners and explanation of the three no-cost extensions. It would have been beneficial to describe the relevant UNEP subprogramme and the UNEP institutional context beyond the divisional level. Table 3: TR Stakeholder Matrix would have benefited from presenting the acronyms used as a footnote (as they are	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
- summary of results framework as stated in the ProDoc (or as officially revised) - stakeholder groups organised according to relevant common characteristics - whether the project has been evaluated in the past (e.g. mid-term, by an external agency, etc.) - substantive or significant changes in design during implementation	not included in the list of acronyms, instead they are included in the legend for Figure 4. Theory of Change.)	
Section C: Evaluation Methods and Theory of Change	Assessment	
3. Does the report present a clear, comprehensive and adequate description of the <i>evaluation methodology</i>? Consider how well it presents the following elements, and their adequacy based on the scope of the evaluation: - statement of the purpose of the evaluation and the key intended audience for the evaluation findings - data collection methods and information sources - justification for methods used (e.g. electronic/face-to-face interviews, qualitative/quantitative analysis) - criteria and sampling strategies used to select stakeholders for consultations, and for sites/countries visited - number and types of respondents (<i>including in a table broken down by gender</i>) - strategies used to increase stakeholder engagement and response rate - methods used to include the voices/experiences of different and potentially excluded groups (e.g. women, marginalised) - data verification methods (e.g. triangulation) - data analysis methods (e.g. scoring, thematic analysis) - evaluation limitations and mitigation measures (e.g. how these were addressed by the evaluator) - consideration for ethics and human rights issues, including how anonymity and confidentiality were protected	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements are addressed, except for the purpose of the review, which is presented in section I. Introduction. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> A detailed description is presented of the review process and limitations faced during the review process. It would have been beneficial to list the two strategic questions of the review. The different phases of the review are well explained. However, there is no reference to a Review Inception Report.	5
4. Does the report describe an assessment and reformulation of the <i>Theory of Change</i>, and present an adequate articulation of the TOC causal pathways that were used to assess project performance (<i>narratively and diagrammatically</i>)? Consider how well the report presents: - whether the project design included a TOC - how the <i>TOC at Evaluation</i>¹¹³ was designed (e.g. who was involved, etc) - confirmation/reconstruction of results in accordance with UNEP definitions (<i>including reformulation table, which may have initially been presented in the Inception Report and should appear in the Main Evaluation report.</i>)	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> The required elements for the ToC narrative are presented including the ToC diagram. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> Intermediate states have been added to the ToC at review while other elements remain as originally formulated. Table 5. Drivers and assumptions of the project provide a comprehensive overview.	5

¹¹³ During the Inception Phase of the evaluation process a *TOC at Evaluation Inception* is created based on the information contained in the approved project documents (these may include either logical framework or a TOC or narrative descriptions), formal revisions and annual reports etc. During the evaluation process this TOC is revised based on changes made during project intervention and becomes the *TOC at Evaluation*.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
• articulation of causal pathways • identification of drivers and assumptions • identification of key actors in the change process	The descriptions of outputs are connected with the outcomes that they contribute to and linked with the relevant assumption or driver.	
Section D: Evidence and Analysis	Assessment	
5. Is the report based on <i>sufficient and adequate data</i> and <i>clear and credible evidence</i>? Consider how well the report presents: • sufficient evidence that is consistent throughout the report • evidence that is supported by data sources (e.g. quotes, reports, etc) • evidence that is explicitly triangulated, unless noted as having a single source • gaps in data are explained and justified • data sources that are reliable, adequate, sufficient for the scope of the evaluation	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> The required elements are adequately addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The review refers to a total 17 interviewees. Interviews were conducted virtually, and language barriers were overcome by focus group discussion/translation. Evidence is presented and triangulated based on documentation, interview responses and interview feedback. The interviewees included key stakeholders from UNEP, MOE and international and national project partners. The review would have benefited from interviews with other key stakeholders from civil society, academia and private sector.	5
6. Does the report include <i>rigorous analysis</i> and <i>logical findings</i>? Consider the extent to which the findings are: • supported by clear analysis that is consistent with the evidence presented • logical, clear and coherent • aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix • aligned with the evaluation framework • more than descriptions and provide insights into 'how' and/or 'why' the project performed a certain way • balanced, presenting both successes and weaknesses	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> The required elements are adequately addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The findings are presented based on analysis and consistent with the evidence presented and only very rarely speculative (e.g., para. 182 ii. "Despite operating in a challenging context marked by political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, the project required only three extensions—fewer than similar projects in more stable countries." Most of the ratings are closely aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix and its wording.	5
Section E: Evaluation Findings	Assessment	
7. Does the report present evidence and analysis of project <i>Strategic Relevance</i> with respect to UNEP, partner and geographic policies and strategies at the time of project approval? Consider how well the report addresses: • Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities • Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities • Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities • Complementarity with Existing Interventions: complementarity of the project at design (or	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements are addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The assessments are linked with relevant documents such as MTS, POW, GEF6/GEF7 and Iraq's National Environmental Strategy.	5.5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
during inception/mobilisation ¹¹⁴), with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups.		
8. Does the report present a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the Quality of Project Design , based on the detailed assessment presented in the Inception Report?	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> The required elements of strengths and weaknesses are identified and addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> Table 6. presents an overview of all the sections assessed for the overall quality of project design score. In addition, detailed and comprehensive assessments are provided of most of the elements in the project design quality template as well as the quality of the ToC in the ProDoc.	5.5
9. Does the report recognise and describe, when appropriate, key features of the Nature of the External Context under which the project was implemented that limited the project's performance (e.g. conflict, natural disaster, political upheaval ¹¹⁵), and how they affected performance?	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> External factors that significantly impacted project implementation and caused considerable delays are assessed.	5.5
10. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the Availability of Outputs to the intended beneficiaries? Consider how well the report presents: • a convincing, evidence-supported and clear presentation of the outputs made available by the project compared to its approved plans and budget • assessment of the nature and scale of outputs versus the project indicators and targets • assessment of the timeliness, quality and utility of outputs to intended beneficiaries • identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> An overall assessment of strengths and weaknesses are provided followed by an assessment of the availability of each output according to the project's results framework and against indicator targets.	5.5
11. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the Achievement of Outcomes, as a result of the uptake, adoption and/or implementation of outputs by the intended beneficiaries? This may include behaviour changes at an individual or collective level. Consider how well the report presents: • a convincing and evidence-supported analysis of the uptake of outputs by intended beneficiaries • assessment of the nature, depth and scale	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> A detailed review of each outcome is conducted and aligned with assumptions and drivers. The assessment is aptly concluded by stating that "project outcomes most important for reaching the intermediate state were partially	5.5

¹¹⁴ A project's inception or mobilization period is understood as the time between project approval and first disbursement. Complementarity during project implementation is considered under Efficiency, see below.

¹¹⁵ Note that 'political upheaval' does not include regular national election cycles, but unanticipated unrest or prolonged disruption. The potential delays or changes in political support that are often associated with the regular national election cycle should be part of the project's design and addressed through adaptive management of the project team.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
of outcomes versus the project indicators and targets - discussion of the contribution, credible association and/or attribution of outcome level changes to the work of the project itself - any constraints to attributing effects to the projects' work - identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	achieved. Assumptions for progress from project outputs to project outcomes were partially held, and drivers to support the transition from outputs to outcomes were partially in place".	
12. Does the report present an integrated analysis, guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC, of all evidence relating to Likelihood of Impact? Consider how well the report presents: - an explanation of how causal pathways emerged and the resulting change processes - an explicit discussion of how drivers and assumptions played out - an explanation of roles played by key actors and change agents - identification of any unintended negative effects of the project, especially on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability).	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The detailed assessment of components has incorporated the intermediate state and progress toward intended outcomes. The assessment builds largely on Interview feedback. The matter of unintended negative effects is addressed.	5.5
13. Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under Financial Management and include a completed 'financial management' table? Consider how well the report addresses the following: <i>adherence</i> to UNEP's financial policies and procedures <i>completeness</i> of financial information, including the actual project costs and actual co-financing used and explanation of any variances between planned and actual expenditures	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> A detailed assessment is made weighing strengths and weaknesses and on which conclusions are made related to the dimensions of financial management and to the extent that the reviewer found there was sufficient evidence to confirm that "the project's financial documentation was generally complete and accurate, although only a portion was made available to this review."	5
14. Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under Efficiency? Consider how well the report presents: - cost-effective or time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe - implications of any delays and no cost extensions - discussion of making use, during project implementation, of/building on pre-existing institutions, partnerships and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. - the extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint.	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The assessment addresses both strengths and weaknesses noting that existing staff was trained to manage the EIS, and that the implementation of the project through the regional office, benefited from an Iraqi Task Manager who improved stakeholder engagement and trust while also noting delays in equipment delivery and onboarding of a local partner.	5

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
15. Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the project's Monitoring and Reporting? Consider how well the report addresses the following: - the quality of <i>monitoring of project implementation</i> (including use of monitoring data for adaptive management) - the quality of <i>project reporting</i> (e.g. PIMS and donor reports)	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The quality and extent of detail of monitoring and reporting have been assessed. The availability of project reports is addressed in detail based on documented evidence and interview feedback.	5.5
16. Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under Sustainability (i.e. the endurance of benefits achieved at outcome level)? Consider how well the report addresses the following: - socio-political sustainability - financial sustainability - institutional sustainability	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> Ownership and stakeholder engagement and mechanisms are well documented and assessed based on interview feedback and evidence. The need for sustained local financial support is addressed, and the assessment concludes based on the project's sustainability strategy that some financial needs have been partially addressed. The assessment would have benefited from an assessment of actual funding needs and resource mobilization efforts made rather than components of the project's sustainability strategy. The assessment of institutional sustainability addresses mechanisms in place and capacity of key stakeholders is based on interview evidence, interview feedback and documentation.	5.5
17. Does the report present a well-evidence analysis of the Factors Affecting Performance, <u>either in this section or in cross-referenced sections?</u> <i>These factors are not always discussed in stand-alone sections and may be integrated in the other performance criteria as appropriate. However, if not addressed substantively in this section, a cross reference must be given to where the topic is addressed, and that entry must be sufficient to justify the performance rating for these factors.</i> Consider how well the report addresses the following cross-cutting issues: - quality of project management and supervision¹¹⁶ - stakeholder participation and co-operation - responsiveness to human rights and gender equality - environmental and social safeguards	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> Elements of the different factors have been adequately addressed and assessed. The assessment of responsiveness to human rights and gender equality would have benefited from addressing the extent to which the dimensions had been demonstrated in the project's expenditures as part of a systematic and comprehensive approach during project implementation.	5.5

¹¹⁶ In some cases, 'project management and supervision' will refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments while in others, specifically for GEF funded projects, it will refer to the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping provided by UNEP. This includes providing the answers to the questions on Core Indicator Targets, stakeholder engagement, gender responsiveness, safeguards and knowledge management, required for the GEF portal.

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
- country ownership and driven-ness - communication and public awareness		
Section F: Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations	Assessment	
18. Do the Conclusions present a summative assessment of the evaluand as a whole, reflecting on prominent aspects of the project's performance? Consider how well the conclusions: - provide a compelling narrative and integrated assessment of project project's performance (i.e. achievements and limitations) - add deeper insights and analysis beyond the findings under each individual criterion - are derived from the synthesized analysis of evidence gathered during the evaluation process - provide clear and succinct response to the key strategic questions - address the human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention explicitly (e.g. how these dimensions were considered, addressed or impacted on) - provide lessons that are rooted in real project experiences, describe the context from which they are derived, and do not duplicate recommendations	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> Conclusions address the extent to which the project delivered on its two components and challenges towards effectiveness and sustainability. Responses are provided to the two strategic questions of the evaluation. Conclusions on gender considerations and targeted involvement with vulnerable groups are included.	5.5
19. Does the report present Recommendations for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting the project or the sustainability of its results? Consider how well the recommendations: - are clearly formulated and logically derived from the findings and/or conclusions - are feasible to implement within the timeframe and resources available (including local capacities) and specific in terms of who would do what and when - include at least one recommendation relating to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions - represent a measurable performance target in order that the Evaluation Office can monitor and assess compliance with the recommendations. <u>NOTES:</u> (i) In cases where the recommendation is addressed to a third party, compliance can only be monitored and assessed where a contractual/legal agreement remains in place. Without such an agreement, the recommendation should be formulated to say that UNEP project staff should pass on the recommendation to the relevant third party in an effective or substantive manner. The effective transmission by UNEP of the recommendation will then be monitored for compliance. (ii) Where a new project phase is already under discussion or in preparation with the same third party, a recommendation can be made to address the issue in the next phase.	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All the required elements have been addressed in the ten recommendations presented in the report. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The recommendations are logically derived from the findings and conclusions of the review. The relative high number of recommendations (10) may prove to be less feasible to prioritize and implement. The need to integrate gender-responsive and socially inclusive design, monitoring and engagement strategies is addressed in Recommendation #10 This project was implemented and executed by UNEP. The recommendations would have benefited from a more specific identification of responsibility as the responsibility in most of the recommendations has been allocated to the UNEP project manager and national project coordinator (except for Rec. #5 and #8 which also include national entities).	5
Section G: Report Structure and Presentation	Assessment	

Report Quality Criteria	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Rating
20. Is the report <i>well-structured and complete</i>? Does it: • follow the Evaluation Office structure and formatting guidelines • include all required sections and annexes, as applicable • not exceed 50 pages in length from the Executive Summary to the end of the Conclusion Does the report <i>present</i> information clearly and appropriately? Is it written: • in clear and accessible language • largely free from grammar, spelling and punctuation errors • in an adequate and professional tone • with the use of visual aids, such as maps, graphs tables and photos	<u>Coverage/omissions:</u> All required elements have been addressed. <u>Strengths/weaknesses:</u> The report is written in a clear and appropriate language and is free of grammar and spelling errors. Tables and figures have been used to good effect throughout the report providing overviews of outputs and outcomes, stakeholders, ToC, assumptions and drivers and project timeline. The report could have benefited from the use photos, for example, related to the implementation of the project's training programme.	5.5
OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING	Satisfactory	5

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