# Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project

# “Conserving, Enhancing and Managing Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone” (GEF ID 4634)

(2015-2024)

Evaluation Office of the United Nations Environment Programme

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Front cover: A herd of endangered Przewalski's horses near a radiation sign in the ChEZ.

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The evaluation consultants hope that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will contribute to the formulation of any next phases, and to the continuous improvement of similar projects in other countries and regions.

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[1] Merged with the Ministries of Economy and of Agricultural Policy and Foodstuffs in July 2025 to form the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine.

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## About the Evaluation

**Joint Evaluation:** No

**Report Language(s):** English.

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**ABSTRACT:** This report is a Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF project: Conserving, Enhancing and Managing Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (GEF ID 4634), implemented between 2015 and 2024. The project's overall goal was to enhance conservation, and management of carbon stocks and biodiversity in forest and non-forest lands in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), in Ukraine. The evaluation sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency) and determine the sustainability of its results. The evaluation has two primary purposes: accountability and learning. Data collection methods included: in-depth interviews and document reviews. Data analysis was based on applying triangulated data to assess performance against a reconstructed Theory of Change and its causal pathways. The overall performance rating was 'Moderately Satisfactory', the 4$^{th}$ point on a six-point scale. Despite operating under extraordinary constraints, the project achieved most of its planned results, exceeded co-financing targets, and delivered a globally unique model for post-disaster conservation management. Its most enduring contribution is the reframing of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone into a biosphere reserve and international research hub, adding lasting value to global environmental knowledge. The main recommendations to UNEP are: ensure that future projects operating in high-risk or fragile contexts are designed and implemented in line with the GEF Framework for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, strengthen in-country implementation capacity and ensure equitable participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, and other marginalized groups in future projects. Implementing parties are advised to: safeguard and strengthen transboundary and international scientific partnerships related to the ChEZ by maintaining collaboration through virtual exchanges, joint data platforms, and multilateral research consortia; integrate environmental recovery in the ChEZ into Ukraine's broader post-conflict reconstruction strategies by positioning the CREBR as a model for ecosystem restoration, monitoring, and resilience; and develop a communication and knowledge management strategy to maintain visibility and gradually position the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve as a model for post-disaster conservation.

**Source(s) of Funding by Country:** *Ukraine*

**Source(s) of Funding by Institution Type:**

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

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# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| BR | Biosphere Reserve |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| ChEZ | Chernobyl Exclusion Zone |
| $CO_2$ | Carbon dioxide |
| CREBR | Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve |
| EA | Expected Accomplishment |
| EOU | Evaluation Office of UNEP |
| ESSM | Environmental, Social and Safeguards Management |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| IPMR | Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting |
| LDN | Land Degradation Neutrality |
| LULUCF | Land use, land-use change, and forestry |
| M&E | Monitoring and evaluation |
| MENR | Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources[2] |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MTR | Mid Term Review |
| NBSAP | National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan |
| NDC | Nationally Determined Contribution |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| PIR | Project Implementation Report |
| PoW | Programme of Work |
| PRC | Project Review Committee |
| ProDoc | Project Document |
| PSC | Project Steering Committee |
| REPC | Research and Environmental Protection Center[3] |
| SAUEZM | State Agency of Ukraine on the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone Management |
| SD | Sustainable Development |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| TAC | Technical Advisory Committee |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

[2] Merged with the Ministries of Economy and of Agricultural Policy and Foodstuffs in 2025 to form the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine.
[3] Functional coordination mechanism for scientific and environmental monitoring within the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve; not a separate legal entity

# Project Identification Table

**Table 1: Project Identification Table**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| GEF Project ID/SMA ID[4]: | GEF ID: 4634, SMA ID 20156 | | |
| Type of GEF Project: | Child: N | Global Coordinating Project: | N |
| | N/A | Medium-Size Project or Full-Size Project: | Full-size Project |
| UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit): | GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, Biodiversity and Land Branch, Ecosystems Division, | Executing Agency: (*indicate if internally executed*): | UNEP Regional Office for Europe (*Internally executed*) |
| Sources of Funding (Co-finance): | *Country[5](ies): Ukraine* | *Institution[6] Name/Type:*<br>Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) of Ukraine[7] - Government<br>United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – UN Body | |
| Relevant SDG(s): | Goal 15 – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. | | |
| MTS (at approval): | UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2014-2017 | UNEP approval date: | 16 March 2015 |
| POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference[8] *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):*<br>**OR**<br>POW Output(s) number/reference[8] *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022)* | *POW Direct Outcome:* | MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference[8] *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):*<br>**OR**<br>POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference[8] *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022):* | *MTS 2025 Outcome:* |
| | *POW Output:* | | *POW Expected Accomplishment:*<br>*POW 2022-2023 Thematic Subprogramme 2: Nature Action*<br>*Outcomes 2B and 2C*<br>*POW 2018-2019 Subprogramme 3: Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, EA (a)* |
| Sub-programme: | Healthy and Productive Ecosystems | Programme Coordination Project (if relevant): | N/A |
| UNEP approval date: | 16 March 2025 | GEF approval date: | 12 December 2014 |

[4] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023. Previously, it was referred to as a PIMS ID number.
[5] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[6] Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund.
[7] The name of the ministry evolved over the course of project execution and during evaluation. Since 2010 it was Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, then in the period August 2019 – May 2020 it was merged into the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Protection of Ukraine and then separated and again re-renamed as Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine. In July 2025, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources was merged with the Ministries of Economy and of Agricultural Policy and Foodstuffs to form the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine.
[8] For these items do not include full text. Only enter the number or reference.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| GEF Project ID/SMA ID[4]: | GEF ID: 4634, SMA ID 20156 | | |
| GEF Operational Programme #: | GEF-5 | GEF Strategic Priority: | BD1: Improve Sustainability of Protected Area Systems<br>CCM-5: Promote conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks through sustainable management of land use, land-use change, and forestry<br>LD-3: Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape |
| Project type: | Full-size Project | Focal Area(s): | Biodiversity<br>Climate Change<br>Land Degradation |
| *Expected* start date: | 26 February 2015 | Actual start date: | 16 March 2015 |
| *Planned* completion date: | 31 December 2018 | Actual operational completion date: | 11 September 2024 |
| *Planned* project budget at approval: | GEF grant allocation: USD 4,863,955 | | |
| | *Expected* co-financing:<br>*Cash: USD 17,390,000*<br>*In-kind: USD 10,950,000* | | |
| | *Total Planned Budget: US$ 33,203,955* | | |
| Actual expenditures reported: | GEF grant expenditures reported as of *30 June 2025*: US$ 4,768,695 | | |
| | Actual co-financing *30 June 2024*: USD 38,475,108 | | |
| | Total actual expenditures reported as of *30 June 2025*: US$ 43,243,803 | | |
| No. of formal project revisions: | 0 | Date of last approved project revision: | N/A |
| No. of Steering Committee meetings: | 4 | Date of Last Steering Committee meeting: | December 2023 |
| Mid-term Review/ Evaluation[9] *(required or not required)*: | UNEP requirement: Y | Mid-term Review/ Evaluation actual date: | March 2020 |
| | GEF requirement: Y | | |
| Terminal Evaluation *(planned date)*: | December 2024 | Terminal Evaluation actual date: | December 2024 |
| Coverage - Country(ies): | Ukraine | Coverage - Region(s): | Europe |
| Dates of previous project phases: | N/A | Status of future project phases: | Design of a new project was ongoing at the time of the Terminal Evaluation. |

UNEP projects of four or more years duration require an MTR unless there is an exceptional circumstance. See the *Evaluation in the Project Cycle* section in the Evaluation Office's operational manual. Donor requirements may vary and should be considered in conjunction with UNEP's requirements.

# Executive Summary

## Project background

1. The Conserving, Enhancing and Managing Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (GEF ID 4634) project was implemented in Ukraine, primarily within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), with a planned budget of USD 4.86 million in funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and USD 28 million in committed co-finance from the Government of Ukraine and international partners. At the end of the project, USD 38.48 million was ultimately mobilized in co-financing for a total budget of USD 42.84. It was implemented between 2015 and 2024, with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the Implementing Agency and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) of Ukraine as the Executing Partner.

2. The rationale for the project was to transform the ChEZ, long perceived as an uninhabitable "wasteland" following the 1986 nuclear accident, into a globally significant conservation area that safeguards biodiversity, enhances carbon storage, and strengthens institutional capacity for ecological monitoring and management. The project responded to Ukraine's national priorities in biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation, while contributing to global commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Its objective was to: "conserve, enhance, and manage carbon stocks and biodiversity in the ChEZ through the establishment of a biosphere reserve, strengthened institutional frameworks, improved monitoring systems, and sustainable financing mechanisms."

## This evaluation

3. The evaluation sought to assess the performance of the project (in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency), and sustainability of results, while also examining its catalytic role and contributions to cross-cutting issues such as gender, human rights, and environmental safeguards. Performance was assessed against the nine[10] standard UNEP evaluation criteria, with ratings assigned using a six-point scale[11]. The evaluation had two primary purposes: accountability, by reporting to UNEP, GEF, and national stakeholders on the results achieved and resources used; and learning, by identifying lessons and best practices that can inform the design and implementation of future UNEP and GEF projects in similar contexts.

4. The scope of the evaluation covered the entire implementation period from 2015 to 2024, including all three project components: Outcome 1. Improved monitoring and research for large areas of forests, wetlands, and other habitat types and associated carbon benefits in the ChEZ through the Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC)[12]; Outcome 2. Improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks within and around the ChEZ

[10] (1) Strategic Relevance, including Complementarity; (2) Quality of Project Design; (3) Nature of External Context; (4) Effectiveness (incl. availability of outputs; achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact); (5) Financial Management; (6) Efficiency; (7) Monitoring and Reporting; (8) Sustainability and (9) Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues.

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

[12] The Project Document referred to the "Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC)" as the primary institutional output. During implementation, this function was integrated into the newly established Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR), formalized by Presidential Decree No. 174/2016.

with the establishment and management of a full protected area network; and Outcome 3. Increased availability and access to critical information needed for decision-making for effective sustainable management of the ChEZ by focusing on learning, field testing and dissemination. It examined both planned and actual results, including the impacts of external shocks such as political transitions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, on project delivery and sustainability.

5. Data collection methods included document reviews, semi-structured interviews with UNEP staff, government officials, project partners, and independent experts, and where possible, remote consultations and focus group discussions with local stakeholders. Field-based observations were not possible because of the security conditions currently present in the project area., but secondary data and remote monitoring outputs were incorporated. Data analysis was based on a triangulation approach, applying multiple sources of data to validate findings. The evaluation was structured around a reconstructed Theory of Change, enabling an assessment of causal pathways with consideration of drivers and assumptions from project activities to outputs, outcomes, and emerging impacts.

**Key findings and performance ratings**

6. The project has demonstrated strong performance in the areas of strategic relevance, catalytic role, and efficiency. It is closely aligned with Ukraine's biodiversity and climate priorities, contributed to global environmental conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD), and achieved the legal establishment of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR). It partially achieved the three project outcomes. While the project duration was extended from 2018 to 2024, it also has mobilized over 30% more co-financing than originally planned, leveraged strong scientific partnerships, and introduced globally significant methodologies for biodiversity and carbon monitoring in a post-disaster landscape.

7. Areas that would have benefited from further attention include sustainability of financing, inclusivity, and institutional arrangements. Gender and social inclusion were only partially addressed, as no Gender Action plan was developed and engagement with marginalized groups remained limited. The quality of project management and supervision, was reduced by the absence of a UNEP-staffed Project Management Unit (PMU) in-country, resulting in delays, diluted accountability, and loss of institutional memory, particularly under crisis conditions. The overall performance of the project is rated as 'Moderately Satisfactory' (MS). This rating reflects the achievements in establishing strong legal and institutional frameworks, demonstrating cost efficiency, and implementing adaptive management despite challenging circumstances. However, these accomplishments are somewhat diminished by moderate shortcomings in ensuring long-term sustainability, engaging stakeholders inclusively, and fully realizing benefits, particularly due to external shocks such as the war and disruptions caused by the pandemic.

***Summary Responses to the strategic questions***

8. The project demonstrated a strong adaptive response to the Mid-Term Review (MTR) recommendations, implementing most actions related to monitoring, safeguards, and institutional strengthening. Biodiversity monitoring protocols were refined, reporting and knowledge-sharing improved, and fire management safeguards reinforced. Lessons from similar UNEP/GEF interventions were effectively applied, particularly in building national ownership and ensuring adaptive management under crisis conditions. While socio-economic and gender monitoring remained partially implemented due to external constraints, overall responsiveness to MTR findings was rated as moderately high, contributing to improved project performance and sustainability. The project effectively adapted to the effects of COVID-19 by implementing remote coordination, virtual training, and desk-based monitoring,

ensuring continuity in institutional and research activities. These measures mitigated major disruptions and maintained performance momentum while modestly reducing the project's carbon footprint. However, field verification, community engagement, and socio-economic monitoring were constrained, slightly limiting inclusiveness. Overall, the adaptive measures proved effective, and the project's performance remained on track despite the pandemic.

**Table 2: Summary of project ratings**

| Criterion | Rating |
|---|---|
| Strategic Relevance | **HS** |
| Quality of Project Design | **S** |
| Nature of External Context | **HU** |
| Effectiveness | **MS** |
| Financial Management | **S** |
| Efficiency | **MU** |
| Monitoring and Reporting | **S** |
| Sustainability | **ML** |
| Factors Affecting Performance | **S** |
| **Overall Project Performance Rating** | **MS** |

## Conclusions

9. Overall, the project performed at the 'Moderately Satisfactory' level achieving most of its planned outputs and partially achieving the project outcomes. The main achievements of the project were the legal establishment of the CREBR, the mobilization of more than 30% additional co-financing beyond commitments, and the development of biodiversity and carbon monitoring methodologies of global significance. The project also reframed the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone from a symbol of disaster into a globally recognized model for post-disaster conservation and ecological resilience. The strongest performing aspects were its high strategic relevance to national and global environmental priorities, its efficiency (with an average GEF investment of only USD 21 per hectare), and its catalytic role in mobilizing resources and international scientific collaboration. Comparative weaknesses were apparent in aspects related to the financial sustainability to ensure the achievements made at outcome level are maintained/ enforced), the limited integration of gender and social inclusion, and the quality of project management and supervision, which was reduced by the absence of an in-country UNEP PMU and compounded by external shocks such as the pandemic and conflict. The absence of the UNEP-staffed PMU was compensated for by empowering the CREBR-run PMU, which contributed to adaptive management of the project and national ownership.

10. The evaluation found that the project made a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone through the establishment of the Biosphere Reserve, enhanced monitoring, and improved fire management systems. It effectively integrated biodiversity and carbon objectives, demonstrating that post-disaster landscapes can function as carbon sinks and biodiversity refuges. Sustainability is underpinned by strong government ownership and institutional anchoring, though ongoing conflict and financing constraints pose risks. The project offered valuable lessons on adaptive management in fragile contexts, underscoring the importance of flexible, conflict-sensitive operations. Its catalytic value lies in transforming Chernobyl into a global model of ecological resilience and offering a replicable framework for integrating biodiversity and climate goals in post-industrial and disaster-affected environments.

**Lessons Learned**

11. Lesson 1: Disaster-affected and contaminated areas can be reframed as opportunities for conservation and climate action. The project demonstrated that the areas long perceived as ones with a suppressed, heavily traumatized natural environment due to contamination can actually be legally designated, managed, and recognized as biodiversity refuges and carbon sinks.

12. Lesson 2: Legal and institutional anchoring ensures the durability of results. The Presidential Decree establishing the CREBR and its associated functions provided a strong foundation for long-term sustainability.

13. Lesson 3: Establishing a nationally-based UNEP Project Office or UNEP-staffed PMU is crucial to ensure continuity, accountability, and efficiency, as reliance on rotating Focal Points causes delays and loss of institutional memory, particularly in fragile contexts.

14. Lesson 4: Adaptive management is essential in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Flexibility in work plans, remote monitoring, and revised coordination enabled the project to continue delivering despite COVID-19 disruptions and the war in Ukraine.

15. Lesson 5: Cross-cutting issues require structured integration from the outset at the time of project design or project inception. The absence of a Gender Action Plan limited the systematic inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups.

16. Lesson 6: Knowledge management and communication amplify catalytic value. Initiatives such as "Chernobyl – Open Air Lab" created global visibility and positioned Ukraine as a hub for ecological and radiological research.

17. Lesson 7: Communication strategies should move beyond ad hoc national outreach to ensure continuous, inclusive, and globally oriented engagement that strengthens visibility and impact

18. Lesson 8: Sustained project impact depends on inclusive community engagement that empowers marginalized groups and is guided by socio-economic analysis.

19. Lesson 9: Transboundary cooperation is crucial for ecosystem connectivity but must be supported by contingency plans and alternative mechanisms to remain effective during crises.

20. Lesson 10: Integrating environmental recovery into post-conflict strategies can restore ecosystems, strengthen resilience, rebuild institutional trust, and foster social cohesion.

**Recommendations**

21. Recommendation 1: For future UNEP-GEF projects, strengthen in-country implementation capacity and institutional continuity through enhanced collaboration mechanisms between UNEP's Regional Office and national executing entities. This can include designating a national coordination focal point or embedded technical liaison within the executing agency to maintain institutional memory, improve communication flow, and ensure adaptive management during crises.

22. Recommendation 2: Develop a phased and resource-sensitive communication and knowledge management strategy to maintain visibility and gradually position the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve as a model for post-disaster conservation. The strategy should be scalable and adaptable to available funding and evolving contextual conditions.

23. Recommendation 3: Based on the availability of funds, develop and implement a post-conflict recovery and continuity plan for the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve, including landmine clearance, infrastructure rehabilitation, and resumption of halted activities.

24. Recommendation 4: Future UNEP-GEF projects operating in high-risk or fragile contexts should be designed and implemented in line with the GEF Framework for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, ensuring that risk-informed and resilience-based approaches are systematically integrated into project design and management.

25. Recommendation 5: Integrate environmental recovery in the ChEZ into Ukraine's broader post-conflict reconstruction strategies by positioning the Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR) as a model for ecosystem restoration, monitoring, and resilience.

26. Recommendation 6: Safeguard and strengthen transboundary and international scientific partnerships related to the ChEZ by maintaining collaboration through virtual exchanges, joint data platforms, and multilateral research consortia.

27. Recommendation 7: Future projects in the ChEZ should embed a comprehensive social inclusion and gender equality framework that ensures equitable participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, and other marginalized groups in planning, monitoring, and benefit-sharing processes.

# 1 THE PROJECT

## 1.1 Context

### 1.1.1 Intervention context

28. Ukraine faces complex environmental challenges in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), a globally unique post-disaster landscape that emerged following the catastrophic explosion of Unit 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant on 26 April 1986. The accident caused the largest release of radioactive material in peacetime history, resulting in the permanent evacuation of settlements and the creation of an extensive uninhabited area. The Ukrainian ChEZ today covers approximately 2,577 km², forming part of a larger approx. 4,750 km² transboundary exclusion zone extending into Belarus.

29. The ChEZ is a fenced and restricted-access zone, with only limited entry permitted for persons such as decommissioning workers of the Chernobyl plant, the biosphere reserve staff, researchers, professionals engaged in remediation, and controlled numbers of eco-tourists. A small number of "self-settlers" continue to live in the town of Chernobyl and several isolated villages. This unique governance regime of the area has allowed massive natural regeneration processes to unfold, creating a de facto conservation area that now supports exceptionally high biodiversity, extensive forest cover, and significant carbon stock potential in the absence of large-scale human pressures.

30. Ecologically, the ChEZ can be described as a mosaic of forests, wetlands, abandoned farmlands, and riverine systems, which now provide habitat for species that are rare or absent elsewhere in human-dominated landscapes. Large mammals such as bear, wolf, and lynx have recolonized the area, alongside diverse bird, amphibian, and invertebrate populations. The endangered Przewalski's horse was introduced to the area and proliferated in it. These dynamics have transformed the ChEZ into a living laboratory for ecosystem recovery and resilience in post-disaster environments, particularly post-radiation-contamination ones.

31. Geopolitically, the ChEZ lies just 7 km from the Belarusian border and 145 km from Russia, making it a sensitive and strategically significant territory. To the north, the Ukrainian ChEZ borders the Polessky State Radiation-Ecological Reserve in Belarus, a 2,162 km² protected area created in 1988. This transboundary ecological corridor, historically lacking hard border barriers, facilitated wildlife movement across both reserves. However, the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war since February 2022 has heavily disrupted the area, with military occupation, landmine contamination, and infrastructure destruction compounding ecological and management challenges. Moreover, on 5$^{th}$ December 2024 the Decree of the President of Ukraine No 835/2024 transferred a 45-meter-wide strip along the 121-km-long state border with Belarus to military regiments of the Border Guard Service of Ukraine to build, equip and maintain engineering facilities and fortification structures, fences, border signs, border forest clearings and communications.

32. Within this fragile but ecologically rich context, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project "Conserving, Enhancing, and Managing Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone" which sought to strengthen institutional capacity, establish the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR, 226,270 ha), and build robust systems for biodiversity and carbon monitoring. The ChEZ's transformation into a formally protected biosphere reserve is a cornerstone achievement, positioning the site as both a national conservation priority and a globally significant case study for post-disaster ecosystem recovery, biodiversity protection, and climate change mitigation.

### 1.1.2 Institutional context

33. The project was implemented under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Climate Change and Ecosystem Management Sub-programmes, contributing directly to UNEP's Programme of Work Expected Accomplishments on ecosystem resilience, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation through ecosystem-based approaches. Within UNEP, the project was managed by the Europe Office with technical inputs from the Ecosystems Division.

34. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine (later the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources) served as the Executing Partner, supported by the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM) and the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR), established by Presidential Decree in 2016. The Project Steering Committee (PSC) provided governance and strategic oversight, bringing together government institutions, scientific organizations, and UNEP.

35. The project was approved by the Project Review Committee (PRC) on 16 March 2015, with the Project Document signed on 25 November 2014. Implementation began on 16 March 2015 and concluded in 2024, following four (4) 'no cost' extensions due to political transitions, UNEP's internal financial system changes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. The project had a total secured budget of USD 4.86 million from the GEF Trust Fund, complemented by USD 28 million in planned co-financing, of which USD 38.5 million was ultimately mobilized.

36. During its lifecycle, the project underwent a Mid-Term Review (MTR) in 2019, which provided corrective recommendations that informed subsequent adaptive management. The current Terminal Evaluation is the first comprehensive end-of-project evaluation. No previous synthesis or agency-led evaluations of the project have been conducted.

37. Clarification on Institutional Terminology: In project documentation and reporting (PIRs, MTR), the terms CREBR and Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC) were often used interchangeably. REPC concept was absorbed and realized through CREBR. It functioned de facto as a coordination mechanism within the CREBR's organizational structure, primarily through the Scientific Department and the Department of Information and Educational Work. In practical terms, the "REPC" referred to the combined scientific, research, and communication functions of the Reserve, rather than a distinct administrative entity. This functional arrangement effectively fulfilled the REPC's intended role as outlined in the Project Document, supporting biodiversity monitoring, data management, and environmental education under the Reserve's umbrella.

## 1.2 Results Framework

38. The following Table 3 shows how the original project formulations have been refined or expanded to align more clearly with the reconstructed Theory of Change at the evaluation inception stage.

**Table 3: Summary of project's latest approved results framework**

| | Results Statement |
|---|---|
| **Project objective** | Enhanced Conservation, and Management of Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in Forest and non-Forest Lands in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), in Ukraine. |
| **Project outcomes** | Outcome 1. Improved monitoring and research for large areas of forests, wetlands, and other habitat types and associated carbon benefits in the ChEZ. |
| | Outcome 2. Improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks within and around the ChEZ. |
| | Outcome 3. Increased availability and access to critical information needed for decision-making for effective sustainable management of the ChEZ. |
| **Outputs** | Output 1.1 The REPC established and fully operational within the CREBR.<br>Output 1.2 Comprehensive assessment of the current state and trends of natural ecosystems in the ChEZ<br>Output 1.3. Assessment of the status of ecosystem services and their values and enhancement of carbon benefits in terms meeting LLUCF |
| | Output 2.1: Formal designation of the ChEZ as Biosphere Reserve for enhancing conservation and management of carbon stocks.<br>Output 2.2 Measures developed to ensure financial and institutional sustainability of multi-sector conservation programs. |
| | Output 3.1: A set of lessons learned and practical recommendations on habitat rehabilitation, carbon stocks management and biodiversity conservation developed and published.<br>Output 3.2: Knowledge sharing at national and international level and Training programme field tested and available for replication |

## 1.3 Project Implementation Structure and Partners

### Implementing Agency (UNEP)

39. UNEP Ecosystems Division's GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, as the implementing agency, was responsible for fiduciary oversight, technical backstopping, and reporting to the GEF. UNEP's Task Manager provided guidance on safeguards, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and adaptive management. UNEP maintained close communication with the national stakeholders through regular reporting cycles, and during the conflict, coordinated adaptive responses to ensure continuity of outputs where feasible.

### Executing Agency (UNEP Regional Office for Europe / National Partners)

40. The UNEP Regional Office for Europe, in collaboration with MENR and SAUEZM, carried out the day-to-day execution of project activities. Responsibilities included procurement, recruitment of technical experts, coordination with line ministries, and engagement with stakeholders at national and local levels. This arrangement benefited from UNEP's convening power but also addressed identified capacity constraints within SAUEZM that required continuous technical support.

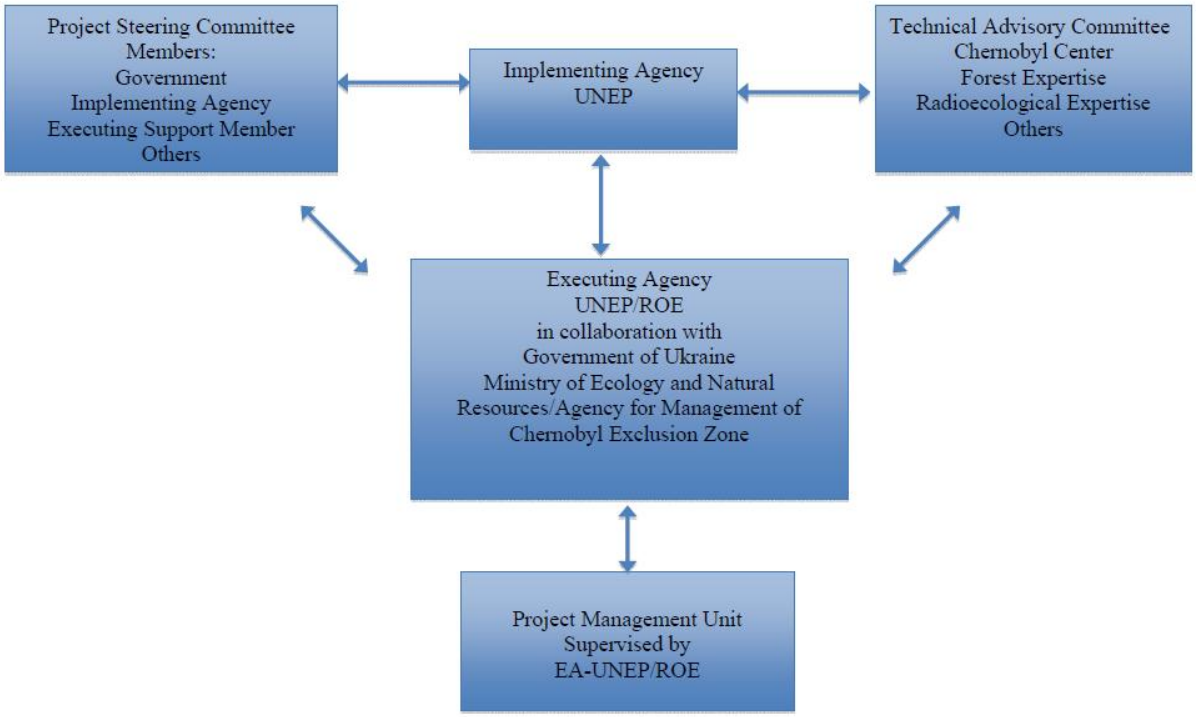
### Project Steering Committee (PSC)

41. The PSC, chaired by MENR and with representatives from UNEP, SAUEZM, scientific institutions, and NGOs, was responsible for strategic guidance and approval of annual work plans and budgets. The PSC was functional, although its effectiveness depended on the active participation of national authorities. PSC meetings were interrupted during the war but reconvened virtually in 2023 to reset priorities and approve a revised work plan.

**Technical Advisory Committee**

42. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was convened to provide expertise in biodiversity monitoring, radiological safety, and carbon accounting. This mechanism was effective in aligning project methodologies with international standards and ensured quality assurance in scientific outputs.

**Figure 1: Organigram of the project with key project stakeholders**




## 1.4 Stakeholders

43. Stakeholder participation and partnerships were a strong feature of the project design and contributed significantly to its achievements. Government agencies, scientific institutions, and NGOs were meaningfully engaged in planning, implementation, and oversight, while UNEP ensured compliance with international standards and fostered knowledge exchange. Despite severe disruptions due to the war, adaptive engagement strategies enabled continuity of participation to a degree, preserving partnerships that remain valuable for sustaining and scaling project outcomes.

44. Engagement strategies were designed to ensure institutional ownership, technical credibility, and inclusiveness, while also responding adaptively to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 and the full-scale war since 2022. The following table provides a summary of the main stakeholder groups, their respective roles, level of engagement, and key findings on the effectiveness of their participation throughout the project cycle.

**Table 4: Project Stakeholders**

| Stakeholder Group | Role in the Project | Level | Findings / Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) | National policy oversight; chairing the Project Steering Committee (PSC). | High | Provided political support and policy guidance; remained committed despite institutional changes. |
| State Agency of Ukraine on the Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM) | Day-to-day management of the Biosphere Reserve; coordination with local authorities. | High | Institutional anchoring ensured ownership; capacity constraints required UNEP technical support. |
| Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC) functioning within CREBR | Technical hub for biodiversity and carbon monitoring; knowledge management. | High | Central to monitoring system development; strengthened scientific capacity and alignment with MEAs. |
| Scientific Institutions (universities, academies) | Research collaboration, technical advice, peer review of methodologies. | Medium–High | Provided technical expertise and data; engagement was consistent, though periodically constrained by disruptions related to the conflict. |
| State Emergency Service of Ukraine | Fire prevention, disaster risk reduction, radiological safety. | Medium–High | Engaged in training and response coordination; enhanced inter-agency cooperation. |
| NGOs and Civil Society | Stakeholder consultations, advocacy, knowledge sharing. | Medium | Contributed perspectives and raised awareness; engagement reduced during conflict but resumed online. |
| Local Communities (adjacent settlements) | Participation in socio-economic surveys; indirect beneficiaries. | Low–Medium | Surveys conducted pre-war; engagement limited due to restricted access to ChEZ and later due to the war. |
| UNEP (Implementing Agency) | Fiduciary oversight, safeguard compliance, technical support. | High | Ensured compliance with GEF standards; guided adaptive management during conflict. |
| UNEP Regional Office for Europe (Executing Agency) | Day-to-day execution, coordination with MENR and SAUEZM. | High | Effective in execution and adaptive management, particularly during crises. |
| Belarusian Polessky State Radiation-Ecological Reserve | Planned transboundary cooperation on ecological connectivity. | Low | Cooperation suspended due to geopolitical conditions post-2022; potential remains for future engagement. |

## 1.5 Changes in Design during Implementation

45. Over the course of its implementation (2015–2024), the project experienced several important changes to its design and schedule, largely driven by external shocks and institutional transitions.

46. Key changes in the timeline of the project:

**2015–2017:** Political transitions and staff turnover in Ukraine slowed initial implementation, requiring adjustments to early work plans and timelines. During this period, UNEP's internal shift from the IMIS to UMOJA financial systems also delayed disbursements and financial reporting.

2018–2019: Following these delays, the project received its first no-cost extension, ensuring continuity and allowing delivery of foundational activities, including the legal establishment of the CREBR.

**2019:** The Mid-Term Review (MTR) identified weaknesses in socio-economic monitoring and biodiversity protocols, leading to a refinement of indicators, safeguard provisions, and survey methodologies.

**2020–2021:** The global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted fieldwork and transboundary collaboration with Belarus. The project adapted by revising work plans, shifting to online coordination, and emphasizing remote monitoring and desk-based reporting. A further no-cost extension was granted to enable recovery of lost implementation time.

**2022:** The war in Ukraine caused suspension of most field activities. In response, UNEP and partners prioritized adaptive measures, including digital data storage, remote consultations, and reallocation of budgets to sustain critical operations. Another extension to 2024 was approved to allow resumption of activities where feasible.

No formal budget revision was recorded during project implementation. Instead, internal reallocations were made between budget lines to optimize the use of remaining funds and ensure completion of priority activities within the extended implementation period.

47. Overall, while the project's scope and objectives remained consistent, its design was repeatedly adapted through no-cost extensions, revised monitoring protocols, and budget reallocations. These changes reflect both the project's resilience in maintaining relevance under unprecedented external pressures and UNEP's adaptive management approach.

## 1.6 Project Financing

48. This Full-Sized Project (FSP) was financed through a GEF grant of USD 4,863,955, implemented by UNEP with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine as Executing Partner. Co-financing was anticipated from the Government of Ukraine, national institutions, and international partners to a value of USD 28,340,000, including both cash and in-kind contributions.

49. Co-financing was reported annually through official financial and progress reports and included both cash and in-kind contributions from the Government of Ukraine and collaborating institutions. Government financing supported the operationalization of the CREBR, the REPC, and associated management and monitoring functions. Additional partner contributions covered research, technical cooperation, and environmental data management activities.

50. Co-financing reached a total of USD 40.55 million, surpassing initial expectations by approximately USD 12.5 million. The Government of Ukraine was the principal contributor (USD 22 million actual), providing both cash and in-kind support for staff, infrastructure, and biodiversity monitoring. Other partners, including research institutions, NGOs, and UN-affiliated entities, contributed USD 18.55 million, primarily through collaborative research, data-sharing, and equipment. The high co-financing realization demonstrates strong institutional commitment and the catalytic role of the project in attracting complementary investments for environmental management and restoration within the ChEZ.

**Table 5: Project co-financing**

| Co-financing (Type/Source) | UNEP own Financing (US$1,000) | | Government (US$1,000) | | Other* (US$1,000) | | Total (US$1,000) | | Total Disbursed (US$1,000) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | |
| Grants | – | – | 15,000 | 17,000 | 13,000 | 16,500 | 28,000 | 33,500 | 33,5 |
| In-kind support | – | – | – | 5,000 | – | 2,000 | – | 7,000 | 7,000 |
| Other (*) | – | – | – | – | – | 50 | – | 50 | 50 |
| **Totals** | – | – | 15,000 | 22,000 | 13,000 | 18,550 | 28,000 | 40,550 | 40,550 |

* This refers to contributions mobilized for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

# 2 EVALUATION METHODS

## 2.1 UNEP's Evaluation Approach

51. In line with UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme and Project Management Manual, the evaluation was undertaken at operational completion of the project to assess performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency) and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned. The main target audiences for the evaluation findings are UNEP and national stakeholders.

52. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy, the UNEP Programme Manual and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations, the evaluation has been carried out using a set of nine (9) commonly applied evaluation criteria which include: (1) Strategic Relevance , (2) Quality of Project Design, (3) Nature of External Context, (4) Effectiveness (incl. availability of outputs; achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact), (5) Financial Management, (6) Efficiency, (7) Monitoring and Reporting, (8) Sustainability and (9) Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues (see Annex II Evaluation Framework for more details on each evaluation criterion).

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

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

55. In addition to the nine (9) evaluation criteria outlined above, the evaluation addresses a number of strategic questions that were formulated in the Terms of Reference. These questions were posed by the UNEP Evaluation Office in conjunction with members of the Project Team. For projects funded by the GEF, findings from the evaluation are to be uploaded in the GEF Portal. To support this process, evaluation findings related to the five (5) topics of interest to the GEF are summarised in Annex VI. The intended action/results on the five (5) topics were described in the GEF CEO Endorsement and Approval documents. The five (5) topics are: i) performance against GEF's Core Indicator Targets; ii) engagement of stakeholders; iii) gender-responsive measures and gender result areas; iv) implementation of management measures taken against the Safeguards Plan and v) challenges and outcomes regarding the project's completed Knowledge Management Approach.

56. This evaluation adopted a participatory approach, consulting with project team members, partners and beneficiaries at several stages throughout the process. Central to the evaluation was the analysis and reconstruction of the project's Theory of Change. Consultations were held during the evaluation inception phase to arrive at a nuanced understanding of how the project intended to drive change and what contributing conditions

('assumptions' and 'drivers') would need to be in place to support such change. The reconstructed ToC, supported by a graphic representation and narrative discussion of the causal pathways, was discussed further with respondents during the data collection phase, and refined as appropriate. The final iteration of the reconstructed Theory of Change is presented in this final evaluation report and has been used throughout the evaluation process.

57. The methodology followed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to assess project performance against key evaluation criteria. It included a thorough review of project documents, stakeholder consultations, and verification of project results. The evaluation emphasized triangulation of evidence to ensure credibility, while integrating cross-cutting considerations such as gender equality, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability. The TE applied a comprehensive methodological framework grounded in three core principles: evidence-based analysis, utilization-focused design, and a consultative and participatory approach.

58. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) was conducted in four sequential phases:

1. Inception Phase: This phase involved a thorough desk review, data collection, and initial analysis. It concluded with the development of the TE Inception Report, which outlined the evaluation approach and detailed the preparations for the field mission.

2. Remote Engagement Phase: Virtual interviews and online surveys were conducted with the project team, implementing partners, and national-level stakeholders to gather a variety of perspectives on the project's progress and challenges.

3. Field Mission: Due to security and safety reasons field visits were not conducted.

4. Finalization Phase: The insights gathered from all phases were synthesized into the Terminal Evaluation Report, providing an evidence-based assessment of the project's performance to date.

## 2.2 Data Collection

### 2.2.1 Primary data sources

59. Multiple data sources were used, including:

- Desk Review of key project documents (e.g., ProDoc, Annual Reports, budgets, M&E data, national strategies).
- Semi-structured Interviews with stakeholders from government agencies, academia, implementing partners, and civil society to answer the evaluation matrix questions and indicators (Annex II).

60. The primary purpose of the stakeholder interviews was to collect qualitative and perception-based data to validate and enrich the findings from the desk review, progress reports and monitoring systems. These tools aimed to capture the experiential knowledge of those directly and indirectly engaged with the project across design, implementation, and use of results, especially in regional cooperation, institutional capacity development, local engagement, and the sustainability of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The interviews and surveys provided valuable feedback on the project's achievements, gaps, and lessons learned. They served as a way to triangulate findings with other sources and ensure that stakeholder voices were included in the TE. Interviewees and survey participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria:

1. *Relevance to Project Objectives: The evaluation sought to involve individuals who were actively contributing to or benefiting from its initiatives related to biodiversity and carbon monitoring, capacity-building efforts, or policy and planning activities focused on environmental sustainability.*

2. *Institutional Affiliation: Participants included representatives from key ministries, who play critical roles in governance. Additionally, academic institutions conducting research and implementing partners like UNEP that provide technical and financial support.*

3. *Technical Expertise: The evaluation engaged experts in several fields; and environmental governance that promote effective policy frameworks for managing natural resources.*

4. *Gender and Inclusion: Where possible, female professionals, gender focal points, and youth representatives were included to ensure diverse perspectives.*

5. *Level of Engagement: The evaluation recognized the importance of engaging both high-level policymakers and practitioners, including researchers and implementers, who are on the ground managing projects and driving results. This multi-tiered approach ensured that insights from various levels can inform decision-making processes effectively. Both high-level policymakers and practitioners, including researchers and implementers, were considered for engagement.*

6. *This evaluation used the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.' The evaluation team has safeguarded the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing data collection and reporting on data. The evaluation team also ensured the security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information. The evaluation team ensured that the evaluation process remained free from external influence and bias through several key strategies applied for the evaluation's design, framework, data collection, analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. A clear separation was maintained between the evaluators and the entities being assessed. The evaluation team functioned independently, without any financial or operational ties to the stakeholders involved.*

61. Throughout this evaluation process and in the compilation of the Final Evaluation Report, efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups. Data were collected with respect for ethics and human rights issues. All pictures were taken, and other information gathered after prior informed consent from people, all discussions remained anonymous, and all information was collected according to the UN 'Standards of Conduct'.

**Table 6: Evaluation respondents and field visits**

| Target Respondents - Individuals | | | A. # people involved in project Total (M/F) | B.# people contacted Total (M/F) | Sample size (% B/A)[13] | C. # people responded Total (M/F) | Response rate (% C/B)[14] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Project Team | **Project Team** (those with management responsibilities e.g. Project Management Unit) | Implementing agency | 7 (5M, 2F) | 7 (5M, 2F) | 100% | 7 (5M, 2F) | 100% |
| | | Executing agency/ies | 8 (8M, 0F) | 8 (8M, 0F) | 100% | 8 (8M, 0F) | 100% |
| Beneficiaries | **Direct Beneficiaries:** (e.g. duty bearers, gatekeepers, training participants, etc.)<br><br>**Indirect Beneficiaries:** (e.g. household members, civil society representatives, group members, etc.) | | 10 (8M, 2F) | 10 (8M, 2F) | 100% | 10 (8M, 2F) | 100% |
| **Target Respondents - Entities** | | | **A. # entities involved in project** | **B.# entities contacted** | **Sample size (% B/A)** | **C. # entities responded** | **Response rate (% C/B)** |
| Partners | **Project implementing/ executing partners** (receiving project funds) | | 3 | 3 | 100% | 3 | 100% |
| | **Project collaborating/ contributing partners** (not receiving project fund) | | 8 | 8 | 100% | 8 | 100% |

### 2.2.2 Strategies for inclusivity

62. A stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted during the TE inception phase to identify key actors across four tiers. The Project Document, stakeholder engagement strategies, progress reports, and consultations with National Stakeholders informed the mapping. Notably, the evaluation team maintained a neutral and independent stance, ensuring objectivity and minimizing potential bias in feedback collection. The evaluation team employed a mixed-method sampling strategy to ensure inclusivity and relevance while minimizing potential bias:

*Purposive Sampling:* This approach targeted individuals with high relevance, particularly those in leadership positions or technical coordination roles within institutions.

*Snowball Sampling:* This method was used to identify additional relevant stakeholders from academia, local agencies, or civil society, based on recommendations from initial interviews.

63. Table 6 provides an overview of evaluation respondents. A total of twenty-two stakeholder interviews were conducted in Ukraine. The interview with one of the international partners, the Polessky State Radiation Ecological Reserve (Belarus), could not be done due to the breach of communication between Ukraine and Belarus caused by the ongoing war. The interviews included various perspectives from government institutions, scientific organizations, and civil society. The complete list of stakeholders consulted is available in the Annex III. Of the total number of persons interviewed, two (2) were women; unfortunately, a more balanced level of gender representation in technical, institutional, and project

[13] Calculated as the percentage of people who were contacted out of the total number of people involved in the project.
[14] Calculated as the percentage of people who responded out of the total number of people contacted.

coordination roles could not be achieved because much higher proportion of Ukrainian women as compared to men have fled from the war in Ukraine.

### 2.2.3 Secondary data sources

64. The evaluation drew extensively on a wide range of secondary data sources to assess project performance and results. Core project documentation included the Project Document (2015), the GEF CEO Endorsement package, budget revisions, and financial spreadsheets submitted by UNEP and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine. Monitoring and reporting data were key sources of evidence. These were comprised of the annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs), the Mid-Term Review (2019), and the Project Information Management System (PIMS) and Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting (IPMR) outputs generated by UNEP. Financial and co-financing data were cross-checked using semi-annual project financial reports and the 2024 PIR, which provided the most recent cumulative expenditure and co-financing figures.

65. Additional documents collected from project partners and during consultations included national policy documents on biodiversity conservation and exclusion zone management, institutional statutes establishing the CREBR, and reports produced by the REPC. The evaluation also made use of scientific publications, fire monitoring datasets, and biodiversity and carbon inventory records developed under the project, as well as relevant national reporting to the CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD.

66. Together, these secondary data sources provided a robust foundation for triangulation of evidence, enabling assessment of project design, implementation progress, financial delivery, and emerging results.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

67. The evaluation adopted a two-tiered approach to analysing and validating information: first, through a thorough review of project documentation, and second, by collecting data from stakeholder interviews and consultations. A comprehensive evaluation matrix was devised to guide the analysis, ensuring unbiased data collection to address the evaluation questions effectively. The methods used to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data included the following:

*Descriptive Analysis and Cross-Checking: Evaluation indicators were verified against monitoring data collected from project documentation, reports, and external sources, ensuring that the findings were substantiated by reliable data*

*Thematic Narrative Analysis: A desk review was conducted to identify critical issues linked to the project indicators outlined in the evaluation matrix, enabling a deeper understanding of the project's context and impact.*

*Iterative Data Analysis: This process connects findings with the evaluation questions, facilitating the identification of key results.*

68. All information and data collected during the evaluation process were systematically triangulated to ensure their validity and reliability. An evaluation matrix was employed to methodically address each research question, organizing the available evidence in alignment with key evaluation questions. This structured approach not only facilitated the development of well-supported conclusions and actionable recommendations but also ensured that the insights derived were based on robust data.

## 2.4 Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

69. The evaluators have aimed to provide a reliable and comprehensive assessment of the project's performance and impacts by addressing data gaps, enhancing stakeholder participation, clarifying attribution, and analysing sustainability.

70. Data Gaps: Incomplete or missing data posed a risk to conducting a comprehensive evaluation. To address this issue, the evaluation team implemented triangulation methods, using multiple data sources, including interviews, secondary reports, and external datasets, to cross-verify findings and fill information gaps.

71. Limited Stakeholder Participation: Logistical constraints risked reducing stakeholder representation, which is crucial for a thorough evaluation. To overcome this, alternative engagement methods, such as remote interviews, surveys, and consultations, were utilized to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and broader representation.

72. Engagement of Women Stakeholders: The evaluation encountered significant challenges in engaging women stakeholders at the national level due to the ongoing war, which has led to displacement, increased workload pressures, and institutional disruptions. Many women left their positions or relocated abroad, making direct participation in interviews difficult and limiting the ability to capture gender perspectives on project outcomes. However, it is important to note that the conflict has also transformed gender roles in Ukraine's institutional landscape. Women are now assuming expanded responsibilities, holding both technical and leadership positions in environmental, emergency management, and scientific institutions. Within CREBR and other partner agencies, women's involvement has intensified in areas such as biodiversity monitoring, environmental education, and administrative coordination. While this shift reflects resilience and adaptive capacity under crisis conditions, the evaluation still faced constraints in fully assessing how these evolving roles influence gender equality and social inclusion in environmental governance.

73. Indicators and Attribution Challenges: Differentiating the project's specific impacts from external factors was challenging due to the absence of clearly defined, measurable, and time-bound targets for several indicators. These gaps limited the precision of performance tracking and made it difficult to attribute results directly to project interventions. In many cases, progress could only be assessed qualitatively rather than against predefined benchmarks, reducing comparability across reporting periods. To address these limitations, the evaluation triangulated qualitative and quantitative evidence from reports, stakeholder interviews, and secondary sources to infer performance trends. A reconstructed Theory of Change, combined with counterfactual reasoning, was applied to identify the project's unique contributions and change pathways. Emphasis was placed on assessing contribution rather than strict attribution, highlighting the project's catalytic role in enabling institutional and systemic change. Expert judgment and stakeholder validation further strengthened the credibility and reliability of findings.

74. Assessing Long-Term Benefits: Evaluating the project's long-term impacts was challenging due to the time required for achievements of the outcomes to fully materialize. To mitigate this, the evaluation incorporated a sustainability analysis, focusing on early indicators of potential long-term impacts and gathering stakeholder insights on the likelihood of sustained benefits. The evaluation reassessed the assumptions underlying the project's logic, including factors such as political stability, security conditions that allow access to the Exclusion Zone, and the willingness of international partners to maintain technical cooperation. By testing these assumptions against the changing context, such as political transitions, the pandemic, and ongoing conflict, the evaluation was able to assess the risks and opportunities for sustainability. This comprehensive assessment of the driving factors

and assumptions enabled the evaluation to move beyond a narrow focus on outputs and provide evidence-based conclusions regarding the likelihood that the project's achievements, especially institutional reforms, biodiversity monitoring systems, and fire management measures, will lead to lasting environmental and policy benefits.

75. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the resulting security conditions on the ground have imposed significant limitations on the evaluation process. However, due to safety concerns, it has not been possible undertake field visits, which would have provided valuable on-site observations and direct engagement with local stakeholders. In some cases, these conditions have also limited access to certain stakeholders, particularly those operating in conflict-affected areas or under constrained institutional capacities. In addition, updated satellite imagery of the ChEZ, which could have served as an alternative source of documentation, was not accessible due to the security restrictions.

76. As a result, the evaluation had to rely more heavily on remote data collection methods and virtual consultations, which, while useful, may not fully capture the contextual nuances and on-the-ground realities of project implementation. Despite these limitations, the application of robust mitigation strategies ensured that the evaluation process could proceed effectively.

# 3 THEORY OF CHANGE AT EVALUATION

77. The project's original design documents did not include a clearly articulated Theory of Change (ToC). While the ProDoc presented a logical framework with objectives, outcomes, and outputs, it lacked an explicit causal pathway linking project interventions to intended environmental and institutional impacts. This absence limited the ability to fully assess how the project was expected to achieve the expected results at outcome level and to test the validity of underlying assumptions and drivers.

78. Specifically, the design did not include an explicit ToC to establish clear connections between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. As a result, the project lacked a structured framework for identifying a causal chain of effects and understanding the linkages between interventions and expected results. During the MTR, the development of a ToC was recommended, with input from stakeholders, UNEP, and Ukraine's government. However, this theory of change was never finalized. As a result, this evaluation reconstructed the theory of change based on a review of available documentation to clarify the project's result chain and intended outcomes, as shown in the table below.

79. Given this gap, the evaluation team reconstructed the ToC as part of the terminal evaluation process. The reconstruction was carried out by the evaluation consultants in close consultation with the UNEP Task Manager and key national stakeholders. The reconstruction process relied on the following sources of information:

80. The original Project Document (ProDoc, 2014), including the log-frame, results framework, and risk/assumptions sections. The MTR report, which had recommended the development of a ToC to clarify the causal chain. The TE stakeholder consultations, which provided insights on how interventions were perceived to have contributed to outcomes. UNEP Evaluation Office guidance on ToC development, ensuring alignment with UNEP definitions of impacts, outcomes, outputs, drivers, and assumptions.

81. The reconstruction process did not involve significant revisions to the ProDoc, as there were no changes made to its design logic or results framework during implementation. The only formal revisions involved no-cost extensions, which impacted the project's duration but did not alter its objectives, components, or outcomes. As a result, the ToC was developed retrospectively, based on evaluation evidence and the methodological requirements set by UNEP. The need for reconstruction stemmed from the following factors:

- The original results framework conflated outcomes and outputs, making causal pathways unclear.
- Assumptions and drivers were either not articulated or insufficiently defined, which limited evaluability.
- The project's broader contributions to global environmental benefits (biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire management) were not explicitly captured in the original design.

82. The Logical Framework includes key elements supporting the expected change outlined in the ToC, such as the focus on biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire management, and stakeholder engagement. These are critical aspects of the causal pathways in the ToC. However, some assumptions and impact drivers mentioned in the ToC are not fully articulated in the Log-Frame. For example, critical assumptions like political

stability and legislative support for expanding the protected area network are not explicitly captured in the Log-Frame, even though they are vital to the success of the intervention.

83. The reconstructed ToC therefore clarified the hierarchy of results, distinguishing between outputs, project outcomes, intermediate states, and long-term impact, while making explicit the drivers and assumptions necessary for pathways to hold. It also placed the project within a broader global context by recognizing how lessons and models from the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone could be replicated elsewhere. This reconstructed ToC served as the framework against which the evaluation assessed the project's achievements, causal linkages, and likelihood of impact. As a result, this evaluation reconstructed the theory of change based on a review of available documentation to clarify the project's result chain and intended outcomes, as shown in the table below. The following Table 7 shows how the original project formulations have been refined or expanded to align more clearly with the reconstructed Theory of Change at the evaluation inception stage.

**Table 7: Justification for reformulation of results statements**

| Formulation in Original Project Document | Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Evaluation Inception (RTOC) | Justification for Reformulation |
|---|---|---|
| **(LONG LASTING) IMPACT** | | |
| Enhanced Conservation, and Management of Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in Forest and non-Forest Lands in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), in Ukraine. | Increased carbon sequestration in reforested areas and former agricultural lands. - Enhanced biodiversity conservation in globally significant ecosystems. - Reduced risk of radioactive contamination spread due to wildfires. - Replication of successful ecosystem recovery models globally. | Reformulated long-term impact aligns the project's local interventions with global environmental and climate goals. By addressing biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire management, and knowledge replication, the project delivers outcomes that have both immediate and long-lasting impacts, contributing to global sustainability efforts. The reformulation ensures that the project's interventions are understood not only as beneficial for Ukraine's ChEZ but as models with far-reaching implications for biodiversity, climate mitigation, and environmental management globally. |
| **INTERMEDIATE STATES** | | |
| - | -Stronger, sustainable institutional and financial mechanisms to support ongoing conservation and carbon sequestration<br>-Established long-term monitoring systems for biodiversity and carbon stocks<br>-Reduced vulnerability of ecosystems and communities to environmental efforts<br>-Increased stakeholder engagement and collaboration in ecosystem governance | Reformulated TOC highlight the transitional outcomes required to move from project outcomes to long-lasting impacts, including institutional and financial sustainability, reduced vulnerability and replication of models. |
| **PROJECT OUTCOMES** | | |

| Formulation in Original Project Document | Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Evaluation Inception (RTOC) | Justification for Reformulation |
|---|---|---|
| Improved monitoring and research for large areas of forests, wetlands, and other habitat types and associated carbon benefits in the ChEZ. | Improved monitoring and research of ecosystem health, leading to better data on biodiversity and carbon stocks.<br>Indicators:<br>Functional ecological and carbon monitoring system established and producing verified datasets on biodiversity and carbon stocks in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ).<br>• Number of national research institutions and scientific partners utilizing project-generated data for biodiversity and carbon assessments.<br>• Frequency and quality of biodiversity and carbon monitoring reports submitted to national and international databases (CBD, UNFCCC).<br>Target stakeholders: Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine; Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR); National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; universities; UNEP science partners. | Clarified outcome to emphasize better data collection as the means to improve biodiversity and carbon stock monitoring, essential for informed decision-making. |
| Improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks within and around the ChEZ. | Conservation of biodiversity and mitigation of land degradation through expanded protected areas. - Enhanced capacity to manage wildfires and illegal activities in the ChEZ.<br>Indicators:<br>• Total area of land under effective protection within the CREBR (ha).<br>• Reduction in frequency and/or extent of wildfires in project areas due to implementation of integrated fire management systems.<br>• Number of staff and rangers trained and equipped for ecosystem protection, fire control, and prevention of illegal activities.<br>• Documented improvement in forest and wetland ecosystem condition within the Reserve based on remote sensing and field data.<br>Target stakeholders: CREBR management units; SAUEZM; Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources; State Emergency Service; local forestry agencies; local communities in buffer zones. | Reformulated to include specific areas of management improvement (protected areas, wildfires, and illegal activities), aligning with the project's specific intervention areas. |
| Increased availability and access to critical information needed for decision-making for effective sustainable management of the ChEZ. | - Increased availability and access to critical information and stronger partnerships with local communities, policymakers, and scientists needed for decision-making for effective sustainable management of the ChEZ.<br>Indicators:<br>• Number of operational data-sharing and communication platforms for ecological and radiological information exchange.<br>• Number of multi-stakeholder partnerships established with universities, NGOs, and local authorities for joint research and decision-making.<br>• Frequency of policy briefs, outreach materials, and awareness campaigns disseminated nationally and internationally.<br>• Stakeholder perception of improved access to scientific and policy-relevant information | Reformulated to reflect the role of partnerships and collaborations in improving decision-making processes, key to enhancing the overall management of the ChEZ. |
| **OUTPUTS** | | |
| 1.1 The REPC (Research and Environmental Protection Center) established and fully functional. | The Research and Environmental Protection Center established and fully operational, within the CREBR., supporting the ecosystem monitoring. | No significant reformulation was made, but the role of the REPC was clarified. It serves |

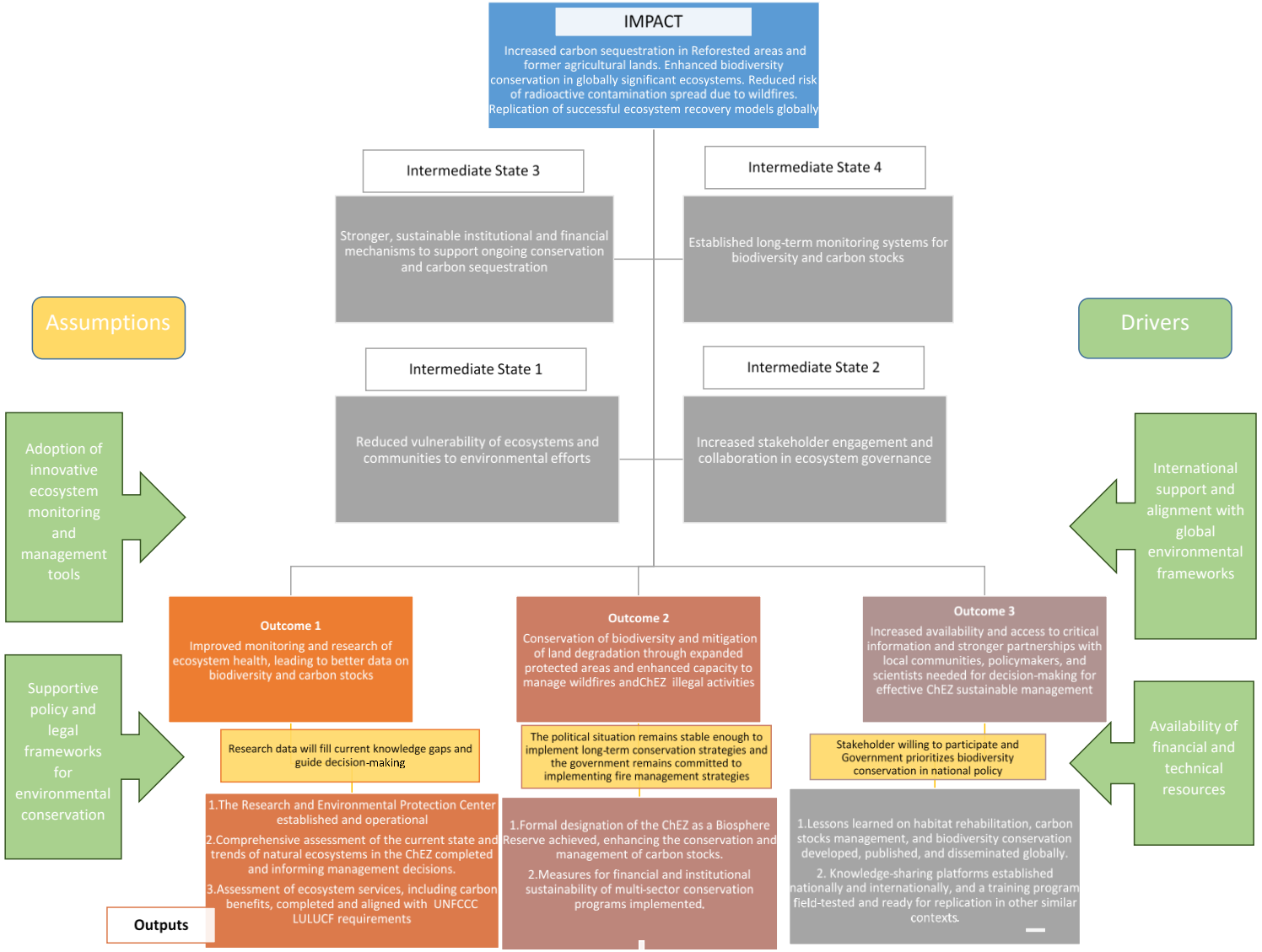
| Formulation in Original Project Document | Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Evaluation Inception (RTOC) | Justification for Reformulation |
|---|---|---|
| | | combined scientific, research, and communication functions that support ecosystem monitoring of the Reserve, rather than acting as a distinct administrative entity. |
| 1.2 Comprehensive assessment of the current state and trends of natural ecosystems in the ChEZ. | Comprehensive assessment of the current state and trends of natural ecosystems in the ChEZ completed and informing management decisions. | Reformulated to emphasize the role of the assessment in informing decision-making, which ties into the outcomes on improved management and conservation. |
| 1.3 Assessment of the status of ecosystem services and their values and enhancement of carbon benefits in terms meeting LULUCF requirements. | Assessment of ecosystem services, including carbon benefits, completed and aligned with Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry requirements. | No major reformulation but aligned the language more closely with international LULUCF standards, which is a key requirement of the project's goals. |
| 2.1: Formal designation of the ChEZ as Biosphere Reserve for enhancing conservation and management of carbon stocks. | Formal designation of the ChEZ as a Biosphere Reserve achieved, enhancing the conservation and management of carbon stocks. | Reformulated slightly for clarity and alignment with the project's outcome of establishing conservation areas. |
| 2.2 Measures developed to ensure financial and institutional sustainability of multi-sector conservation programs. | Measures for financial and institutional sustainability of multi-sector conservation programs implemented. | Reformulated to emphasize the implementation of sustainability measures, a critical step from design to effective long-term outcomes. |
| 3.1: A set of lessons learned and practical recommendations on habitat rehabilitation, carbon stocks management, and biodiversity conservation developed and published. | Lessons learned on habitat rehabilitation, carbon stocks management, and biodiversity conservation developed, published, and disseminated globally. | Expanded slightly to include dissemination, which is important for the replication of effective conservation models globally (one of the Intermediate States). |
| 3.2: Knowledge sharing at national and international levels and Training programme field-tested and available for replication. | Knowledge-sharing platforms established nationally and internationally, and a training program field-tested and ready for replication in other similar contexts. | Reformulated to emphasize the platforms and replication potential, aligning with the impact driver of scaling up successful interventions. |

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

| Formulation in original project document(s) | Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Evaluation (RTOC) | Justification for Reformulation |
|---|---|---|
| **DRIVERS** | | |
| Human rights and gender equality not explicitly addressed | UN principles of human rights, gender equality, and inclusion applied as an underlying driver. | Though not stated in the ProDoc, UNEP policy treats these as fundamental drivers ensuring inclusivity and fairness in project implementation. |
| Strong scientific interest in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ) as a unique | Strong scientific interest in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (CheZ) as a unique | Scientific attention underpins feasibility of monitoring, research, and knowledge-sharing pathways. |

| Formulation in original project document(s) | Formulation for Reconstructed ToC at Evaluation (RTOC) | Justification for Reformulation |
|---|---|---|
| ecosystem for biodiversity and carbon stock conservation. | ecosystem for biodiversity and carbon stock conservation. | |
| National and international recognition of the ChEZ as an area of ecological and climate relevance. | National and international recognition of the ChEZ as an area of ecological and climate relevance.<br><br>No change | Global recognition enhances political and donor support for conservation and carbon management. |
| Existence of institutions and research facilities already monitoring radiation and biodiversity in the area. | Existence of institutions and research facilities already monitoring radiation and biodiversity in the area.<br><br>No change | Institutional presence provides the baseline capacity needed for project activities. |
| Opportunities for synergies with other regional and global environmental agreements and donor initiatives. | Opportunities for synergies with other regional and global environmental agreements and donor initiatives.<br><br>No change | External initiatives and agreements create enabling conditions for sustainability and replication. |
| Political will and policy frameworks in Ukraine supporting conservation and land management in the ChEZ. | Political will and policy frameworks in Ukraine supporting conservation and land management in the ChEZ.<br><br>No change | Political support is essential for legal designation, management, and sustainability of conservation measures. |
| **ASSUMPTIONS** | | |
| Human rights and gender equality (not explicitly addressed) | UN principles of human rights, gender equality, and inclusion applied as an assumption/driver | Since no explicit commitment was made in the ProDoc, these principles are integrated as driver or assumptions, consistent with UNEP and UN system norms. |
| – | Stakeholder commitment (government, scientific community, local authorities, local communities) to long-term conservation of the ChEZ. | Project success depends on sustained national and local stakeholder engagement. |
| – | Security and access to the ChEZ remain stable enough for monitoring, research, and project activities. | The ChEZ's security and accessibility are critical for fieldwork and monitoring. |
| – | Continued support from international partners (UNEP, GEF, bilateral donors). | International partners' technical and financial support is necessary for sustaining interventions. |
| – | Legal and institutional frameworks for protected areas management remain functional and enforceable. | Conservation outcomes depend on effective and enforceable institutional arrangements. |
| – | Biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits in the ChEZ will be globally recognized and leveraged. | Recognition of ChEZ benefits ensures alignment with global environmental priorities and mobilization of further support. |

## Figure 2: Theory of change at Terminal Evaluation



# 4 EVALUATION FINDINGS

## 4.1 Strategic Relevance

### 4.1.1 Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and Strategic Priorities

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

| UNEP strategic document | Alignment with UNEP's mandate and thematic priorities | Level of alignment |
|---|---|---|
| **MTS** (MTS 2014-2017) | The project contributed directly to the thematic priority on ecosystem management, supporting the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and carbon stocks in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ) | Full |
| **POW** (2018-2019 ) | It reinforced UNEP's focus on resilience to disasters and conflicts and climate change mitigation, by addressing wildfire risks, reducing potential transboundary contamination, and enhancing carbon sequestration | Full |
| **South-South Cooperation** | The project embodied the principles of South-South Cooperation by generating knowledge and lessons learned on ecosystem rehabilitation in post-disaster landscapes that can be shared and adapted by other countries with similar ecological or socio-political contexts. This alignment underscores UNEP's comparative advantage in bridging science, policy, and practice for global environmental benefits. | Full |

### 4.1.2 Alignment to GEF/Donor Strategic Priorities

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

| Donor or partner strategic document | Alignment with donor or partner strategic priorities | Level of alignment |
|---|---|---|
| GEF | The project was designed as a multi-focal area initiative, directly addressing the GEF focal areas of Biodiversity (BD-1), Climate Change Mitigation (CCM-5), and Land Degradation (LD-3). It contributes to GEF priorities on strengthening protected area systems, sustainable land use, and carbon stock management. The project's design complied fully with GEF requirements and offered a model for post-disaster conservation and management | Full |

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

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

| Strategic document or agreement | Alignment with global, regional, sub-regional, national environmental priorities | Level of Alignment |
|---|---|---|
| Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) | The project contributes to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (notably Targets 5, 11, and 15), by conserving ecosystems and enhancing carbon storage | Full |
| United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) | Through carbon stock management and wildfire risk reduction, the project supports climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. | Full |

| Strategic document or agreement | Alignment with global, regional, sub-regional, national environmental priorities | Level of Alignment |
|---|---|---|
| United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) | By addressing land degradation and restoring ecosystem functions in the ChEZ, the project supports the global Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target. | Partial |
| 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) | Contributes to SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), with relevance to Targets 15.1 and 15.2 on conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and forests. Indirectly SDG 3 (Health and Well-being). | Full |
| National Environmental Strategy of Ukraine to 2020 and Action Plan | Identifies biodiversity conservation, protected area management, and climate change response as core national priorities. | Full |
| Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of Ukraine under the UNFCCC | The project supports mitigation through carbon stock conservation and adaptation by reducing wildfire risks. | Full |
| National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) | Project contributes to strengthening protected areas, conserving biodiversity in the ChEZ, and enhancing ecosystem services. | Full |
| National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy of Ukraine | Project activities in fire management and ecosystem resilience directly align with adaptation objectives. | Full |
| Presidential Decree signed on April 26, 2016 "Establishment of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve" | This decree designated approximately 226,965 hectares of state-owned land within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as a biosphere reserve. The reserve encompasses about two-thirds of the exclusion zone's territory and is the largest of its kind in Ukraine. The primary objectives of the reserve include preserving its unique flora and fauna, stabilizing the hydrological regime, remediating land contaminated with radiation, and conducting scientific research in ecology, natural sciences, and geography. | Full |

### 4.1.4 Complementarity with Existing Interventions/ Coherence

**Table 12: Complementarity with Existing Interventions/Coherence**

| Other initiatives by UNEP or other organisations | Complementarity (including collaboration, coordination and overlap or duplication) | Level of Alignment |
|---|---|---|
| UNEP/GEF Project on Environmental Remediation of Uranium Tailings in Central Asia | Shared technical expertise in managing contaminated and hazardous sites; methodological complementarity in addressing environmental legacies of industrial/nuclear activity. | Partial |
| UNEP/GEF Peatlands and Climate Change Initiative | Coordination on ecosystem services valuation and fire prevention strategies, particularly relevant to ChEZ's peatlands and fire risk management. | Full |
| GEF/UNDP Projects on Biodiversity Conservation in Forest-Steppe and Wetland Ecosystems of Ukraine | Direct thematic synergy with biodiversity monitoring and protected area expansion; collaboration with national institutions on biodiversity baselines. | Full |
| EU/UNDP ClimaEast Pilot Projects in Ukraine | Complementary work on climate change adaptation and mitigation, including forestry and peatland management. Provided policy synergies for Chernobyl Reserve establishment. | Partial |
| OSCE and IAEA Chernobyl-related initiatives | Avoidance of duplication: these projects focused on radiological monitoring and nuclear safety, while UNEP/GEF emphasized biodiversity and ecological restoration. Opportunities for scientific data exchange. | Partial |

| Other initiatives by UNEP or other organisations | Complementarity (including collaboration, coordination and overlap or duplication) | Level of Alignment |
|---|---|---|
| UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme | Full alignment: CREBR designation process benefited directly from UNESCO's MAB framework, ensuring international recognition and sustainability of outcomes. | Full |
| National Environmental Action Plan and State Programme on Radioactive Waste Management | High complementarity in aligning project interventions with national strategic frameworks for waste management, radiation safety, and ecosystem protection. | Full |
| UNDP/GEF Project on Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Ukraine's Agriculture and Energy Sectors | Overlap in institutional strengthening and policy mainstreaming for biodiversity; synergies in stakeholder engagement and national reporting (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD). | Partial |

84. The project was designed to complement and build upon existing national, regional, and international initiatives in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and post-disaster environmental management. The Project implementation had strong synergies with ongoing interventions, though the outbreak of conflict in 2022 limited some planned linkages. The project demonstrated strong alignment with, and complementarity to, other interventions at the national, regional, and global levels. It built directly on Ukraine's policy commitments, complemented international conventions, and sought to advance transboundary cooperation. While the war curtailed some planned regional collaboration, the project maintained synergies with national institutions and contributed valuable knowledge to international forums. This linkage-oriented approach enhanced the project's strategic relevance and potential for replication in other post-disaster and high-risk contexts.

**Findings Statements on Strategic Relevance and Complementarity**

85. The project demonstrated strong strategic relevance by directly aligning with GEF-5 focal area objectives on biodiversity and climate change mitigation, as well as UNEP's medium-term strategy on ecosystem management. Its focus on the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone addressed a globally significant yet underrepresented conservation landscape, positioning Ukraine as a contributor to global environmental benefits through carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. This strategic fit explains why the project is rated as 'Highly Satisfactory' under relevance: it tackled both national environmental priorities and international commitments (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD), thereby ensuring legitimacy and ownership across scales. The evaluation highlights that the project's high relevance was a critical determinant of its performance rating, as linkages to international conventions and national strategies and plans enabled that political and institutional commitments were upheld even during the periods of crisis.

86. The project was also highly complementary to ongoing national and regional initiatives, particularly in biodiversity monitoring, disaster risk management, and climate adaptation. By embedding its activities within the institutional framework of the State Agency of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and linking to UNEP's broader ecosystem management agenda, the project ensured coherence and avoided duplication of effort. Complementarity with MEA reporting frameworks (e.g., CBD national reporting) enhanced the project's value-added, while efforts to link with Belarusian institutions initially showed potential for transboundary ecological connectivity, though these were later halted by geopolitical disruptions. This complementarity underscores how the project leveraged existing institutional and policy frameworks to maximize outcomes, even as external shocks constrained the realization of all intended synergies.

**Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory**

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

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

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

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

## 4.2 Quality of Project Design

**Table 13: Summary of quality of project design assessment ratings**

| | SECTION | RATING (1-6) | Summary Assessment |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Project Preparation | 4 | The project design shows limited stakeholder consultation and insufficient integration of human rights and social considerations. While key stakeholders are mentioned, the consultation process lacks detail, and some groups may have been overlooked. Human rights concerns, including the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples, are not explicitly addressed, and potential impacts on livelihoods, access to resources, and participation in decision-making are not analysed. The project focuses primarily on environmental restoration without fully integrating human-nature interdependencies or promoting sustainable development practices that benefit local communities. Gender perspectives are minimal, with no analysis of how men and women may be differently affected or how the project will ensure equitable benefits, potentially limiting inclusivity and the effectiveness of conservation and sustainable development outcomes |
| B | Risk identification and Safeguards | 5 | The project document effectively identifies risks in its logical framework and risk table, outlining potential environmental, economic, and social impacts along with mitigation measures. Key assumptions in the reconstructed theory of change include continued government commitment to fire management, adequate enforcement capacity, prioritization of biodiversity in policy, generation and use of research data, stakeholder participation, acceptance of alternatives to illegal activities, and political stability for long-term conservation. While strategies to reduce the project's environmental footprint are incorporated, gaps remain in fully articulating assumptions and addressing unintended impacts, indicating that additional measures could further strengthen the project's sustainability and resilience. |
| C | Governance and Supervision Arrangements | 6 | The project governance and supervision model is comprehensive, clear, and appropriate, and the roles and responsibilities within UNEP are clearly defined. |
| D | Partnerships | 3 | The project design references the involvement of government agencies, scientific institutions, and local communities as partners, but it provides only a limited assessment of their capacities. While roles and responsibilities for external partners, including UNEP, UNDP, the World Bank, and research institutions, are clearly specified, the project document does not thoroughly evaluate the technical expertise, operational capacity, or resources of these partners to implement project activities effectively. Gaps include the lack of assessment of government agencies' ability to |

| | **SECTION** | **RATING** (1-6) | **Summary Assessment** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | manage biodiversity, carbon stocks, and wildfire risks; insufficient analysis of research institutions' capacity for monitoring and data collection; and no evaluation of local communities' knowledge, skills, or readiness to participate in conservation and fire management efforts. Addressing these capacity gaps is crucial for ensuring effective project implementation and long-term sustainability. |
| E | Strategic Relevance | 6 | The project document clearly demonstrates alignment and relevance with UNEP's strategic frameworks, GEF and donor priorities, regional and national environmental objectives, and complements other ongoing interventions. |
| F | Logical Framework and Causality | 5 | The Logical Framework captures key elements of the reconstructed Theory of Change, including biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire management, and stakeholder engagement, and aligns outputs and outcomes with project activities such as establishing a research centre, fire monitoring systems, and a protected area network. However, critical assumptions—like political stability and legislative support—are not fully reflected, and some ambitions, such as socioeconomic benefits for local communities and comprehensive wildfire mitigation, may be overly optimistic within the project's timeframe. Baseline information for key indicators is partially included, but gaps remain, and many output and outcome indicators lack specific, measurable, and time-bound targets, making it challenging to track progress effectively or evaluate achievement of project goals. The impact drivers and assumptions are partially described but not fully articulated for each key causal pathway. While some impact drivers and assumptions are mentioned, they are not fully elaborated for each key causal pathway |
| G | Financial Planning | 5 | The project's financial planning appears well-structured, with a clear budget breakdown, co-financing commitments, and cost-effectiveness measures. The project's resource mobilization strategy appears realistic and well-structured, leveraging a combination of GEF funding, government contributions, and international partnerships. However, certain risks related to co-financing and economic stability could impact financial sustainability. |
| H | Efficiency | 6 | The project is well-designed regarding its duration and secured funding, leveraging existing institutions, partnerships, data sources, and synergies to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness. COVID-19 restrictions, and the geopolitical sensitivity of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, particularly due to the war, have affected field activities, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement. |
| I | Monitoring | 5 | The project includes a monitoring plan and workplan with key milestones and timelines for activities such as establishing the Research and Environmental Protection Center, expanding the protected area network, and implementing wildfire monitoring systems, but these milestones and timelines are not sufficiently detailed or specific. Critical gaps include unclear sequencing of activities, insufficiently defined timeframes for stakeholder engagement and capacity-building, and a lack of quantitative, time-bound targets for tracking progress. Without SMART milestones and realistic scheduling that account for legislative processes and technical complexities, it is difficult to monitor progress |

| | **SECTION** | **RATING** (1-6) | **Summary Assessment** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | effectively, ensure adaptive management, and achieve the project's long-term results. |
| J | Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects | 5 | The project design addresses socio-political, financial, institutional, and environmental sustainability effectively, with a credible strategy supported by government commitments, institutional strengthening, and financing mechanisms. While it includes elements of an exit strategy and promotes scaling up, replication, and catalytic action through knowledge sharing, capacity-building, and policy integration, gaps remain in fully detailing long-term financial planning and ensuring institutional ownership and financial sustainability beyond the project's completion. |
| K | Learning, Communication and Outreach | 6 | The project incorporates a foundational knowledge management approach with comprehensive communication plans that engage stakeholders, including minority groups and women, and ensure their input informs decision-making. While dissemination of results and lessons is planned through Outcome/Component 3 to support national and international mainstreaming, the KM and outreach strategies could be further refined to ensure sustained engagement and inclusivity of vulnerable groups throughout the project. |
| | *Total (Weighted) Score:* | 4.52 | *(Full analysis in the Inception Report, available from the Evaluation Office.)* |

87. The project design demonstrates strong alignment with the GEF objectives, particularly in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and land degradation management. It presents a well-structured and comprehensive document covering key sections such as Project Identification, Intervention Strategy, Institutional Framework, Stakeholder Participation, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, and Project Finance, along with 14 appendices meeting GEF documentation standards. The design incorporates a holistic approach to environmental management, integrating biodiversity protection, carbon sequestration, and land restoration, and focuses on a high-impact, globally significant area. Notably, it emphasizes research and data collection through a proposed Research and Environmental Protection Center, establishes a protected area network within the ChEZ, and includes mechanisms for replication, knowledge sharing, risk mitigation, and substantial co-financing support from the Government of Ukraine. These strengths collectively enhance the project's potential for evidence-based decision-making, long-term sustainability, and broader applicability.

88. Despite these strengths, the project design exhibits notable weaknesses that could affect project performance. Socioeconomic considerations are insufficiently addressed, with limited strategies for sustainable livelihoods or poverty alleviation in local communities. Baseline data for key indicators is unclear, complicating M&E efforts, while institutional capacity building for local and national authorities is underemphasized. Stakeholder engagement mechanisms lack specificity, legislative gaps remain inadequately addressed, and the implementation of the project heavily depends on government support, posing risks in the context of political instability. Fire management strategies are basic, gender considerations are absent, and inconsistencies in outputs and activity definitions across project documents may create reporting confusion. Addressing these weaknesses, particularly socioeconomic integration, institutional strengthening, gender mainstreaming, and adaptive strategies, will be critical for improving futures initiatives and ensuring long-term success.

89. The results Framework presents a transparent and coherent structure, adapted to the objectives and the variety of themes the project proposes to address. But to make this

effective, it needs to improve the indicators to assess transformational change, not simply capture activities. Enhancement of base data, establishment of realistic and measurable targets, and integration of some of the gender-sensitive indicators could greatly enhance the framework's value in monitoring progress and assessing impact. The outcomes are generally ambitious but mostly realistic within the project's timeframe and scale of intervention. However, some outcomes may require more time or resources than are allocated in the current project design.

90. The outputs are generally appropriate and linked to the activities of the project (e.g., creation of a research centre, establishment of fire monitoring systems, development of protected area networks). The outcome level results are well-aligned with the project's goals, but they could be further refined to meet the SMART criteria. The Log-Frame does reflect the overall scope of work and ambitions of the project. It aligns with key activities such as the creation of a protected area network, carbon sequestration, and research on ecosystem health. However, some ambitions (e.g., socioeconomic benefits for local communities and full wildfire risk mitigation) may be too optimistic within the project's timeframe and scope. Baseline information related to key performance indicators is partially included, but there are gaps in the data that could affect effective monitoring and evaluation.

91. The desired level of achievement (targets) for indicators of outputs and outcomes is not always clearly specified. While some general goals and objectives are mentioned, specific, measurable targets for key indicators at both the output and outcome levels are often missing or not sufficiently detailed. Lack of Quantitative Targets: Many of the indicators, especially at the outcome level, are qualitative or general in nature. For example, terms like "improved biodiversity" or "enhanced carbon sequestration" are used without specifying the extent of improvement or enhancement. For some outputs and outcomes, there is a lack of specific timelines by which these achievements are expected to be realized. More specific time-bound targets would help track progress. In several cases, the absence of baseline data makes it difficult to set realistic targets. For example, without a baseline measure of current carbon stocks or species populations, it is hard to define clear goals for improvement.

**Rating for Project Design: Satisfactory**

## 4.3 Nature of the External Context

92. The project's implementing context was significantly influenced by a range of external factors that were largely unanticipated and beyond the control of the project team. Most notably, the war in Ukraine created a highly unstable and sensitive geopolitical environment, directly affecting field operations in the ChEZ. Security risks and restricted access limited the ability to conduct site visits, implement conservation and monitoring activities, and engage stakeholders effectively. These conditions also disrupted coordination with government institutions and local communities, constraining progress towards achievement of the project's outcomes.

93. During the occupation of the ChEZ in February–March 2022, key infrastructure, including administrative buildings, research stations, and monitoring equipment, was destroyed or rendered non-functional. This severely restricted access for project staff and stakeholders, disrupted ongoing conservation, research, and monitoring activities, and damaged critical systems for wildfire management and biodiversity monitoring.

94. In addition to geopolitical challenges, the project faced natural and public health-related disruptions, including COVID-19 restrictions during 2020-2022. Lockdowns, travel bans, and limitations on gatherings slowed down training, stakeholder engagement, and field-

based research activities. The compounded effect of these external pressures reduced the pace at which project outputs could be delivered and made available and limited the options for adaptive management. The project's reliance on government institutions, which were themselves affected by shifting priorities, economic upheaval and shift to wartime expenditures from 2022 onwards, further exacerbated the challenges of sustaining project momentum under these extraordinary circumstances.

95. The external conditions presented significant challenges that could have substantially affected the project's performance. However, these external factors did not have a decisive impact on the project's implementation. In 2022, work within the exclusion zone was suspended for two months; after that, operations fully resumed, and administrative tasks continued without interruption. The project itself also progressed: for instance, despite the occupation of the Reserve's territory, the land management project for the Reserve was successfully developed. Activities such as the expansion of protected areas, establishment of wildfire management systems, and capacity-building for local communities were delayed or constrained. While the project design included risk mitigation measures, the severity and combination of geopolitical, institutional, and public health disruptions created an unusually challenging environment, highlighting the importance of adaptive planning and flexible implementation strategies in contexts affected by conflict and other large-scale external shocks.

**Rating for Nature of the External Context: Highly Unfavourable**

## 4.4 Effectiveness

### 4.4.1 Availability of Outputs

**Table 14: Availability of outputs**

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Output 1.1: The REPC established and fully operational within the CREBR** | | | | |
| Budget of ChEZ EPC in Mill USD<br><br>Number of jobs created to manage the reserve.<br><br>Research and business plan in place with stakeholder input; | 3 Mill annual budget allocation for the management of the Biosphere reserve by project end. | Fully | The Project Document originally envisaged establishing a "Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC)" as the main institutional mechanism for coordinating environmental research and monitoring within the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. During implementation, this concept evolved into the creation of the CREBR, formalized through Presidential Decree No. 174/2016. The REPC functions were fully realized within the CREBR's structure—mainly through its Scientific and Information Departments—representing an adaptive institutional strengthening beyond the original design. The REPC, operationally integrated within the CREBR's Scientific and Information Departments, significantly enhanced institutional capacity for biodiversity and radiological monitoring, data management, and research dissemination. Although not a formally registered entity, the REPC functions as an interdepartmental coordination hub, consolidating research efforts, data storage, and public communication under a unified operational structure.<br><br>Biodiversity and radiological monitoring protocols were developed, and linkages with international platforms (CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD) were established. The evaluation noted initial delays in field-based data collection, but by 2024 monitoring systems were fully operational, producing and disseminating scientific outputs. | • Project reports and PIRs confirming REPC establishment and monitoring protocols<br>• Field visit reports noting procurement of equipment and partial damage/loss during conflict<br>• Interviews with project team on staffing and operational challenges<br>• Draft Research and Business Plan with stakeholder inputs<br>• State Agency of Ukraine budget documents referencing EPC allocations |
| | By end of year 3 the REPC is fully staffed – up to 300 jobs created | | The REPC had reached full operational status with a core staff of approximately 45–50 personnel, including technical specialists, scientists, field monitoring staff, and administrative employees. This figure represented a combination of newly created jobs (estimated 25–30 positions directly attributable to the project) and the integration of existing reserve staff. However, following the war in 2022, many REPC operations were disrupted. Several staff were displaced, equipment and facilities suffered damage, and regular field activities were suspended. | |
| | Required equipment purchased and operational; | | Core functions (biodiversity/carbon monitoring design, initial equipment procurement, data protocols) were established, but continuity was disrupted by the occupation and damage to facilities; several instruments and databases became inaccessible or non-functional | |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Implementation of related activities begins end year | | All related activities began and were completed by the end of the implementation period. Rather than establishing a new standalone body, the project strengthened existing internal departments within the CREBR to serve as the functional Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC). This pragmatic model ensured that research and educational capacities were institutionalized within the Reserve's management structure, contributing to sustainability despite administrative limitations and wartime disruptions. Although the 2022 conflict caused temporary losses, the REPC's staffing and core research activities were successfully re-established, ensuring continuity of scientific and environmental monitoring functions in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. | |
| **Output 1.2** Comprehensive assessment of the current state and trends of natural ecosystems in the ChEZ | | | | |
| Components of a research and field experiment program designed and launched; | Programme for, targeted radioecological and sustainable forest and wetlands management research launched by beginning of year 3; | Partially | -Baseline carbon stock assessment completed.<br>-Fire prevention contributed to avoided emissions (data incomplete due to disruptions). While emissions data remain incomplete due to conflict-related disruptions, the project demonstrated significant progress toward ecosystem-based carbon management. Early-warning protocols, watchtowers/sensors, and SOPs were piloted; several assets were damaged or lost. | • Baseline carbon stock assessment (shared in PIRs and technical annexes)<br>• Fire prevention and emissions data reported in project monitoring reports (incomplete due to war)<br>• Scientific manuscripts in draft form, evidence from project archives<br>• Interviews with key informants (beneficiaries, monitoring staff)<br>• Project reports confirming piloting of early-warning systems and damaged assets |
| Results of Ukrainian and international publications made available on the project website and through other means such as scientific journals, etc. | A study of the impact of radioactivity related factors on selected habitats, species and populations of global importance published by end of year 4; | | The study evaluating the impacts of radioactivity on key habitats and species in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone was largely completed by the end of 2021. Extensive field research, conducted by the REPC and the National Academy of Sciences, produced valuable data on biodiversity, ecosystem recovery, and the effects of radiation. The findings were compiled into technical reports and draft scientific papers, generating baseline data on species diversity, biomass recovery, and radiological dose impacts. This contributes to Ukraine's national biodiversity and climate monitoring obligations under the CBD and UNFCCC. The final publication and dissemination of these results were delayed due to disruptions in fieldwork and damage to research facilities. Despite these challenges, the study successfully met its scientific objectives and received a rating of largely achieved | |
| | Summary report of socio-economic benefits derived to date at end of year 4 | | Periodic socio-economic surveys were conducted in settlements surrounding the ChEZ. These surveys assessed baseline socio-economic conditions, perceptions of conservation policies, and the differing impacts on livelihoods based on gender. The data revealed indirect socio-economic benefits resulting from project activities, such as job creation, skills development through technical training, and improved local governance mechanisms for environmental monitoring and fire management. Overall, the project contributed to measurable socio-economic benefits, focusing on institutional employment, capacity building, and community engagement in conservation. However, the absence of a finalized synthesis report limits the full visibility of these results. | |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Output 1.3.** Assessment of the status of ecosystem services and their values and enhancement of carbon benefits in terms meeting LULUCF | | | | |
| Analysis/description of ecosystem services deriving from the ChEZ, including values and benefits of meeting LULUCF targets. | An assessment of the status and pattern of rehabilitation processes of forest and wetland habitats, and evaluation of their role in terms of CC mitigation and meeting LULUCF targets completed by mid- year 3; | Partially | A draft ecosystem rehabilitation assessment was completed and shared with the Ministry of Environment but not formally adopted due to wartime institutional disruptions. Preliminary analyses of forest and wetland recovery, including carbon sequestration and LULUCF targets, were initiated but remained incomplete after data collection was interrupted in 2022 | • Draft rehabilitation assessment forwarded to Ministry of Environment (documentary evidence)<br>• PIRs confirming draft habitat management measures for wetlands and forests<br>• Field studies on natural succession (partially completed, unpublished manuscripts)<br>• Equipment procurement and pilot fire monitoring infrastructure noted in project documentation<br>• Desk review of official documents and stakeholder interviews |
| | Appropriate sustainable habitat management measures for the rehabilitation of Forests, Wetlands and Marshlands contributing to the conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks and meeting LULUCF targets developed by end of year 3. | | Draft management measures for forests, wetlands, and marshlands were prepared and discussed among stakeholders, but finalization and government endorsement were delayed. | |
| | A study of the ongoing natural succession processes in the various habitat types affected by radiation in the ChEZ completed and published by mid-year- year 3; | | Field studies on natural succession in radiation-affected habitats were underway and partially completed, but publication was disrupted. No peer-reviewed output was published within the planned timeframe. | |
| | A fire monitoring system established within the ChEZ by end of year 3; | | A pilot fire monitoring system was established with equipment installed before the war; however, infrastructure damage and occupation caused major setbacks, leaving the system only partially operational. | |
| | Peer reviewed research publications and monitoring results available end of year 4 | | Some manuscripts were drafted and submitted, but the disruptions prevented their completion and international publication. Monitoring results exist but are not systematically disseminated. | |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Output 2.1:** Formal designation of the ChEZ as Biosphere Reserve for enhancing conservation and management of carbon stocks. | | | | |
| Number of hectares declared as Biosphere Reserve with formalized links to Polessky Nature Reserve; | Presidential Decree upgrading the ChEZ to Biosphere Reserve status expected by mid- year 3; | Partially | The Presidential Decree No. 174/2016, issued on April 26, 2016, formally established the CREBR, upgrading the ChEZ from a restricted contaminated area to a nationally protected area of global environmental significance. This decree designated approximately 226,270 hectares as a biosphere reserve under the management of the MENR, creating the legal and institutional foundation for long-term conservation and ecological monitoring in the region. Following the decree, the Biosphere Reserve Management Plan was developed with support from UNEP and national experts, outlining zoning, conservation priorities, biodiversity monitoring protocols, and fire management measures. The plan was subsequently reviewed and approved by the Government of Ukraine, ensuring its formal integration into national environmental policy and planning frameworks.<br>The project successfully developed methodologies and initiated preliminary data collection on forest and wetland carbon dynamics within CREBR, linking to Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) monitoring efforts. However, by 2022, the field-based measurements and verification activities were suspended due to restricted access and security risks caused by the full-scale war. As a result, the assessment and consolidation of data required to finalize the national-level carbon stock inventory were not achieved. Some analytical progress was made through remote sensing and desk-based analyses, but the absence of continuous field sampling and institutional disruptions prevented the completion and formal validation of the carbon stock inventory.<br>The project conducted ecological and socioeconomic assessments within and around the ChEZ, particularly in buffer-zone settlements. These surveys included the collection of gender-disaggregated data. socio-economic surveys captured gender-differentiated perspectives on natural resource use and livelihoods, thereby enhancing understanding of gendered roles in resource management. However, this information was not consistently integrated into project planning or decision-making, and systematic gender monitoring was constrained by the lack of a formal gender action plan, inconsistent reporting, and external disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the war. | • Presidential Decree of 2016 establishing CREBR as a Biosphere Reserve<br>• Government-approved Biosphere Reserve Management Plan<br>• REPC datasets and geoportal access protocols documented in PIRs<br>• PSC meeting minutes and project reports on designation and operationalization |
| PA management plans designed in line with the results from carbon stock, ecological and socioeconomic surveys | Carbon stocks inventory complete end year 2; | | | |
| | Comprehensive ecological and socioeconomic surveys are conducted by end of years 2 and 4 containing gender segregated data by end of year 3. | | | |
| | Final comprehensive PA management plan by mid-year 3. | | | |
| **Output 2.2** Measures developed to ensure financial and institutional sustainability of multi-sector conservation programs. | | | | |
| Approved budgets and workplans of relevant government ministries and other national and international stakeholders. | A protected area management structure, an initial core team of staff, equipment and associated professional capacity on place by end of 3. | Fully | The project successfully established the management structure for the CREBR, formalized through Presidential Decree No. 174/2016. This structure operates under the authority of the SAUEZM. The governance and staffing arrangements for the Reserve were clearly defined, with core functional units dedicated to administration, research, biodiversity monitoring, and fire management. Measures (plans, institutional arrangements and related instruments) to secure financial and institutional sustainability were developed and finalized. The project facilitated the recruitment and training of approximately 45 to 50 staff members, including managers, rangers, and technical experts, many of whom | • Approved government budgets/workplans, including allocations for CREBR<br>• Financial reports showing government |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | were newly hired with project funding. Essential equipment for biodiversity monitoring, GIS-based planning, and ecological research was procured and installed through the Research and Environmental Protection Center (REPC). By 2020, both CREBR and REPC were fully operational, and their professional capacities had been strengthened through multiple training programs focused on radiological safety, ecosystem monitoring, and conservation management. These activities ensured that the Reserve had both the institutional and technical capacities to fulfil its conservation mandate. Although the war caused temporary disruptions and damage to infrastructure, the management structure remained intact, and limited operations resumed by 2023 with the support of the MENR and UNEP. | co-financing exceeding planned levels, confirming actual co-finance mobilized (USD 38.5m vs. USD 28m planned)<br>• Institutional measures documented in PSC minutes and official statutes<br>• Interviews with project team and partners confirming institutional sustainability arrangements |
| | By end of year 3 budget for the PA management formally part of approved MENR annual budget. | | The project had successfully secured the formal integration of the CREBR budget line within the annual budget of the MENR. The budget line covers operational costs, staff salaries, and essential management functions, reflecting MENR's formal assumption of financial responsibility for CREBR. This institutionalized financial allocation ensured sustainability of protected area management post-project. | |
| Number of jobs created to manage the reserve. | Up to 300 jobs created | | The formal inclusion of the CREBR within the annual budget of the MENR resulted in the creation and institutionalization of approximately 45–50 permanent positions within the Reserve's management and operational structure. This includes administrative, technical, and field personnel responsible for biodiversity monitoring, ecological research, environmental protection, and fire management.<br>Of these, an estimated 25–30 jobs were newly created through project financing during the implementation phase, particularly linked to the REPC and its research and monitoring functions. These positions transitioned into nationally funded roles once the Reserve's budget line was secured under MENR, ensuring long-term employment continuity beyond project completion.<br>The project also supported indirect employment through short-term contracts, training programs, and technical assistance for data collection, GIS mapping, and fire management, benefiting local specialists and researchers. Overall, this output contributed to sustained institutional employment and capacity retention, reinforcing national ownership and long-term operational sustainability for protected area management in the ChEZ. | |
| **Output 3.1:** A set of lessons learned and practical recommendations on habitat rehabilitation, carbon stocks management and biodiversity conservation developed and published. | | | | |
| Written report enumerating and describing, on the | Written summaries of project outputs of lessons learned and | Fully | The project successfully compiled, synthesized, and disseminated a comprehensive set of lessons and best practices derived from field-based research on post-disaster ecosystem recovery, carbon stock management, and biodiversity monitoring within the ChEZ. These | • Written reports and database of lessons |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| project website and through other distribution mechanisms, lessons learned widely uptaken/cited/used; | dissemination expanded upon at end of year 4<br><br>By end of years 3, and 4 reports developed for ongoing work; end of year 4 Final Report of lessons learned and recommendations. | | lessons were integrated into the REPC and published through the project's geo-information portal website[15], forming part of Ukraine's official contributions to international environmental processes under CBD, Ramsar, and UNCCD frameworks The documentation included written reports, peer-reviewed summaries, and datasets linked to the Chernobyl – Open Air Lab initiative. Dissemination was achieved through international workshops and digital repositories, ensuring visibility and uptake by scientific, policy, and donor communities. Stakeholder interviews confirmed the practical relevance of these knowledge products for ecosystem rehabilitation and climate adaptation in other post-industrial and contaminated landscapes. | learned integrated into REPC/geoportal<br>• Dissemination lists and evidence of uptake in CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD reporting<br>• Interviews with stakeholders on usefulness of lessons learned<br>• Project knowledge products archived on the project website and shared internationally |
| **Output 3.2:** Knowledge sharing at national and international level and Training programme field tested and available for replication | | | | |
| Distribution lists and numbers distributed; | Description of yearly distributions for all project years; | Partially | The project effectively implemented a comprehensive knowledge-sharing and capacity-building programme, which facilitated national and international exchange on ecosystem monitoring, biodiversity conservation, and post-disaster land management. Training modules were developed in collaboration with the REPC and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, focusing on ecological monitoring, radiological safety, and fire management. Several training sessions and workshops had been conducted for CREBR staff, local experts, and academic institutions, enhancing technical capacity and operational understanding of biosphere reserve management. The training programme was field tested within the ChEZ and made available for replication through digital platforms, enabling continued use by Ukrainian institutions and international partners. At the international level, the project contributed to scientific exchange through partnerships under the "Chernobyl – Open Air Lab" initiative, linking Ukrainian experts with global research networks in ecosystem rehabilitation and carbon monitoring. However, full-scale replication and in-person training beyond 2022 were constrained by security restrictions following the war, shifting focus to virtual learning and documentation-based dissemination. Overall, the output is rated Partially Achieved, with all training materials | • Evidence of national/international presentations (workshop agendas, conference participation)<br>• Project website and geoportal containing datasets and shared outputs<br>• PIRs confirming international linkages (CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD) |

[15] https://www.geo-portal.org.ua/home

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | developed, tested, and shared, though further replication and outreach remain contingent on post-conflict condition | • Interviews with beneficiaries on replication potential |
| Training manuals and list of trainers; | Trainers recruited and trained at end of year 3;<br>List of number of people trained at end of year 4;<br>National education centre opened at end of year 4.<br>Final Report at end of year 4; | | The REPC had recruited approximately 20–25 trainers and technical specialists, primarily from Ukrainian universities, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources (MENR). These trainers were equipped through workshops and mentoring sessions in biodiversity monitoring, radiological safety, GIS, and ecosystem management, and subsequently provided on-the-job training for CREBR and reserve staff. Across all training events between 2018 and 2023, an estimated 120–150 individuals were trained through national workshops, short courses, and international exchanges. These participants included CREBR field staff, research scientists, forest managers, and regional environmental authorities, as well as representatives of local NGOs and academia. Training coverage extended to both thematic and operational areas—ecosystem monitoring protocols, radiological field safety, biodiversity database management, and carbon accounting. Although the war curtailed further in-person training, the project transitioned to virtual modalities, enabling continued knowledge sharing and maintaining trainer engagement. However, educational and training functions were operationalized through REPC, the National Education Center itself was not formally opened. | |
| Dedicated project website; | | | The project created and operated an official website to disseminate knowledge and share progress on biodiversity and carbon stock management in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The site was publicly accessible at www.chornobyl-gef.com, and was used to publish outreach materials, lessons learned, and updates on the activities of the Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve. However, site continuity was suspended after 2022 due to conflicts. | |
| Project presence (representatives, project displays, etc.) at relevant national and international events. | | | The GEF-UNEP Chernobyl Project maintained a strong presence at both national and international environmental events during its active implementation phase (2017–2021), effectively promoting its scientific achievements and raising awareness of post-disaster ecosystem recovery. At the national level, the project participated in events organized by the MENR, the CREBR, and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Project staff and REPC scientists presented research findings, biodiversity monitoring results, and fire management innovations at national | |

96. The project achieved its planned outputs, with a relatively high completion rate across all components. Key achievements include the legal establishment of the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve (Output 2.1), the development of financial and institutional sustainability measures with co-financing exceeding targets (Output 2.2), and the creation and population of comprehensive databases and repositories with access protocols and data-sharing agreements (Outputs 3.1 and 3.2). These outputs were reinforced by the functions of the REPC, ensuring data generation, consolidation,

and dissemination. Collectively, the availability of these outputs represent a robust technical and institutional foundation aligned with the project's Theory of Change. Overall, the project succeeded in delivering its outputs, laying strong institutional and knowledge foundations for biodiversity conservation and carbon management, though sustainability and equity dimensions require further evidence and ongoing risk management.

### 4.4.2 Achievement of Project Outcomes

**Table 15: Achievement of project outcomes**

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Outcome 1.** Improved monitoring and research for large areas of forests, wetlands, and other habitat types and associated carbon benefits in the ChEZ. | | | | |
| Environmental monitoring systems designed and operational and generating information on state of the ChEZ environment. | Center based activities (e.g. publishing and making available monitoring data) Begin by the end of year 3. | Fully | The achievement of Outcome 1 is assessed as largely achieved, with substantial progress made in strengthening the monitoring and research framework of the ChEZ and in operationalizing systems for long-term ecological observation and data generation. The outcome sought to enhance scientific understanding of ecosystem dynamics and associated carbon benefits through the design and implementation of environmental monitoring systems, supported by the establishment of dedicated research infrastructure and institutional capacity. These efforts led to the design and operationalization of environmental monitoring systems that regularly generated data on forest condition, wetland health, and key biodiversity indicators. The integration of geospatial and radiometric data provided a more comprehensive understanding of post-disaster ecological recovery processes and informed land-use management decisions. Research productivity in the ChEZ improved significantly during project implementation. The REPC, in collaboration with Ukrainian research institutions and international partners, produced numerous scientific publications, monitoring datasets, and technical reports that expanded global knowledge on ecosystem resilience in post-nuclear landscapes. The project facilitated the "Chernobyl – Open Air Laboratory" initiative, which promoted knowledge sharing and public access to research outputs, aligning with the target of making monitoring data available and disseminated.<br>The institutional and technical systems established under Outcome 1 provide a sustainable platform for continued monitoring, positioning the ChEZ as a unique global model for long-term ecosystem research in contaminated and post-disaster environments. | • Annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs, 2016–2024)<br>• Mid-Term Review (2019) and Terminal Evaluation interviews<br>• REPC technical reports (ecosystem, carbon stock, fire monitoring)<br>• Draft rehabilitation and biodiversity assessments<br>• Observations of REPC facilities and equipment status<br>• PSC meeting minutes and stakeholder workshop records |
| | End of year 3, linkages created with relevant international agreements and | | The project successfully establishing institutional and technical linkages between the CREBR and major multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), particularly the CBD, the UNCCD, and the UNFCCC. The project directly contributed to Ukraine's reporting obligations under these conventions by generating ecological and carbon monitoring data aligned with GEF-5 focal area tracking tools for biodiversity and land degradation. | • |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | platforms (e.g. CBD, Ramsar, CCD). | | Through its biodiversity and carbon monitoring activities, the project strengthened Ukraine's capacity to report on CBD Aichi Targets, UNCCD land degradation neutrality indicators, and UNFCCC LULUCF commitments. The REPC and MENR collaborated in integrating project data into national environmental monitoring systems, ensuring that Chernobyl-related ecological data inform national reporting to the MEAs. Furthermore, the project fostered knowledge exchange through international partnerships, including engagement with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, the European Network for Long-Term Ecosystem Research (eLTER), and scientific cooperation under UNEP's global biodiversity and climate initiatives. These linkages elevated the visibility of the ChEZ as a globally relevant site for ecosystem restoration and climate mitigation research. Overall, the project made significant progress in aligning national monitoring and reporting systems with international environmental agreements, thus advancing Ukraine's integration into global biodiversity and climate governance platforms. | |
| **Outcome 2.** Improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks within and around the ChEZ. | | | | |
| Number of hectares declared as Biosphere Reserve with formalized links to Polessky Nature Reserve; | At end of year 2 a sustainable management plan has been developed for a 230,000 ha Biosphere Reserve, with formalized links to Polessky Nature Reserve, and submitted to government for approval. | Partially | The achievement of Outcome 2 is assessed as largely achieved, with the project making significant progress in strengthening the institutional, legal, and technical foundations for the improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks in the ChEZ. The outcome sought to enhance the ecological governance of the Zone through the establishment of a large biosphere reserve, integrated management planning, and transboundary ecological linkages. The project supported the establishment of the Reserve's institutional structure, including administrative, research, and fire management divisions, and strengthened technical capacity through equipment procurement and staff training. These developments collectively enhanced the management effectiveness of natural resources and biodiversity in the ChEZ. The Biosphere Reserve Management Plan, developed and approved by the Government of Ukraine, provided a strategic framework for zoning, habitat protection, biodiversity monitoring, and carbon management. The plan integrated fire management protocols and land-use regulations that improved the conservation of forests, wetlands, and steppe ecosystems, thereby contributing to the stabilization and recovery of carbon stocks. The Reserve's management practices also incorporated adaptive approaches to mitigate wildfires and illegal logging—identified as key threats to the area's ecological integrity. The project also made progress toward establishing transboundary ecological linkages with the Polessky State Radiation and Ecological Reserve in Belarus. Early-stage collaboration included joint workshops, data exchange, and technical consultations aimed at harmonizing monitoring methodologies and developing the concept of a transboundary protected | • Draft technical assessments (ecosystem succession, rehabilitation, carbon monitoring)<br>• Project Implementation Reports (PIRs, 2020–2024)<br>• Field observations of REPC and monitoring systems<br>• Interviews with project partners, government officials, and NGOs<br>• International reporting linkages (CBD, UNCCD, Ramsar) |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | area complex. However, the escalation of geopolitical tensions and the full-scale war in 2022 interrupted direct cooperation and prevented formalization of these transboundary arrangements. Despite these constraints, the groundwork laid for future collaboration remains relevant and could be reactivated under more favourable conditions. In conclusion, Outcome 2 demonstrated strong progress toward integrated ecosystem management and carbon conservation within the ChEZ | |
| Stakeholders contributing to maintain and protect nature reserve; | | | During project implementation, key institutional partners, including the MENR, the SAUEZM, and the CREBR, actively contributed to the management and protection of the reserve. Technical collaboration with the REPC and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU)*strengthened scientific monitoring and ecological oversight. However, participation from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and **local communities (LCs) in buffer-zone areas was limited due to restricted access to the ChEZ and subsequent disruptions caused by the war. Although institutional cooperation remained strong, broader stakeholder participation, particularly involving women's groups and youth representatives, was not fully achieved. Overall, the indicator demonstrates solid institutional engagement but only moderate inclusivity and community-level involvement in maintaining and protecting the CREBR. | • Project Implementation Reports (PIRs, 2020–2024)<br>• Interviews with CREBR staff, SAUEZM, and local stakeholders |
| Approved management plan; | PA management structure in place end year 3;<br>Records or public involvement contain gender segregated data. | | The indicator Approved management plan is assessed as fully achieved, with associated targets partially achieved. The Biosphere Reserve Management Plan for the CREBR was developed with project support and formally approved by the Government of Ukraine. The plan outlines zoning, conservation priorities, biodiversity and carbon monitoring protocols, and fire management strategies, aligning with GEF and UNEP requirements for integrated protected area (PA) management. The PA management structure was successfully established, with a core administrative and technical team in place under the SAUEZM) and the REPC, responsible for ecological monitoring and research coordination. The evaluation confirm that some public consultation activities were conducted during plan preparation, including community and institutional stakeholder inputs; however, documentation of public involvement and gender-segregated data was limited. While women were represented among CREBR and REPC staff, systematic gender-disaggregated reporting was not maintained, resulting in partial achievement of gender-related targets. Overall, the indicator demonstrates **strong institutional and technical achievement**, reflecting the effective establishment of governance and management systems for the reserve; however, it also underscores the need to **enhance inclusiveness and representation** in stakeholder engagement processes, ensuring that the perspectives of women, local communities, and other underrepresented groups are systematically integrated into future management and decision-making frameworks | • Presidential Decree (2016) establishing CREBR<br>• Government-approved CREBR Management Plan<br>• Project Implementation Reports (PIRs, 2020–2024)<br>• Interviews with CREBR staff, SAUEZM, and local stakeholders<br>• |

| Indicators | Targets | Level of delivery | Narrative Assessment | Sources of Information/ Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Outcome 3.** Increased availability and access to critical information needed for decision-making for effective sustainable management of the ChEZ. | | | | |
| System for tracking number of requests for data and other information. | By end of year 4 comprehensive data base completed and located in the REPC; | Partially | The achievement of Outcome 3 is assessed as partially achieved, reflecting progress in improving access to environmental information and strengthening the data infrastructure necessary for evidence-based decision-making within the ChEZ. The project successfully established a comprehensive environmental and research database housed within the REPC, fulfilling the main outcome target. This database consolidates biodiversity, radiological, hydrological, and carbon monitoring data collected through project-supported activities and integrates geospatial information from various institutions under the SAUEZM The system significantly enhanced the ability of the CREBR and the MENR to manage and analyse ecosystem trends. Although a formal tracking system for data requests was designed, its operationalization remained partial. Before 2022, the REPC and project partners maintained a system for documenting data sharing with national agencies, universities, and international researchers; however, disruptions caused by the war and associated cybersecurity restrictions temporarily limited access and exchange of sensitive data. In summary, the project significantly improved environmental data management and accessibility, laying a strong institutional foundation for sustained knowledge sharing. While the data request tracking mechanism was only partially functional, the establishment of a centralized, well-structured database at the REPC represents a lasting achievement toward transparent, informed, and sustainable management of the ChEZ. | • REPC environmental database and geoportal records<br>• Access protocols and data-sharing agreements (project documentation)<br>• Draft habitat rehabilitation and natural succession studies<br>• Pilot fire monitoring system documentation and site reports<br>• Project Implementation Reports (PIRs, 2018–2024)<br>• Observations from site visits (pre-2022)<br>• Interviews with CREBR staff, SAUEZM, and local stakeholders<br>• Co-financing records and government budget allocations |
| | Repositories in place and access protocols and data sharing agreements finalized by end of year 4. | | The project had successfully established data repositories within the REPC, which served as the central hub for environmental and radiological monitoring data in the ChEZ. These repositories consolidated datasets on biodiversity, carbon stocks, hydrology, and fire monitoring, improving data organization and accessibility for internal use by the CREBR, the SAUEZM, and partner research institutions. However, while the technical infrastructure was in place, the formalization of access protocols and data-sharing agreements was only partially completed. Draft frameworks for data exchange and inter-institutional cooperation were developed between the REPC, MENR, and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU), but comprehensive legal agreements governing data use, confidentiality, and international sharing were still pending at the time of the 2022 disruption. The onset of the war further limited external access to sensitive geospatial and radiological data for security reasons, restricting broader data-sharing Despite these constraints, the project achieved important progress in establishing a functional data management system and informal collaboration mechanisms that facilitated continued data use and research integration. | |

97. The project achieved several important intermediate outcomes, most notably the legal establishment of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR) and the preparation of a management plan that provides an institutional basis for long-term conservation. These achievements represent a significant enabling condition within the Theory of Change, as they formally protect a globally important ecosystem and establish a framework for biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration. The creation of the REPC and the initiation of systematic monitoring also advanced the project's outcome pathway by generating essential data to inform decision-making and building a platform for scientific collaboration. Together, these outputs strengthened institutional recognition of the ChEZ as a conservation priority and improved the knowledge base for sustainable management. The outputs translated into tangible outcomes. The Reserve's Management Plan was approved and embeds the Triad Approach, monitoring systems are operational, and knowledge products are being actively shared, including with international frameworks such as CBD, Ramsar, and UNCCD

98. Outcome 1 (monitoring and research): The project has increase environmental monitoring and research, restoring and strengthened the knowledge base needed to manage the ChEZ. It also created strengthened international linkages (CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD). War-related damages temporarily halted operations, but capacities were restored afterwards.

99. Outcome 2 (management of natural resources and carbon): A management plan embedding the Triad Approach was developed and approved by the government, securing institutionalization of conservation and carbon management. The outcome also depended on cooperation with Belarus's Polessky Reserve, which was initiated but is no longer feasible due to Belarus's political stance. Financial sustainability was reinforced through government co-finance that exceeded the planned target by 30%.

100. Outcome 3 (availability of critical information): The project has increased the availability and access to critical information needed for effective and sustainable management of the ChEZ. Knowledge gaps were closed, and data are now accessible nationally and internationally. Outcomes were rated Satisfactory with full target attainment.

101. Cross-cutting considerations: Gender mainstreaming was pursued (gender-segregated attendance records, inclusive engagement), though no standalone Gender Action Plan was implemented. Evidence on benefits for vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, or marginalized communities is limited, as socio-economic surveys were halted by the war. No project-related negative socio-economic or environmental effects were reported, but contextual risks (war, wildfires) remain major threats to sustaining outcomes.

102. However, the three project outcomes were only partially realized. While assessments on habitat rehabilitation, succession processes, and fire monitoring were completed in draft or pilot form, they were not fully adopted, operationalized, or disseminated due to disruptions from the war, damage to infrastructure, and reallocation of government resources to emergency needs. Community participation in conservation and fire management remained weak, limiting progress toward inclusive and locally owned outcomes. The project's capacity-building and stakeholder engagement activities raised awareness but were insufficient to shift long-term practices or ensure active participation of women, vulnerable groups, and marginalized communities. As a result, the dimensions of sustainable livelihoods, social inclusion, and equitable benefit-sharing were underachieved, particularly under Outcome 2 (Improved management of natural resources and carbon stocks within and around the ChEZ) and Outcome 3 (Increased availability and access to critical information for decision-making). While these outcomes successfully strengthened institutional capacity, biodiversity monitoring, and data accessibility, they fell short in translating these environmental achievements into tangible socio-economic benefits for local communities in the buffer

zones. Limited public access to the ChEZ, compounded by security restrictions and the absence of structured livelihood initiatives, constrained the project's ability to generate direct economic or social benefits. Furthermore, community engagement was largely institutional rather than participatory, and gender and social inclusion considerations were not systematically integrated into project design or monitoring. Consequently, while the project advanced ecological and institutional objectives, the social co-benefits envisioned under the sustainability dimension of Outcomes 2 and 3 were only partially realized.

### 4.4.3 Likelihood of Impact

103. The likelihood of long-term impact depends on whether the partially achieved outcomes can be consolidated and scaled. The legal designation of the Reserve and the existence of technical assessments provide a solid foundation, but gaps in financing, institutional capacity, and social integration weaken the causal chain to sustained impact. Without securing recurrent budgets, rebuilding damaged infrastructure, and embedding gender-responsive and community-inclusive approaches, the risk is that conservation outcomes will remain fragile and unevenly distributed. Conversely, if the project's groundwork is reinforced with stronger adoption, financing, and inclusive governance, the outcomes achieved to date have the potential to catalyse durable biodiversity protection and measurable climate mitigation benefits consistent with the GEF and UNEP strategic priorities.

104. The project represents a unique intervention, addressing biodiversity and carbon stock management in the aftermath of one of the world's most severe nuclear disasters. Unlike most GEF biodiversity projects, which focus on expanding or improving protected area systems under "normal" ecological conditions, this initiative worked in a radioactively contaminated, depopulated landscape, making it the first GEF-financed project to systematically integrate post-disaster recovery with ecosystem conservation.

105. Biodiversity Conservation in a Post-Disaster Area: The creation of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (226,270 ha) transformed the Exclusion Zone into one of Europe's largest contiguous protected areas, it formalized the restoration of its natural environment, and enhanced implementation of environmental protection policies. The ChEZ has become a living laboratory of ecological resilience, where ecosystems are regenerating in the absence of human pressures. The project helped document thriving populations of wolves, lynx, bears, mooses, Przhevalski's horses, raptors, and other species, challenging assumptions about the long-term impacts of radiation on biodiversity. This case has captured international attention, demonstrating that ecosystems, even under contamination stress, can deliver significant conservation outcomes when freed from direct human disturbance.

106. The project established a baseline carbon stock assessment, an unprecedented effort in a nuclear exclusion zone. By improving fire management and land-use regulation, the project reduced the frequency and severity of wildfires - historically, a major source of carbon release in the ChEZ. These results contribute not only to Ukraine's climate reporting obligations but also to the global debate on how abandoned or restricted landscapes can contribute to climate mitigation through natural carbon sequestration.

107. A Global Model for Post-Disaster Conservation: The project provides the first tested model of how a site of nuclear catastrophe can be re-purposed as a biodiversity reserve and carbon sink. Lessons learned are relevant not only for radiation-contaminated sites, but also for other toxic legacy landscapes worldwide (e.g., mining tailings, chemical disaster zones). The "Open-Air Laboratory" Concept: Through the "Chernobyl - Open Air Lab," the project institutionalized the ChEZ as a global hub for research on ecological resilience, radioecology, and carbon dynamics. This knowledge-sharing platform has positioned Ukraine as a leader in global scientific collaboration on post-disaster ecosystems.

108. Catalytic Leverage: With co-finance exceeding USD 38 million (vs. 28 million planned), the project mobilized substantial additional resources, underscoring its global appeal. International media attention and scientific publications have amplified the catalytic impact, making Chernobyl a symbolic and practical example of "nature's return" after catastrophe. At the national level, Ukraine now views the ChEZ not only as a restricted security zone, but also as a flagship protected area integrated into its national biodiversity and climate policy. The project's demonstration effect suggests pathways for transforming abandoned or contaminated landscapes elsewhere into conservation and climate assets. While the project's demonstration value is unparalleled, its full catalytic potential is constrained by the war, which disrupted transboundary cooperation and limited further research activities. Nonetheless, the institutional and legal frameworks created ensure that the demonstration effect will continue beyond project closure.

109. The project has had a transformative impact, reframing the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone from a global symbol of ecological disaster into a model of post-disaster conservation, climate mitigation, and scientific innovation. Its uniqueness lies in proving that even the most damaged landscapes can be repurposed into biodiversity havens and carbon sinks, offering critical lessons for global conservation and resilience. The likelihood of impact is moderately likely, given strong achievements at the levels of outputs, outcomes, and intermediate states, alongside sustained government ownership and institutional resilience. However, the pathway is undermined by external shocks: The war (which halted activities and damaged infrastructure), climate-driven wildfire risks in contaminated forests, and the collapse of regional cooperation with Belarus.

110. Unintended effects also influence the assessment. Positive effects include increased global visibility of Chernobyl's ecological recovery and strengthened international scientific collaboration. Negative effects include halted socio-economic surveys, heightened vulnerability for nearby communities, and risk of radioactive release from forest fires. While technical and institutional achievements are robust, the likelihood of impact is rated as Moderately Likely, depending heavily on the future security and environmental context of Ukraine. The likelihood of achieving the intended impact is threatened by systemic external risks outside the project's control.

111. The likelihood of long-term impact is moderate–high, driven by durable legal and institutional embedding, government commitment, and strong financial co-financing. However, the causal pathway was strained by external shocks. The war disrupted implementation, damaged facilities, and stalled cross-border cooperation with Belarus, while wildfire risk continues to pose a systemic threat. These risks do not negate achievements but underscore the fragility of sustained impact in a volatile context.

**Table 16: Likelihood of Impact**

| Factors influencing likelihood of impact | Assessment | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| **Drivers** to support transition from Outputs to the Project Outcomes | In place | The drivers identified in the ToC, including strong institutional commitment, availability of technical capacity, inter-agency coordination, and continued political and financial support, were largely in place, enabling the effective transition from project outputs to outcomes despite significant external challenges. Institutional commitment was a key driver that remained consistently strong throughout implementation. The MENR and the SAUEZM demonstrated ownership and continuity in overseeing the CREBR and the REPC, ensuring that outputs such as the management plan, research infrastructure, and monitoring systems were operationalized and sustained. The project also benefitted from a technically |

| Factors influencing likelihood of impact | Assessment | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| | | competent and dedicated research community, including the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU) and the REPC, which actively contributed to achieving outcomes related to improved monitoring, research, and environmental management. Inter-agency and scientific coordination functioned effectively during the early and mid-stages of the project, serving as another strong driver of transition. |
| **Assumptions** for the change process from Outputs to Project Outcomes | Partially Hold | Overall, the evaluation found that while assumptions about government commitment, institutional strengthening, and stakeholder engagement held, the critical assumptions on security, environmental stability, and transboundary cooperation didn't hold. These broken assumptions also triggered unintended negative effects, whereas positive spill overs came from stronger-than-expected institutionalization and knowledge dissemination. |
| Proportion of **Project Outcomes** fully or partially achieved | Partially | The proportion of project outcomes fully or partially achieved is estimated at 100%, with approximately one outcome fully achieved and two partially achieved. The project demonstrated strong institutionalization and technical achievements, though the social inclusion and long-term sustainability dimensions remain areas for continued support and consolidation |
| **Drivers** to support transition from Project Outcomes to Intermediate States | In place | The transition from outcomes to intermediate states has been supported by three main drivers: (i) strong government ownership, evidenced by the Presidential Decree establishing the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve and co-financing contributions that exceeded targets; (ii) strengthened institutional capacity, with the Reserve management now effectively anchoring conservation, carbon management, and monitoring functions; and (iii) broad stakeholder engagement, including scientists, NGOs, and communities, reinforced by awareness campaigns that elevated public understanding of environmental risks. These factors provided durable institutional and social foundations for outcomes to evolve into intermediate states such as improved ecosystem governance and integration into policy frameworks |
| **Assumptions** for the change process from the Project Outcomes to Intermediate States | Partially Hold | Several assumptions underpinned the causal chain from outcomes to intermediate states:<br>Stable government commitment: This assumption held true. The government consistently demonstrated ownership, including issuing a Presidential Decree upgrading the ChEZ to a Biosphere Reserve and providing steady co-financing above agreed levels<br>Strengthened institutional capacity: It was assumed that weak starting capacity could be mitigated. This was achieved through the strengthening of Biosphere Reserve management structures, which provided continuity and effectiveness<br>Financial commitments met: The project assumed financial flows would be stable. This proved valid, with government co-financing maintained throughout implementation<br>Challenged assumptions:<br>Peace and political stability: The assumption of a stable national and regional context did not hold. The war created massive disruption, damaging infrastructure, halting activities, and undermining earlier achievements. Although activities resumed post-occupation, this risk remains high and systemic<br>Manageable environmental risks: It was assumed that climate and wildfire risks could be controlled. However, fire hazards in |

| Factors influencing likelihood of impact | Assessment | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| | | radioactive forests, intensified by drought and climate change, continue to pose systemic risks to sustaining outcomes<br>Regional cooperation: Cooperation with Belarus's Polessky Reserve was assumed to reinforce resilience. This collapsed due to geopolitical alignment, weakening the regional pathway |
| Proportion of **Intermediate States** achieved | Some | The analysis indicates that most transitional conditions between outputs and outcomes were partially to largely achieved before the onset of the 2022 conflict. These intermediate states—covering institutional integration, technical functionality, data use, and stakeholder collaboration—were essential in linking the project's outputs to sustained outcomes across biodiversity conservation, carbon monitoring, and ecosystem management within the ChEZ. The institutional integration was one of the most robust intermediate achievements. Technically, the establishment of operational environmental monitoring systems and a functioning data repository at REPC facilitated a continuous flow of ecological information. However, the transition to a fully self-sustaining national monitoring and reporting mechanism remains incomplete, as periodic disruptions interrupted data updates and international collaboration. .In conclusion, approximately two-thirds of the intermediate states were achieved or partially achieved. The institutional and technical foundations were strong and durable, but full realization of participatory and transboundary cooperation states was curtailed by the war and related operational limitations. |
| **Drivers** to support transition from Intermediate States to Impact | In place | The key drivers supporting the transition from intermediate states to long-term impact were largely effective, particularly institutional ownership, scientific credibility, and policy alignment. The establishment of the CREBR and REPC ensured lasting national capacity, while collaboration with NASU and UNEP strengthened research quality and global relevance. However, transboundary cooperation and community participation were disrupted by the conflict, limiting broader social and ecological impacts. Overall, strong institutional and technical foundations are in place, but achieving full and sustained impact will depend on renewed post-conflict engagement and financing. |
| **Assumptions** for the change process from Intermediate States to Impact | Partially hold | Continued government commitment: This assumption held true. The Government of Ukraine consistently demonstrated ownership, including by providing co-financing above target and maintaining institutional reforms, even during crises<br>Institutional resilience: It was assumed that strengthened institutions would sustain the transition. This held in part — the Biosphere Reserve and REPC resumed operations after wartime disruptions, showing adaptive capacity<br>Financial viability: The assumption that co-financing obligations would be met was valid, with government contributions surpassing expectations<br>Challenged assumptions:<br>Peace and stability: The most critical assumption, that a stable national and international context would prevail, collapsed. The war severely disrupted implementation, destroyed infrastructure, and undermined many achievements<br>Environmental manageability: Assumptions that fire and climate risks could be contained proved fragile. Forests |

| Factors influencing likelihood of impact | Assessment | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| | | contaminated by radionuclides remain highly vulnerable to drought-driven wildfires, posing ongoing risks to biodiversity, human health, and food security<br>Regional cooperation: The assumption of effective cross-border collaboration with Belarus collapsed due to geopolitical alignment, limiting regional ecosystem resilience. |

112. Unintended Positive Effects: The project generated several unintended positive effects, particularly in advancing Ukraine's global scientific visibility and environmental governance capacity. By establishing the CREBR and REPC, the project unintentionally transformed the ChEZ into an internationally recognized "living laboratory" for ecosystem recovery, biodiversity conservation, and climate mitigation research. This repositioned Chernobyl from a symbol of nuclear disaster to one of ecological resilience and innovation, catalysing global interest in post-disaster conservation. Additionally, the project's adaptive management during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict encouraged the use of remote sensing, digital collaboration, and virtual scientific exchanges—creating new modalities of research cooperation that could serve as models for projects operating in fragile or high-risk contexts.

113. Unintended Negative Effects: No major environmental or safeguard-related negative effects were identified during implementation. At the socio-institutional level, the project made positive efforts to engage local communities, particularly through employment opportunities and environmental education activities around the ChEZ. These initiatives helped raise awareness and fostered some degree of local participation in reserve management. However, broader inclusion of women, youth, and vulnerable groups in decision-making and benefit-sharing could have been further strengthened. While meaningful steps were taken, more systematic approaches to social engagement and inclusivity would enhance the long-term social sustainability and ownership of project results. Furthermore, the centralization of research and monitoring activities within national institutions may have reduced opportunities for local knowledge integration and stakeholder ownership at the grassroots level. In addition, the growing international attention on the ChEZ as a conservation site, without adequate conflict-sensitive communication strategies, risked exposing sensitive environmental and security data. These unintended effects highlight the importance of integrating inclusive governance, community engagement, and data protection measures into future project phases.

**Findings Statements on Effectiveness**

114. Project effectiveness at the start of implementation was assessed as moderate, as early delays in establishing field-based monitoring systems and management structures slowed initial progress. Once these foundations were in place, however, implementation accelerated, and the evaluation confirms that nearly all planned outputs were delivered. The project successfully achieved its core conservation and institutional targets, with the notable exception of the transboundary cooperation component. Despite unprecedented external shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 and the full-scale war since 2022 war, the project demonstrated strong adaptive management and sustained national ownership, resulting in lasting achievements in biodiversity protection, capacity-building, and institutional strengthening.

115. The project objective is to conserve biodiversity and carbon stocks in the ChEZ through enhanced management, monitoring, and institutional strengthening. Evidence from the Project Document, Theory of Change, project monitoring reports, and consultations with key stakeholders that the project has partially achieved its intended outcomes, despite severe

disruptions from political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war. By 2024, nearly all planned outputs had been delivered, and the CREBR had been formally established and operationalized, covering 226,270 ha under effective protection. The Biosphere Reserve Management Plan has been approved and is under implementation, ensuring a framework for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and carbon stock management. Assessments suggest that the project is demonstrating an effective trajectory in addressing the urgent and complex ecological needs of Ukraine. Indications confirm progress in reducing ecological vulnerabilities in the Chernobyl Zone while fostering scientific cooperation and institutional capacity. The achievement of the project's outcomes has been addressed through multiple interconnected components.

116. The project demonstrated substantial progress toward achieving its intended outcomes, focusing on biodiversity conservation, carbon stock management, and institutional strengthening within the ChEZ. Evidence from the Project Document, Theory of Change, monitoring reports, and stakeholder consultations confirms that the project has largely achieved its expected results, despite severe external disruptions caused by political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war. By 2024, nearly all planned outputs were delivered, including the formal establishment and operationalization of the CREBR, now covering 226,270 ha under effective management. The approval and implementation of the Biosphere Reserve Management Plan provided an institutional and technical framework for sustained biodiversity conservation, carbon monitoring, and land-use planning.

117. Overall, the project's outcomes and likelihood of impact are rated as moderately satisfactory, reflecting a strong trajectory toward long-term environmental and institutional benefits. The project effectively strengthened ecological monitoring systems, enhanced policy coherence, and fostered scientific collaboration at national and international levels. It also contributed to reducing ecological vulnerabilities in the ChEZ and to positioning Ukraine as a leader in post-disaster ecosystem restoration. However, gaps remain in social inclusiveness and sustained community engagement, which have limited the project's broader socio-ecological impact.

**Rating for Effectiveness: Moderately Satisfactory**

*Rating for Availability of Outputs: Moderately Satisfactory*

*Rating for Achievement of Project Outcomes: Moderately Satisfactory*

*Rating for Achievement of Likelihood of Impact (Use 'Likely' scale): Moderately Likely*

## 4.5 Financial Management

### 4.5.1 Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

118. The project demonstrated strong adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures throughout its implementation. Financial management risks were consistently rated "Low" in the PIR risk logs, alongside budget oversight and reporting. This indicates that project expenditures were well aligned with approved budgets and financial controls remained robust despite external shocks. Throughout most of implementation, budget execution followed the original ProDoc structure, with adaptive management applied mainly at the operational level (reallocation of activity budgets within existing component ceilings). Only the 2024 budget revision, approved by UNEP, formally consolidated expenditure adjustments and documented cumulative co-financing and disbursement levels.

119. According to the 2024 PIR, by June 2024 USD 4,579,941 had been disbursed, with USD 4,369,695 reported as actual expenditures. These figures reflect accurate and transparent

reporting consistent with UNEP's financial accountability standards. The project also underwent financial reviews at mid-term (2019) and was on track for closure by mid-2025, following UNEP's financial closure protocols.

120. The adherence to UNEP's financial procedures was fully satisfactory throughout the implementation phase of the project. It consistently complied with UNEP's financial policies, maintained transparent reporting, and achieved co-financing levels that exceeded initial targets, with no irregularities or management issues reported. However, the transition from UNEP's IMIS to the UMOJA financial management system during the early implementation phase (2015–2017) caused significant delays in the approval and disbursement of funds to the MENR and other national partners. These administrative bottlenecks slowed down procurement, staffing, and field activities, which led to the need for the first no-cost extension in 2018 to recover lost implementation time. Once the UMOJA system stabilized, financial operations improved, and disbursements proceeded normally. Despite subsequent disruptions caused by the war, the project maintained strong financial oversight and transparency, ensuring that resources were effectively managed and fully aligned with UNEP's fiduciary standards.

### 4.5.2 Completeness of Financial Information

**Table 17: Financial management**

| Financial management components | | Rating | Evidence/ Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Adherence to UNEP's/GEF's policies and procedures:** | | **HS** | |
| Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence[16] to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules | | NO | The evaluation notes that project implementation faced "service disruptions from IA and EA due to financial management system transitions", but there is no indication of non-compliance with UNEP or donor financial procedures |
| Was first disbursement carried out within 9 months of UNEP's project approval date. | | Yes | The first disbursement took place on 16 March 2015, the same date as UNEP's project approval (16 March 2015), well within the 9-month window |
| Were the procurement policies of UNEP and the donor(s) followed? *(where applicable)* | | Yes | The evaluation does not report any deviations, complaints, or irregularities regarding procurement, suggesting UNEP and donor procurement rules were followed throughout implementation. |
| **2. Completeness of project financial information[17]:** | | **MS** | |
| Provision of key documents to the evaluator (based on the responses to A-H below) | | | |
| A. | Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines) | Yes | The Project Document included standard co-financing and project cost tables, but the level of detail at design was limited. Budget allocations were presented by components rather than by specific budget lines or expenditure categories, which reduced transparency and traceability for later financial monitoring. While this format was consistent with GEF templates at the time, it constrained the ability to assess cost-efficiency |

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

| Financial management components | | Rating | Evidence/ Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | and compare planned versus actual expenditures in detail during implementation and evaluation. |
| B. | Revisions to the budget | Yes | No formal budget revisions were recorded during the project's implementation. Instead, internal reallocations between budget lines were undertaken to optimize resource use and ensure completion of priority activities within the extended timeframe. These adjustments were administrative in nature and did not require formal approval under UNEP's financial procedures. While such flexibility allowed the project to maintain financial continuity during disruptions, the absence of official revision records limits the traceability of budgetary adjustments |
| C. | All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA) | Yes | All key project legal agreements were properly established and shared. |
| D. | Proof of fund transfers | No | |
| E. | Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind) | Yes | The co-finance reporting provides a structured and disaggregated view of project co-financing. Contributions are presented in relation to budget revisions and expenditure statements, allowing for verification of government inputs alongside GEF allocations. The "SSFA breakdown" sheet adds further granularity, listing small-scale funding agreements (SSFAs) signed with national institutions such as the Ecological Management Centre, REEFMC, and Podilsk Land Center. Each entry records contract signing dates, payment schedules (first and second instalments), amounts paid and totals due. This makes it possible to trace how government or partner co-financing was operationalized through concrete contracts and service delivery arrangements. These allocations, covering both UNEP and national partner contributions, make it possible to trace how co-financing commitments were embedded into the project's financial framework. The presentation of multi-annual totals ensures that co-financing can be reconciled not only at the aggregate level but also by year, budget line, and contractual arrangement. In evaluative terms, the evidence shows that co-financing was systematically documented and traceable. The project tracked government and partner contributions through SSFAs and integrated them into revised budgets, enabling auditors and evaluators to verify materialization against commitments. However, while the data are detailed at the contract and budget-line level, they do not explicitly provide an annualized aggregate summary of co-financing flows, which would have enhanced accessibility. Overall, the reporting demonstrate a high level of technical detail sufficient for financial accountability and verification. |
| F. | A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget | Yes | The project's financial reporting has been comprehensive and aligned with UNEP and GEF requirements, providing expenditure details at multiple levels of granularity. Throughout the life of |

| Financial management components | | Rating | Evidence/ Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| | lines, project components and/or annual level) | | the project, expenditures were tracked and reported by budget lines, project components, and annual disbursement periods, allowing for transparency and accountability across all phases. Reports distinguish between GEF financing and government co-financing, with clear tracking of disbursements against approved budgets and expenditures, as evidenced by the alignment between total disbursements (USD 4.58 million) and expenditures (USD 4.37 million) as of June 2024. At the component level, financial data were systematically linked to project outputs and activities, with expenditure updates accompanying implementation progress ratings. For example, Component 1 (monitoring and research), Component 2 (protected area management), and Component 3 (knowledge and dissemination) each included reporting on financial execution alongside narrative justifications of progress. At the annual level, expenditure reporting was presented in cumulative form across each fiscal year, with adjustments and reallocations documented during periods of disruption, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of operations due to war in 2022. This level of detail ensured that variances could be explained in real time and corrective measures undertaken, such as restoring capacity in the Research and Environmental Protection Center and revising timelines for completion of assessments |
| G. | Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)* | N/A | |
| H. | Procure documents[18], including the approved requisition document and Source Selection Plan *(where applicable)* | No | Laboratory equipment was procured using project funds. Documents process not available |
| I. | Any other financial information that was required for this project (list): | N/A | |
| **Overall rating** | | **MS** | |

121. The completeness of financial information for the project is assessed as moderately satisfactory. Core expenditure data were consistently reported through annual PIRs and periodic financial statements, providing an adequate overview of budget utilization by component and activity. The project maintained transparency and compliance with UNEP's financial procedures, and one formal budget revision was conducted to align expenditures with revised implementation timelines following no-cost extensions. However, co-financing documentation was not consistently consolidated, with variations in format and level of detail across reporting years, limiting full verification of contributions. While UNEP's financial tracking systems (transitioning from IMIS to UMOJA) ensured accountability, gaps in co-finance verification and partner expenditure records limit the full traceability of financial flows. Overall, financial reporting provided sufficient evidence to support evaluation findings but

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

would benefit from more systematic integration of co-finance and expenditure data across all funding sources.

**Findings Statements on Financial Management*:***

122. The financial management of the project has been 'Satisfactory' and demonstrates a high degree of accountability and control by the executing agency. Disbursement and expenditure levels remained closely aligned with the approved budget, with a total of USD 4.58 million disbursed and USD 4.37 million expended as of June 2024. This reflects prudent resource utilization and effective financial oversight, with minimal variance between funds received and funds applied to project activities. Furthermore, co-financing commitments by the Government of Ukraine significantly surpassed expectations, amounting to over USD 38.4 million against the planned USD 28.3 million, representing an increase of more than 30 percent. This performance is particularly noteworthy given the adverse external conditions, including pandemic disruptions and the ongoing war, which placed extraordinary pressure on financial systems and project delivery.

123. Risk ratings related to financial management remained consistently low across all reporting periods, reflecting the adequacy of internal controls and compliance with UNEP and GEF financial policies. The project successfully adapted to unforeseen challenges through budgetary flexibility, timely revisions, and extensions, thereby safeguarding delivery of outputs within revised timelines. The ability to resume operations in 2023 and move towards full financial closure by July 2025 underscores the robustness of the financial management framework and the strong commitment of both the executing and co-financing partners. Overall, the project's financial performance demonstrates efficiency, transparency, and resilience, providing assurance that financial resources were managed effectively and in line with international fiduciary standards.

**Rating for Financial Management: Satisfactory**

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

*Rating for Completeness of Financial Information: Moderately Satisfactory*

## 4.6 Efficiency

124. The project demonstrated a high level of efficiency in relation to both the scope and uniqueness of the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of its interventions. Despite operating in a geographically challenging and politically complex region, it effectively managed financial and human resources to deliver planned outputs and sustain progress across three components. The project successfully mobilized and utilized complementary resources. Actual co-finance materialized at USD 38.5 million, exceeding the original target by more than 30%, underscoring the project's success in attracting and deploying additional funds to ensure the efficiency of the GEF grant while accommodating for the extended project duration period.

125. Compared to global benchmarks in protected area management cost literature. For example, the wide per-hectare cost ranges documented in Spatiotemporal variation in costs of managing protected areas (2022)[19]. The GEF investment of USD 146/ha over 4–5 years (USD 21/ha GEF share) is consistent with a highly cost-efficient approach in a globally complex ecological context.

[19] Waldron, A., Miller, D. C., Redding, D., Mooers, A. Ø., Nibbelink, N., & Fisher, B. (2022). *Spatiotemporal variation in costs of managing protected areas*. Conservation Science and Practice, 4(10), e12697. https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12697

126. Further efficiencies were achieved by building upon pre-existing institutions, agreements, and partnerships, including the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine and the State Agency on the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The project also established the Research and Environmental Protection Center as the hub for monitoring and research, developed comprehensive databases and a Geoinformation Portal, and leveraged synergies with international conventions (CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD) and related programmes. These measures reduced duplication, enabled economies of scale, and ensured that resources were directed strategically toward sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem services.

127. Implementation timeliness was significantly challenged by both internal and external factors. Delays in the early years (2015–2017) were attributed to political transitions and staff turnover, while UNEP's internal shift from IMIS to UMOJA financial systems slowed disbursement and reporting. External shocks further disrupted progress, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war, which temporarily suspended fieldwork and resulted in damage to infrastructure and project assets. Despite these substantial disruptions, the project secured four (4) no-cost extensions (to 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2024), which provided the necessary flexibility to safeguard results. Adaptive management measures, including online coordination, revised work-plans, and flexible budget reallocations, enabled the project to resume activities in 2023 and concentrate efforts on priority outputs such as ecosystem assessments, public awareness campaigns, and restoration of monitoring systems. By 2024, the majority of outputs had been completed, demonstrating the project's capacity to recover momentum and deliver within the extended timeframe.

128. Efficiency was also enhanced through reliance on existing data sources and institutional networks, as well as the use of digital platforms. The planned 2022 international conference was cancelled due to the war; however, project partners adapted by organizing smaller virtual technical exchanges and online dissemination activities, which helped preserve stakeholder engagement during conflict while minimizing UNEP's carbon footprint by reducing international travel The emphasis on digital repositories, portals, and remote coordination supported continuity, lowered environmental impacts, and optimized time and cost efficiency.

**Findings Statements on Efficiency*:***

129. While early delays and systemic challenges in disbursement reduced efficiency in the initial phases, the project subsequently demonstrated strong recovery and efficient use of resources. The high level of co-finance mobilization, low cost per hectare for biodiversity protection, and adaptive management under extraordinary circumstances all underline the project's value-for-money.

130. The project demonstrated strong evidence of cost-effectiveness, strategic use of complementary resources, and successful adaptive management. Although implementation timeliness was constrained by factors largely outside project control, the use of extensions, flexible delivery methods, and synergies with existing institutions ensured that planned outputs were achieved within the secured budget and revised timeframe.

**Rating for Efficiency: Moderately Unsatisfactory**

## 4.7 Monitoring and Reporting

### 4.7.1 Monitoring of Project Implementation

131. The project's M&E design followed UNEP and GEF requirements, incorporating a logical results framework with indicators, baselines, and targets; however, several of these indicators were not fully SMART—lacking specific, measurable, or time-bound parameters—which limited the precision and evaluability of the framework. Provisions included: A Project Results Framework aligned with GEF-5 focal area tracking tools for biodiversity and land degradation. An M&E Plan with annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs), MTR, and a Terminal Evaluation (TE). Budgeted resources for M&E (approximately 5% of project costs), ensuring financial support for implementation. Responsibility for M&E shared between the Project Focal Point, the PSC, and UNEP as Implementing Agency. The design was found to be generally sound but some weaknesses were identified: (i) socio-economic indicators were underdeveloped given the project's indirect community impacts, (ii) co-financing monitoring mechanisms were insufficiently specified, and (iii) some outcome-level indicators were ambitious given baseline data gaps. Furthermore, the M&E framework's design presented several weaknesses. In particular, some indicators were not fully SMART, and the framework lacked dedicated provisions for impact assessment, especially concerning long-term ecological changes and the effectiveness of pilot demonstration projects.

132. The milestones in the monitoring plan are present but may not be fully sufficient or detailed enough to effectively track progress and guide management toward the desired outputs and outcomes. While the project includes a monitoring plan with regular evaluations and reporting mechanisms, the milestones are not sufficiently detailed or specific to track progress effectively toward outputs and outcomes. The lack of clear, time-bound, and quantitative milestones for key activities makes it difficult to monitor whether the project is progressing as planned. By setting SMART milestones and ensuring that interim targets are clearly defined, the project can improve its ability to track progress, foster adaptive management, and ensure it achieves its long-term goals.

133. The M&E system was actively used during implementation to guide project activities, assess progress, and inform adaptive management. Project implementation demonstrated consistent commitment to M&E, with adaptations to changing circumstances:

134. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale war since 2022, field-based monitoring was suspended. The project adapted by prioritizing desk-based reporting, remote data collection where possible, and maintaining digital repositories of monitoring data to safeguard continuity. Stakeholders, including NGOs and scientific institutions, were involved in data validation and workshops, contributing to transparency and ownership of monitoring results. However, the evaluation identified persistent gaps: 1. Socio-economic monitoring was not systematically implemented due to restricted access to data? and wartime conditions. 2. Some outcome-level indicators could not be fully measured due to disruptions in fieldwork and the suspension of transboundary activities with Belarus.

### 4.7.2 Project Reporting

135. The project consistently met UNEP and GEF requirements for reporting, producing annual PIRs, half-year expenditure updates, and financial statements linked to budget lines and components. Reporting was carried out through UNEP's UMOJA system, ensuring alignment with corporate financial and monitoring standards. Despite some early challenges associated with the transition from IMIS to UMOJA, reporting was comprehensive in documenting disbursements, expenditures, risks, co-financing levels, and progress towards outputs and outcomes.

136. The MTR provided an important learning opportunity, leading to corrective actions including strengthening socio-economic surveys, refining biodiversity monitoring protocols, and enhancing safeguard provisions. The establishment of the CREBR within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone provided a sustainable institutional hub for biodiversity and carbon monitoring. This significantly enhanced national monitoring capacity and ensured alignment with reporting requirements under the CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD.

137. The project's work plan includes a general timeline for key activities such as establishing the Research and Environmental Protection Center, expanding the protected area network, and implementing wildfire monitoring systems. However, some critical details are missing: The timeline for some activities, such as stakeholder engagement and capacity-building efforts, lacks specificity. For example, there is no clear indication of when capacity-building activities will occur and how much time is allocated for stakeholders to adopt new practices or technologies. The work plan does not fully outline the sequencing of activities, which is important to ensure that capacity-building efforts are followed by adequate time for local stakeholders to take up new practices (e.g., after training workshops, when will stakeholders begin actively participating in biodiversity monitoring or fire management?). While the project's goals are ambitious, the work plan does not provide enough detail to determine whether the timeline is realistic for achieving these goals. For example: Expanding the protected area network within the project's timeframe might be feasible, but it depends on legislative processes that can take longer than expected. Similarly, the introduction of wildfire monitoring and mitigation systems may require more time for full implementation, given the large area of the ChEZ and the technical complexities of fire management.

138. On gender and social inclusion, the PIRs include a dedicated section on gender mainstreaming. Reporting emphasizes that activities were conducted in an inclusive and gender-responsive manner, recognizing the different rights, needs, and roles of women and men. Specific references highlight the inclusion of women's knowledge, experiences, and roles in Biosphere Reserve governance and management, as well as women's involvement as consumers and stakeholders in environmental decision-making. However, the evaluation also notes that gender engagement was constrained by the war, limiting opportunities for direct participation. Importantly, while gender was regularly addressed in reports, the data provided was qualitative rather than systematically disaggregated (i.e., the reports did not present numeric gender-disaggregated participation indicators).

139. With respect to vulnerable or marginalized groups, including people living with disabilities, no direct references were found in the PIR. Reporting focused primarily on ecological and institutional achievements, with stakeholder engagement described in broad terms (government, scientific institutions, NGOs, local communities) rather than with a disaggregated lens on vulnerable populations. Although stakeholder consultations were a strength, systematic reporting on the participation or benefits for marginalized groups was limited.

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**Findings Statements on Monitoring and Reporting:**

141. Overall, the project demonstrated strong commitment to M&E, adapting its framework under highly challenging conditions, but was constrained by weaknesses in M&E design and by external disruptions that limited full outcome-level measurement.

142. Project reporting was robust in terms of tracking progress of implementation, financial accountability and compliance with UNEP/GEF standards, while social equity dimensions were partially addressed. Gender mainstreaming was recognized as an important element, but data remained mostly descriptive. Reporting on vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, was absent, highlighting an area where future projects could strengthen monitoring frameworks by embedding gender-sensitive and inclusivity indicators into reporting systems.

**Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Satisfactory**

*Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation: Satisfactory*

*Rating for Project Reporting: Satisfactory*

## 4.8 Sustainability

### 4.8.1 Socio-political Sustainability

143. The project has benefited from high-level political commitment. The 2016 Presidential Decree establishing the CREBR provided legal and policy backing that ensures long-term recognition and protection of 226,270 ha of globally significant ecosystems. National ownership has been further demonstrated by the government of Ukraine's continued policy attention and financial contributions to the Reserve, even during wartime. Local governments, NGOs, and communities in buffer-zone areas have been engaged through awareness campaigns and consultations. This broad-based support enhances the socio-political sustainability of project achievements, although local engagement activities were reduced after 2022 due to security constraints.

### 4.8.2 Financial Sustainability

144. Financial sustainability prospects are relatively strong. Co-financing exceeded expectations (USD 38.5 million actual vs. USD 28.3 million planned), with the Government of Ukraine maintaining its obligations even under extreme fiscal pressures. The high level of international interest in ChEZ conservation and radiological research creates opportunities for continued bilateral and multilateral funding. However, sustaining monitoring and management functions will require long-term strategies (15–20 years). Without predictable financing for staffing, research, and infrastructure, risks remain, especially if external shocks persist.

### 4.8.3 Institutional Sustainability

145. Institutional sustainability is one of the project's strongest dimensions. The establishment of the CREBR and the REPC has created permanent entities mandated to manage biodiversity, carbon monitoring, and research. However, the REPC functions effectively as an internal coordination mechanism within the CREBR but remains informal in legal terms, which may limit its ability to independently attract research funding or formalize international scientific cooperation. Formal recognition could enhance the sustainability and visibility of its research outputs. These institutions are embedded in the SAUEZM, ensuring continuity within government structures. Institutional acceptance at the presidential and

ministerial levels, along with growing scientific capacity, provides a stable foundation. Community-level institutional sustainability is emerging but requires further strengthening once the security situation stabilizes.

**Findings Statements on Sustainability*:***

146. The sustainability of the achieved outcomes is generally strong, as biodiversity protection, ecosystem monitoring, and fire management systems are now in place. However, the war has significantly increased environmental risks, including damage to habitats, restricted monitoring access, and heightened fire hazards. The project adapted during implementation by resuming monitoring and awareness activities in secure areas in 2023–2024, but the broader environmental risks remain beyond project control.

147. The project has established the legal, institutional, and financial foundations required to sustain its achievements. The existence of CREBR as a state-backed biosphere reserve, coupled with strong scientific and government ownership, provides assurance of continuity. However, sustainability is constrained by the ongoing war, which creates risks for environmental integrity, community engagement, and stable financing.

**Rating for Likelihood of Sustainability (*use 'Likely' scale*): Moderately likely**

*Rating for Socio-political Sustainability: Moderately Likely*

*Rating for Financial Sustainability: Moderately Likely*

*Rating for Institutional Sustainability: Likely*

## 4.9 Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

### 4.9.1 Quality of Project Management and Supervision

#### 4.9.1.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:

148. UNEP's GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, was the Accredited Entity and accountable to the GEF for ensuring the project's implementation adhered fully to GEF policies, as well as to UNEP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures, financial regulations, and established social and environmental standards. This section assesses UNEP's performance as the Accredited Entity and the effectiveness of execution arrangements. UNEP was responsible for fiduciary oversight, safeguard compliance, technical guidance, and overall reporting to the GEF. Its performance can be summarized as follows: 1. UNEP ensured that financial reporting and procurement processes adhered to GEF standards, with no major fiduciary irregularities reported. 2. UNEP applied its Environmental and Social Safeguard Framework, which was embedded into project subcontracts and guided adaptive measures, particularly around radiological safety and fire management. 3. UNEP provided ongoing technical advice on biodiversity monitoring, carbon accounting, and risk management.

149. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, UNEP supported the revising work plans, shifting towards knowledge management outputs, and sustaining institutional strengthening efforts. UNEP maintained regular communication with the focal point and PSC, including through virtual modalities during the war, ensuring that accountability and reporting to GEF were not interrupted. The evaluation recognized UNEP's role in guiding adaptive measures to strengthen socio-economic analysis and safeguard integration.

150. UNEP as Accredited Entity: Performance is assessed as Satisfactory. UNEP provided strong oversight, ensured safeguard compliance, and guided adaptive responses under unprecedented conditions. Its consistent engagement, even during conflict, safeguarded accountability and credibility of the project. Execution structures were generally effective and well-aligned with project needs, but institutional capacity gaps within SAUEZM and external shocks (COVID-19, war) limited full delivery of results. The project benefitted from UNEP's technical, fiduciary, and safeguard oversight, which remained robust throughout the project cycle. Execution arrangements ensured national ownership and institutional embedding, although capacity gaps and external disruptions created challenges. Overall, UNEP and its partners demonstrated resilience, maintaining delivery of outputs and accountability mechanisms despite highly adverse conditions.

#### 4.9.1.2 Partners/Executing Agency:

151. Execution was led by the UNEP Regional Office for Europe, in close collaboration with MENR and SAUEZM. The UNEP Regional Office for Europe acted as the primary executing body, responsible for day-to-day management, coordination with national institutions, procurement, and supervision of technical experts. The evaluation found the Office to be effective in balancing UNEP oversight with operational delivery. MENR and SAUEZM: Provided policy direction, institutional anchoring, and on-the-ground management of the CREBR. Capacity limitations were noted particularly in technical and financial management, but the project provided targeted capacity-building support

152. The PSC and TAC were effectively established and provided strong oversight and technical guidance during the initial and mid-stages of implementation. They facilitated coordination among UNEP, MENR, SAUEZM, and NASU, contributing to transparent decision-making and adaptive management. However, their operation was disrupted after 2020 due to the pandemic and conflict, reducing meeting frequency and participation. Overall, the committees functioned well as governance mechanisms, though their continuity was partially limited by external factors.

### 4.9.2 Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

153. The project placed strong emphasis on inclusive stakeholder participation and strategic partnerships, recognizing that effective management of the CREBR required collaboration across government agencies, scientific institutions, civil society, and international stakeholders. The project was developed and implemented through a participatory, multi-stakeholder process that actively engaged national governments, institutions, scientific organizations, civil society, and international partners. During the formulation phase, comprehensive consultations were conducted to ensure that the project effectively addressed national priorities and cooperation needs, while also being responsive to the distinctive challenges encountered at the project site. This inclusive approach helped build political support, align interventions with existing institutional mandates, and foster ownership among key stakeholders.

**Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms**

154. The PSC: Chaired by MENR, the PSC included UNEP, SAUEZM, NGOs, and scientific institutions. It served as the main oversight mechanism, approving work plans and budgets. While PSC meetings were disrupted during the war, they resumed in hybrid format in 2023.

155. Workshops and Consultations: The project conducted inception, technical, and policy workshops, ensuring inclusive participation and dialogue. During COVID-19 and the war, stakeholder consultations shifted to remote and hybrid formats, maintaining engagement despite constraints.

156. Community-Level Engagement: Socio-economic surveys were carried out in communities adjacent to the ChEZ to understand indirect impacts and opportunities for participation. These activities were interrupted in 2022 but are expected to inform post-project planning.

157. Stakeholder participation and partnerships were a strong feature of the project and contributed significantly to its achievements. Government agencies, scientific institutions, and NGOs were meaningfully engaged in planning, implementation, and oversight, while UNEP ensured compliance with international standards and fostered knowledge exchange. Despite severe disruptions due to the war, adaptive engagement strategies enabled continuity of participation to a degree, preserving partnerships that remain valuable for sustaining and scaling project outcomes. Engagement strategies were designed to ensure institutional ownership, technical credibility, and inclusiveness, while also responding adaptively to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 and the full-scale war since 2022. Table 4 provides a summary of the main stakeholder groups, their respective roles, level of engagement, and key findings on the effectiveness of their participation throughout the project cycle.

### 4.9.3 Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

158. The project sought to integrate gender-responsive approaches into its capacity-building, institutional strengthening, and stakeholder engagement activities. However, the project did not develop a formal gender action plan at design stage, nor did it include specific gender-related indicators in the Results Framework or have specific gender-related budget lines e.g. for travel. As a result, gender considerations were not systematically mainstreamed across all components, limiting the ability to comprehensively track the extent to which gender considerations were considered during project implementation and interpretation of results. Despite these design limitations, the project nevertheless made relevant contributions to gender equality and women's participation, particularly in the context of stakeholder engagement and institutional strengthening.

159. Women's participation in project activities: Gender-disaggregated data were collected during some consultations, workshops, and stakeholder engagement events, showing active participation of women scientists, NGO representatives, and community members. However, reporting was inconsistent across components and time periods.

160. Employment and Institutional Engagement: Women were represented among the staff of the CREBR and the REPC primarily through their existing professional roles in biodiversity monitoring, education, and administrative functions. While this indicates a level of gender representation within the project-related institutions, there is no evidence that these positions were filled as part of new hires or as a result of a deliberate effort to promote women's inclusion. Instead, women's participation emerged naturally as existing personnel were integrated into project-supported activities, rather than through targeted recruitment or gender-specific capacity-building measures.

161. Capacity-building opportunities: Training sessions and awareness-raising events included both men and women, although without a systematic mechanism to ensure equal participation or targeted capacity support for women. Women scientists and reserve staff were trained in biodiversity monitoring protocols, radiological safety procedures, and ecosystem management approaches.

162. Community-level engagement: Socio-economic surveys conducted in the ChEZ buffer-zone communities captured gender-differentiated perspectives on natural resource use and livelihoods. While this enhanced understanding of gendered roles in resource management, the findings were not consistently translated into project planning or decision-making.

163. Gender disaggregated monitoring: Gender-disaggregated participation was encouraged throughout the project but also acknowledged that tracking remained uneven due to lack of formal requirements and disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the war.

164. The ChEZ context limited direct engagement with women in local communities, as permanent settlement in the zone is restricted. This reduced opportunity for livelihood-related gender mainstreaming compared to other GEF projects. The war in Ukraine disrupted stakeholder engagement processes, making it more difficult to sustain momentum on gender-balanced participation. While gender considerations were integrated, systematic monitoring of gender-disaggregated participation and benefits was not consistently applied.

165. The project achieved modest but meaningful contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in institutional and technical domains. While opportunities for direct livelihood-related interventions were limited due to the ChEZ's restricted context, the project demonstrated that even in highly specialized, post-disaster environments, gender-responsive strategies can enhance inclusiveness and effectiveness. The project contributed to strengthening the role of women in science and technical fields, particularly in biodiversity research and monitoring. It increased women's participation in decision-making forums, such as the project's steering committee meetings and technical advisory processes. The project also raised awareness of gender-responsive approaches in environmental and conservation management within the ChEZ institutional framework. Future GEF projects in similar contexts should ensure systematic monitoring of gender-disaggregated participation and prioritize women's leadership roles in science-policy interfaces.

166. Through its focus on biodiversity conservation and carbon stock management in the ChEZ, the project intrinsically targeted a landscape that is globally unique, but also socio-politically sensitive and affected by past and current crises. Ensuring fair participation, safeguarding ecosystem services, and maintaining inclusive governance under such conditions required strong adaptive management and attention to safeguards. The national partners assumed responsibility for monitoring environmental and social risks, implementing safety regulations, and applying adaptive measures to maintain continuity during conflict-related disruptions.

167. The project has emphasized institutional inclusivity by engaging national authorities, particularly the SAUEZM, the MENR, and relevant scientific and technical institutions. This high-level coordination ensured strong national ownership and policy integration. However, engagement at the community level in buffer-zone areas was more limited, especially after 2022, when security restrictions and conflict the war reduced opportunities for direct interaction. Strengthening inclusive governance will require further collaboration with local governments, NGOs, and civil society groups, particularly those supporting women, youth, and other underrepresented groups, once conditions allow.

168. Disability inclusion was acknowledged through safeguards but not systematically addressed. Data collection on persons with disabilities was absent, and no dedicated measures were introduced to ensure their participation in consultations or benefits from project outcomes. Youth and marginalized groups played only a limited role in project implementation. Although socio-economic surveys captured some perspectives of local communities, broader engagement of young people, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable households was constrained. Their underrepresentation in consultations may limit the diversity of perspectives and the sustainability of conservation strategies. In future, expanding outreach to these groups and incorporating their perspectives into monitoring, education, and community engagement initiatives could strengthen resilience and inclusivity.

### 4.9.4 Environmental and Social Safeguards

169. The project was screened at CEO Endorsement and classified as low risk under UNEP's Environmental, Social and Safeguards Management (ESSM) system. No moderate or high safeguard risks were identified at approval. The project has consistently remained in the low-risk category, with no new social or environmental safeguard risks identified during implementation. No formal complaints or grievances were received regarding potential or actual environmental or social impacts throughout the reporting period. Although the war caused temporary suspension of activities and observable damage to infrastructure, these were security-related risks rather than safeguard compliance issues. Project activities were resumed in late 2023 once conditions allowed.

170. Following the MTR recommendation, the project management team undertook socio-economic surveys in settlements adjacent to the ChEZ. These surveys informed stakeholder engagement and helped ensure that the project's conservation and carbon management objectives did not negatively impact neighbouring populations. Safeguard provisions were embedded in consultancy and subcontracting agreements, requiring verification and reporting on environmental and social safeguards. Regular stakeholder meetings (until interrupted by the war) provided a platform for inclusive participation, with gender-disaggregated data recorded in public consultations. The war in Ukraine interrupted socio-economic monitoring and limited the ability to sustain community-level engagement. Restricted access to the ChEZ meant that direct livelihood-related safeguard issues were limited, though cross-boundary risks such as radiological exposure from fires remained.

171. Overall, the project complied with UNEP and GEF safeguard requirements. No safeguard-related non-compliance was recorded, and project design was responsive to emerging risks through adaptive management. The inclusion of safeguard provisions in contracts and socio-economic surveys represented good practice. However, the disruption caused by the war highlights the importance of contingency planning in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

### 4.9.5 Country Ownership and Drivenness

172. The project was firmly grounded in Ukraine's national environmental framework, with its institutional legitimacy anchored by Presidential Decree No. 174/2016 of 26 April 2016, titled "On the Establishment of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve." This decree mandated the creation of the reserve in the Ivankiv and Poliske districts of Kyiv Oblast, incorporating 226,964.7 hectares of state-owned land within the Exclusion and Mandatory Resettlement Zones, and stipulated development of governance regulations and land-use planning within six months to two years. Its legal and administrative weight provided the foundational basis for the project's strategic alignment with national policy, ensuring that its objectives and operations were fully embedded in Ukraine's conservation and institutional modalities.

173. The strength of country ownership was further evidenced by substantial governmental support and resource mobilization. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, alongside the State Agency for the Exclusion Zone, played central roles in project governance and decision-making, including through the Project Steering Committee. Moreover, co-financing levels exceeded the original USD 28 million commitment, actual mobilization reached USD 38.5 million, demonstrating that, even amid national crises, the government prioritized sustained investment in environmental resilience and ecological governance.

174. Ownership extended beyond policy and finance; it was also reflected in the project's operational model and stakeholder engagement. Ukrainian scientific institutions, NGOs, and local stakeholders contributed actively to design, implementation, and monitoring. The

establishment of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR) created a sustainable, nationally managed institution serving as the project's institutional hub. Its mandate continues beyond the project, reinforcing long-term national stewardship. In summary, the project was not an externally imposed initiative but a nationally driven endeavour, grounded in law, sustained by finance, administered by national institutions, and reinforced through local ownership.

### 4.9.6 Communication and Public Awareness

175. The project invested significant resources in communication and awareness activities, ensuring visibility of its objectives and achievements among both national and local stakeholders. Public awareness activities included targeted campaigns, community consultations, and dissemination of knowledge products that highlighted the ecological value of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. For example, a biodiversity-focused article[20] was distributed widely in popular media, helping to strengthen societal understanding of the Reserve's role as a unique conservation site. These initiatives were complemented by outreach to local communities and scientific stakeholders, which fostered a sense of ownership and improved commitment to project outcomes. A key achievement was the development of a Geo-information Portal[21], which consolidated ecological monitoring data and made it publicly accessible. This platform has enhanced transparency, enabled broader availability of scientific outputs, and provided continuity during periods when field-based activities were disrupted. Together with training manuals, presentations, and technical publications, the portal reinforced the long-term sustainability of communication efforts by embedding them within institutional systems.

176. At the same time, several weaknesses reduced the overall impact of the communication efforts made. Awareness campaigns were limited in frequency and not maintained consistently across the full project cycle. Communication outputs lacked diversity, with few media products beyond traditional reports and the single widely distributed article. While the portal represented an important step forward, outreach to ensure broad uptake and use by communities, NGOs, and schools was limited. Moreover, communication activities did not sufficiently address social inclusion. Finally, engagement with international media and networks was not pursued systematically, constraining opportunities to position Chernobyl's recovery as a global example of ecosystem resilience.

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

177. Project performance was strongly influenced by external shocks, including political transitions, UNEP's financial system changes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, which caused delays, asset losses, and restricted fieldwork. Despite these disruptions, adaptive management, through revised work plans, online coordination, and no-cost extensions, enabled the project to recover momentum and complete most outputs within the extended timeframe.

178. Overall, the project demonstrated awareness of gender equality issues and enabled women's participation in various scientific, institutional, and community-based activities. However, in the absence of a dedicated gender strategy, opportunities to fully mainstream gender perspectives into project design, monitoring, and reporting were missed. The project has taken important steps to integrate human rights and cross-cutting issues, particularly in

[20] "How Chernobyl Has Become an Unexpected Haven for Wildlife", published on the Global Landscapes Forum platform. It discusses how wildlife has flourished within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ), reframing the area from a site of disaster to one of ecological recovery and biodiversity resurgence. Available at: https://news.globallandscapesforum.org/viewpoint/how-chernobyl-has-become-an-unexpected-haven-for-wildlife/

[21] Available at: https://www.geo-portal.org.ua/home

terms of gender participation, institutional inclusivity, and safeguards. Yet, there remain clear opportunities to improve inclusivity, especially regarding community engagement, disability inclusion, and youth participation. To fully uphold the UN principle of "Leave No One Behind" and strengthen resilience in the face of ongoing conflict and environmental risks, it will be essential to deepen collaboration with civil society, mainstream gender-responsive actions, and ensure that vulnerable groups are meaningfully included in future conservation and monitoring efforts. The project showed strong country ownership, anchored in Presidential Decree No. 174/2016 establishing the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve. National institutions led implementation, and government co-financing exceeded commitments by over 30%, reflecting resilience and sustained priority despite crises. Public awareness efforts included campaigns, consultations, knowledge products, and a Geoinformation Portal that improved data access and visibility. However, communication was episodic and limited in diversity, with little focus on vulnerable groups and modest international outreach, reducing global recognition of the Reserve's significance.

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

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

*Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation: Moderately Satisfactory*

*Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality: Moderately Unsatisfactory*

*Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards: Satisfactory*

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

*Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: Moderately Satisfactory*

# 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Conclusions

179. The project performed at a Moderately Satisfactory level, achieving most of its planned outputs and partially achieving the three project outcomes despite operating under exceptionally challenging conditions. Its strongest achievements were in establishing and consolidating the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve as a nationally recognized institution, strengthening ecological monitoring systems, and mobilizing significant co-financing well beyond initial commitments.

180. Although the Project Document referred exclusively to the REPC, the project's implementation trajectory resulted in the creation of the CREBR, which effectively encompassed and institutionalized the REPC's intended roles. This shift from a planned coordination unit to a national biosphere reserve constitutes one of the project's most significant achievements and a clear example of adaptive management leading to institutional up-scaling and over-delivery on expected outcomes.

181. Despite severe external shocks, including political transition, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war, the project delivered most of its planned outcomes and left a durable institutional and legal legacy. Its catalytic contribution has been to reframe the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone from a symbol of an incurable disaster into a globally recognized living laboratory of ecological resilience- Comparative weaknesses were apparent in systematic socio-economic monitoring, inclusivity in communication and reporting, and the timeliness of implementation, which was affected by external shocks beyond the project's control.

182. **Main achievements.** The project's principal achievements include: 1. The establishment of an operational hub for ecological research and monitoring. 2. The development of a comprehensive database and Geo-Information Portal for biodiversity and carbon data, supporting decision-making and transparency. 3. Significant progress in conservation planning, capacity building, and alignment with global conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD). 4. Delivery of public awareness campaigns and knowledge products that enhanced national visibility of the Reserve. 5. Exceeding the original co-financing target by more than 30%, demonstrating strong government commitment.

183. **Causal factors.** These achievements were brought about largely by strong country ownership, as evidenced by the 2016 Presidential Decree establishing the Reserve and by sustained government financial contributions. Effective adaptive management by UNEP and project partners was another critical success factor, with revised work plans, online coordination, and flexible budgeting ensuring continuity when field activities were suspended due to the pandemic or war.

184. **Innovation and scaling.** The project demonstrated innovative practice by integrating ecological monitoring with carbon assessment in a post-disaster exclusion zone, producing lessons of global relevance. Its use of digital platforms, particularly the Geoinformation Portal, provided a scalable model for transparent data-sharing that can be replicated in other contexts.

185. **Unintended positive and negative effects.** No major unintended negative effects were identified. However, some opportunity costs were observed: delays and crisis-induced suspensions limited the scope for sustained stakeholder engagement and reduced opportunities for international communication that could have elevated the global profile of

the Reserve. In future, UNEP should ensure that communication strategies and stakeholder engagement plans include contingency measures for conflict and crisis contexts.

186. **Relevance.** The project was highly relevant to Ukraine's biodiversity and climate priorities and directly supported obligations under the CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD. By addressing critical gaps in biodiversity monitoring, ecosystem protection, and institutional strengthening in a globally unique post-disaster landscape, the project made a strategically important contribution. Its alignment with SDGs 13 and 15 reinforced the global significance of its objectives.

187. **Coherence.** Internal coherence was strong, with well-integrated components and alignment with UNEP's Nature Action priorities and GEF focal areas. External coherence was initially advanced through transboundary collaboration with Belarus, but these linkages could not be maintained after 2022 due to geopolitical conflict.

188. **Effectiveness.** The project has partially achieved the three project outcomes. It legally established the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve, built institutional capacity, strengthened biodiversity and carbon monitoring, and produced knowledge of global relevance. Effectiveness was more limited where long-term continuity of data was needed, particularly in carbon monitoring and socio-economic tracking, and where transboundary cooperation was disrupted. Institutional weaknesses were highlighted by the lack of a UNEP-staffed Project Management Unit. Relying on rotating Focal Points resulted in a loss of institutional memory, diluted accountability, and delays, which impacted the quality of project management and supervision.

189. **Efficiency.** While implementation was delayed by external disruptions, the project demonstrated notable efficiency in in the use of resources that put the implementation of the project back on track after the disruptions and damage caused by the war and deliver most of the planned outputs within the extended project period. It leveraged 30% more co-finance than originally planned, achieved conservation at a very low cost per hectare by global standards, and applied adaptive management to maintain progress.

190. **Sustainability.** The sustainability of the project is rated as 'moderately likely'. The main features that support the sustainability of the benefits brought by the project are the strong institutional and legal frameworks through the CREBR and the Research and Environmental Protection Center, reinforced by government ownership and international visibility. These provide a solid basis for sustainability, though external risks, particularly conflict and uncertainty over long-term financing, could undermine the durability of results.

191. **Cross-cutting issues**. The project contributed significantly to capacity building within national institutions and research centres, enhancing long-term scientific and technical skills. Gender equality and social inclusion were addressed but not systematically. Women participated in training and institutional roles, yet the absence of a Gender Action Plan and limited engagement of youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups constrained inclusivity. Safeguards were applied effectively, and the project demonstrated adaptive, conflict-sensitive management under highly adverse conditions.

192. The project's achievements contribute directly to UNEP's biodiversity and ecosystem resilience portfolio, while also adding lessons to global discourse on managing ecosystems in post-disaster and conflict-affected areas. Its integrated approach to biodiversity and carbon monitoring aligns with and strengthens national commitments to the CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC. The Chernobyl Reserve now stands as both a national and global reference point for ecological resilience, climate mitigation, and protected area management under extreme conditions.

193. Despite operating under extraordinary constraints, the project achieved most of its planned outputs, partially achieved its outcomes, exceeded co-financing targets, and delivered a globally unique model for post-disaster conservation and climate management. Its most enduring contribution is the catalytic reframing of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone into a biosphere reserve and international research hub, adding lasting value to the GEF portfolio and to global environmental knowledge.

194. The table below provides a summary of the ratings and findings discussed in Chapter 4. Overall, the project demonstrates a performance rating of Moderately Satisfactory, with particularly strong results in strategic relevance, efficiency, country ownership, and ecological monitoring, and moderate weaknesses in timeliness, socio-economic monitoring, and gender/inclusivity plans, reporting and communication.

**Responses to Key Strategic Questions**

**Question 1:** In what ways, and to what extent, were the recommendations from the Mid Term Review actioned upon? To what extent did project implementation incorporate lessons learned from previous interventions?

195. The MTR provided targeted recommendations to strengthen monitoring systems, socio-economic assessments, safeguard integration, and stakeholder participation. Most of these recommendations were partially or fully implemented, demonstrating adaptive project management and responsiveness to evaluation findings. Following the MTR, biodiversity monitoring protocols were refined to improve data quality and alignment with GEF-5 focal area tracking tools. The project also enhanced safeguard implementation—particularly on fire management and radiation safety—and integrated socio-economic dimensions into subsequent monitoring activities, although the latter was later constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 war. Institutionally, the MTR prompted a stronger emphasis on knowledge management and communications, resulting in improved reporting mechanisms and wider dissemination of scientific outputs through the Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR). The project's adaptive responses—such as remote monitoring, desk-based analysis, and data digitization—also reflected incorporation of lessons from other UNEP/GEF interventions operating in fragile or post-disaster environments. These included the emphasis on establishing nationally owned institutional frameworks and embedding monitoring capacity within existing government structures to ensure sustainability. Overall, the project demonstrated a moderately high degree of responsiveness to MTR recommendations and to lessons learned from similar biodiversity and climate resilience initiatives. While certain actions (e.g., systematic gender mainstreaming, full socio-economic monitoring) were only partially achieved due to contextual limitations, the project's iterative learning and adaptive management significantly improved implementation quality and contributed to institutional resilience under crisis conditions.

**Question 2:** What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes have affected the project's performance?

196. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted field operations, stakeholder consultations, and institutional coordination in 2020–2021. However, the project demonstrated strong adaptive capacity by adjusting its management and implementation modalities to sustain progress. The main adaptations included: (i) transitioning from field-based to desk-based monitoring and research activities; (ii) expanding the use of remote sensing, digital data management, and virtual collaboration platforms; (iii) adopting flexible workplans and budget reallocations; and (iv) conducting online training sessions, technical meetings, and Steering Committee reviews to ensure continuity in decision-making.

These adaptive measures mitigated major operational disruptions and allowed the project to maintain momentum in implementing critical activities such as biodiversity monitoring, data processing, and institutional strengthening. Remote working modalities also facilitated coordination among UNEP, the MENR, and the SAUEZM. Furthermore, the transition to virtual modes of communication reduced travel-related emissions, contributing modestly to a lower project carbon footprint. Nonetheless, the pandemic's restrictions limited some field verification, delayed socio-economic data collection, and constrained engagement with local communities and marginalized groups. These limitations modestly affected inclusiveness and the comprehensiveness of on-the-ground validation but did not substantially undermine the achievement of core institutional and technical outputs. Overall, the project's adaptive management under COVID-19 demonstrated resilience and effectiveness, balancing health-related restrictions with continuity of delivery.

**Table 18: Summary of project findings and ratings[22]**

| Criterion | Summary Assessment | Rating |
|---|---|---|
| **Strategic Relevance** | Strong alignment with UNEP's MTS, GEF focal areas, and Ukraine's biodiversity/climate priorities. High relevance to CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD; coherence with SDGs 13 & 15. Complementarity partly reduced by war-related disruption to Belarus cooperation. | HS |
| 1. Alignment to UNEP MTS, POW and Strategic Priorities | Fully consistent with UNEP Nature Action, ecosystems, and resilience frameworks. | HS |
| 2. Alignment to UNEP Donor/GEF/Partner strategic priorities | Strongly aligned with GEF-5 biodiversity, climate, and land degradation objectives. | HS |
| 3. Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities | Addressed key international and national frameworks; underpinned by 2016 Presidential Decree on CREBR. | HS |
| 4. Complementarity with existing interventions/ Coherence | The project demonstrated a high degree of complementarity and coherence with existing national and international initiatives related to biodiversity conservation, land management, and post-disaster recovery. | HS |
| **Quality of Project Design** | Robust technical and institutional design but insufficient gender/social analysis and weak baseline data. | S |
| **Nature of External Context** | Severely constrained by war, occupation of the ChEZ, COVID-19, and political transition. | HU |
| **Effectiveness** | Most outcomes achieved or largely achieved. CREBR established, monitoring advanced, co-finance exceeded. Shortfalls in transboundary cooperation, socio-economic monitoring, and continuity of carbon data. | MS |
| 1. Availability of outputs | Nearly all core outputs delivered; monitoring/data systems disrupted by conflict. | MS |
| 2. Achievement of project outcomes | Key outcomes (legal designation, institutional frameworks) achieved; socio-economic and inclusivity aspects under-realized. | MS |
| 3. Likelihood of impact (use 'likely' scale) | Transformative potential, but contingent on security and financing. | ML |
| **Financial Management** | Financial rules followed; co-finance exceeded by 30%. Weaknesses in tracking/reporting consistency. | S |

[22] 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 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures | Met standards. | HS |
| 2. Completeness of project financial information | Core expenditure data were regularly reported through PIRs and financial statements, ensuring transparency and compliance with UNEP procedures. However, co-financing documentation was inconsistently consolidated, with variations across reporting years that limited full verification of contributions. Although UNEP's financial systems (IMIS and later UMOJA) supported accountability, gaps in co-finance reporting and partner expenditure records reduced traceability. Overall, financial information was adequate to support evaluation findings but would benefit from greater consistency and integration across funding sources | MS |
| **Efficiency** | The project had extensions that were more than 1 year long without a change in the results framework (scope of work). | MU |
| **Monitoring and Reporting** | PIRs and monitoring generally timely and useful; gaps in socio-economic/gender-disaggregated data. | S |
| 1. Monitoring of project implementation | Monitoring of project implementation was systematic and largely effective, adhering to UNEP and GEF requirements. A comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework guided implementation, including annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs), periodic progress reports, and a Mid-Term Review (MTR) that informed adaptive management and corrective actions | S |
| 2. Project reporting | Regular, but inconsistent detail on gender/social aspects. | S |
| **Sustainability** | Strong institutional/legal foundations (CREBR, REPC) and government co-finance; external risks remain. | ML |
| 1. Socio-political sustainability | Government commitment remains high, but war context fragile. | ML |
| 2. Financial sustainability | Above-expected co-finance but long-term dedicated budgets uncertain. | ML |
| 3. Institutional sustainability | CREBR and REPC established with legal mandate. | L |
| **Factors Affecting Performance** | Implementation slowed by weak PMU structure, loss of institutional memory, and conflict shocks. | S |
| 1. Quality of project management and supervision | UNEP oversight constrained by absence of in-country PMU. | S |
| *2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:* | Technical support strong; delays from limited country presence. | S |
| *2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:* | National agencies showed commitment but limited authority/capacity. | S |
| 2. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation | Participatory intent but limited systematic inclusion of vulnerable groups. | MS |
| 3. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality | Gender-disaggregated data collected; no Gender Action Plan. Marginalized groups underrepresented. | MU |
| 4. Environmental and social safeguards | Safeguards applied effectively. | S |
| 5. Country ownership and driven-ness | Strong legal/government ownership, anchored by Presidential Decree. | HS |
| 6. Communication and public awareness | National outreach strong; limited sustained global profile. | MS |
| **Overall Project Performance Rating** | | MS |

## 5.2 Lessons learned

| | |
|---|---|
| **Lesson Learned #1:** | Post-disaster landscapes can be reframed as opportunities for biodiversity conservation and climate action. |
| **Context/comment:** | Areas long perceived as wastelands due to contamination can be legally designated, managed, and valued as biodiversity refuges and carbon sinks. This has global significance for countries managing toxic legacies, abandoned industrial zones, or disaster-affected territories. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs: 97,** 98 (Outcome 1 analysis and global significance of the ChEZ) | |

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|---|---|
| **Lesson Learned #2:** | Legal and institutional anchoring ensures durability of results |
| **Context/comment:** | The Presidential Decree establishing the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve and creation of the REPC provided a strong foundation for sustainability. Anchoring projects in government structures increases resilience against external shocks like political instability or conflict. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs:** 97, 99 (Project outcomes on CREBR establishment, REPC functioning, and institutional sustainability) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #3:** | A nationally-based UNEP Project Office or UNEP-staffed PMU is essential. |
| **Context/comment:** | Reliance on rotating Focal Points led to delays, diluted accountability, and loss of institutional memory. A UNEP-staffed PMU strengthens control, efficiency, and preserves knowledge, especially in fragile contexts. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs:** 150, 151 (Project management and supervision performance) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #4:** | Adaptive management is critical in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. |
| **Context/comment:** | Flexibility in work plans, remote monitoring, and online coordination enabled progress during COVID-19 and war. Projects in high-risk regions should embed contingency planning, remote backups, and flexible delivery models. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs:** 149 (Project management and supervision performance) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #5:** | Cross-cutting issues require structured integration from the outset. |
| **Context/comment:** | Although women participated, absence of a Gender Action Plan and systematic inclusion of marginalized groups limited impact. Projects should integrate gender-responsive design, disability inclusion, and LNOB principles into frameworks. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs**: 159 - 168 (Gender, social inclusion, and human rights considerations) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #6:** | Knowledge management multiplies catalytic value. |
| **Context/comment:** | Initiatives like the 'Chernobyl – Open Air Lab' and scientific outputs positioned Ukraine as a hub for ecological research. Knowledge platforms amplify replication, attract co-financing, and strengthen global demonstration value. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs: 175**, 176 (Communication and outreach assessment) 44–145 (Knowledge products, geoportal, and replication pathways | |

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| **Lesson Learned #7:** | Communication strategies must be systematic, inclusive, and globally oriented. |
| **Context/comment:** | Outreach was effective nationally but episodic and limited intentionality. Future strategies should ensure continuous engagement, inclusivity, and global promotion. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs: 175**, 176 (Communication and outreach assessment) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #8:** | Community and stakeholder engagement are vital for sustainability. |
| **Context/comment:** | Engagement in buffer zones was constrained by security, limiting adoption. Future projects should strengthen inclusive governance, ensure participation of marginalized groups, and act on socio-economic analysis. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs: 156, 167** (Stakeholder participation, local engagement, and inclusivity) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #9:** | Transboundary cooperation is fragile but essential. |
| **Context/comment:** | Collaboration with the Belarusian Polessky Reserve was halted by conflict, underscoring vulnerability. Ecosystem connectivity requires contingency planning and alternative modalities (virtual or multilateral). |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs**: 99 (Links with Polessky Nature Reserve and regional collaboration) | |

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| **Lesson Learned #10:** | Environmental recovery can support post-conflict rebuilding |
| **Context/comment:** | The Chernobyl case shows ecosystem protection, fire management, and biodiversity monitoring can aid recovery, strengthen resilience, and rebuild institutional trust. Integrating environment into recovery strategies enhances social cohesion. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs: 104** - 110 (Findings on resilience, post-conflict recovery, and integration of environmental management into national recovery) frameworks | |

## 5.3 Recommendations

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| **Recommendation #1:** | For future UNEP-GEF projects, strengthen in-country implementation capacity and institutional continuity through enhanced collaboration mechanisms between UNEP's Regional Office and national executing entities. This can include designating a national coordination focal point or embedded technical liaison within the executing agency to maintain institutional memory, improve communication flow, and ensure adaptive management during crises. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | Lack of a permanent UNEP presence led to delays, diluted accountability, and loss of institutional knowledge. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 150 |
| **Priority Level:** | Critical |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Project |
| **Responsibility:** | UNEP |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | Medium-term (applied in next project cycle) |

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| **Recommendation #2:** | Develop a phased and resource-sensitive communication and knowledge management strategy to maintain visibility and gradually position the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve as a model for post-disaster conservation. The strategy should be scalable and adaptable to available funding and evolving contextual conditions. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | Communication outputs were episodic, lacked diversity, and had limited international visibility. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 176 |
| **Priority Level:** | Important |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Partner |
| **Responsibility:** | CREBR |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | Medium term (12–24 months) |

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| **Recommendation #3** | Based on the availability of funds, develop and implement a post-conflict recovery and continuity plan for the Chernobyl Biosphere Reserve, including landmine clearance, infrastructure rehabilitation, and resumption of halted activities. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | The conflict has severely disrupted the functioning of the Biosphere Reserve, leading to damaged infrastructure, interrupted monitoring activities, and reduced institutional capacity. In the absence of a structured recovery and continuity plan, the sustainability of ecological and institutional outcomes achieved by the project is at risk, including the potential loss of long-term environmental data and management expertise |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 93, 103 |
| **Priority Level:** | Critical |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Partner |
| **Responsibility:** | Government of Ukraine, Biosphere Reserve Management, International Partners |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | 6–18 months post-conflict stabilization |

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| **Recommendation #4:** | Future UNEP-GEF projects operating in high-risk or fragile contexts should be designed and implemented in line with the GEF Framework for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, ensuring that risk-informed and resilience-based approaches are systematically integrated into project design and management. This includes the incorporation of conflict sensitivity, adaptive management mechanisms, flexible delivery modalities, and contingency planning to maintain operational continuity and safeguard results under crisis conditions. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | The project experienced severe disruptions due to overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which limited field activities, stakeholder participation, and data continuity. Although adaptive measures such as remote monitoring and flexible work plans were implemented, these were reactive rather than systematically embedded in the project design. Future UNEP-GEF projects operating in fragile or high-risk contexts require a more structured integration of risk-informed and resilience-based planning consistent with the GEF's Framework for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations. Embedding conflict sensitivity, contingency planning, and flexible delivery mechanisms from the outset would strengthen operational continuity, safeguard results, and enhance institutional resilience under crisis conditions. |

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| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 149, 150 (Effectiveness and Efficiency – adaptive management under crisis); 171 (Cross-cutting Issues – conflict-sensitive management). |
| **Priority Level:** | Critical |
| **Type of Recommendation** | UNEP wide |
| **Responsibility:** | UNEP Programme Management Officers, GEF Secretariat, Executing Agencies |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | Next GEF project cycle / project design stage |

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| **Recommendation #5:** | Integrate environmental recovery in the ChEZ into Ukraine's broader post-conflict reconstruction strategies by positioning the CREBR as a model for ecosystem restoration, monitoring, and resilience. This should include the rehabilitation of damaged research and monitoring infrastructure, reactivation of field-based biodiversity and carbon assessments, and the re-engagement of displaced scientific personnel. By embedding the Reserve's environmental management and monitoring functions into national recovery frameworks, Ukraine can demonstrate how nature-based restoration contributes to social stability, livelihood recovery, and long-term resilience in post-conflict settings. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | Post-conflict recovery efforts in Ukraine have largely prioritized infrastructure and humanitarian needs, with limited integration of environmental restoration and biodiversity conservation into national recovery planning. The war severely disrupted ecological monitoring, infrastructure, and institutional capacity within the ChEZ. Key research facilities, monitoring stations, and data repositories were damaged or rendered inaccessible, while many technical staff were displaced or reassigned. These disruptions have weakened the continuity of biodiversity and carbon stock assessments and reduced the ability of the CREBR to function as an integrated environmental management hub. The absence of a coordinated framework linking post-conflict reconstruction with ecological recovery risks further loss of institutional capacity and environmental degradation. Integrating CREBR's environmental recovery and monitoring functions into Ukraine's national post-conflict rebuilding strategy would ensure the rehabilitation of ecological infrastructure, support re-engagement of displaced experts, and strengthen the role of nature-based solutions in national resilience and recovery planning. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | **104** - 110 |
| **Priority Level:** | Critical |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Project |
| **Responsibility:** | UNEP Europe Office, Government of Ukraine, International Donors |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | Incorporated into recovery planning (2025–2027). |

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| **Recommendation #6:** | Safeguard and strengthen transboundary and international scientific partnerships related to the ChEZ by maintaining collaboration through virtual exchanges, joint data platforms, and multilateral research consortia. Building on pre-war cooperation with the Polessky Nature Reserve (Belarus) and international academic institutions, the project's successor phase should institutionalize online mechanisms for data sharing, ecosystem monitoring, and joint research on radiation ecology and biodiversity recovery. These mechanisms will ensure that ecological connectivity and knowledge exchange continue despite restricted cross-border access, sustaining scientific collaboration and reinforcing the ChEZ's role as a global research hub. |

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| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | The interruption of bilateral cooperation with Belarus has weakened opportunities for regional scientific exchange and joint ecosystem management across the transboundary landscape. The loss of these collaborations risks reducing data sharing, scientific innovation, and coordinated biodiversity monitoring. Transboundary scientific cooperation., particularly with the Belarusian Polessky Nature Reserve and other regional partners, was suspended following the war, disrupting ecological data exchange and coordinated conservation management across shared ecosystems. This has weakened landscape-level biodiversity monitoring and hindered comparative research essential for understanding transboundary ecological processes. Re-establishing these partnerships under current conditions requires innovative approaches that are not reliant on physical access or bilateral agreements. Developing structured virtual collaboration mechanisms and multilateral research networks will safeguard scientific continuity, preserve institutional relationships, and ensure the ChEZ remains integrated within broader regional and international conservation frameworks. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 109, 111, 134 |
| **Priority Level:** | Opportunity for improvement |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Partner |
| **Responsibility:** | UNEP, CREBR, international scientific networks |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | Medium-term / Post-conflict |

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| **Recommendation #7:** | Future projects in the ChEZ should embed a comprehensive social inclusion and gender equality framework that ensures equitable participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, and other marginalized groups in planning, monitoring, and benefit-sharing processes. This framework should include measurable indicators, gender-disaggregated data collection, and targeted capacity-building activities with local communities in the buffer zones of the Biosphere Reserve. Strengthening inclusive governance within the Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR) will enhance social legitimacy, improve local ownership, and contribute to more sustainable conservation outcomes. |
| **Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:** | The project lacked a structured approach to social inclusion and did not implement a Gender Action Plan. Participation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups was limited, reducing opportunities for equitable benefits, local ownership, and the social sustainability of results. |
| **Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs** | 159 - 168 |
| **Priority Level:** | Critical |
| **Type of Recommendation** | Project |
| **Responsibility:** | UNEP Europe Office; Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine; State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM) |
| **Proposed implementation time-frame:** | To be mainstreamed during project design and operationalized throughout the project implementation cycle for all future UNEP-GEF projects in Ukraine |

# ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

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

| Paragraph | Stakeholder comment | Evaluator(s) Response | UNEP Evaluation Office Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| Paragraph 4 and 8 | Clarify regarding gender. This was not included in the technical specifications. | While gender aspects were not included in the project's technical specifications, they were addressed in line with the TOR and GEF evaluation policies to ensure consistency with gender-responsive evaluation standards. | The Evaluation Office is in agreement with the response of the Evaluator.<br>The Evaluation Office is in agreement with the response of the Evaluator. |
| Paragraph 8, 16, and lesson learned 5 | A general remark: the gender issues are not so severe in Ukraine; women have always been active and engaged, occupying management positions (probably there is an issue that men occupy high-level positions). In times of conflict, women are even more engaged | The evaluation acknowledges that gender participation and representation in Ukraine are generally strong, with women historically active in public administration, academia, and environmental management, including in mid- and senior-level positions. During the conflict, women's engagement has further expanded, with many assuming leadership and operational roles in environmental institutions and local governance. However, the evaluation's gender analysis focuses not on the existence of gender inequality per se, but on the absence of formal mechanisms—such as a Gender Action Plan or gender-responsive indicators—within the project's design and monitoring framework. While women's participation was evident, the lack of systematic gender mainstreaming limited the project's ability to track, report, and strengthen equitable participation and benefit-sharing in a structured way, consistent with UNEP and GEF gender policy requirements. | |
| Paragraph 95 | The restrictions on tourism did not affect us at all. | The expression "travel bans" referred not to tourism but to the problems in gathering people from different places for the planned events/activities. | |
| | All relevance and alignment ratings are "HS," and national ownership is "HS." This shows the project was strongly positioned and well-integrated institutionally. Core outcomes delivered: CREBR and REPC legally established, co-financing exceeded by 30%, and monitoring systems (before the war) were operational. These are major, lasting achievements. Effective adaptive management under crisis: Despite COVID-19 and war, implementation continued. Maintaining progress in such a context reflects strong performance. UNEP and partner performance: UNEP supervision and national partner commitment were both rated "S." This indicates solid internal management which should merit a "Satisfactory" rating. Suggest considering changing to "S". | These aspects are fully recognized and commended in the evaluation findings, particularly the highly satisfactory (HS) ratings for relevance, coherence, and national ownership, as well as the satisfactory (S) performance of UNEP and executing partners.<br>However, the overall Moderately Satisfactory (MS) rating reflects the balance between strong achievements and significant contextual and structural limitations that affected the realization and sustainability of all outcomes. While the project delivered exceptional results in establishing CREBR and operationalizing its research and monitoring functions, external shocks (pandemic, conflict), institutional disruptions, and inclusivity gaps constrained the achievement of long-term impacts and social outcomes. Additionally, co-finance verification issues moderately reduced the evidence base for an "S" rating. In summary, the MS rating is maintained for holistic performance assessment, weighing both effectiveness and sustainability dimensions, while fully acknowledging the project's notable institutional, legal, and adaptive successes under unprecedented operational constraints. | The Evaluation Office is in agreement with the response of the Evaluator. Further, the overall rating is derived from weighted ratings and not a simple average. |

# ANNEX II. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Strategic Relevance | | | | |
| **Key question for Strategic Relevance: To what extent were the Project objectives relevant and suited to the priorities, policies and strategies of the implementing agencies, donors and target groups?** | | | | |
| i. | Alignment to the UNEP Medium term strategy (MTS), programme of Work (POW), and other strategic priorities | · Was the Project in line with UNEP's mandate and how?<br>· Is the Project responding to UNEP strategies and programme of work, and how (qualitative and quantitative contributions)? | · Degree of alignment with UNEP MTS and POW<br>Degree of alignment with UN Environment's Sub-programme 3, which emphasizes Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, as outlined in the 2018-2019 Programme of Work, | · UNEP publications (MTS, PoW)<br>· ProDoc<br>· PIR reports/progress reports<br>· Interviews with Task Manager (TM) )<br>· UNEP publications |
| ii. | Alignment to Donor Strategic Priorities (GEF) | - Was the Project responding to GEF Strategic priorities, and how (qualitative and quantitative contributions?) | - Degree of alignment with other GEF strategic policies | · ProDoc<br>· PIR reports/progress reports<br>· Interviews with TM, UNITAR Project Coordinator (PC)<br>· GEF publications |
| ii. | Relevance to Regional, Sub-Regional and national Environmental Priorities | - Was the Project responding to the stated environmental concerns and needs of the countries/sub- regions/regions? | - Degree of alignment with: National and (sub) regional plans, strategies, policies and agreements | · ProDoc<br>· PIR reports/progress reports<br>· Regional strategies and agreements<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews country National Coordinator (NC) and other Project partners<br>· Interviews with other stakeholders<br>· Interviews with government representatives |
| iv. | Complementarity with existing interventions | · To what extent did the Project, at design and/or mobilization phase, take account of ongoing and/or planned initiatives?<br>· To what extent did the Project team make efforts to ensure that the Project was complementary to other UNEP and UN interventions, and optimize any | · Degree of potential synergies identified<br>· Absence of duplication of efforts<br>· Potential duplications identified at design stage<br>· Degree of identified complementarities with other projects | · Pro Doc<br>· PIR reports/progress reports<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>· Interviews with government |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | synergies? | | representatives |
| B. Quality of Project Design | | | | |
| **Key question: How adequate was the Project design to achieve the Project Outputs, Outcomes and Objectives?** | | | | |
| | Relevance and logic of Project Objectives, activities, Outputs and Outcomes according Project Quality Design template (see annexes). | The Quality of Project Design is assessed using the template provided by the UNEP Office. | - Result of Overall Project Design Quality rating | · ProDoc, including the Project Review Committee review sheet<br>· Interviews |
| C. Nature of External Context | | | | |
| **Key question: To what extent does the project consider external factors which might have an effect on project implementation?** | | | | |
| | Aspects related to external operating context (considering the prevalence of conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval). | - Has the Project faced an unusually challenging operational environment that negatively affected project performance, such as:<br>* Conflicts or security issues?<br>* Government instability?<br>* Risks of natural disasters? | - Number of Project delays / extensions, ProDoc / log frame revisions and budget revisions | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| D. Effectiveness | | | | |
| **Key question: To what extent did the projects achieve the expected Outcomes and Outputs?** | | | | |
| i. | Availability of Outputs | · Were Outputs and milestones delivered on time and as planned? If not, what were the reasons of delay/changes?<br>· What is the quality of these Outputs?<br>· To what extent do the Outputs contribute to their planned Outcomes?<br>· How useful, relevant and appropriate did beneficiaries find the Outputs produced by the Project?<br>· Which factors contributed to the achievement of Outputs (and/or what were the reasons Outputs were not produced)? | · Concrete examples of Outputs being used by end users<br>· Approved Project extensions/budget revisions<br>· Involvement of stakeholders in the production of Outputs | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| ii. | Achievement of direct | · What direct Outcomes (as per the | · Actual use of the enhanced fire | · ProDoc |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Outcomes | combined reconstructed TOC) have been achieved?<br>- Are these Outcomes a result of Project intervention?<br>- Would these have been achieved without the direct involvement of UNEP? Why? | monitoring system<br>- Quality and number of assessments of the status and pattern of rehabilitation processes of forest and appropriate sustainable habitat management measures<br>-Quality and number of appropriate sustainable habitat management measures for the rehabilitation of Forests, Wetlands and Marshlands contributing to the conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks and meeting LULUCF targets<br>-Number of scientific publications and technical report available for decision markers<br>-Level of dissemination of the Project's lessons learned | - Project progress reports<br>- PIR reports<br>- Final report<br>- Interviews with TM and PC<br>- Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| iii. | Likelihood of Impact | - What is the likelihood of expected positive impacts to be realized?<br>- To what extent have any possible negative effects been identified in the Project as risks?<br>- How successful was the Project in playing a catalytic role and/or promoting the scaling up or replication of Project results?<br>- Is the Project likely to contribute to the long-lasting changes represented by the Sustainable Development Goals, and/or the intermediate-level results reflected in UNEP's MTS, POW and national strategic priorities of participating countries? | - Pending / already approved new Project proposal documents<br>- Development of budget lines committed to finance the maintenance of the PA of ChEZ | - Likelihood of Impact Assessment<br>- Reconstructed ToC at Design and at Evaluation<br>- ProDoc<br>- Project progress reports<br>- PIR reports<br>- Financial reports<br>- Final report<br>- Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>- |
| E. Financial Management | | | | |
| **Key question: How conducive was the financial management for the achievement of project Outputs and Outcomes?** | | | | |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| i | Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures | - Was the Project implemented in compliance with UN financial management standards and procedures? | · Approval of contracting documents, Project reports and financial reporting<br>· Alignment of expenditures during Project implementation with approved budget | · Project budget<br>· Financial reports, audit reports<br>· Interview with UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO)<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with Project partners that received financial support |
| ii | Completeness of financial information | - Was the Projects' key financial information complete?<br>· What was the actual expenditure across the life of the Project?<br>· To what extent were the projects' expenditures in line with the corresponding approved budget?<br>· What changes, if any, have been made to the projects' budget and why? | - Approval of contracting documents, Project reports and financial reporting<br>- Alignment of expenditures during Project implementation with approved budget | · Project budget<br>· Financial reports, audit reports<br>· Interview with UNEP FMO<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with Project partners that received financial support |
| iii | Communication between financial and Project management staff | - To what extent did the quality of communication between Project management and financial management staff affect project efficiency? | · Approval of contracting documents, Project reports and financial reporting<br>· Alignment of expenditures during Project implementation with approved budget | · Project budget<br>· Financial reports, audit reports<br>· Interview with UNEP FMO Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with Project partners that received financial support |
| F. Efficiency | | | | |
| **Key question: To what extent and how were cost-effectiveness and timeliness considered during Project implementation? How did these factors affect Project performance?** | | | | |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Cost-effectiveness and timeliness of Project execution | · Did the Project make use of / build upon pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, etc. to increase Project efficiency? How?<br>· What factors have caused delays (if any) and have affected Project execution, costs and effectiveness? How?<br>· Were events leading to completion of activities sequenced efficiently?<br>· What was the role of the Project's? governance structure and management approach on its efficiency? management approach on its efficiency? | · Number of Project extensions, budget adjustments, revisions<br>· Number of measures to mitigate delays<br>· Timeliness of report submission | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· Steering Committee meetings<br>· PIR reports<br>· Financial reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| G. Monitoring and Reporting | | | | |
| **Key question: How were monitoring, evaluation and reporting used to support, adapt and improve Project implementation?** | | | | |
| i. | Monitoring design and budgeting | · To what extent were the monitoring plans designed to track progress against SMART indicators?<br>· To what extent were the allocated funds adequate for monitoring purposes, and for the mid-term and terminal evaluations? | · Quality of monitoring plan<br>· Number and quality of monitoring documents<br>· Existence and quality of mid-term review reports | · ProDoc<br>· Mid-term review reports<br>· Project budget<br>· PIR reports<br>· Financial reports<br>· Monitoring reports<br>· Interviews |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ii. | Monitoring of Project implementation | · To what extent were the monitoring plans operational?<br>· To what extent did the monitoring system facilitate the timely tracking of results and progress towards Project Objectives?<br>· To what extent was the information, generated by the monitoring system, used to adapt and improve Project execution, achievement of Outcomes and ensure sustainability? | · Number and quality of monitoring documents<br>· Existence and quality of mid-term review report and management response | · Mid-term review report<br>· Project budget<br>· PIR reports<br>· Financial reports<br>· Monitoring reports<br>· Interviews |
| iii. | Project reporting | · Have the 6-monthly status reports been delivered in a timely manner?<br>· To what extent have other UNEP and donor reporting requirements been fulfilled? | · Number and quality of reports delivered in line with reporting requirements<br>· Number and quality of approved reports | · ProDoc<br>· Mid-term review reports<br>· Project budget<br>· PIR reports<br>· Financial reports<br>· Monitoring reports |
| | H. Sustainability | | | |
| **Key question: How do socio-political, financial and institutional factors affect the probability of Project Outcomes being maintained and developed after the Projects end?** | | | | |
| i. | Socio-political sustainability | · What is the level of ownership, interest and commitment among governments and among other main stakeholders?<br>· What is the likelihood that the Project achievements will be taken forward at the national level, by the government (including allocation of budgets) and by the main stakeholders?<br>· What is the likelihood that capacity development efforts continue?<br>· Has increased capacity in the country been sustained until today? | - Number of follow-up initiatives and planning by the national government (including designated budgets) | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· Steering Committee meetings<br>· PIR reports<br>· Financial reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ii. | Financial sustainability | · To what extent are Project Outcomes dependent on future funding for the benefits they bring to be sustained?<br>· Is there any government funding secured to sustain the use of PRTRs or fund future use of the PRTRs designed by the Project?<br>· What efforts are being made to secure funding for future complementary activities? | · Number of follow-up initiatives<br>· Amount of new funding available | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>· Interviews/surveys with government representatives |
| iii. | Institutional sustainability | - To what extent were institutional frameworks, policies, and legal and accountability frameworks in place | - Number and quality of policies and legal and accountability frameworks | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports |
| | | and robust enough to support the sustainability of Project Outcomes? | - Number of follow-up activities initiated by governments | · Final report<br>· Interviews with government representatives and other stakeholders |
| | I. Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance | | | |
| **Key question: How and to what extent did certain factors – preparation and readiness, quality of Project management and supervision, stakeholder participation and cooperation, responsiveness to human rights and gender, and environmental and social safeguards - affect Project performance?** | | | | |
| i. | Preparation and Readiness | · Were appropriate measures taken to either address weaknesses in the Project design or respond to changes that took place between Project approval, securing of the funds and Project mobilisation? Which measures?<br>· What was the nature and quality of engagement with stakeholder groups by the Project team during Project preparation?<br>-Were initial staffing and financing arrangements sufficient to drive implementation? | · Number and quality of appropriate measures taken (if necessary)<br>· Quality of partner agreements | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Partner agreements<br>· Interviews with TM and PM<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ii. | Quality of Project Management and Supervision | - Was Project management by UNEP pro-active and responding timely and adequality to any issues encountered within the Project?<br>· What was the nature of communication and collaboration with stakeholders?<br>· What was the nature of communication and collaboration with UNEP staff and the UNITAR Project management staff?<br>· How were risks managed? Did this require use of problem-solving and/or Project adaptation? How? | - Number of issues complicating sound Project implementation solved timely (as opposed to unsolved issues)<br>- (Amount of) evidence of adaptive management being applied | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>· Interviews with government representatives<br>· Interviews with other stakeholders |
| iii. | Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation | · Were all important Project stakeholders properly identified at Project design and duly involved in Project implementation?<br>· What consultation and communication mechanisms were put in place to ensure an active stakeholder engagement and ownership? Were these effective?<br>· What was the level of support provided to maximise collaboration and coherence between stakeholders?<br>· What measures were taken to ensure inclusion and participation of all differentiated groups, including gender and vulnerable groups? | · Number of stakeholders identified and actively involved in Project implementation<br>· % of stakeholders satisfied with the stakeholder participation | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| iv. | Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity | - To what extent did the Project intervention adhere to UNEPs policy and strategy for gender and human rights?<br>- To what extent did Project implementation and monitoring take into consideration: | - Number of gender and human rights stakeholders identified and actively involved in Project implementation | - UN policies and strategies on gender and human rights:<br>* UN Common Understanding on the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | * Possible inequalities (especially gender-related)<br>* Specific vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups (especially women, youth, children) to environmental degradation or disasters<br>* The role of disadvantaged groups (especially gender-related) in mitigating or adapting to environmental changes and engaging in environmental protection and rehabilitation | - Number of stakeholders satisfied with the stakeholder participation realized<br>- Evidence that sensitivity in gender has been observed in Project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation activities, including gender distribution in participation in Project activities and events | * UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People<br>* UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment<br>- ProDoc<br>- Project progress reports<br>- Steering Committee meeting minutes and/or Workshop reports<br>- PIR reports<br>- Final report<br>- Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |
| v | Environmental and Social Safeguards | - To what extent were UNEP's requirements, with respect to environmental and social safeguards, met (through the process of environmental and social screening at Project approval stage, risk assessment and management) of potential environmental and social risks and impacts associated with Project and programme activities?<br>- To what extent were the following activities carried out:<br>* Review of risk ratings on a regular basis;<br>* Monitoring of Project implementation for possible safeguard issues;<br>* Providing responses to safeguard issues;<br>- To what extent did the Project management minimise UNEP's environmental footprint? What measures, if any, where taken? | - Frequency of review of risk ratings<br>- Number of monitoring reports that include monitoring of safeguard issues<br>- Evidence of adequate responses to safeguard issues | - ProDoc<br>- Project progress reports<br>- PIR reports<br>- Final report<br>- Interviews with TM and PC<br>- Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders |

| No | Evaluation Criteria | Sub Questions | Indicators / Means of verification | Data Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| vi. | Country Ownership and Driven-ness | · To what extent was the government / public sector qualitatively involved with the Project? (in respect to the need to embed the Outputs and Outcomes of Project work in their respective institutions)<br>· How did this contribute to embed changes in their respective institutions and offices?<br>· To what extent do these representatives/agencies consider the needs or interest of all gendered and marginalised groups? | · Number of Project Outputs and Outcomes entrenched in the national government and other stakeholders<br>· Degree to which Project results have been adopted and championed nationally and globally. | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with TM and PC<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>· Interviews/surveys with other stakeholders<br>· Interviews/surveys with government representatives |
| vi. | Communication and Public Awareness | · How were learning and experience sharing communicated between Project partners and interested groups?<br>· Which public awareness activities were undertaken during Project implementation?<br>· To what extent did they influence attitudes or shape behaviour among wider communities and civil society at large? How?<br>· To what extent were existing communication channels and networks used effectively, including meeting the differentiated needs of gendered or marginalized groups? | · Operative communication platforms<br>· Discussion boards<br>· Degree on awareness of stakeholders on PA of the ChEZ<br>-Degree on awareness of stakeholders on the biodiversity and carbon stock significance in the ChEZ | · ProDoc<br>· Project progress reports<br>· PIR reports<br>· Final report<br>· Interviews with NC and representatives of other national stakeholders<br>· Interviews with other stakeholders<br>· -Awareness raising materials developed within the Project |

# **ANNEX III.** STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED DURING THE EVALUATION

**Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation** *[No names should be included]*

| Organization | Position | Role in the Project | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve | First Deputy Director | Project implementation, institutional management | M |
| | Deputy Director | Project implementation, institutional management | M |
| | Chief of Department of International Cooperation | International cooperation, reporting | M |
| | Chief of Scientific Department (2018–2025); Chief of Dept of Radioecological Monitoring, Ecocentre (2015–2018) | Scientific monitoring, biodiversity data | M |
| | Senior Research Fellow (Research Fellow/Junior Research Fellow during project term) | Research, biodiversity monitoring | F |
| National University of Life and Environmental Sciences / REEFMC | Professor of Forestry; Head of REEFMC | Fire monitoring, technical expert | M |
| State Agency for Chornobyl Exclusion Zone Management | Head of Agency (Acting) | Government oversight | M |
| | Head of Dept. for Exclusion Zone Barrier Function, Nature Reserve Management, Radiation Safety, Occupational Safety and Civil Protection | Barrier function, safety, reserve management | M |
| Ivankiv Regional / Territorial Community Council | Former Head | Local governance, stakeholder engagement | M |
| Chornobyl Center for Nuclear Safety, Radioactive Waste & Radioecology | Director | Technical expertise, scientific input | M |
| Research Institute of Agricultural Radiology, NULES | Director; Former Research Fellow | Agricultural and radiological monitoring | M |
| Vyshgorod District State Administration / Prybirsk Settlement | Deputy Head; Ex-Mayor of Prybirsk | Local governance, stakeholder perspective | F |
| Pripyat.com NGO | Chair/Founder | Civil society engagement, outreach | M |
| National Univ. of Kyiv Botanical Garden | Deputy Director | Biodiversity conservation, scientific partner | M |
| National Ecological Center of Ukraine (NGO) | Head of the Review Committee | NGO engagement, policy input | M |
| Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine | Deputy Director, Strategic Environmental Policy & International Cooperation (~2018–2021); GEF Operational Focal Point (~2018–2021) | Government liaison, co-financing | M |
| Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine | GEF Operational Focal Point in Ukraine | Government liaison, co-financing | M |
| UNEP | Task Manager | UNEP project management | M |
| | Senior Programme Officer & Former Task Manager | UNEP project management | F |
| | International Expert | Thematic expertise, cross-cutting issues | F |
| | Portfolio Manager | Portfolio oversight | M |
| | Independent Consultant | Technical Advisor | M |
| | Finance Officer | Financial management | M |
| | Regional Coordinator (ROE) & Project Manager | Regional coordination and oversight | M |

# **ANNEX IV.** KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

## A Project Planning and Reporting Documents

- Project Identification Form (PIF) and Project Document (ProDoc) – GEF ID 4634
- CEO Endorsement Document (2015)
- UNEP Project Supervision Reports (PIRs 2017–2024)
- Mid-Term Review (MTR) Report (2019)
- Annual Work Plans and Budgets (2016–2024)

## B. Project Outputs – Overall

- Presidential Decree establishing the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (2016)
- Consolidated Final Project Report
- Project Knowledge Products uploaded to the GEF IW:LEARN platform and UNEP portals
- Legal documents and regulatory acts for establishment of CREBR
- Management Plan for CREBR (draft, 2020; updated, 2022)

- Institutional capacity-building reports of the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM)
- Baseline Biodiversity Assessment Reports (2017–2021)
- Scientific publications and technical guidelines on biodiversity monitoring in the ChEZ

- Data sets from camera traps, aerial surveys, and species inventories
- Methodological Guidelines on Carbon Stock Assessment in Post-Disaster Landscapes (2018, 2020)
- Reports on Forest and Wetland Carbon Sequestration in the ChEZ (2019–2021)
- Pilot results applying IPCC Good Practice Guidance for LULUCF in ChEZ context

- "Chernobyl: Open Air Laboratory" Concept Note and Communication Materials
- Project newsletters, press releases, and media briefs (2017–2022)
- Final Knowledge Management Strategy (2021)

## C. Previous Evaluations

- Mid-Term Review of the Project (2019)
- UNEP Evaluation Office Strategic Evaluation of Biodiversity and Land Degradation Portfolio (relevant sections, 2020)

## D. Reference Documents

- Ukraine's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP, 2015)
- Ukraine's National Communications to the UNFCCC (3rd and 4th)
- GEF Policies on Gender, Safeguards, and Knowledge Management
- UNEP Evaluation Policy and GEF Evaluation Office Guidelines

# **ANNEX V.** BRIEF CV OF THE EVALUATORS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name** | Sergii Myrnyi |
| **Profession** | Environmentalist |
| **Nationality** | Ukraine |
| **Country experience** | • Europe: Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary<br>• Asia: Japan |
| **Education** | • MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy (Manchester/Central-European Universities' Joint Program)<br>MSc in Physical Chemistry (Kharkiv State [now Karazin National] University). |

Sergii MYRNYI (Mirnyi) specializes in multidisciplinary comparative research of Chernobyl and contemporary disasters and is an expert in comprehensive prevention and mitigation of their aftermath. In the first months after the Chernobyl explosion he was a commander of radiation reconnaissance platoon in the Chernobyl zone and was cited "for courage and heroism during the mitigation of the aftermath of the accident at the Chernobyl NPP" by the Commanding General of Kyiv Military Area. During last decades he was involved in a series of projects in the Chernobyl zone and has intimate knowledge of the zone and adjacent region. He is currently a research fellow at the Ukrainian National Museum "Chornobyl" in Kyiv.

Selected assignments and experiences

- Project "Addressing the consequences of military activities and occupation of the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone (ChEZ) by Russian invading troops in 2022" (2023-2024), financed by the Norwegian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (DSA). The Beneficiary of the project is the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM), and the End User (Recipient) is the State Specialized Enterprise (SSE) "Ecocentre", Chornobyl.
- Project "Chornobyl Exclusion Zone as an area of humanitarian demining" (2025) on request of the "Ukrainian Demining Services".

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name** | Leandro Fernandez |
| **Profession** | Biologist |
| **Nationality** | Argentina |
| **Country experience** | • Europe: Ukraine, Moldova<br>• Asia: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Island Republic<br>• América: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Guatemala, Panamá, México, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, The Bahamas<br>• Africa: Zambia, Guinea Equatorial, Sao Tome and Principe, Ethiopia, Mozambique |
| **Education** | • MSc in Sustainable Energy. Institute of Technology of Buenos Aires<br>• Bachelor in Biology Sciences. La Plata University |

Leandro Fernandez is an accomplished International Consultant with over 20 years of experience in biodiversity conservation, climate change, sustainable finance, and environmental management, working with UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, IADB, World Bank, and other multilateral agencies. Proven track record in leading Terminal, Mid-term, and Interim Evaluations of GEF- and GCF-funded projects across Africa, Asia, Central Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Recognized expert in environmental and social safeguards (SESP, ESMF, GRM, FPIC), applying UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, IADB, and World Bank standards to ensure compliance, risk management, gender equality, and social inclusion. Experienced in designing monitoring systems, conducting participatory consultations, and providing evidence-based recommendations to strengthen adaptive management, institutional capacity, and sustainability.

# **ANNEX VI.** GEF PORTAL INPUTS

The following table contains text to be uploaded to the GEF Portal. **It will be drawn from the Evaluation 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-7[23], these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided[24]). |
| ***Response:*** *(Might be drawn from Monitoring and Reporting section)*<br>i) Performance against GEF's Core Indicator Targets<br>Protected Areas: The project legally established the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (CREBR), covering 226,270 ha of forests, wetlands, and abandoned agricultural land, thus significantly exceeding initial conservation commitments.<br>Carbon Benefits: Enhanced carbon sequestration achieved through natural regeneration of forests and wetlands. Carbon monitoring methodologies were developed and piloted, providing credible baseline and trend data for future reporting.<br>Land Degradation: The project contributed to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) by restoring ecological functions in degraded lands within the ChEZ.<br>Global Environmental Benefits: The area contributes both as a biodiversity refuge (large mammals, rare birds, amphibians) and as a globally recognized carbon sink. |
| ***Question:*** What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program as evolved from the time of the MTR? *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)* |
| **Response:** (Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)<br>ii) Engagement of Stakeholders<br>Government: Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) and State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM) played central roles in policy, governance, and implementation.<br>Scientific Institutions: Universities and academies contributed technical expertise, particularly in biodiversity and carbon monitoring.<br>Civil Society: NGOs were consulted during design and implementation, though engagement was reduced during the war.<br>Local Communities: Socio-economic surveys were conducted in adjacent settlements, though sustained engagement was limited by restricted access and security constraints. Socio-economic surveys in adjacent settlements captured initial feedback but did not evolve into sustained participatory mechanisms. Engagement was moderately strong but lacked inclusivity.<br>International Partners: UNEP and scientific consortia ensured global standards in monitoring and knowledge-sharing.<br>Overall, stakeholder engagement was high at institutional and scientific levels, but weaker in terms of inclusivity for local and marginalized groups. |
| ***Question:*** What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas? *(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including* |

[23] 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)

[24] This is not applicable for Enabling Activities

| |
|---|
| *gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)* |
| ***Response:*** *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)*<br>The project lacked a formal Gender Action Plan, and gender mainstreaming was partial. Some gender-disaggregated data were collected in surveys and trainings, and women participated in CREBR and REPC staffing. However, their presence in leadership and decision-making roles remained limited, particularly after conflict-related displacement. Future projects should adopt a structured Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy. |
| ***Question:*** What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. *(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)*. |
| ***Response:*** *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)*<br>Safeguard implementation was satisfactory, aligned with UNEP's Environmental, Social, and Human Rights Standards. Measures addressing radiological safety, wildfire management, and conflict-related risks were implemented effectively. However, integration of human rights and social inclusion into the safeguards framework was limited. Adaptive management ensured compliance under evolving conditions, with no major violations reported. |
| ***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:*** *(Might be drawn from Factors Affecting Performance section)*<br>Knowledge management was a major strength. The REPC was established as a national ecological data hub and launched the "Chernobyl – Open Air Lab," boosting global visibility of the ChEZ. Outputs included scientific publications, GIS datasets, and communication materials disseminated nationally and internationally. COVID-19 and conflict limited exchanges and halted cooperation with Belarus, but adaptive virtual mechanisms maintained outreach. |
| **Question:** *What are the main findings of the evaluation?* |
| **Response:**<br>The evaluation found the project largely successful in achieving its expected results, with strong relevance, institutionalization, and cost-efficiency. Key achievements included the legal establishment of CREBR, development of global monitoring methodologies, and operational functions of the REPC. The project enhanced Ukraine's environmental governance and redefined Chernobyl as a site of resilience, research, and biodiversity conservation. |

# **ANNEX VII.** QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE EVALUATION REPORT

**Evaluand Title:** Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project : "Conserving, Enhancing and Managing Carbon Stocks and Biodiversity in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone" (GEF ID 4634) (2015-2024)

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

| Report Quality Criteria | UNEP Evaluation Office Comments | Final Report Rating |
|---|---|---|
| **Section A: Executive Summary** | Assessment | |
| **1.** Does the ***Executive Summary*** act as a concise, accurate standalone section, especially to inform decision-making? Consider how clearly and concisely the report presents:<br>• a clear summary of the evaluation object<br>• evaluation objectives, scope and methodology<br>• the overall project evaluation rating<br>• a summary of main evaluation findings, including key features of performance (strengths and weaknesses)<br>• summary responses to key strategic evaluation questions<br>• summary of main conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations | Coverage/omissions:<br>All required elements are addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The executive summary presents a concise summary of the evaluation report and includes a concise description of the evaluand, evaluation objectives, scope, a summary of the findings, a summary response to the strategic questions, a summary of the recommendations, lessons learned and the overall rating. | 6 |
| **Section B: The Project** | Assessment | |
| **2.** Does the report clearly describe the ***key parameters, scale and complexity of the evaluand***? Consider how well the report presents:<br>• an overview of the main issue that the project is trying to address<br>• timeline, including dates of project approval, duration and number of phases (where appropriate)<br>• geographic coverage (regions/countries)<br>• total secured budget and project financing, including a table with funding sources<br>• implementing and funding partners<br>• institutional context (i.e. UNEP sub-programme, Division, Branch etc.)<br>• implementation structure with diagram<br>• UNEP results frameworks to which it contributes (e.g. PoW Direct Outcome)<br>• summary of results framework as stated in the ProDoc (or as officially revised)<br>• stakeholder groups organised according to relevant common characteristics<br>• whether the project has been evaluated in the past (e.g. mid-term, by an external agency, etc.)<br>• substantive or significant changes in design during implementation | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements adequately addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report presents a comprehensive description of the key dimensions of the evaluand as expected. | 6 |
| **Section C: Evaluation Methods and Theory of Change** | Assessment | |

| **Report Quality Criteria** | **UNEP Evaluation Office Comments** | **Final Report Rating** |
|---|---|---|
| **3.** Does the report present a clear, comprehensive and adequate description of the ***evaluation methodology***? Consider how well it presents the following elements, and their adequacy based on the scope of the evaluation:<br>• statement of the purpose of the evaluation and the key intended audience for the evaluation findings<br>• data collection methods and information sources<br>• justification for methods used (e.g. electronic/face-to-face interviews, qualitative/quantitative analysis)<br>• criteria and sampling strategies used to select stakeholders for consultations, and for sites/countries visited.<br>• number and types of respondents *(including in a table broken down by gender)*<br>• strategies used to increase stakeholder engagement and response rate.<br>• methods used to include the voices/experiences of different and potentially excluded groups (e.g. women, marginalised)<br>• data verification methods (e.g. triangulation)<br>• data analysis methods (e.g. scoring, thematic analysis)<br>• evaluation limitations and mitigation measures (e.g. how these were addressed by the evaluator)<br>• consideration for ethics and human rights issues, including how anonymity and confidentiality were protected | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements adequately addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The section provides a clear description of the evaluation methods including clear rationale for the methods used, selection criteria for respondents and strategies for inclusivity. The report also includes a description of the limitations faced during the evaluation and mitigation action taken. | 6 |
| **4.** Does the report describe an assessment and reformulation of the ***Theory of Change***, and present an adequate articulation of the TOC causal pathways that were used to assess project performance (*narratively and diagrammatically)?* Consider how well the report presents:<br>• whether the project design included a TOC<br>• how the *TOC at Evaluation*[25] was designed (e.g. who was involved, etc)<br>• confirmation/reconstruction of results in accordance with UNEP definitions (*including reformulation table, which may have initially been presented in the Inception Report and should appear in the Main Evaluation report.)*<br>• articulation of causal pathways<br>• identification of drivers and assumptions<br>• identification of key actors in the change process | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The ToC at Evaluation is well presented both in narrative and diagrammatic forms. The causal pathways are articulated, and the drivers and assumptions discussed. | 5 |
| **Section D: Evidence and Analysis** | Assessment | |
| **5.** Is the report based on ***sufficient and adequate data*** and ***clear and credible evidence***? Consider how well the report presents:<br>• sufficient evidence that is consistent throughout the report<br>• evidence that is supported by data sources (e.g. quotes, reports, etc)<br>• evidence that is explicitly triangulated, unless noted as having a single source.<br>• gaps in data are explained and justified.<br>• data sources that are reliable, adequate, sufficient | Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report provides sufficient evidence to support findings. Evidence has sufficiently been triangulated and gaps in evidence sufficiently explained. | 6 |

[25] 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 | Final Report Rating |
|---|---|---|
| for the scope of the evaluation | | |
| **6**. Does the report include ***rigorous analysis*** and ***logical findings***? Consider the extent to which the findings are:<br>• supported by clear analysis that is consistent with the evidence presented.<br>• logical, clear and coherent<br>• aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix<br>• aligned with the evaluation framework<br>• more than descriptions and provide insights into 'how' and/or 'why' the project performed a certain way.<br>• balanced, presenting both successes and weaknesses | Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The presents clear, coherent and logical findings. The ratings are also aligned with UNEP's Criteria Ratings Matrix. | 5 |
| **Section E: Evaluation Findings** | Assessment | |
| **7.** Does the report present evidence and analysis of project ***Strategic Relevance*** with respect to UNEP, partner and geographic policies and strategies at the time of project approval? Consider how well the report addresses:<br>• Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities<br>• Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities<br>• Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities<br>• Complementarity with Existing Interventions: complementarity of the project at design (or during inception/mobilisation[26]), with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups. | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are adequately addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>All elements related to strategic relevance of the evaluand are covered to a satisfactory level. | 6 |
| Does the report present a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the ***Quality of Project Design***, based on the detailed assessment presented in the Inception Report? | Coverage/omissions:<br>The report presents a summary of the project design's strengths and weaknesses. | **NOT RATED** |
| 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[27]), and how they affected performance? | Coverage/omissions:<br>The report presents a section on nature of the external context which analyses the negative externalities to project implementation. | **NOT RATED** |
| **8.** Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the ***Availability of Outputs*** to the intended beneficiaries? Consider how well the report presents:<br>• a convincing, evidence-supported and clear presentation of the outputs made available by the project compared to its approved plans and budget<br>• assessment of the nature and scale of outputs versus the project indicators and targets<br>• assessment of the timeliness, quality and utility of outputs to intended beneficiaries<br>• identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability). | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>This report presents a detailed and evidence-based assessment of the level of achievement of project outputs. | 6 |

[26] 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.

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

| Report Quality Criteria | UNEP Evaluation Office Comments | Final Report Rating |
|---|---|---|
| **9.** Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the ***Achievement of Outcomes***, as a result of the uptake, adoption and/or implementation of outputs by the intended beneficiaries? This may include behaviour changes at an individual or collective level. Consider how well the report presents:<br>• a convincing and evidence-supported analysis of the uptake of outputs by intended beneficiaries<br>• assessment of the nature, depth and scale of outcomes versus the project indicators and targets<br>• discussion of the contribution, credible association and/or attribution of outcome level changes to the work of the project itself<br>• any constraints to attributing effects to the projects' work<br>• identification of positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability). | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>This report presents a detailed and evidence-based assessment of the level of achievement of project outcomes. | 6 |
| **10.** Does the report present an integrated analysis, guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC, of all evidence relating to ***Likelihood of Impact***? Consider how well the report presents:<br>• an explanation of how causal pathways emerged and the resulting change processes<br>• an explicit discussion of how drivers and assumptions played out<br>• an explanation of roles played by key actors and change agents<br>• identification of any unintended negative effects of the project, especially on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability). | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The section presents a logical analysis of the ToC following the causal pathways. Also included in the analysis are the assumptions, drivers and the actors involved in the change process. | 5 |
| **11.** Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under ***Financial Management*** and include a completed 'financial management' table? Consider how well the report addresses the following:<br>• *adherence* to UNEP's financial policies and procedures<br>• *completeness* of financial information, including the actual project costs and actual co-financing used and explanation of any variances between planned and actual expenditures | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The section presents a concise analysis of all the dimensions of financial management. | 6 |
| **12.** Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under ***Efficiency***? Consider how well the report presents:<br>• cost-effective or time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe<br>• implications of any delays and no cost extensions<br>• discussion of making use, during project implementation, of/building on pre-existing institutions, partnerships and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc.<br>• the extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint. | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The section discusses aspects related to timeliness and cost-effectiveness of project execution. The report also includes an analysis of project team efforts to leverage pre-existing institutions, partnerships and complementarities with other initiatives. Also included in the analysis were project efforts in minimising UNEP's environmental footprint. | 5 |

| Report Quality Criteria | UNEP Evaluation Office Comments | Final Report Rating |
|---|---|---|
| **13.** Does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the project's ***Monitoring and Reporting***? Consider how well the report addresses the following:<br>• the quality of *monitoring of project implementation* (including use of monitoring data for adaptive management)<br>• the quality of *project reporting* (e.g. PIMS and donor reports) | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report analyses both sub-criteria under Monitoring and Reporting. The analysis covers monitoring efforts by the project include challenges encountered and analysis of the frequency and quality project reporting. | 6 |
| **14.** Does the report present an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under ***Sustainability*** (i.e. the endurance of benefits achieved at outcome level)? Consider how well the report addresses the following:<br>• socio-political sustainability<br>• financial sustainability<br>• institutional sustainability | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements of sustainability are adequately addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report analyses the three dimensions under sustainability. The report also makes a well-reasoned judgment on the likelihood of sustainability for each of the three dimensions. | 6 |
| **15.** Does the report present a well-evidence analysis of the ***Factors Affecting Performance***, either in this section or in cross-referenced sections?<br>*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.*<br>Consider how well the report addresses the following cross-cutting issues:<br>• quality of project management and supervision[28]<br>• stakeholder participation and co-operation<br>• responsiveness to human rights and gender equality<br>• environmental and social safeguards<br>• country ownership and driven-ness<br>• communication and public awareness | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are well addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>An assessment of all the factors affecting performance is presented as a stand-alone section within the report. | 5 |
| **Section F: Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations** | Assessment | |
| **16.** Do the ***Conclusions*** present a summative assessment of the evaluand as a whole, reflecting on prominent aspects of the project's performance? Consider how well the conclusions:<br>• provide a compelling narrative and integrated assessment of project project's performance (i.e. achievements and limitations)<br>• add deeper insights and analysis beyond the findings under each individual criterion<br>• are derived from the synthesized analysis of evidence gathered during the evaluation process<br>• provide clear and succinct response to the key | Coverage/omissions:<br>All elements are adequately addressed.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The conclusions section presents a synthesis of project performance based on findings while addressing human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention. | 6 |

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

| **Report Quality Criteria** | **UNEP Evaluation Office Comments** | **Final Report Rating** |
|---|---|---|
| strategic questions<br>• address the human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention explicitly (e.g. how these dimensions were considered, addressed or impacted on)<br>• provide lessons that are rooted in real project experiences, describe the context from which they are derived, and do not duplicate recommendations | The report also presents lessons learned drawn from real project experience and summary responses to the strategic questions. | |
| **17.** Does the report present ***Recommendations*** for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting the project or the sustainability of its results? Consider how well the recommendations:<br>• are clearly formulated and logically derived from the findings and/or conclusions<br>• are feasible to implement within the timeframe and resources available (including local capacities) and specific in terms of who would do what and when<br>• include at least one recommendation relating to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions<br>• represent a measurable performance target in order that the Evaluation Office can monitor and assess compliance with the recommendations.<br>NOTES:<br>**(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.<br>**(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. | Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report presents actionable and time bound recommendations based on identified problems in project implementation. | 5 |
| **Section G: Report Structure and Presentation** | Assessment | |
| **18.** Is the report ***well-structured and complete***? Does it:<br>• follow the Evaluation Office structure and formatting guidelines<br>• include all required sections and annexes, as applicable<br>• not exceed 50 pages in length from the Executive Summary to the end of the Conclusion<br><br>Does the report ***present*** information clearly and appropriately? Is it written:<br>• in clear and accessible language<br>• largely free from grammar, spelling and punctuation errors<br>• in an adequate and professional tone<br>• with the use of visual aids, such as maps, graphs tables and photos | Coverage/omissions:<br>All expected sections are included in the report.<br><br>Strengths/weaknesses:<br>The report is complete and follows the Evaluation Office guidelines.<br>Overall, the report is clear and well written in a professional tone. | 5 |
| **OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING** | **Highly Satisfactory** | **5.6** |