Improving sustainability of the PA system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity compatible livelihoods in and around PAs

PIMS 4855, Atlas Award 00073767, Atlas Project No: 00086425

Midterm Review

GEF SO-1, SP-3 Strengthening Terrestrial Protected Areas

Republic of Kazakhstan

Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan

United National Development Program (UNDP)

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the project team both in Astana and in each of the project pilot areas for all they did for during the MTR mission.

The project team and all of the project partners patiently answered all of our questions and requests for clarification. The team organized the mission including all the meetings that we had with the broad range of stakeholders. We are indebted to them all as the mission's success and efficiency was a result of their efforts.

Wherever we went when visiting the various field sites, we were warmly received: the people we met were extremely generous with their hospitality. Finally, Pavel Shulgin provided excellent and faultless interpretation, and good company through the mission.

The evaluation is intended to give a summary of what has been achieved in the project to date as well a glean some of the lessons that can be learned from it in what was a relatively short period. In the report, we have tried to offer constructive criticism where we think it is warranted (although given the project, there's little to criticise!) and we hope that those involved in the project take it as such.

Finally, for one of us (SW), it is a pleasure to be welcomed back to Kazakhstan, to see some familiar faces, to be shown around again with such evident pride and to see wonderful places. We saw the results of the dedication and enthusiasm that people had put into environmental work in important places in the world. We would like to offer them our thanks and wish them every success in their continuing endeavours.

Stuart Williams — Kampala, Uganda

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Acronyms, Abbreviations and Glossary

APR	Annual Project Review
BD	Biodiversity (when related to the GEF focal area)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer (referring to GEF)
CFW	Committee for Forestry and Wildlife
ENO	Scientific Rationale (Rus. *Estestvenno-nauchnoye obosnovanie*)
EOP	End of Project (usually in the context of targets for indicators)
FFSA	Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System(s)
GOK	Government of Kazakhstan
ha	Hectares
IUCN	World Conservation Union
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
METT	Monitoring Effectiveness Tracking Tool (for protected areas)
MTR	Midterm Review
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NEX	Nationally Executed (referring to a project implementation modality)
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIM	Nationally Implemented (referring to a project implementation modality)
NPC	National Project Coordinator
NPM	National Project Manager
PA	Protected Area
PB	Project Board
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PR	Public Relations
PRF	Project Results Framework

ProDoc	Project Document (referring to the UNDP operational project document)
Oblast	Kazakh administrative unit equivalent to region
Rayon	Kazakh administrative unit equivalent to district
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TEO	"*Tekhniko-ekonomicheskoje obosnovanie*" or Technical economic background report
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United National Development Program
UNDP-CO	UNDP Country Office
UNDP-GEF RTC	UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Centre (based in Istanbul)
USD	United States dollars
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund)
Zakaznik	A regional level protected area or reserve
Zapovednik	A central protected area or strict nature reserve (equivalent to IUNC PA Category I)

1 Executive Summary

Project Information Table

Project Title	Improving sustainability of the PA system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs		
UNDP Project ID	0086425	PIF Approval Date	Aug 5, 2011
GEF Project ID	4584	CEO Endorsement Date	26 August 2011
ATLAS Business Unit Award No.	Kaz10 00073767	ProDoc Signature Date	September 2013
Country	Kazakhstan	Date PM hired	01.01.2014
Region:	Central Asia	Inception W/shop date	14.11.2013
GEF Focal Area/Strategic Objective	Environmental sustainability: - Biodiversity; - Land degradation	MTR completion date	15 June 2016
Trust Fund	-	If revised, proposed op. closing date:	-
Executing Agency/Implementing partner	Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan		
Other executing partners	-		
Project Financing	at CEO endorsement (USD)	At MTR (USD)	
[1] GEF Financing	$4,364,000	$2,505,065	
[2] UNDP Contribution	$600,000	-	
[3] Government	$9,379,147	$4,708,620	
[4] Other partners	$9,200,146	$165,627	
[5] Total cofinancing	$19.18 million	$4,874,247	
PROJECT TOTAL COSTS	$**23,543,293**	$7,379,312	

Project Description

Desert and semi-desert ecosystems make up approximately 30.3 million ha (and 58%) of the land area of Kazakhstan. They provide habitats for 151 threatened species (out of 800 listed in the country), 27 rare vegetation communities (out of 79 rare vegetation communities in need for protection), 51.4% of all bird species and 65.2% of all reptile species. It is also an area that supports the livelihoods of many people (e.g., including an estimated 3.2 million people and the city of Almaty). It is important for rangeland livestock husbandry, irrigated farming and fisheries. Hydroelectric systems along the Ily river power the metropolitan area of Almaty.

Much of the area is severely degradation and a number of threats remain, including: i) agriculture – especially the impact of vast canal-irrigated fields that have affected the soil structure, causing waterlogging, salinization, leaching of essential soil

nutrients, and wind erosion, and the loss of the Aral Sea, ii) overgrazing – sustained, heavy grazing of livestock is one of the main causes of habitat destruction across the majority of arid and semi-arid rangelands across the globe and the deserts of southern Kazakhstan are no exception, iii) exploitation of natural resources – local communities are largely dependent on natural resources but some of the uses of natural resources are potentially unsustainable or lead to threats, and iv) other miscellaneous threats – including, unplanned road construction and competing forms of land-use.

The long-term solution proposed by the project to address the threats is "*to take a more strategic landscape-based approach to protected area expansion and management of the least-represented desert and semi-desert ecosystems in Ile Balkhash and Southern Kazakh desert areas*". The project aims to contribute to this long-term goal through achievement of its objective: "*To enhance the sustainability of protected areas in globally important desert and semi-desert ecosystems by expanding their geographic coverage, promoting a landscape approach and supporting biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs, focusing on regions of Ile Balkhash, Ustyurt and Aral-Syrdarya desert and semi-desert ecosystems.*" In functional terms, this means that the long-term solution and project objective are to be achieved through the achievement, in turn, of the following outcomes: i) Outcome 1: *PA system of Kazakhstan contains representative samples of desert and semi-desert ecosystems under various conservation regimes and is effective in protecting ecosystems and ecological processes*, ii) Outcome 2: *Landscape-level conservation planning and management are developed and implemented in target desert and semi-desert environments*, and iii) Outcome 3: *Community involvement in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in and around pas is enhanced*.

The project is being nationally executed (NEX) with the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife (CFW) acting both as Implementing Partner and Beneficiary for the project. The project is being directly implemented by UNDP as is acceptable under Nationally Implementation Modalities (NIM). Nonetheless, the government, through the CFW, retains key control functions of the project including leadership. The project is being implemented by a PMU that is responsible for the financial and administrative reporting, preparation of annual workplans, and drafting TOR for all procurements. The PMU is not only implementing this project but they are also implementing three other projects as well.

Project Results

The project started on 03 September 2013 but over the course of project implementation, there have been delays primarily because of institutional restructuring in 2014 that has occurred. A further change to the context in which the project is working is the dissolution of the *Zhasyl Damu* programme; the programme has now been transmuted into two new programmes although the, first, a CFW strategy is not fully aligned with the project objectives and outcomes while the second, the recently developed NBSAP, is much more closely aligned with the project's objective and intended outcomes. The project (with the UNDP-CO and CFW) should do what it can to facilitate the process of approval of the NBSAP.

In all other respects, project implementation that has been progressing well. If implementation continues for the remaining 28 months at the pace that it has to date,

then the majority – if not all – project outcomes and the project objective should be achieved in good time. The following progress has been made:

- There has been satisfactory progress towards the establishment of three new protected areas and the expansion of another three.
- Scientific work has been carried out in the process to determine the feasibility and validity of two proposed wildlife corridors. The work focused primarily on monitoring the movement patterns of goitered gazelles using satellite collars and making inferences for the need – or otherwise – for corridors on this basis. While this is what is proposed in the project document, it is a very narrow definition of a corridor. Thus, if it is possible, the MTR suggests a deeper analysis taken place.
- At the level of the PAs, the monitoring and research members of staff have received some training and there has been provision of equipment as the mechanism to build capacity for enforcement.
- The work that the project has been doing with PAs has been reflected in an increase in METT scores.
- The project has catalysed two Master's courses in Biological Resources Management and the first cohort of students has been enrolled and is expected to complete their courses in June 2017.
- A series of land use maps were produced for both Ile-Balkash and Aral-Syrdarya areas.
- The project is carrying out a suite of pilot activities, including: i) the restoration of the Aidarkol lakes system, ii) the rehabilitation of two areas of degraded pastures through the establishment of "distant pastures" – in turn, through the restoration of water points and accommodation, iii) the diversification and rotation of crops (away from rice monocultures) in demonstration sites in the Akdala area of the Balkash rayon, iv) the conservation of Asiatic poplar (*Populus* spp including *pruinosa*) woodlands and v) the introduction of water and energy saving technologies for tree nurseries. Notably, the project worked with the laboratory of the National Forest Seed Breeding Centre to propagate Asiatic poplar seedlings successfully for the first time and plant them in three pilot sites.
- An ecological monitoring system is being put into place specifically to support and inform conservation and land use planning in the pilot or demonstration sites (e.g., the use of satellite data to analyse the potential for saxaul forest improvement on the former Aral sea bed).
- The establishment of two PA Public Committees (for Altyn Emel National Park and Barsakelmes zapovednik). This is the first time that there is such involvement of local communities in PA management in Kazakhstan. Second, recommendations have been made for amendments and addenda for the legislative framework in Kazakhstan to allow for the formation of such committees.
- Studies, the first of their kind in Kazakhstan, were carried out to identify the ecosystems services in the Ile-Balkash and Aral-Syrdarya sites and six pilot PES schemes have been developed with the aim that they are integrated into development planning at different levels.
- In partnership with the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture (FFSA), 63 registered land users (relating to 9% of land users) have received micro-credit

facilities under the "Eco Damu" micro-credit scheme; this equates to a total of USD 1.5 million being lent to date (with the project contributing USD 0.5 million and the FFSA contributing USD 1 million).

- Finally, the project has successfully leveraged funding from a variety of donors and organisations.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the success of the project, to date, that should be recognised, including: i) good collaboration and cooperation among the different project partners, including central government actors, local government actors, and non-state actors, ii) the trust and confidence that exists between the CFW and the UNDP-CO, iii) the project is building on the experience, lessons learned and successes of previous projects, and iv) the team has good capacity to carry out their tasks.

There is, nonetheless, much work still to do, including, for example, operationalization of the wildlife corridor(s) and the development of PA management plans.

MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary Table

Measure		MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Project Strategy		N/A	The project design and strategy is good and, most importantly, it is appropriate and relevant for the context of Kazakhstan. It is ambitious without being overly so; it introduces a number of new concepts into Kazakhstan.
Progress towards Results	**Objective**	**HS**	The project has taken significant steps towards achieving its objective with many processes underway. The MTR report describes a small number of improvements and adaptations that the project may make in order to further improve implementation. In addition, there is much work still to complete. However, if the project continues along the same trajectory as it is following during the first half of the project's life, it will be an outstanding project – and a model for GEF projects.
	Outcome 1	**S**	With the expansion of the Altyn-Emel National Park, the project has its first significant result. In addition, the expansion of other areas and establishment of new PAs are well underway. One corridor will be established but using a relatively limited definition of a corridor, there are questions about the other. The project has also established two Master's level courses in Management of Natural Resources as a mechanism to increase capacity of PA managers. In summary, there is satisfactory progress.
	Outcome 2	**S**	The project has developed land-use plans for the pilot areas. There are a number of pilot projects that are underway for restoration of wetlands, "distant" pastures use by domestic livestock, and the restoration of Asiatic poplar woodlands. As above, there is satisfactory progress.

Measure		MTR Rating	Achievement Description
	Outcome 3		The project is working with local communities in various ways (PA Public Committees, finding ways of implementing PES schemes and provision of microcredit finance for people living in the pilot areas). Satisfactory progress is being made but the project should be vigilant for inadvertent impacts and ensure that marginalised and vulnerable people also participate in project processes and benefits.
Project Implementation and Adaptive Management		**S**	The implementation is efficient and effective. The only concern is the high spending on the project management budget and the UNDP-CO and PMU should resolve this issue as the project moves forward. The project team keeps a tight focus on the project document and the PRF therein, and, therefore, aside from the occasions of over-delivery, there has been little need for adaptive management. The project did suffer some delays from institutional and programmatic changes that have occurred over its life – but these have not significant impaired the implementation of the project.
Sustainability		**S**	Broadly, the project processes and impacts should be sustainable – but the project should remain vigilant to the sustainability of the livelihood work that it is implementing. The TE will ascertain the degree to which this is achieved.

Summary of conclusions

The project is, to date, being successfully implemented by a competent team. There are very few caveats to such a statement. If it continues to be implemented in the way it has been until the time that the MTR took place, it has the potential to become a model project for the GEF.

There are many factors that have contributed to the success of the project to date and some of these are discussed in para 43 *et seq*. In summary, though, it appears to hinge on the good collaboration and cooperation among the project's key stakeholders and, most particularly, in the relationship between the CFW and the UNDP-CO. This is based on mutual trust and confidence. In addition, the majority of the PMU team are ex-employees of and are well known in the CFW and Ministry of Agriculture, which, again, leads to confidence and trust.

When dealing with such well-implemented projects, evaluators and reviewers may tend towards being picky and pedantic. Of the little criticism can be pointed at the project, it may be suggested that there is a little too close a focus on the project document and the project's results framework. This means that the project is only as good as the design. Fortuitously, the design of the project is good.

The most outstanding projects deliver both on the expected results as described in the project document – but also seek to adapt and find mechanisms (and often additional funding) to deliver results over and above these targeted results. In some ways, the project is *already* doing this: additional funding has been secured and there are some areas in which the project is over-delivering (e.g., there are two universities

offering a post-graduate course, not just the one that is mentioned in the project document). In the sections below, a few suggestions are made how the project might seek to extend itself and deliver even more results. Irrespective of whether it does this or not, no evaluator or reviewer is going to be critical if the project team does not manage to do this. If the team and the partners continue to implement the project as they already are and achieve the targeted results alone, it will stand out as an excellent project!

Recommendation Summary Table

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
A	**Objective:**	
A.1	The project is being successfully implemented to date. There is much that remains to be done and if the project is to become a model GEF project, then the PMU and the partners will have to keep working furiously!	CFW, PMU, UNDP-CO, partners
A.2	*Adapt and grow, where possible*. The project's design is generally good but there are aspects that could be further improved (if the project has adequate time and funding), there are additional and additive work it could carry out (see Section 5.2.2 for examples)[1].	PB, PMU, partners
A.3	*Replication plan and measuring impact*. For some of the other aspects of the project, it is unclear how i) results will be replicated and ii) how the impact will be measured (see Section 5.2.2 for examples). The PMU should strive to find mechanisms for replication and for measuring the impacts of the work they are carrying out.	CFW, PMU, UNDP-CO
A.4	*NBSAP approval*. Support the process and try to ensure that the NBSAP is fully approved.	CFW, UNDP-CO
B	**Outcome 1:**	
B.1	The definition of corridors used by the project (movement of one species of antelope) is limited; if there is sufficient time and resources (without compromising the need to operationalize the corridor(s)), the analysis could be deepened to include other important parameters, especially as corridors are increasingly important under climate change scenarios (see para 41b under Section 4.2.1)[2,3]	PMU, partners

[1] The MTR would like to reiterate that such adaptations and additions are not absolutely necessary, and if the team and the partners continue to implement the project as they already are and achieve the targeted results alone, it will stand out as an excellent project

[2] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Project, considering the importance of conservation of unique, key biotopes of Ile-Balkash project area is making efforts to establish a wildlife corridor in Almaty Oblast. Preparation of scientific rationale (ENO) for the wildlife establishment is at the finishing stage. It is expected that ENO will be reviewed by the competent authority in the fall of the current year. With an aim of establishment of the wildlife corridor in Ustyurt and Aral-Syrdaria project areas, an extensive scientific research has been undertaken in 2015 to assess the ecological state of wildlife and its habitat. Field works in Kyzylorda Oblast and preparation of the ENO are expected as well in 2017.*" **MTR Response**: The MTR expects that it is too late (and perhaps unnecessary) to amend the ENO for the Ile-Balkash corridor. However, the "extensive scientific research", referred to in

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
	The project will have to go through the complicated steps of *operationalizing* the corridors. Given that this is a relatively complicated process, the sooner the project embarks on getting this done, the better.	
B.2	If and when the project considers supporting the development (including design and content) of PA visitor's centres, there are some outstanding examples across the region. The UNDP-GEF RTC is Istanbul should be in a position to advise appropriately.	PMU, UNDP-GEF RTC, CFW
B.3	*Support the approval of the NBSAP*. As suggested in Section 4.2.1, the project partners, including the CFW and the UNDP-CO should do whatever they can to support the approval of the NBSAP as this will, in turn, support the process of extending and establishing further protected areas	CFW, UNDP-CO
D	**Outcome 3:**	
D.1	*Beware of inadvertent impacts*. Some of the project activities may lead to negative, inadvertent impacts especially an arid system. The team should remain cognisant and vigilant against such inadvertent impacts and attempt to stave them off before they become significant[4].	PMU, partners
D.2	*Be vigilant for the impact of climatic stochasiticity*. There may be occasions when a particular intervention may appear to fail – but this may be more due to climatic stochasticity than to the actual failure of the intervention. The team and the project partners should remain vigilant to such climatic stochastic events masking the actual results of the interventions.[5]	PMU
D.3	*Ensure inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable people*. It is essential that	PMU,

the comment, is (at least insofar as the information received by the MTR) limited because it focuses on the migration patterns of one species only. See Section 4.2.1 for further discussion.

[3] **Additional comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Field studies, the analysis of available literary and library sources were undertaken in 2015-2016 while preparing the ENO to establish a wildlife corridor in Ile-Balkash project area. The following specialists took part in the preparation of the ENO: geobotanist-florist, ornithologist, mammologist, herpetologist, specialist on socio-economic assessment. In addition, additional processing of received data will be undertaken in the MARXAN programme. Draft schematic map of the proposed wildlife corridor, developed as part of the ENO is enclosed.*" **MTR Response**: It is admirable that such detailed studies are undertaken – but the question is whether they are *relevant* for landscape level ecological processes, connectivity and corridors in particular (see discussion in Section 4.2.1 for more details).

[4] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Project is taking into consideration this recommendation. In its turn, in order to prevent inadvertent impacts Project jointly with Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture, Committee for Forestry and Wildlife has formed a committee to monitor implemented microcredit projects*." **MTR Response**: Good.

[5] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*At the early stage of designing pilot subprojects (grants and microcredits) possible risks from implementation of subprojects were considered, including natural and climatic. Measures on their mitigation and adaptation were described.*" **MTR Response**: Good.

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
	the project (with the FFSA – the project partner on the "Eco Damu" microcredit scheme) is inclusive of these marginalised and vulnerable people. In addition, the Eco Damu scheme offers an opportunity to include women and women-led households[6]	partners
E	**Project Management**	
E.1	As indicated in Section 4.3.3, 86% of the project management budget has been spent to date. The PMU and UNDP-CO should plan how the project management costs will be funded for the remainder of the project's life[7].	PMU, UNDP-CO
E.2	*TE to meet a broader range of stakeholders*. There were a number of stakeholders that the MTR did not manage to meet. At the end of the project, the TE should aim to meet stakeholders such that it can evaluate all the successes of the project (including stakeholders who have been trained to evaluate the success of the training and how it is being used to deliver impacts).	PMU, UNDP-CO
E.3	*Monitoring co-finance*. The accuracy of co-finance monitoring could be further improved – using the system that was developed by a UNDP-GEF project in Uzbekistan[8] that monetises the time that people spend on project business. Once the system is in place, it would be relatively simple to keep track of all in-kind co-finance.	PMU, UNDP-RTC
E.4	*Build system of records*. It is always useful to have an organised system of records of everything (including, for example, trainings, outputs – correspondence, reports, plans and policy documents, government approvals, etc.) that the project is and has been doing. Having databases of all such project outputs makes it simple for the project team to produce these things whenever anybody (including an MTR team!) asks for them	PMU

[6] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*The "Eco Damu" microcredit scheme is aimed at supporting various categories of people and households, including vulnerable categories of people. At the moment out of 69 approved microcredit requests – 17 of borrowers (24%) who obtained microcredits to develop sustainable types of activities, had low income. Moreover, Project is paying a lot of attention to capacity-building of local communities, including vulnerable people*." **MTR Response**: Good; the MTR suggests that this should be further extended and to ensure that vulnerable people are not excluded because of the requirement to use houses as collateral.

[7] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Since the Desert Project is a part of the Biodiversity Projects Portfolio, which includes 5 projects, expenditures related to project management are split up between five projects. Project management costs will be funded from other projects of the Portfolio for the remainder of the project's life*." **MTR Response**: This is acceptable but the UNDP-CO and other donors need to ensure that this is done in a transparent and accountable way.

[8] The UNDP-GEF project "*Mainstreaming biodiversity in Uzbekistan's oil and gas sector policies and operations*".

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the review

1. The Midterm Review (MTR) of the UNDP-GEF project "Improving sustainability of the PA system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs" was carried out according to the UNDP-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. Thus, it was carried out with the aim of providing a systematic and comprehensive review and evaluation of the performance of the project to date by assessing its design, processes of implementation, achievement relative to its objectives. It was also set up to detect early signs of project success and/or failure, to identify changes that may be necessary to set the project on track, and to review the risks to sustainability.

2.2 Scope & Methodology

2. The approach for the MTR was determined by the Terms of Reference (TOR, see Annex I) and by the UNDP-GEF Guidance for conducting Midterm Reviews[9]. Thus, it was carried out with the aim of providing a systematic, evidence-based and comprehensive review of the performance of the project to date by assessing its strategy and design, processes of implementation and achievements relative to its objectives. As such, the MTR determined the progress of the project in relation to its stated objectives (through the assessment of results, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability, impact and efficiency - requiring a review of the fund allocations, budgets and projections, and the financial coordination mechanisms), to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on the results and lessons (both positive and negative) that can be learned from the implementation of the project to date. The MTR examined whether the implementation arrangements – including the relationships and interactions among the project's partners, including the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife (now in the Ministry of Agriculture), UNDP, and other partners – are effective and efficient.

3. The MTR included a thorough review of the project documents and other outputs, financial plans and audits, monitoring reports, the PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, Inception Report, Annual Project Reviews (APR), Project Implementation Reviews (PIR), monitoring tools (including, for example, the METT), relevant correspondence and other project related material produced by the project staff or their partners.

4. The MTR also included a mission to Kazakhstan from 21 April - 01 May 2016 (see Annex II for an itinerary of the mission). The mission followed a

[9] UNDP-GEF (2014) *Project-level Monitoring: Guidance for conducting midterm reviews of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed projects*.

collaborative and participatory approach, and included a series of structured and unstructured interviews, both individually and in small groups (see Annex III for the people met and interviewed over the course of the mission to Kazakhstan). Site visits were also conducted i) to validate the reports and indicators, ii) to examine, in particular, any infrastructure development and equipment procured, iii) to consult with personnel in the pilot areas, local authorities or government representatives, protected area authorities, project partners and local communities, and iv) to assess data that may only be held locally. Particular attention was paid to listening to the stakeholders' views and the confidentiality of all interviews was stressed. Whenever possible, the information was crosschecked among the various sources. In addition, the review examined the achievements of the project within the realistic political, institutional and socio-economic framework of Kazakhstan.

5. The logical framework towards which the project is working formed an important part of the MTR.

6. The review was carried out according to the UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and, therefore, ratings were provided for: i) the progress towards results, by outcome and by the objective, ii) project implementation and adaptive management, and iii) sustainability (and the risks thereto). Overall there was an emphasis on supportive recommendations.

7. The MTR was conducted by one international and one national consultant. The consultants have been independent of the policy-making process, and the delivery and management of the assistance to the project; the consultants have not been involved in the implementation and/or supervision of the project.

8. The preliminary findings of the MTR were presented at a debriefing meeting at the end of the mission on 29 April 2016 at the UNDP-CO offices.

9. Finally, the MTR was carried out with a number of audiences in mind, including: i) the various entities of the Government of Kazakhstan that are involved with the project – primarily the CFW, ii) the UNDP-CO and UNDP-GEF RTC in Istanbul, and iv) the GEF.

2.3 Structure of the review report

10. The report follows the structure of Project Evaluations recommended in the UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects as given in Annex 5 of the TOR. As such, it first deals with the purpose of the review and the methodology used for the review (Section 2), a description of the project and the development context in Kazakhstan (Section 3), it then deals with the Findings (Section 4) of the evaluation within four sections (Project Strategy, Progress Towards Results, Project Implementation and Adaptive

Management, and Sustainability). The report then draws together the Conclusions and Recommendations from the project (Section 5).

3 Project description and background context

3.1 Development context

11. Desert and semi-desert ecosystems make up approximately 58% of the land area of the 271,730,000 ha of Kazakhstan. They provide habitats for 151 threatened species (out of 800 listed in the country), 27 rare vegetation communities (out of 79 rare vegetation communities in need for protection), 51.4% of all bird species and 65.2% of all reptile species.

12. The Southern Kazakh desert region covers 30.3 million ha and includes two Global 200 Ecoregions (as described by WWF) and a number of Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The area contains threatened mammals such as Goitered gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*), kulan (*Equus hemionus*), Pallas's Cat (*Otocolobus manul* or *Felis manul),* Caracal (*Caracal caracal),* near-threatened ground squirrel species, several species of gerbil and the endemic Desert Dormouse (*Selevinia betpakdalaensis*).

13. The Ile Balkhash region is a mountain-valley desert ecosystem with unique landscape diversity combining high mountains, vast arid desert valleys, small-scale wetlands, Tugai forests, and grasslands. The small wetlands and lakes attract hundreds of thousands of migratory birds (e.g., *Anas, Anser, Rufibrenta, Chettusia).* The wetlands provide habitat for a number of threatened species that are particularly vulnerable to spatial habitat changes and degradation, including Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*), Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*), and Pallas's Sandgrouse (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*). The Ile Balkash also supports the livelihoods of an estimated 3.2 million people, including the city of Almaty. It is important for rangeland livestock husbandry, irrigated farming and fisheries. Hydroelectric systems along the Ily river power the metropolitan area of Almaty.

3.2 Problems that the project sought to address

14. The Tugai forest and wetlands in Ile Balkhash and Southern Kazakhstan deserts are key "oases" important for the livelihoods of rural communities. Tugai forests within desert landscapes, including some patches of unique Asiatic poplar wooded areas, cover app. 80,000 ha, of which approximately 15% suffer from severe degradation.

15. The Prodoc describes various threats to the desert and semi-desert ecosystems of southern Kazakhstan, with a focus on unsustainable crop agriculture and degradation from excessive grazing.

16. *Agriculture*. During the Soviet era and with the construction of the Kapchagai hydroelectric dam, massive earthworks were carried out to create vast canal-irrigated fields primarily for rice and cotton. Satellite imagery has demonstrated the consequent desiccation of the Ile Delta that served as critical habitat for 125 migrating bird species (88 of which use the Balkhash Lake and its adjacent landscapes for overwintering), 50 mammal, and 20 native fish species[10]. In addition, inefficiencies (including wasteful use of irrigation water and/or leakages) negatively affected the soil structure, causing waterlogging, salinization, leaching of essential soil nutrients, and wind erosion. The impact of irrigation systems on the Aral Sea are well known.

17. *Overgrazing*. Sustained, heavy grazing of livestock is one of the main causes of habitat destruction across the majority of arid and semi-arid rangelands across the globe and the deserts of southern Kazakhstan are no exception. This has been exacerbated by the replacement of sheep by goats (largely for economic reasons). As elsewhere, the results of overgrazing are loss of vegetation cover, vegetation changes towards unpalatable "grazing weeds" and increased erosion (primarily wind but also water erosion). In some areas (e.g., on the Ustyurt plateau), there is the formation of salinized or "solonchak" lands. Overgrazing is particularly prevalent in the vicinity of villages and settlements. The impacts of overgrazing are also prevalent in vulnerable poplar (*Populus pruinosa*) and tugai forests in the Ile delta; these ecosystems have as a consequence become degraded

18. *Exploitation of natural resources*. Local communities are largely dependent on natural resources but some of the uses of natural resources are potentially unsustainable or lead to threats. These include hunting of goitered gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*) and kulan (*Equus hemionus*), the numbers of which declined sharply in the 1990s, fishing, and the use of saxaul trees for fuel. Other natural resources that are being exploited by people include sagebrush (*Atriplex cana,* fodder plant for Saiga antelope), tulips and ornamental flowers, as well as of medicinal plants for commercial purposes.

19. *Other miscellaneous threats*. Other threats to the biodiversity of the area and the integrity of the ecosystems include: the unplanned construction of unpaved roads, competing forms of land-use (including hydropower, fisheries, waste treatment facilities, landfills, sand, clay, marble and gravel mining, cement production, multiple small and medium-size businesses (e.g. car maintenance and wash services, gas stations), land development for tourism and recreation). In addition, some remote areas here formerly served as testing grounds for biological weapons (with potentially long-lasting negative effects for biodiversity in the region).

[10] http://www.grid.unep.ch/activities/sustainable/balkhash/index.php

3.3 Project description and strategy

20. The Prodoc identifies the long-term solution to addressing the threats as being the need "*to take a more strategic landscape-based approach to protected area expansion and management of the least-represented desert and semi-desert ecosystems in Ile Balkhash and Southern Kazakh desert areas*".

21. The project aims to contribute to this long-term goal through achievement of its objective:

> "*To enhance the sustainability of protected areas in globally important desert and semi-desert ecosystems by expanding their geographic coverage, promoting a landscape approach and supporting biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs, focusing on regions of Ile Balkhash, Ustyurt and Aral-Syrdarya desert and semi-desert ecosystems.*"

22. The Prodoc recognizes that there are three "key elements" necessary to realize the long-term solution: i) expansion of the PA estate to include desert ecosystems, accompanied with management plans for the PAs, financing, and permanent and fully staffed management units, ii) a high degree of integration of these protected areas with buffer zones, wildlife corridors and other areas of the broader landscape, and iii) engagement of local communities in activities that bring income on the one hand and ensure a biodiversity dividend on the other, as well as their participation in PA management. In functional terms, this means that the long-term solution and project objective are to be achieved through the achievement, in turn, of the following outcomes:

a. *Outcome 1*: PA system of Kazakhstan contains representative samples of desert and semi-desert ecosystems under various conservation regimes and is effective in protecting ecosystems and ecological processes

b. *Outcome 2*: Landscape-level conservation planning and management are developed and implemented in target desert and semi-desert environments

c. *Outcome 3*: Community involvement in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in and around pas is enhanced

23. The analysis of the outputs and indicators under each of these outcomes is presented below (see Section 4.1).

3.4 Project Implementation Arrangements

24. The project is being nationally executed (NEX) with the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife (CFW)[11] acting both as Implementing Partner and

[11] In the Prodoc, the Implementing Partner and Beneficiary is listed as being the Committee for Forestry and Hunting (CFH). Over the project's lifetime, there have been institutional

Beneficiary for the project. However, because the Government of Kazakhstan (GOK) does not allow for direct project execution and/or implementation of international assistance project by government entities, the GOK has requested that UNDP provide direct implementation services; this is acceptable under Nationally Implementation Modalities (NIM). Nonetheless, the government, through the CFW, retains key control functions of the project including leadership (through the National Project Director, NPD, and by chairing the Project Board, PB).

25. The role and function of the PB is, therefore, similar to the majority of UNDP-GEF projects with the PB taking overall responsibility for project delivery. The PB is responsible to review and approve annual project reviews, workplans and budgets, technical documents and financial reports. The PB provides strategic oversight to the project. It has met four times since the beginning of the project[12]. The Prodoc describes in some detail the roles and responsibilities of the PB[13].

26. Day to day management and implementation of the project is being carried out by the National Project Manager and the Project Management Unit (PMU). The PMU is responsible for the financial and administrative reporting, preparation of annual workplans, and drafting TOR for all procurements.

27. The PMU is housed in an office block in Astana (thus, neither within the CFW offices nor within UNDP-CO[14]) – thus, differing from the setup as described in the project document – however, as explained in Sections below (see Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.3), this has been done for practical reasons relating to efficiencies surrounding the implementation of a number of projects.

28. The UNDP-CO has three principal roles and responsibilities in the project: i) project assurance – through a development Advisor who provides independent oversight and monitoring functions, ii) financial and administrative support – including procurement, contracting (with the majority of contracts being signed by the Deputy Resident Representative, DRR, but the bigger contracts are signed by the Resident Representative, RR) and payments, and iii) contracting the PMU staff.

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changes that means that the CFH has transmuted into the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife (CFW), as described below.

[12] On the following dates: 07 February 2014, 23 January 2015, 29 July 2015 and 29 January 2016.

[13] See Section on Management Arrangements in the Prodoc, para 90 *et seq*.

[14] This was a decision taken by the NPM even though office space was offered within the UNDP-CO building. The decision was taken to distance the project from the UNDP-CO (thereby ensuring that the perception that the project was not solely owned by UNDP) and as close to the CFW offices as possible.

3.5 Project timing and milestones

29. The project was planned as a five-year project with a start date of 03 September 2013 and a proposed close date of 02 September 2018 (see Table 1).

30. Since the commencement of the project, there have been a few delays to project implementation – primarily associated with the institutional restructuring that occurred; this will be described later (see Section 4.2.1).

Table 1. The project milestones including the projected end date for the project.

Milestone	Date
PIF Approval	05 August 2011
PPG Approval	26 August 2011
CEO Endorsement	08 July 2013
UNDP Prodoc signed	03 September 2013
National Project Manager appointed	01 January 2014
Inception Workshop	14 November 2013
MTR mission commences	21 April 2016
Projected EOP	02 September 2018

3.6 Main stakeholders

31. The Project Document exhaustively identified the project's stakeholders[15]. The table in the Project Document not only identifies the stakeholders but it describes their current mandate and their role within the project.

32. It is notable that the Prodoc included a full annex on gender aspects[16]. It is, however, important to reiterate that gender is not simply about women or women's rights issues but, rather, it is about how constructed gender identities intersect in the public sphere (and in the project's implementation), whose experiences are taken as the default, and the impact that that has on how problems are solved within the context of the project.

[15] See the Stakeholder Analysis presented on pg. 25 of the Project Document.

[16] See Annex 9 of the Prodoc: "Action plan for incorporation of gender aspects in the project with quantifiable baseline and target indicators as per GEF and UNDP guidance".

4 Findings

4.1 Project Strategy

4.1.1 Project Design

33. The Prodoc identifies three barriers to achieving the long-term solution: i) limitations of the PA system, ii) the need for a landscape-level approach to conservation and iii) the need for collaborative management in PA governance, with particular reference to local communities. The overall project strategy and design to overcome these barriers, as well as the threats and root causes was summarised in the Prodoc[17].

34. As will be discussed later on in the report, the quality of the project design is critically important because the PMU is adhering strictly to the described activities and focusing on achieving the end-of-project (EOP) targets for each of the indicators.

35. Aside from the observation that the project has been well designed (with a few criticisms that will be described and discussed as they arise through the report) and is relevant both to the development processes within Kazakhstan as well as the GEF and UNDP priorities, it should also be noted that, most importantly, the project design is wholly appropriate for the political and socio-economic context of Kazakhstan. As such, it is ambitious but not to the extent that the ambition becomes a barrier in and of itself within the socio-political context. As an example, the project aims to establish "PA Public Committees" (under Output 3.1; see Section 4.2.1 for further discussion). These do not wholly conform with the co-management committees that are found elsewhere in the world but they are appropriate for the framework within Kazakhstan: to demand that they were anything other than this would only condemn the project to failure[18].

4.1.2 Analysis of LFA/Results Framework

36. The principal analysis of the project's result framework (PRF) is done in the PRF itself (see Table 2 in Section 4.2.1 in which the results framework is

[17] See table on page 12 of the Prodoc comparing the baseline scenario with the GEF alternative.

[18] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*The formation of PA Public Committees is a new concept in Kazakhstan. Project has carried out very important preparatory work for their institutionalization. International experience was studied, the potential of regulatory and legal framework of Kazakhstan was assessed, the potential and barriers were identified for implementing the co-management mechanism. Public Committees are being tested in target PAs. At this stage activities will be focused on the capacity-building of local communities and local authorities for their participation in the PA co-management and experience will be obtained related to public involvement in the process of biodiversity conservation.*" **Response of MTR**: This is *precisely* the point being made by the MTR!

analysed both from the perspective of its design and the progress that the project has taken in achieving the targets of each of the indicators). However, it is worth noting that, broadly, the PRF is well designed and appropriate.

4.2 Progress Towards Results

4.2.1 Analysis of progress towards outcomes

37. As indicated above (see Section 3.5), the project started on 03 September 2013. Thus, the MTR is taking place 32 months into project implementation.

38. Over the course of project implementation, there have been delays. These have revolved primarily about the institutional restructuring that has occurred. When the project commenced, it fell under the Committee for Forestry and Hunting within the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Water Resources. On appointment of the new Prime Minister for the country (on 02 April 2014), a restructuring of the government took place. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Water Resources was dissolved and its functions and committees were split and shifted into the Ministries of Agriculture and Energy. The Committee for Forestry and Hunting (CFH) was, itself, moved into the Ministry of Agriculture and merged with Fisheries to become the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife (CFW). There are two aspects upon which to reflect: i) the restructuring did cause some delays to project implementation over a period of six months, and ii) while the majority of the personnel with whom the project interacted remained the same, there were some new faces and some of the previously familiar faces were moved on.

39. The restructuring has posed the only delay to project implementation that has, otherwise, been progressing well. Indeed, for the ambition of the project (including, for example, the establishment of new protected areas and the expansion of existing protected areas), progress has been outstanding. If implementation continues for the remaining 28 months at the pace that it has to date, then the majority – if not all – project outcomes and the project objective should be achieved in good time.

40. A further change to the context in which the project is working is the dissolution of the *Zhasyl Damu* programme. This was the government programme for the expansion of the protected area system within the country. It was a two-phase programme and the project had objectives under both phases that spanned the project's lifetime. The *Zhasyl Damu* programme has now been transmuted into two new programmes. The first is a new strategy under the CFW spanning the years from 2015-2017. However, this strategy is not fully aligned with the project objectives and outcomes. The second is the recently developed National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) that will run from 2016-2030 (in three phases, 2016-2020, 2021-2025 and 2026-

2030). The NBSAP is much more closely aligned with the project's objective and intended outcomes. The draft NBSAP is "currently under consideration" having already been approved by the Ministry of Agriculture. It is hoped that the NBSAP will be approved in time for a Convention of Parties (COP) to be held in Mexico later this year. If there is a need, then it is recommended by the MTR that the project do what it can to facilitate the process of approval of the NBSAP such that it strengthens the space in which the project is being implemented. This will continue to be important as the project continues to establish new protected areas, extend existing protected areas and to establish ecological corridors between the protected areas.

41. In summary, then, the following progress has been made:

a. Under Outputs 1.1 and 1.3, the project is aiming to establish three new protected areas (the Ile-Balkash reserve, the Mangistau State Reserve and Arganaty area) and expand another three (Barsakelmes zapovednik, Ustyurt zapovednik and Altyn Yemel National Park)[19].

   Despite delays in the process (e.g., in the establishment of the Ile-Balkash reserve – specifically with the recruitment of new staff for the PA which was affected by the moratorium placed by the government following the economic crisis of 2015), significant progress has been made: i) the expansion of Altyn Yemel National Park is already approved (Resolution of the Government of Kazakhstan No. 1047 dated 24 December 2015), ii) the TEO for the Ile Balkash reserve has been approved by the CFW on 04 May 2014 and the Akimat for Almaty oblast has approved setting aside 415,000ha for the reserve, iii) the ENO for the expansion of Ustyrut zapovednik was drafted and it received positive comments from the "ecological expertise", and iv) the ENO has been drafted for the Arganaty zakaznik.

   In principle, these expansions and establishments should lead to direct global biodiversity benefits.

b. Under Outputs 1.2 and 1.3, scientific work has been carried out in the process to determine the feasibility and validity of two proposed wildlife corridors – one that spans the area between the Altyn Yemel National Park and the soon-to-be-established Ile Balkash zapovednik and the other to span the area between the Ustyurt zapovednik and the Barsakelmes zapovednik (see Annex IV).

[19] See Acronyms, Abbreviations and Glossary for explanation of the terms used in this section.

The work has focused primarily on monitoring the movement patterns of goitered gazelles using satellite collars. Using data from these species, a wildlife corridor between Altyn Yemel National Park and Ile Balkash zapovednik has been supported. As a result, an area of over 1 milion ha has been proposed as a wildlife corridor. The ENO for the wildlife corridor is, as a consequence, under preparation.

In contrast, the movement of the goitered gazelles in the vicinity of Ustyurt and Barsakelmes zapovedniks did *not* support the establishment of a wildlife corridor.

Notwithstanding the conclusion that a wildlife corridor is necessary between the Altyn Yemel National Park and Ile Balkash zapovednik, the project has adopted a very narrow definition of a corridor. Indeed, the basic concepts of landscape level conservation include conserving: i) ecological processes such as migration or dispersal (as has been focused on with the goitered gazelles in the project) and maintaining connectivity – which is increasingly important in the face of climate change[20], ii) ecosystem functions and services that also operate at a larger scale than discrete, fragmented protected areas (e.g., water and water flow systems – with their associated ecological function such as bird and fish migratory routes), iii) processes and habitats that, with their constituent species, are poorly known, iv) the temporally adaptive nature of processes, functions and services. In summary, then, landscape-level conservation moves away from the traditional conservation assumption that more is simply better but instead asks "how much more, why do we need it and where do we need it?" It also allows for different land-use and land-tenure systems, and specifically counters broad-scale changes include: i) climate change, ii) land use and land cover change, iii) water and air-borne pollution, iv) a shift in disturbance/recovery regimes, and v) habitat loss and fragmentation. This synopsis – which by no means is exhaustive – indicates the complexity of landscape-level conservation and serves to suggest that building (or not in the case of the Ustyurt – Barsakelmes) corridors on the movement patterns of one species in one year may be limited. In summary, then, the MTR suggests that the analysis considers some of these other aspects (and most particularly the flightways of migratory species

[20] The foundation of this thinking lies in the patch-corridor-matrix models as these led to changed perceptions that biodiversity conservation needs to occur at different spatial scales to account for the different levels of biological organisation.

including birds and the predicted migration of species under the current climate change projections) when considering the need and feasibility of corridors between and among protected areas in the southern and arid areas of Kazakhstan.[21]

Finally, much work remains to be done because once the decision has been made to create a corridor, including (but not limited to) writing regulations, guidelines and by-laws for the land users and infrastructural features that may impact the functionality of the corridor. This work – the operationalization of the corridor(s) – will, of course, have to be done in the remainder of the project's life (this is Output 2.3).

c. The management plans that should be developed for the newly established and extended protected areas (under Output 1.4) have yet to be done: they await the finalisation of the establishment and extension of these areas.

d. Under Output 1.5 (regarding the monitoring and enforcement capacities of the protected areas), the focus is primarily on provision of equipment [22] and training inspectors within the protected areas. In order to do this systematically, the project has worked on developing a monitoring programme to be implemented in all the protected areas that fall under the auspices of the project. The monitoring and research members of staff from the protected areas have received some training.

   The project, to date, has focused on provision of equipment as the mechanism to build capacity for enforcement: there has been provision of vehicles, GPS units and radios.

[21] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*Project appreciates such a detailed description of the issue related to the establishment of the wildlife corridor and fully agrees with the expressed opinion. Project supports an integrated approach in solving the issue related to establishment of protected areas in general for conservation of ecosystems. At such, according to the existing rules for preparing ENOs to establish protected areas (including to establish a wildlife corridor) in Kazakhstan the following aspects are considered: (i) natural conditions, (ii) flora, fauna, (iii) socio-economic characteristics, (iv) integral assessment of the territory, (v) ecosystems and landscapes, (vi) uniqueness and importance of natural complexes of the territory, (vii) commercial (anthropogenic) activity, (viii) the state of ecosystems and measures on protection, restoration and use, (ix) activities on protection of ecological systems. Moreover, in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, after the establishment of the wildlife corridor, the Certificate of the wildlife corridor, Development Plan, the Wildlife Corridor Using Rules should be prepared*." **MTR Response**: Good to see that there is agreement from the project team.

[22] See Annex 10 of the Prodoc for the planned equipment transfer to the different protected areas.

e. Output 1.6 focuses on the adoption of the METT across the protected area system within Kazakhstan as well as application of the METT to those protected areas that are the focus of the project to demonstrate the success of the project.

   The discussions regarding the adoption of the METT for the protected area system of Kazakhstan are still ongoing with no resolution to date. One of the issues confronting the project is that Kazakhstan *already* has a methodology to monitor the effectiveness of the management within its protected areas that has been used for a number of years – therefore, they provide invaluable long term, comparative data. Given that this is the case and that there is obvious reluctance to embrace the METT, it does beg the question of why this was included in the project design. The principle here is that there is a robust and sufficiently detailed method to monitoring effective management as well as to be used as a planning tool by the individual protected area managers.

   This is not the first time that this discussion is being had within the CIS. In addition, there have been further questions regarding the appropriateness of the METT to strict nature reserves (IUCN PA Category I – such as zapovedniks) and, as a result, in Russia (in cooperation with WWF-Russia), a version of the METT for zapovedniks has been developed.

   The MTR recommends that this be resolved as soon as possible with input from the UNDP-GEF RTC in Istanbul such that there is a coherent and rational way forward. Nonetheless, for the purposes of the project, the METT needs to continue to be applied to the project's pilot/demonstration protected areas. It is, however, important that the project and their partners do not consider the application of the METT as a passing method for monitoring the effectiveness of the management in those areas and the success of the project but also to carry out analysis of the areas in which improvements are possible – and, therefore, the METT is also used as a planning tool as well[23].

[23] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*Project agrees that METT is one of the efficient systems to evaluate PA management. This is confirmed by the fact that all GEF-UNDP biodiversity projects (wetlands, agrobio, Altai-Sayan, steppe projects) since 2004 made assessment of pilot PAs at national level based on the METT methodology. To date the existing rating assessment of PAs of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife is officially used that enables to see quantitative indicators of protection, tourism, environmental education and finance. At the same time, Project adheres to an opinion to implement METT in national PA system as a real necessity.*" **MTR Response**: Good to see that there is agreement from the project team.

f. In part, the success of Output 1.7 (capacities for the desert and semi-desert PA sub-system) will be measured through gains in the METT for the pilot protected areas. However (and a little oddly), the output also includes environmental education aspects with inclusion of local schools and not just a focus on the capacities within the protected areas.

g. Under Output 1.8, *two* (as opposed to the one mentioned in the project document) Master's courses in Biological Resources Management have commenced in both Astana and Almaty (at S. Seifulin Kazakh Agrarian University and Kazakh National Agraian University, respectively). The first cohort of students has been enrolled and is expected to complete their courses in June 2017. The courses are designed to train specialists for the management of protected areas and biological resources. The target is to train at least 40 people in five years – thereby eliminating the deficit in qualified PA managers.

h. A series of land use maps were produced for both Ile-Balkash and Aral-Syrdarya areas (under Output 2.1) – covering a total of 13 million ha (thus, significantly higher than the EOP target for the project – see Annex V). This exercise was carried out on the basis that the Land Code of Kazakhstan is not functional and, as a result, is leading to the unsustainable use of resources and the degradation of land and resources.

   The process included an analysis of the potential for social and economic development in the areas, the potential for environmental impacts and conflicts. The land use maps incorporated over 30 different layers of data. This is leading to the creation of three atlases of "functional zoning" in three rayons (Balkash, Aral and Kazalinsk).

i. Output 2.2[24] is one of the most ambitious parts of the project and covers a vast range of work. It includes: i) restoring wetlands, ii) sustainable management of riparian and saxaul forests, iii) changing vegetation cover and quality of pastures, iv) the income of people that are participating in pasture management, and v) the replication of pilots among farmers' associations. There are *six* indicators associated with this Output!

[24] Demonstration of sustainable and replicable resource use practices to reduce threats to biodiversity and preserve ecological functions of productive landscapes around target PAs in the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya regions

The work is focusing, to date, on i) the restoration of the Aidarkol lakes system, ii) the rehabilitation of two areas of degraded pastures through the establishment of "distant pastures" – in turn, through the restoration of water points and accommodation, iii) the diversification and rotation of crops (away from rice monocultures) in demonstration sites in the Akdala area of the Balkash rayon, iv) the conservation of Asiatic poplar (*Populus* spp including *pruinosa*) woodlands and v) the introduction of water and energy saving technologies for tree nurseries.

Of particular note is the work to restore the areas of rare and endangered Asiatic popular (or *turanga* trees that are threatened by overgrazing and forest fire). The trees are important because they are drought resistance but their propagation was proving challenging. The project worked with the laboratory of the National Forest Seed Breeding Centre to propagate seedlings successfully for the first time and plant them in three pilot sites.

Furthermore, work is ongoing in five sites where water systems are "not owned". The idea is to certify (or allocate land use rights) and water projects are, thereafter, transferred to local executive bodies.

The plan is to expand these pilot projects further during the remaining part of the project (including 2016).

With a limited budget and with a limited amount of time, there will only be a limited amount that the project can realistically achieve in this Output. The important thing is to focus on testing the pilots, determining what works and finding mechanisms to replicate the successes – as well as ensuring that the lessons are learned from those pilots that do not work so well and are not replicated. This requires a significant amount of M&E, analysis and dissemination of the results. The project should ensure that this is done thoroughly.

j. An ecological monitoring system is being put into place specifically to support and inform conservation and land use planning in the pilot or demonstration sites (Output 2.4). To date, there has been analysis of the former Aral Sea bed to determine those areas with the potential for saxaul forest improvement. This has focused on the use and analysis of satellite data.

   In addition, a database for the results of biodiversity monitoring has been designed and developed – with the inclusion of data from the four pilot PAs that fall under the project (Barsakelmes, Ustyurt, Altyn-Emel, and the future Ile-Balkash PAs).

k. The final three outputs fall under Outcome Three: the enhanced involvement of local communities in conservation and sustainable use of resources in and around protected areas. As above, progress has been made in all three outputs.

   Output 3.1 calls for the establishment of "Protected Areas Public Committees" and two PA Public Committees have been established – the first for Altyn Emel National Park and the other for Barsakelmes zapovednik.

   There are a few points that should be explored regarding the PA Public Committees. First, this is the first time that there is such involvement of local communities in PA management in Kazakhstan. Second, recommendations have been made for amendments and addenda for the legislative framework in Kazakhstan to allow for the formation of such committees.

   However, to date, the mandate and function of the PA Public Committees are still limited. They are not fully mandated to oversee and direct the management of the protected areas. In other words and in the terminology of the METT, the local communities do not yet "directly participate in all relevant decisions relating to management" of the protected area. The extent that the project – and, indeed, all Kazakhstan – needs to take to this utopic goal needs to be carefully discussed and agreed. What Kazakhstan needs are successful protected areas that fulfil their objectives: the protection of biodiversity, ecosystems and ecological processes. It is likely that the inclusion of local communities, to a lesser or greater extent, will need to be considered on a case by case basis and written into management plans and by-laws for each protected area.[25]

l. Output 3.2[26] focuses on implementing incentive schemes – usually financial – for actors in the vicinity of protected areas. Partly because the indicator under this output focuses on Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), the project has chosen to examine the possibilities in this area.

   Initially, studies were carried out to identify the ecosystems services in the Ile-Balkash and Aral-Syrdarya sites. The work

[25] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*As you have rightly noted the Public Councils do not fulfill oversight functions and Project did not set itself such a task. Meanwhile, the PC is an advisory and consultative organ facilitating participation of local communities in activities of PAs.*" **MTR Response**: Good to see agreement from project team.

[26] "Compensation or reward schemes for long-term sustainable biodiversity use in and around target PAs piloted among PA management, local communities, conservationists, hunting/fishing areas, tourism operators and other non-PA actors"

identified, classified and prioritised the ecosystem services; the users of ecosystem services have been identified. As a result of this work – which was carried out in a participatory way, six pilot PES schemes have been developed with the aim that they are integrated into development planning at different levels.

It should be noted that this is innovative work for Kazakhstan as there is no previous work on the practical application of PES.

m. Under Output 3.3[27], 63 registered land users (relating, apparently, to 9% of land users in the areas, based on the 730 registered land users) have received micro-credit facilities under the "Eco Damu" micro-credit scheme. The micro-credit scheme is being implemented in partnership with the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture (FFSA). A total of USD 1.5 million has been lent to date with the project contributing USD 0.5 million and the FFSA contributing USD 1 million.

As a result of the micro-credit facilities, 102 jobs were created and some of the micro-credit targeted low-income households, and vulnerable and marginalised people, including women.

There are a number of points to consider here. First, the project represents a pilot phase (2014-1029) of a program that will, in principle, be scaled up and replicated across the protected area estate of Kazakhstan (2020-2024). Second, to date, a total of 63 projects have been financed to the sum of 208.9 million tenge[28]. The projects have covered a wide range of investments, including: greenhouses, bakeries, the production of national clothing, apiculture for the production of honey, poultry breeding, ecotourism, the production of souvenirs, horticulture and the development of a fishery. Third, the micro-credit scheme is being implemented at a very advantageous annual rate of 4% (although this will, apparently, be increased to 6% during the second phase). The terms are for a minimum loan period of six months and with a maximum period of 54 months. The maximum loan is the equivalent of USD 33,000. The borrower's house is used as collateral for the loans.

There are a number of further points to consider. First, the project needs to ensure that the micro-credit schemes remain relevant and

[27] "Biodiversity microcredit line under the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture (FFSA) specifically to support sustainable livelihoods of rural communities in and around PAs".
[28] Equivalent to USD 1.5 million, of which USD 0.5 million is funded using project funds and the FFSA have contributed USD 1 million.

pertinent to the project's targeted objective and outcomes. Second, the project should make efforts to include low-income households where possible. This is somewhat complicated by the current practice of taking the borrower's house as collateral: such a policy may lead to the exclusion of low-income and vulnerable households. The project should, if possible, find strategies to overcome this. Finally, the project's experience to date is that women are "more serious" about use of the micro-credit and about loan repayments: the project should build on such experiences such that women (and other marginalised groups) are proactively targeted. This will allow the project to be, at the very least, a GEN-2 project (making "significant contributions to gender equality").[29]

n. Finally, aside from these Output focused results, the project has successfully leveraged funding from a variety of donors and organisations, including: Coca-Cola (USD 94,000) and IFAS (USD 4,800), and a further USD 315,100 from a joint UN program in the region.

42. In summary, then, the project has carried out significant amounts of work to date. It is on course to complete most if not all the work that has been planned. There are a small number of minor observations, mentioned above, made by the MTR that should be taken into account for the remaining part of the project.

43. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the success of the project, to date, that should be recognised. These include:

a. There is good collaboration and cooperation among the different project partners, including central government actors, local government actors, and non-state actors.

[29] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*1. In the Agreement between the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife and Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture on the implementation of the Eco Damu microcredit scheme lending terms are well-defined, meeting the project requirement on biodiversity conservation. Areas of environmentally sustainable types of activity are specified; 2. Based on the carried out analysis out of total number of loan participants 24% accounts for low-income households with income less than USD 80 for one member of the family per month; 3. Project and the microcredit scheme are open and encourage participation of women in obtaining loan for development. Out of total number of borrowers 40% are women*" **MTR Response**: 1. Despite the agreement and the specification on environmental sustainability, the microcredits and grants should remain relevant to the project objectives: some of the grantees and recipients of credit are borderline in terms of relevance (and, as a consequence, may not lead to the global environmental benefits required by the GEF); 2. The 24% representation of low income households is good but could, arguably, be improved (noting that poorer households may be more reluctant to put their houses as collateral – hence the suggestion that the project find strategies); and 3. Again, this is good.

b. There is an excellent relationship among the CFW, the UNDP-CO and the PMU – partly based on the fact that many of the members of the PMU previously worked in the CFW or the Ministry of Agriculture and have good relationships with the people therein. This has led to trust and confidence that, in turn, has led to developing joint strategies that are synergistic.

c. The project is building on the experience, lessons learned and successes of previous projects

d. The team has good capacity to carry out their tasks

Table 2. The Project Results Framework showing the MTR status and the MTR comments and ratings (and see Annex VI for detailed PRF as completed by the project team).

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
Objective: To enhance the sustainability of protected areas in globally important desert and semi-desert ecosystems by expanding their geographic coverage, promoting a landscape approach, and supporting biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs	Coverage of under-represented Southern desert in the PA System of Kazakhstan	1,591,800 ha (5.3% of ecological zone)	By 2015 coverage of Southern desert in PA system increases by 2,682,032 ha (8.9% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from the following:	1,591,800 ha (5.3% of ecological zone)	1,591,800 ha (5,3 %)	GIS, Cadaster, Government resolutions	No issues with indicator, baseline figures or EOP target. **Satisfactory progress is being made in the establishment and expansion of protected areas in southern Kazakhstan. However, because of the time taken to secure all the necessary approvals for the establishment and expansion of protected areas, the project team will have to continue to work effectively and efficiently to ensure that all targets are achieved by the EOP.** **See comments in the main body of the report regarding corridors as the project has taken a rather narrow[30]**
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Mangistau State Reserved Zone) covering 2,676,262 ha	0 ha	0 ha	Approval of Mangistau PA boundaries by oblast akimat	
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Barsakelmes State Nature Reserve) by 5,770 ha	0 ha	0 ha	TEO drafted and submitted for approval	
			By 2020 coverage of Southern desert in PA system increases by approximately 970,000 ha (3.2% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from:				
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Ustyurt	0 ha	0 ha	ENO approved; TEO under	

[30] Also see main body of report and footnotes in Section 4.2.1 for comments made on draft MTR Report and responses.

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
			State Nature Reserve) by approximately 220,000 ha			development	
			Establishment of a wildlife corridor between Barsakelmes and Ustyurt PAs of approximately 750,000 ha	0 ha	0 ha	Report on issue for corridor creation under preparation.	
	Coverage of under-represented Mountain-valley subtype desert in the PA System of Kazakhstan	99,704 ha (3.3% of ecological zone)	By 2015 coverage of Mountain-valley subtype desert in PA system increases by 1,602,504 ha (53.4% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from the following:	99,704 ha (3,3% of ecological zone)	276,204 ha (8,1 %)	GIS, Cadaster, Government resolutions	
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Ile-Balkhash State Nature Reserve) covering 442,296 ha	0 ha	0 ha	TEO approved, 04 May 2014 Reservation of 415,000 ha for PA officially set aside by Almaty oblast, 22 Sept 2015	
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Altyn Yemel State National Nature Park) by	0 ha	146 500 ha	Resolution No. 1047, 24 December 2015	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
			460,208 ha				
			Establishment of a wildlife corridor between Altyn Yemel and Ile-Balkhash PAs of 700,000 ha	0 ha	0 ha		
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Arganaty) covering approximately 30,000 ha	0 ha	0 ha	Draft ENO	
	Size of flagship species populations of desert & semi-desert ecosystems in target areas remains at the baseline level or increase	Ile Balkhash Project Area:				Monitoring reports (census) of CFW, Research institutes & relevant NGOs	These biodiversity indicators are mandatory in GEF BD projects – particularly PA projects. However, projects often focus on and select species that are very unlikely to dramatically change over the course of a 4 – 6 year project (unless there is a calamitous decline as happened with saiga populations in Kazakhstan – and such stochastic declines are often beyond the capacity of any project to control. **The project team**
		Goitered gazelle: 1,800	1800≥	Goitered gazelle: 3998	4100		
		Koulan: 1,700	1700≥	Koulan: 2692	2700		
		Argali: 205	205≥	Argali: 205	215		
		Aral Syrdarya Project Area:					
		Goitered gazelle: 80	80≥	Goitered gazelle: 83	90		
		Koulan: 340	340≥	Koulan: 471	490		
		Pallas's sandgrouse: 407	407≥	Pallas's sandgrouse: 467	468		

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
		Ustyurt Plateau:					**asserts that gains in the numbers of selected species can be "explained by improved conservation measures of pilot PAs and by project's support in improving their facilities". This is relatively unlikely (see comment above).**[31]
		Ustyurt argali: 1,020	1020≥	Ustyurt argali: 1,074	1,070		
		Goitered gazelle: 270	270≥	Goitered gazelle: 277	270		
		Houbara bustard: 60	60≥	Houbara bustard: 74	74		
Outcome 1: PA system of Kazakhstan contains representative samples of desert and semi-desert ecosystems under various conservation regimes and is effective in protecting ecosystems and ecological processes	Enhanced management effectiveness of existing PAs that are expanded under the project (as measured by METT)	Altyn Yemel: 50 %	75%	Altyn-Yemel: 59 %	Altyn-Yemel: 55 %	METT Scorecard	Inclusion of the METT for PA projects is mandatory for GEF PA projects. **The project team notes that METT increases are linked to "upgrading of facilities and capacity building". The MTR concurs with this view.**
		Barsakelmes: 42 %	67%	Barsakelmes: 49 %	Barsakelmes: 55%		
		Ustyurt: 43 %	68%	Ustyurt: 43 %	Ustyurt: 53%		
	Enhanced management effectiveness of new PAs that are established under the	Ile-Balkhash: 19%	44%	Ile-Balkhash: 21 %	Ile-Balkhash: 22%		
		Mangistau: 7%	32%	Mangystau: 7 %	Mangystau: 7%		
		Arganaty: 9%	34%	Arganaty: 9 %	Arganaty: 9%		

[31] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*Undoubtedly, positive trend of increase in numbers of indicator species of animals is a result of several favorable factors such as improvement of food resources, creation of conditions for habitat, ensuring adequate protection of key habitats and carried out project activities related to capacity-building of pilot PAs*" **MTR Response**: The MTR concurs.

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
	project (as measured by METT)						
Outcome 2: Landscape-level conservation planning and management are developed and implemented in target desert and semi-desert environments	Territorial development plans employing landscape management approach	0 ha	9 million ha	0 ha	13 million ha	Approval documents for land use maps (Balkhash and Aralsk rayon akimats	There are no issues with the indicator. **The project has made satisfactory progress with the development of land use maps.**
	Number of hectares of restored wetlands & delta lakes	0 ha	2,202 ha	0 ha	*Data not specified*	Hydrological study reports	No issues with the indicators. **Much of the work is already underway to restore the Aidarkol and Kalte lake systems, and areas with Asiatic poplar. These successes need to be scaled up such that the project achieves its EOP targets.**
	Number of hectares of riparian & saksaul forests under sustainable management	0 ha	18,048 ha	1,500 ha of saxaul planted in the Aral pilot area	4 693 ha (including previous 1,500 ha and, in addition, 1,800 ha of Asiatic poplar (turanga) conservation	Akimat and CFH records	
	Quality and quantity of vegetation cover in rangelands in 3 rural districts	Hectares of land with significant signs of soil erosion caused by overgrazing in selected plots	Reduction of the size of the area heavily affected by soil erosion by at least 15% in the Ile Balkhash area and 20% in the Aral Syrdarya target area	Access to 11,000 ha of "distant" pastures for cattle	11,000 ha of distant pastures	Reports of experts from monitoring plots (Nausha Bulak, 5000 ha, land degradation factor is 30% of monitoring area; Dala Karatay, 6000 ha, land	The indicator calls for a reduction in the area affected by soil erosion. In effect, this is calling for *restoration* of eroded areas (because natural regeneration of the eroded sites would be beyond the time frame

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
						degradation factor is 35% of monitoring area)	of the project). **To date, the project has facilitated access to "distant" pasture – but there has been no attempts to restore pastures that are overgrazed and eroded. The project (with RTA and PSC) should determine whether this indicator should be amended.**[32]
	Presence of plant species which negatively affect the function of distant rangelands	Hectares of distant rangelands with significant signs of natural succession due to under	Unwanted plant species in at least 4 rangeland monitoring plots are less than 5% surface coverage	Nausha Bulak: 750 ha (15% of total area); Dala Karatay plot: 550 ha (9.1% of total area)	To be determined in May 2016	Reports of experts from monitoring plots	As with the above indicator, it is somewhat unclear how the project will achieve changes in the vegetation composition without resorting to active management (i.e., eradication of the

[32] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*In desert areas the restoration of degraded pastures is a considerably long process. Pastures that are located near settlements (within the radius of 8-10 km) and around existing wells are exposed to severe degradation. The most optimum approach to restore grass canopy in conditions of arid climate is non-admission of livestock grazing and letting pastures rest for 1-2 years. As part of pilot subprojects with an aim of reducing pressure on pastures adjacent to villages drive of cattle to distant plots is practiced as well as erosional-preventive rotation grazing is implemented. The rotation grazing system envisages dividing pastures into 4-5 plots and their alternate use according to season of the year (spring, summer, autumn, winter), where one plot is always left for rest until its restoration. Such an approach is used in all Project pilot sites. In desert areas restoration of pastures by sowing and planting shrubs is risky and costly*" **MTR Response**: The MTR fully agrees with the comment on the draft MTR report – i.e., that within the scope and timeframe of the project, it will be difficult to make significant impacts (including the EOP target of reduced area affected by soil erosion) – hence the suggestion that the indicator be amended to something more realistic.

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
		grazing					"unwanted plant species" – something that the project has not engaged in to date).[33]
	Average income of families participating in the measures on pasture management	US$ 1,600	Increase by at least 20%	$1600	To be determined in May 2016	Field survey	In principle, there are no issues with this indicator. It remains to be seen whether the target can be achieved.
	Number of farmer associations that use the experiences of this project as a model	No projects which use participatory bottom-up approaches in the target areas	At least 15 farmer associations or rural consumer cooperatives in the Aral Syrdarya target area and 25 in the Ile Balkhash area use the experience of this project as a model.	Awareness and demonstration in >20 farms.	>10 farms of Aral-Syrdarya and 10 farms of Ile-Balkash pilot areas using approaches and technologies of pastures sustainable management demonstrated by the pilot projects	Records of farmer associations/ RCCs	The indicator is as much about dissemination, knowledge management and replication as it is about environmental impacts. **The project appears to be making steady progress but it might also consider additional reporting on the anticipated environmental impacts of the replication**

[33] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*As it was noted Project is carrying out the work on application of seasonal rotation grazing aimed at restoration of the vegetation cover which fosters the reduction of number of unwanted and poisonous plants. At the same time, we should note that in conditions of desert pastures to restore grass canopy in degraded sites are required 4-5 years and more.*" **MTR Response**: MTR concurs; in addition, refer to above footnote.

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
							processes.
Outcome 3: Community involvement in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in and around PAs is enhanced	Reduction in poaching and illegal logging at target PAs (annual) per unit of patrolling effort, compared with year of initial patrolling	Ile-Balkhash Target Area				CFH and akimats	Again, in principle, there are no issues with the indicator. **The project reports that reductions in illegal activities are as a result of "improved conservation activity". The project must report the number of violations *per unit effort* as without this, the changes (and even the baseline) are meaningless.**
		Illegal logging violations: 67 Poaching violations: 436 Total violations: 503	Reduction by 40%	Illegal logging: 49 Poaching: 368 Total, violations: 417	Illegal logging violations: 7 (reduction by 32%) Poaching violations: 20 (reduction by 74%) Total violations reduced by 53%		
		Aral-Syrdarya Target Area					
		Illegal logging violations: 241 Poaching violations: 157 Total violations: 398	Reduction by 40%	Illegal logging: 212 Poaching: 118 Total, violations: 330	Illegal logging: 1 (reduction by 98%) Poaching: 267 (***increased***) Total, violations: 268 (reduction by 49%)		
	Functioning stakeholder engagement mechanism for transparency in PA planning and management	No PA public committees for mobilizing stakeholders in and around PAs in the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya target areas	Two (2) operational PA public committees	0	2 public committees established	Meeting minutes	No issues with this indicator (however, for further discussion on the PA Committees, see main body of the report). **The project has satisfactorily achieved the target. The real test begins to determine *functionality* of the PA**

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification	MTR comment on design and status
							Committees and their uptake across the PA estate in Kazakhstan.
	Number of PES agreements under implementation in project area	0	2 by project end	0	6 Pilot schemes have been developed for introduction of payments for ecosystem services, based on international experience	Approved biodiversity supply agreements	**The project is making progress; the target could have been more accurate and specific regarding the purpose of the PES agreements and then the project could be working towards this.**
	Share of registered land users and low-income rural households benefiting from biodiversity microcredit line	0%	5%	16 registered land users (2%) in three project areas obtained access to microcredit funds	63 registered land users (9%) at three project sites have access to micro-credit facilities under Eco-Damu Microcredit Program (and 102 jobs were created)	FFSA reports	**The project has satisfactorily achieved its target. As with some of the above indicators, the project should consider i) the environmental impacts that the microcredit schemes will deliver and, ii) the sustainability of the processes and impacts.**

4.2.2 Remaining barriers to achieving project objectives

44. The project has been making good progress towards achieving its objectives (see discussion in Section 4.2.1). There are relatively few barriers to achieving its objectives. However, there are a number of opportunities for the project to go beyond its stated objective, outcomes and outputs (some of which are explored in the project results framework, see Table XX). In this way, the project could "*over-deliver*". Nonetheless, there are few if any barriers to achieving the project objectives.

4.3 Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

4.3.1 Management arrangements

45. The project is being implemented, as described in Section 3.4, by a project management unit that is separately housed from both the CFW as well as the UNDP-CO. In this way, it retains independence from but retains god communications with both. The project also has regional offices in Almaty, Kyzylorda and Aktau. Overall, the management arrangements appear to be effective and, as will be described in Section 4.3.3, efficient.

46. The PB has met four times, three times in Astana and once in Bashy village in Kerbulak rayon of Almaty oblast.

47. The PMU is comprised of a number of staff some of whom are shared with other projects[34] and some of whom are working on this project alone (see Table 3). Thus, while the PMU structure does not precisely match the described structure in the Prodoc[35], this is understandable given the circumstances.

48. One aspect of note is that the majority of the PMU team are ex-employees of the CFW and/or the Ministry of Agriculture; this increases trust and confidence between the government, the UNDP-CO and the PMU team. This, in turn, is one the keys to the success of the project (see Section 5.1 for further discussion). The project also includes team members who are employees of the government – for example, the project representatives in the Kyzylorda and Mangystau Regions (in other words, only one of the project's field

[34] The projects include: i) the CFW/UNDP Project "Improving of the National Policy on Natural Resources Management, Monitoring, Conservation and Sustainable Use in the Context of Transition of Kazakhstan to Green Economy", and ii) the multi-donor BIOFIN project "Building Transformative Policy and Financing Frameworks to Increase Investment in Biodiversity Management"

[35] The Prodoc proposes that the PMU will consist of the NPM, an Administrative and Financial Assistant (AFA) and two team leaders in the field offices of Almaty and Aralsk; for comparison with the actual situation, see Table 3 in Section 4.3.1

officers is a direct employee of the project – that in the Ile-Balkash project area).

Table 3. The members of the Project Implementation Unit, including position and period within the position.

Name	Position	Employment dates
Talgat Kerteshev	Project Manager	01.01.2014 - 01.04.2017
Gulnaz Abdaliyeva	Administrative and Finance Assistant	01.01.2014 - 01.01.2017
Assel Zhakupbekova	Procurement specialist	12.06.2014 - 11.06.2016
Akmaral Agazhayeva	Project expert, territorial landscape planning	14.05.2014 - 13.05.2016
Aray Belgubayeva	Project expert Improving the PA Management System	08.07.2014 - 07.07.2016
Georgiy Akhmetzhanov	Project expert, capacity building expert	17.03.2014 - 16.03.2017
Aiman Omarbekova	Project expert of Wildlife Corridors and Improvement of Wildlife Management System	21.05.2014 - 20.05.2016
Zhanel Bessembayeva	Project expert on economic mechanisms of biodiversity management	18.08.2014 - 17.08.2016
Dinara Savazova	Project expert, management and implementation of demonstration projects on productive landscape conservation and sustainable use	22.09.2014 - 21.09.2016
Talgat Taukenov	Project expert, ecological monitoring of ecosystems and biodiversity	14.04.2014 - 13.04.2017
Arman Tlepbergenov	Project expert, sustainable ecosystems management and socio-economic development on Ile-Balkhash project area	09.07.2015 - 08.07.2016

49. There is a high degree of support, cohesiveness, coordination and collaboration among the project team.

4.3.2 Work planning

50. As with the majority of UNDP-GEF projects, the workplans and associated budgets are produced on an annual basis and they are approved by the PB. The first workplan was developed for approval during the project's Inception Workshop. Thereafter, the workplan and budgets have been developed towards the end of the calendar year.

4.3.3 Project Finance and Co-finance

51. The project received a grant of USD 4.364 million from the GEF Trust Fund. To date, the project has expended USD 2,505,065 – leaving USD 1,858,935 for the remaining portion of the project.

52. An additional USD 19.18 million was pledged at the outset of the project in co-finance. The project has kept relatively good information on the expenditure of both in-kind and cash co-finance (see Table 4).

Table 4. The planned value and actual expenditure, to date, of co-finance (all figures in USD)

Organization:	Total amount	Amount for MTE	% of the total amount
Monetary contribution			
GEF	4,364,000	**2,505,065**	**57,4%**
RK Government	9,379,147	**4,444,542**	**47,3 %**
IFAS	45,520	**33,000**	**72,5 %**
NGOs	754,000	**15,864**	**2,1 %**
Private sector	1,286,667	**95,554**	**7,4 %**
Other	2,032,952	-	-
Total:	**17,862,286**	**7,094,025**	**39,7 %**
In-kind contribution			
RK Government	3,250,807	**264,078**	**8,1 %**
IFAS	140,000		
NGOs	286,200	**2,885**	**1,0 %**
Other	1,304,000	**18,324**	**1,4 %**
UNDP	100,000		
Total:	**5,081,007**	**285,287**	**5,8 %**

Table 5. The project's budgeted (as it appeared in the project document) and actual expenditure by year and by Component (all figures in USD)

	YR1, 2013			YR2, 2014			YR3, 2015		
Outcome	**Budgeted**	**Actual**	**%spent**	**Budgeted**	**Actual**	**%spent**	**Budgeted**	**Actual**	**%spent**
1	25735.50	9234.59	35.88	361426.00	171390.04	47.42	289076.00	246128.50	85.14
2	48464.00	2844.21	5.87	1232463.50	227642.87	18.47	508483.50	594734.26	116.96
3	22863.50	6302.53	27.57	591909.00	447872.28	75.67	107409.00	408334.04	380.17
ProjMgt	31756.00	-	-	53363.00	131215.11	245.89	39113.00	55485.75	141.86
Total	**128819.00**	**18381.33**	**14.27**	**2239161.50**	**978120.30**	**43.68**	**944081.50**	**1304682.55**	**138.20**

	YR4, 2016	YR5, 2017	YR6, 2018
Outcome	**Budgeted**	**Budgeted**	**Budgeted**
1	94851.00	54245.00	30666.50
2	203263.00	229263.00	119063.00
3	88963.00	84709.00	54146.50
ProjMgt	34613.00	33213.00	24942.00
Total	**421690.00**	**401430.00**	**228818.00**

53. The expenditure, when compared with the budget (as originally appeared in the PRODOC – cf. the annual workplans and budgets), is low overall (USD 2,301,184.18 expended vs. USD 3,312,062 budgeted or 69.5% of the budgeted amounts expended). This is primarily driven by low delivery of Outcome 2 – with only 46% of the budget of this Outcome being expended against the originally budgeted amount. Outcome 1 is also underspent against the original budget (63% of the budget expended to date). In contrast, Outcome 3 and the project management budgets are both overspent (as compared with the original budgets in the PRODOC).

54. With respect to the project management spending, a significant portion has been spent to date (86% of the total project management budget for the entire life of the project) leaving only 14% (or USD 30,299) for the remaining period of the project. This will mean that the PMU, together with the UNDP-CO, will have to ensure that funds are found for project management once the GEF funds for project management are exhausted[36].

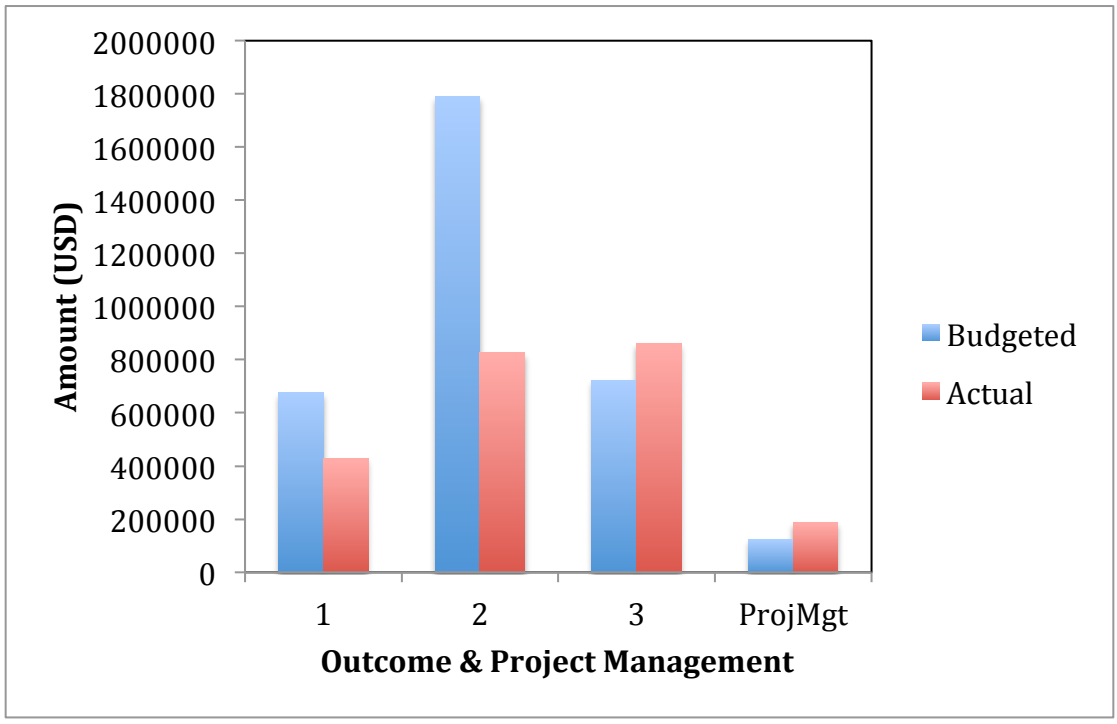

Figure 1 The total budgeted amounts and actual expenditure by outcome (noting that Outcome 3 represents the project management budget).

55. If there is a shortfall in the project management funds towards the final stages of the project, the UNDP-CO may have to cover the outstanding project management costs; this should be done taking into account that the UNDP-

[36] It is possible that project management costs for the other projects that are being allocated to the GEF project; this should be carefully re-examined and if discrepancies are found, the funds should be reallocated.

CO had pledged USD 100,000 in co-finance but, to date, has not expended any of these funds (see Table 4). Nonetheless, the PMU and the UNDP-CO need to monitor project management expenditure carefully to ensure that it stays as close to the budgeted amount as closely as possible, including ensuring that there is equitable sharing of project management costs across the four projects that the PMU is implementing[37]. Finally, none of the funding allocated to Outcomes One to Three should be reallocated to cover project management costs.

56. In terms of co-finance, the government is making substantial contributions, both in kind and in cash. One good example of the government contribution is the fact that two (of three) of the project's field officers are government employees (in Kyzylorda and Mangystau Regions), with only one (in the Ile-Balkash project area) a direct employee of the project.

57. Despite the reported high project management costs, the overall PMU structure (in that it is implementing four projects) should significantly improve efficiency and cost effectiveness. In addition, there are other factors that contribute to cost-effectiveness, including:

a. The PMU is comprised of experienced, competent people. Little time and effort was necessary to train the team.

b. The project is using the usual UNDP procurement rules that are designed to optimise value-for-money.

4.3.4 Project-level Monitoring & Evaluation Systems

58. The project's M&E framework is similar to the majority of all UNDP-GEF projects with a generous USD 234,000 allocated for project monitoring.

59. The project appears to be well monitored with the UNDP-GEF RTA visiting the project annually, the UNDP-CO visiting project sites twice a year. The PB sits at least once a year to fulfil its role of project oversight. The current MTR is a critical aspect of project M&E.

60. In conclusion and as elsewhere in project processes, then, the project is adhering strongly to the designed processes and the budgets therein.

4.3.5 Stakeholder engagement

61. Stakeholder engagement within the project is satisfactory and the project is engaging with a large number of stakeholders, both at a central level but

[37] **Comment on draft MTR Report**: "*Since the Desert Project is a part of the Biodiversity Projects Portfolio, which includes 5 projects, expenditures related to project management are split up between five projects. Project management costs will be funded from other projects of the Portfolio for the remainder of the project's life*" **MTR Response**: As noted in the Recommendations table, this is fine but the project management budgets and expenditure should be managed in a transparent and accountable way.

also with the appropriate people and organisations in the areas in which the pilots are taking place. The contact with stakeholders is taking place on a number of different levels:

a. The PB has broad representation from all sectors
b. At a more local level and with respect to the pilot sites, all the appropriate stakeholders are involved – the local authorities, relevant government institutions, protected area managers, etc.
c. Importantly, the project has involved the *aksakal*, or local elders. This has assisted with the implementation of the project – for example, when establishing the PA Public Committees.

4.3.6 Reporting

62. As with many of the above sections, the project is adhering closely to the requirements as described in the project document and as required with UNDP-GEF projects.

4.3.7 Communication

63. Over the course of the MTR mission, the PMU employed a PR Specialist; this position is to continue to ensure communications out of the OMU – including coverage of the project.

64. The project already has a Facebook page, and web-based information on the project can be found on numerous websites[38].

4.4 Sustainability

65. As with many projects that become involved in working on livelihood issues – especially those working with microcredit schemes – the key

[38] www.undp.kz, https://www.facebook.com/UNDPKazakhstan?fref=nf, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005287928651, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrT9p169uwA, https://www.facebook.com/UNDPKazakhstan?fref=ts, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005287928651&fref=ts, http://24.kz/ru/tv-projects/green-economy/item/44337-zelenaya-ekonomika-bioraznoobrazie, http://24.kz/ru/tv-projects/green-economy/item/35841-zelenaya-ekonomika-ekologicheskij-turizm, http://www.24.kz/ru/tv-projects/green-economy/item/21215-zelenaya-ekonomika-kak-ostanovit-peski, http://www.24.kz/ru/tv-projects/green-economy/item/58884-13-04-15, http://24.kz/kz/telepoject/zhasyl-ekonomika/item/36146-zhojyludy-aldynda-t-r, http://www.agroalem.kz/news/1822-kreditovanie-po-programme-eko-damu.html, http://www.kursiv.kz/examination/details/Blogs/Kak_sokhranit_saygakov_888/, http://www.zhurfaq.com/news/konferencija_integracija_ehkosistemnykh_uslug_v_zelenuju_ehkonomiku_24_ijunja_astana/2015-06-19-1544, http://thenews.kz/2015/06/25/1831890.html, http://www.kaztag.kz/news/detail.php?ID=379126&sphrase_id=182103, http://rusmiobzor.ru/post/282358/, http://www.inform.kz/rus/article/278974, http://www.astanatimes.com/2015/06/astana-hosts-global-conference-on-ecosystem-services-transitioning-to-a-green-economy/, http://ognialatau.kz/index.php?newsid=4512

sustainability issues lie within the sustainability of the processes and impacts that the project put into place and has, respectively, in this area.

66. In addition, at this point in the project's implementation, only a preliminary assessment of sustainability can be carried out. The Terminal Evaluation will determine the areas in which sustainability has – or has not – been achieved. Nonetheless, the MTR makes efforts to highlight those areas in which sustainability is less likely – and, by extension, the areas in which the project should focus to improve the likelihood of sustainability.

4.4.1 Financial Risks to Sustainability

67. Given the context and framework within which the project is working (especially one that has the state and state actors firmly at the centre of the project), there are relatively few concerns regarding financial sustainability. Thus, for example, once the government has committed to establish new protected areas and/or expand existing protected areas, the allocation of funds becomes "obligatory". On occasion, the allocated funding may not be sufficient but, at the very least, the majority of the funding requirements will be covered.

68. In contrast, however, and as suggested above, there may be financial sustainability issues associated with the microcredit schemes. Because these are linked to socio-economic sustainability, they are discussed below.

4.4.2 Socio-economic Risks to Sustainability

69. The greatest concerns to sustainability lie in the area of livelihoods and well-being. The project is implementing microcredit schemes among local communities in the pilot areas. There are a number of risks associated with such schemes – including financial (when the loan runs out and there are insufficient funds for the activities to continue), socio-economic (the livelihoods and well-being of the participants of the Eco Damu programme have taken some risks to participate – including using their houses as collateral for the loans) and environmental (livelihood programmes can lead to inadvertent, negative impacts because there are so many variables involved). Because the people have their houses as collateral, there is some risk that the vulnerable become more impoverished – if their project fails. In addition, the sustainability of each project that has been funded by microcredit loans is dependent on it being financially successful (as is the nature of loans).

70. In order to mitigate the risks, the project has associated itself with the Eco Damu process through partnership with the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture (FFSA). This will significantly reduce the risks to sustainability – nonetheless, the project should remain vigilant and consider the sustainability

of each venture into which it enters especially when there are local communities involved.

4.4.3 Institutional Framework and Governance Risks to Sustainability

71. The institutions with which the project is working are all robust and resilient. They also work within a governance framework that is well known to the project and to all the actors involved with the project. In short, there are few if any risks posed by either the institutional or governance framework.

72. There are only two areas of concern: i) the PA Public Committees and ii) the pasture councils/committees. It is likely that the former, the PA Public Committees, are relatively robust and resilient given their association with the protected areas themselves. However, the pasture committees are far less resilient and the project will have to find mechanisms to increase the likelihood of them being sustainable.

4.4.4 Environmental Risks to Sustainability

73. As mentioned above, the principal risks to environmental sustainability are the inadvertent, negative factors that may emerge from carrying out work on livelihoods or development. Thus, for example, the work with "distant" pastures could lead to accelerated degradation in the vicinity of the rehabilitated waterpoints[39]. The project should remain vigilant to the possibility that such eventualities may occur and work to implement strategies that prevent this type of environmentally unsustainable results occurring.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

74. The project is, to date, being successfully implemented by a competent team. There are very few caveats to such a statement. If it continues to be implemented in the way it has been until the time that the MTR took place, it has the potential to become a model project for the GEF.

75. There are many factors that have contributed to the success of the project to date and some of these are discussed in para 43 *et seq*. In summary, though, it appears to hinge on the good collaboration and cooperation among the project's key stakeholders and, most particularly, in the relationship between the CFW and the UNDP-CO. This is based on mutual trust and confidence. In addition, the majority of the PMU team are ex-employees of and are well

[39] Such impacts are common in arid and semi-arid areas in which waterpoints are either drilled or rehabilitated as they have been in this project.

known in the CFW and Ministry of Agriculture, which, again, leads to confidence and trust.

76. When dealing with such well-implemented projects, evaluators and reviewers may tend towards being picky and pedantic. Of the little criticism can be pointed at the project, it may be suggested that there is a little too close a focus on the project document and the project's results framework. This means that the project is only as good as the design. Fortuitously, the design of the project is good.

77. The most outstanding projects deliver both on the expected results as described in the project document – but also seek to adapt and find mechanisms (and often additional funding) to deliver results over and above these targeted results. In some ways, the project is *already* doing this: additional funding has been secured and there are some areas in which the project is over-delivering (e.g., there are two universities offering a post-graduate course, not just the one that is mentioned in the project document). In the sections below, a few suggestions are made how the project might seek to extend itself and deliver even more results. Irrespective of whether it does this or not, no evaluator or reviewer is going to be critical if the project team does not manage to do this. If the team and the partners continue to implement the project as they already are and achieve the targeted results alone, it will stand out as an excellent project!

5.2 Recommendations

Table 6. The summary of MTR recommendations for the project

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
A	**Objective:**	
A.1	The project is being successfully implemented to date. There is much that remains to be done and if the project is to become a model GEF project, then the PMU and the partners will have to keep working furiously!	CFW, PMU, UNDP-CO, partners
A.2	*Adapt and grow, where possible*. The project's design is generally good but there are aspects that could be further improved (if the project has adequate time and funding), there are additional and additive work it could carry out (see Section 5.2.2 for examples)[40].	PB, PMU, partners
A.3	*Replication plan and measuring impact*. For some of the other aspects of the project, it is unclear how i) results will be replicated and ii) how the impact will be measured (see Section 5.2.2 for examples). The PMU should strive to find mechanisms for replication and for	CFW, PMU, UNDP-CO

[40] The MTR would like to reiterate that such adaptations and additions are not absolutely necessary, and if the team and the partners continue to implement the project as they already are and achieve the targeted results alone, it will stand out as an excellent project

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
	measuring the impacts of the work they are carrying out.	
A.4	*NBSAP approval*. Support the process and try to ensure that the NBSAP is fully approved.	CFW, UNDP-CO
B	**Outcome 1:**	
B.1	The definition of corridors used by the project (movement of one species of antelope) is limited; if there is sufficient time and resources (without compromising the need to operationalize the corridor(s)), the analysis could be deepened to include other important parameters, especially as corridors are increasingly important under climate change scenarios (see para 41b under Section 4.2.1)[41].[42] The project will have to go through the complicated steps of *operationalizing* the corridors. Given that this is a relatively complicated process, the sooner the project embarks on getting this done, the better.	PMU, partners
B.2	If and when the project considers supporting the development (including design and content) of PA visitor's centres, there are some outstanding examples across the region. The UNDP-GEF RTC is Istanbul should be in a position to advise appropriately.	PMU, UNDP-GEF RTC, CFW
B.3	*Support the approval of the NBSAP*. As suggested in Section 4.2.1, the project partners, including the CFW and the UNDP-CO should do whatever they can to support the approval of the NBSAP as this will, in turn, support the process of extending and establishing further protected areas	CFW, UNDP-CO
D	**Outcome 3:**	

[41] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Project, considering the importance of conservation of unique, key biotopes of Ile-Balkash project area is making efforts to establish a wildlife corridor in Almaty Oblast. Preparation of scientific rationale (ENO) for the wildlife establishment is at the finishing stage. It is expected that ENO will be reviewed by the competent authority in the fall of the current year. With an aim of establishment of the wildlife corridor in Ustyurt and Aral-Syrdaria project areas, an extensive scientific research has been undertaken in 2015 to assess the ecological state of wildlife and its habitat. Field works in Kyzylorda Oblast and preparation of the ENO are expected as well in 2017.*" **MTR Response**: The MTR expects that it is too late (and perhaps unnecessary) to amend the ENO for the Ile-Balkash corridor. However, the "extensive scientific research", referred to in the comment, is (at least insofar as the information received by the MTR) limited because it focuses on the migration patterns of one species only. See Section 4.2.1 for further discussion.

[42] **Additional comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Field studies, the analysis of available literary and library sources were undertaken in 2015-2016 while preparing the ENO to establish a wildlife corridor in Ile-Balkash project area. The following specialists took part in the preparation of the ENO: geobotanist-florist, ornithologist, mammologist, herpetologist, specialist on socio-economic assessment. In addition, additional processing of received data will be undertaken in the MARXAN programme. Draft schematic map of the proposed wildlife corridor, developed as part of the ENO is enclosed.*" **MTR Response**: It is admirable that such detailed studies are undertaken – but the question is whether they are *relevant* for landscape level ecological processes, connectivity and corridors in particular (see discussion in Section 4.2.1 for more details).

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
D.1	*Beware of inadvertent impacts*. Some of the project activities may lead to negative, inadvertent impacts especially an arid system. The team should remain cognisant and vigilant against such inadvertent impacts and attempt to stave them off before they become significant[43].	PMU, partners
D.2	*Be vigilant for the impact of climatic stochasiticity*. There may be occasions when a particular intervention may appear to fail – but this may be more due to climatic stochasticity than to the actual failure of the intervention. The team and the project partners should remain vigilant to such climatic stochastic events masking the actual results of the interventions.[44]	PMU
D.3	*Ensure inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable people*. It is essential that the project (with the FFSA – the project partner on the "Eco Damu" microcredit scheme) is inclusive of these marginalised and vulnerable people. In addition, the Eco Damu scheme offers an opportunity to include women and women-led households[45]	PMU, partners
E	**Project Management**	
E.1	As indicated in Section 4.3.3, 86% of the project management budget has been spent to date. The PMU and UNDP-CO should plan how the project management costs will be funded for the remainder of the project's life[46].	PMU, UNDP-CO
E.2	*TE to meet a broader range of stakeholders*. There were a number of stakeholders that the MTR did not manage to meet. At the end of the project, the TE should aim to meet stakeholders such that it can evaluate all the successes of the project (including stakeholders who have been trained to evaluate the success of the training and how it is	PMU, UNDP-CO

[43] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Project is taking into consideration this recommendation. In its turn, in order to prevent inadvertent impacts Project jointly with Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture, Committee for Forestry and Wildlife has formed a committee to monitor implemented microcredit projects*." **MTR Response**: Good.

[44] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*At the early stage of designing pilot subprojects (grants and microcredits) possible risks from implementation of subprojects were considered, including natural and climatic. Measures on their mitigation and adaptation were described*." **MTR Response**: Good.

[45] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*The "Eco Damu" microcredit scheme is aimed at supporting various categories of people and households, including vulnerable categories of people. At the moment out of 69 approved microcredit requests – 17 of borrowers (24%) who obtained microcredits to develop sustainable types of activities, had low income. Moreover, Project is paying a lot of attention to capacity-building of local communities, including vulnerable people*." **MTR Response**: Good; the MTR suggests that this should be further extended and to ensure that vulnerable people are not excluded because of the requirement to use houses as collateral.

[46] **Comment on Draft MTR Report**: "*Since the Desert Project is a part of the Biodiversity Projects Portfolio, which includes 5 projects, expenditures related to project management are split up between five projects. Project management costs will be funded from other projects of the Portfolio for the remainder of the project's life*." **MTR Response**: This is acceptable but the UNDP-CO and other donors need to ensure that this is done in a transparent and accountable way.

Rec#	Recommendation	Entity Responsible
	being used to deliver impacts).	
E.3	*Monitoring co-finance*. The accuracy of co-finance monitoring could be further improved – using the system that was developed by a UNDP-GEF project in Uzbekistan[47] that monetises the time that people spend on project business. Once the system is in place, it would be relatively simple to keep track of all in-kind co-finance.	PMU, UNDP-RTC
E.4	*Build system of records*. It is always useful to have an organised system of records of everything (including, for example, trainings, outputs – correspondence, reports, plans and policy documents, government approvals, etc.) that the project is and has been doing. Having databases of all such project outputs makes it simple for the project team to produce these things whenever anybody (including an MTR team!) asks for them	PMU

5.2.1 Corrective actions for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project

78. *Keep it going, keep it relevant*. As indicated above, in order to achieve the full range of results, it will have to continue to work hard. The project has already encountered a few delays and stumbling blocks and it is quite likely that there will be more in the remaining half of the project's life. As such, if it is to reach its full potential as a model project, the project team will have to continue to work efficiently and effectively.

79. In addition to this, the project must ensure that all activities – and the work with the microcredit scheme in particular – remain relevant to the objectives of the project, to the development objectives of the Government of Kazakhstan and of the UNDP-CO, and to the GEF and its results frameworks.

80. *Corridors*. The issue of corridors – as it relates to landscape-level conservation – has already been discussed above (see para 41b under Section 4.2.1) and it is unnecessary to discuss it further. It may be already too late to carry out further analysis but this is something that should be considered in future work of this kind, especially as corridors are increasingly important under climate change scenarios.

81. Irrespective of whether these further analyses are carried out, the project will have to go through the complicated steps of *operationalizing* the corridors. Given that this is a relatively complicated process, the sooner the project embarks on getting this done, the better.

[47] The UNDP-GEF project "*Mainstreaming biodiversity in Uzbekistan's oil and gas sector policies and operations*".

82. *The Terminal Evaluation to meet a broader range of stakeholders*. There were various stakeholders that the MTR did not manage to meet – including, for example, Olga Klimonova (the consultant who carried out the METT analysis), the staff at the universities who are implementing the course on the Management of Biological Resources – and even the students who are studying the course.

83. At the end of the project, the TE should aim to meet such stakeholders such that it can evaluate the success of the training and the methods used for METT analysis. In addition, the TE should consult with other stakeholders who have been trained to evaluate the success of the training and how it is being used to deliver impacts.

84. *Beware of inadvertent impacts*[48]. As discussed above, the project is working on livelihood and other anthropic activities. Because of the number of variables involved, it is often difficult to predict the outcome of such interventions – and they can end in negative, inadvertent impacts especially if the environment is fragile – such as an arid system. The team should remain cognisant and vigilant against such inadvertent impacts and attempt to stave them off before they become significant. One common example of such an inadvertent impact is accelerated degradation of vegetation in arid areas around waterpoints when they are established (as these attract high densities of livestock). Obviously, the project has rehabilitated water points in "distant" pastures and, as a result, the team and partners should monitor the vegetation such that such accelerated degradation does not occur. At present, it appears *unlikely* to occur (because densities of livestock are relatively low) but vigilance would still be warranted.

85. *Climatic stochasticity masking actual impacts*[49]. There may be occasions when a particular intervention may appear to fail – but this may be more due to climatic stochasticity than to the actual failure of the intervention. One example of this (although it may not be limited to this example alone), is the intervention in the former rice paddies with the diversity of crops. It is possible that any given year is drier – or wetter – than average and the intervention may be deemed a failure. As with the inadvertent impacts discussed above, the team and the project partners should remain vigilant to such climatic stochastic events masking the actual results of the interventions.

[48] See Recommendations Table for comments on this recommendation and MTR response to the comments.

[49] See Recommendations Table for comments on this recommendation and MTR response to the comments.

86. *Visitor's centres*. Across the region, there are some outstanding examples of visitor's centres within protected areas[50]. When considering the design and content of visitor's/education centres for protected areas, the project staff and contractors should carry out research into the optimum centres relative to the available budget.

87. *Ensure that the marginalised and vulnerable people are beneficiaries*[51]. Marginalised and vulnerable people are often those that are most dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. The project proposes microcredit loans as one mechanism to reduce the dependence of such people on natural resources and to contribute to improving their livelihoods. It is essential that the project (with the FFSA – the project partner on the "Eco Damu" microcredit scheme) is inclusive of these marginalised and vulnerable people. It may require some thinking and planning to find an appropriate mechanism to ensure inclusion as such people may be reluctant to put their houses up as collateral in order to be a recipient of a microcredit loan.

88. Finally, the project's experience is one that shared across the globe: women are "more serious" with the loans and are more likely to repay them. As such, the Eco Damu scheme offers an opportunity to include women and women-led households.

5.2.2 Actions to follow up or reinforce initial benefits from the project

89. This section makes a series of recommendation to *enhance* the project further (as opposed to the more essential recommendations made above).

90. *Adapt and grow, where possible*. While the project's design is good, relevant and, most importantly, contextually appropriate, there are aspects that could be further improved – if the project finds that it has adequate time, energy and funding, it could carry out additional, further work – all of which could contribute to the objectives of the project. This is partly because, like any sector, biodiversity conservation and protected area management is dynamic, and since the PIF was written (in 2011), there have been a slew of developments. Examples include: i) the development of SMART[52] - a ranger/scout-based monitoring system that is also currently being adapted for law enforcement[53], ii) the use of UAVs – also usually associated with law

[50] One example is the visitor centre in Kronotsky zapovednik in Kamchatka in the Russian Federation. There are many others and consultation with the UNDP-GEF RTC should lead to a number of further suggestions.

[51] See Recommendations Table for comments on this recommendation and MTR response to the comments

[52] See http://www.smartconservationsoftware.org

[53] While SMART is the most common system as it is being rolled out by a consortium of actors including many of the larger international NGOs. However, there are others – for example, WILD LEO (https://www.nscr.nl/en/poaching-in-uganda-the-wild-leo-project/ and http://www.ugandacf.org/ucf-projects/welcome-to-the-wild-leo-project), which is a more

enforcement[54] but people are increasingly exploring the possibility of using them for carrying out surveys, and iii) the use of online training resources, many of which are free[55].

91. Even in some of the activities that the project has carried out, there is room for enhancing the positive impacts. For example, i) rather than using a diesel-pump for pumping water to the tree nursery (in the vicinity of Kamystybas/Akbai village), the project could have installed a wind or solar pump (and, indeed, a hybrid wind/solar system *was* installed to provide for the nursery offices), and ii) the year-to-year rotation of crops in the (former) rice paddies could be more explicit and planned such that the fertility and status of the soil should improve with time.

92. Nonetheless, the MTR would like to reiterate that such adaptations and additions are not absolutely necessary, and if the team and the partners continue to implement the project as they already are and achieve the targeted results alone, it will stand out as an excellent project!

93. *Monitoring co-finance*. The project is doing a good job in monitoring both the cash and in-kind co-finance expenditure. However, accuracy could be further improved – using the system that was developed by a UNDP-GEF project in Uzbekistan[56] that monetises the time that people spend on project business. Once the system is in place, it would be relatively simple to keep track of all in-kind co-finance.

94. *Build system of records*. It is always useful to have an organised system of records of everything (including, for example, trainings, outputs – correspondence, reports, plans and policy documents, government approvals, etc.) that the project is and has been doing. Having databases of all such project outputs makes it simple for the project team to produce these things whenever anybody (including an MTR team!) asks for them.

95. *Replication plan and measuring impact*. While it is relatively clear how some of the aspects of the project will be replicated and scaled up (e.g., the successes in the protected areas will be disseminated to the CFW and the

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specifically law enforcement system. In addition, there are other law enforcement tools – protected area managers need to decide on which tools are the most appropriate for them on the basis of their needs and the threats that they face.

[54] See, for example, http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Tanzania-to-use-drones-in-a-new-anti-poaching-initiative/-/2558/3197856/-/m5qobhz/-/index.html which uses the following UAV: http://martinuav.com/uav-products/super-bat-da-50/

[55] For example, see https://www.facebook.com/groups/619295954876670/ (and the project's PA staff should definitely be subscribed to this page), http://us13.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ae0bdc2b700d2ab6415906b10&id=7aa83fba44&e=8609bd0cf3, https://www.conservationtraining.org, https://learn.unitedforwildlife.org,

[56] The UNDP-GEF project "*Mainstreaming biodiversity in Uzbekistan's oil and gas sector policies and operations*".

different oblast authorities around the country enabling them to learn and incorporate lessons from the project; however, for a counterpoint, see the next paragraph), it is less clear for some of the other aspects of the project. In addition, it is not always clear how some of the impacts – on those things in which GEF is interested (biodiversity and land degradation) – of some of the activities will be demonstrated. These include the microcredit schemes, the aspects of "sustainable and replicable resource use" such as i) the work with livestock and "distant" pastures, ii) the crop diversification work (under Component Two) and iii) the PES work. Thus, for example, how will the environmental impacts of the crop diversification work be demonstrated (e.g., to the water systems and soils)? Further, how will livelihood impacts be demonstrated (e.g., soil fertility in rice paddies, price of fatter cattle, etc)? The project is carrying out many activities but some of the results and impacts may, as a result, be missed or go unreported. And while there are some replication plans, by the end of the project, it would be good to see actual replication taking place!

96. One of the regrets of the project team is that other areas – e.g., the south Kyzylkum deserts – were not included in the project document. This does not mean that the project cannot be expended to include such areas! Indeed, a replication plan describing how to expand the project (or at least the concepts incorporated in the project) would be useful. The CFW, the UNDP-CO and other development partners within the country could actively seek funding to take the opportunity of the presence and competence of the project team to make this happen. In the absence of this funding, at least a mechanism to replicate the processes in these other areas should be developed and published.

97. When asked, the project team suggested five areas that should be replicated: i) the microcredit schemes, the land use planning and zoning, iii) the propagation of the Asiatic poplar seedlings, iv) the use of satellite collars for carrying out research and v) the use of remote sensing for the monitoring of saxaul plantations. By the end of the project (thus, at the stage of the TE), the project should see what they can do to achieve just that: replication of these aspects of the project!

98. *Recognition of non-standard PAs*. The processes of the project have established protected areas that may not be currently recognised in the framework of legislation. One good example of this is the area is the small, protected areas in which the Asiatic poplars (or *turanga* trees) are found. Such areas are de facto protected areas and should be recognised as such.

99. *Support the approva*l *of the NBSAP*. As suggested in Section 4.2.1, the project partners, including the CFW and the UNDP-CO should do whatever

they can to support the approval of the NBSAP as this will, in turn, support the process of extending and establishing further protected areas.

5.2.3 Proposals for future directions underlining main objectives

100. This final section of the report explores the lessons that can be learned, to date, from the project's implementation. The majority are positive based on the fact that the project is, to a greater extent, working well.

101. *Trust and confidence*. As has been discussed through the report, one factor that is contributing to the success of the project is the trust and confidence that the CFW and the UNDP-CO have in each other. The reasons for this are also explored in the report. While there are legal barriers to the government implementing the project (see Section 3.4), the CFW has full confidence and trust that the PMU, with the support of the UNDP-CO, is implementing a project in its best interests. Quite remarkably, this trust and confidence is not so common even though in principle GEF projects are owned by governments and served and facilitated by the UNDP. Yet in Kazakhstan, this trust and confidence is well developed and, as a consequence, the partners have been delivering good GEF projects.

102. The trust and confidence, in the case of the current project, also extends to the oblast and rayon levels – and with the recognition and inclusion of the *aksakal*s. Again, this is important for delivering good projects.

103. *Contextually appropriate*. In addition to the trust and confidence discussed above, the project design is contextually appropriate. In other words, it does not make demands that are difficult or challenging in the context of Kazakhstan, and, as such, it is much more likely to be successful. This may appear to be a rather obvious observation but the context is either not fully taking into account in many other projects or the project documents (and hence the developers of the projects) are not fully honest about the contextual barriers that exist. The honest recognition of all barriers (including those that are cultural, social or political) is absolutely necessary if projects are to be successful.

104. *Significant changes cause delays*. Over the course of the project there have been a number of significant events that have led to delays in the project's implementation. These have included: i) restructuring within the government, ii) the dissolution of the *Zhasyl Damu* programme, and iii) the economic crisis of December 2015. While it may not be possible to predict if and when such events may take place, when it is or when they occur, projects should expect some delays and the GEF and UNDP must be sympathetic.

105. *Working at a local level is easier than the national level*. This is true of almost all processes. Local authorities are likely to be more approachable, more receptive and more likely to engage – and even attend meetings! As a

result, if, for example, projects go through the process of establishing new protected areas, it would be easier to secure approvals at the local level than it is at a national level.

106. *New concepts are challenging to introduce*. The project has been working to introduce a number of new concepts but some are more difficult than others to introduce and secure support. The PES is probably the best example of this and the project has demonstrated that while there is interest in such a concept, there is insufficient knowledge to secure further support to develop and apply PES as an economic tool. Further knowledge is needed before such concepts will be taken up more fully.

107. *There is still much to do*. Finally, the project is but one step in a much longer process to develop the protected area system in Kazakhstan and much remains to be done particularly in the development of capacity. When asked what remained to be done beyond the project, many respondents replied: i) the provision of material and technical support, ii) learning processes including from international experiences (e.g., through study tours), iii) investing in systems to increase awareness and environmental education.

Improving sustainability of the PA system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity compatible livelihoods in and around PAs

PIMS 4855, Atlas Award 00073767, Atlas Project No: 00086425

Midterm Review

Vol II (Annexes)

GEF SO-1, SP-3 Strengthening Terrestrial Protected Areas

Republic of Kazakhstan

Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan

United National Development Program (UNDP)

Table of Contents

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

1.1.1 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the UNDP-GEF Midterm Review (MTR) of the full- sized project titled "**Improving sustainability of the protected areas system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity-compatible live-support sources in and around protected areas**" (PIMS #00086425) implemented through the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of agriculture of Republic of Kazakhstan, which is to be undertaken in 2016.

The project started on the Project Document signature date and is in its third year of implementation. In line with the UNDP-GEF Guidance on MTRs, this MTR process was initiated before the submission of the second Project Implementation Report (PIR). This ToR sets out the expectations for this MTR. The MTR process must follow the guidance outlined in the document Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects: (http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/guidance/GEF/mid-term/Guidance_Midterm%20Review%20_EN_2014.pdf)

1.1.2 2. PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The project was designed to improve sustainability of the protected areas in globally important desert and semi-desert ecosystems by expanding their geographic coverage, promoting landscape approach and supporting biodiversity-compatible live-support sources inside PA and adjacent territories.

The project works in three directions. The first result relates to expanding the PA system to improve coverage of desert ecosystems in the national PAs system of Kazakhstan, as well as to assist development of PAs management plans, improve management effectiveness in scientific, environmental, eco-educational and tourism activities, and participate in improving the material and technical base. Introduction of the Management the Effectiveness of the Tracking Tools (METT) system to evaluate the effectiveness of management and training of specialists in new master's program is one of the key directions of this result.

As part of the second result the landscape planning methods will be introduced by conducting functional zoning of the project areas. Under this result territorial landscape planning will be improved, sustainable practices in pastures, riparian forests and wetlands will be demonstrated. Creation of necessary conditions for migration of large mammals through the establishment of wildlife corridor on the Ile-Balkhash project area is envisaged in the Project document. Improvement of information systems and provision of access of target groups to different data and characteristics of the project areas is also a priority.

The third result focuses on involvement of local community in the process of PAs co-management, support of local communities initiatives in the development of alternative income sources, which contributes to reducing

pressures on natural ecosystems of project PAs and implementation of mechanisms for payments for ecosystem services

Target areas are desert and semi-desert ecosystems of the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya basin and the Ustyurt plateau.

The project document was signed in September 2013, and its implementation started in November 2013. Total project budget is $23.5 million, 4,364 million of which is a contribution from the GEF. Implementing Agency from the part of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of agriculture of RK.

1.1.3 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MTR

The MTR will assess progress towards the achievement of the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document, and assess early signs of project success or failure with the goal of identifying the necessary changes to be made in order to set the project on-track to achieve its intended results. The MTR will also review the project's strategy, its risks to sustainability.

1.1.4 4. MTR APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The MTR must provide evidence based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The MTR team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Environmental & Social Safeguard Policy, the Project Document, project reports including Annual Project Review/PIRs, project budget revisions, lesson learned reports, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the team considers useful for this evidence-based review). The MTR team will review the baseline GEF focal area Tracking Tool submitted to the GEF at CEO endorsement, and the midterm GEF focal area Tracking Tool that must be completed before the MTR field mission begins.

The MTR team is expected to follow a collaborative and participatory approach[1] ensuring close engagement with the Project Team, government counterparts (the GEF Operational Focal Point), the UNDP Country Office(s), UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisers, and other key stakeholders.

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful MTR.[2] Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to *UNDP Kazakhstan, project team*; executing agencies, senior officials and task team/ component leaders, key experts and consultants in the subject area, Project Board, project stakeholders, Protected Areas employees, academia, local government and CSOs, etc.

[1] For ideas on innovative and participatory Monitoring and Evaluation strategies and techniques, see UNDP Discussion Paper: Innovations in Monitoring & Evaluating Results, 05 Nov 2013.
[2] For more stakeholder engagement in the M&E process, see the UNDP Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results, Chapter 3, pg. 93.

Additionally, the MTR team is expected to conduct field missions to Kazakhstan, including the following project sites Astana city, Almaty region, Kyzylorda region, Mangistau region.

The final MTR report should describe the full MTR approach taken and the rationale for the approach making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the review.

1.1.5 5. DETAILED SCOPE OF THE MTR

The MTR team will assess the following four categories of project progress. See the *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects* for extended descriptions.

i. Project Strategy

Project design:

- Review the problem addressed by the project and the underlying assumptions. Review the effect of any incorrect assumptions or changes to the context to achieving the project results as outlined in the Project Document.
- Review the relevance of the project strategy and assess whether it provides the most effective route towards expected/intended results. Were lessons from other relevant projects properly incorporated into the project design?
- Review how the project addresses country priorities. Review country ownership. Was the project concept in line with the national sector development priorities and plans of the country (or of participating countries in the case of multi-country projects)?
- Review decision-making processes: were perspectives of those who would be affected by project decisions, those who could affect the outcomes, and those who could contribute information or other resources to the process, taken into account during project design processes?
- Review the extent to which relevant gender issues were raised in the project design. See Annex 9 of *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects* for further guidelines.
- If there are major areas of concern, recommend areas for improvement.

Results Framework/Logframe:

- Undertake a critical analysis of the project's logframe indicators and targets, assess how "SMART" the midterm and end-of-project targets are (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound), and suggest specific amendments/revisions to the targets and indicators as necessary.
- Are the project's objectives and outcomes or components clear, practical, and feasible within its time frame?
- Examine if progress so far has led to, or could in the future catalyse beneficial development effects (i.e. income generation, gender equality and women's

empowerment, improved governance etc...) that should be included in the project results framework and monitored on an annual basis.

- Ensure broader development and gender aspects of the project are being monitored effectively. Develop and recommend SMART 'development' indicators, including sex-disaggregated indicators and indicators that capture development benefits.

ii. Progress Towards Results

Progress Towards Outcomes Analysis:

- Review the logframe indicators against progress made towards the end-of-project targets using the

  Progress Towards Results Matrix and following the *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDPSupported, GEF-Financed Projects*; colour code progress in a "traffic light system" based on the level of progress achieved; assign a rating on progress for each outcome; make recommendations from the areas marked as "Not on target to be achieved" (red).

Table. Progress Towards Results Matrix (Achievement of outcomes against End-of-project Targets)

Project Strategy	Indicator[3]	Baseline Level[4]	Level in 1st PIR	MTR Target[5]	EOP Target	MTR Level	Rating [6]	Justification for Rating
Objective:	Indicator (if applicable):							
Outcome 1:	Indicator 1:							
	Indicator 2:							
Outcome 2:	Indicator 3:							
	Indicator 4:							
	Etc.							
Etc.								

Indicator Assessment Key

[3] Populate with data from the Logframe and scorecards
[4] Populate with data from the Project Document
[5] If available
[6] Use the 6 point Progress Towards Results Rating Scale: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU

Green= Achieved	Yellow= On target to be achieved	Red= Not on target to be achieved

In addition to the progress towards outcomes analysis:

- Compare and analyse the GEF Tracking Tool at the Baseline with the one completed right before the Midterm Review.
- Identify remaining barriers to achieving the project objective in the remainder of the project.
- By reviewing the aspects of the project that have already been successful, identify ways in which the project can further expand these benefits.

iii. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

Management Arrangements:

- Review overall effectiveness of project management as outlined in the Project Document. Have changes been made and are they effective? Are responsibilities and reporting lines clear? Is decisionmaking transparent and undertaken in a timely manner? Recommend areas for improvement.
- Review the quality of execution of the Executing Agency/Implementing Partner(s) and recommend areas for improvement.
- Review the quality of support provided by the GEF Partner Agency (UNDP) and recommend areas for improvement.

Work Planning:

- Review any delays in project start-up and implementation, identify the causes and examine if they have been resolved.
- Are work-planning processes results-based? If not, suggest ways to re-orientate work planning to focus on results?
- Examine the use of the project's results framework/ logframe as a management tool and review any changes made to it since project start.

Finance and co-finance:

- Consider the financial management of the project, with specific reference to the cost-effectiveness of interventions.
- Review the changes to fund allocations as a result of budget revisions and assess the appropriateness and relevance of such revisions.
- Does the project have the appropriate financial controls, including reporting and planning, that allow management to make informed decisions regarding the budget and allow for timely flow of funds?
- Informed by the co-financing monitoring table to be filled out, provide commentary on co-financing: is co-financing being used strategically to help the objectives of the project? Is the Project Team meeting with all co-financing partners regularly in order to align financing priorities and annual work plans?

Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:

- Review the monitoring tools currently being used: Do they provide the necessary information? Do they involve key partners? Are they aligned or mainstreamed with national systems? Do they use existing information? Are they efficient? Are they cost-effective? Are additional tools required? How could they be made more participatory and inclusive?
- Examine the financial management of the project monitoring and evaluation budget. Are sufficient resources being allocated to monitoring and evaluation? Are these resources being allocated effectively?

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Project management: Has the project developed and leveraged the necessary and appropriate partnerships with direct and tangential stakeholders?
- Participation and country-driven processes: Do local and national government stakeholders support the objectives of the project? Do they continue to have an active role in project decision-making that supports efficient and effective project implementation?
- Participation and public awareness: To what extent has stakeholder involvement and public awareness contributed to the progress towards achievement of project objectives?

Reporting:

- Assess how adaptive management changes have been reported by the project management and shared with the Project Board.
- Assess how well the Project Team and partners undertake and fulfil GEF reporting requirements (i.e. how have they addressed poorly-rated PIRs, if applicable?)
- Assess how lessons derived from the adaptive management process have been documented, shared with key partners and internalized by partners.

Communications:

- Review internal project communication with stakeholders: Is communication regular and effective? Are there key stakeholders left out of communication? Are there feedback mechanisms when communication is received? Does this communication with stakeholders contribute to their awareness of project outcomes and activities and investment in the sustainability of project results?
- Review external project communication: Are proper means of communication established or being established to express the project progress and intended impact to the public (is there a web presence, for example? Or did the project implement appropriate outreach and public awareness campaigns?)
- For reporting purposes, write one half-page paragraph that summarizes the project's progress towards results in terms of contribution to sustainable development benefits, as well as global environmental benefits.

iv. Sustainability

- Validate whether the risks identified in the Project Document, Annual Project Review/PIRs and the ATLAS Risk Management Module are the most important and whether the risk ratings applied are appropriate and up to date. If not, explain why.
- In addition, assess the following risks to sustainability:

Financial risks to sustainability:

- What is the likelihood of financial and economic resources not being available once the GEF assistance ends (consider potential resources can be from multiple sources, such as the public and private sectors, income generating activities, and other funding that will be adequate financial resources for sustaining project's outcomes)?

Socio-economic risks to sustainability:

- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outcomes? What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the project outcomes/benefits to be sustained? Do the various key stakeholders see that it is in their interest that the project benefits continue to flow? Is there sufficient public / stakeholder awareness in support of the long term objectives of the project? Are lessons learned being documented by the Project Team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the project and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?

Institutional Framework and Governance risks to sustainability:

- Do the legal frameworks, policies, governance structures and processes pose risks that may jeopardize sustenance of project benefits? While assessing this parameter, also consider if the required systems/ mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and technical knowledge transfer are in place.

Environmental risks to sustainability:

- Are there any environmental risks that may jeopardize sustenance of project outcomes?

Conclusions & Recommendations

The MTR team will include a section of the report setting out the MTR's evidence-based conclusions, in light of the findings.[7]

Recommendations should be succinct suggestions for critical intervention that are specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant. A recommendation table should be put in the report's executive summary. See the *Guidance For*

[7] Alternatively, MTR conclusions may be integrated into the body of the report.

Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects for guidance on a recommendation table.

The MTR team should make no more than 15 recommendations total.

Ratings

The MTR team will include its ratings of the project's results and brief descriptions of the associated achievements in a *MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary Table* in the Executive Summary of the MTR report. See Annex E for ratings scales. No rating on Project Strategy and no overall project rating is required.

Table. MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary Table for

1.1.5.1 (Improving sustainability of the protected areas system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity-compatible live-support sources in and around protected areas)

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Project Strategy	N/A	
Progress Towards Results	Objective Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 1 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 2 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 3 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Etc.	
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	(rate 6 pt. scale)	
Sustainability	(rate 4 pt. scale)	

1.1.6 6. MIDTERM REVIEW DELIVERABLES

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Responsibilities
1	**MTR Inception Report**	MTR team clarifies objectives and methods of Midterm Review	Not later 7 April, 3 days	MTR team submits to the Commissioning Unit and project management

2	**Presentation**	Initial Findings	Not later 25 April, 1 day	MTR Team presents to project management and the Commissioning Unit
3	**Draft Final Report**	Full report (using guidelines on content outlined in Annex B) with annexes	Not later 10 May, within 2 weeks, 7 days	Sent to the Commissioning Unit, reviewed by RTA, Project Coordinating Unit, GEF OFP
4	**Final Report***	Revised report with audit trail detailing how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final MTR report	Not later 15 June 2016, within 4 weeks, 10 days	Sent to the Commissioning Unit

*The final MTR report must be in English. If applicable, the Commissioning Unit may choose to arrange for a translation of the report into a language more widely shared by national stakeholders.

1.1.7 7. MTR ARRANGEMENTS

MTR is UNDP Kazakhstan *(In the case of single-country projects, the Commissioning Unit is the UNDP* The principal responsibility for managing this MTR resides with the Commissioning Unit.
The Commissioning Unit for this project's *Country Office. In the case of regional projects and jointly-implemented projects, typically the principal responsibility for managing this MTR resides with the country or agency or regional coordination body – please confirm with the UNDPGEF team in the region – that is receiving the larger proportion of GEF financing. For global projects, the Commissioning Unit can be the UNDP-GEF Directorate or the lead UNDP Country Office).*

The commissioning unit will contract the consultants and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the MTR team. The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the MTR team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits.

Annex 2 MTR Mission Itinerary

Date	Item
21 Apr	Arrival of the international consultant in Astana Presentation of the project by the project team Travel from Astana to Almaty
22 Apr	Travel from Almaty to Bakanas village (Balkhash district, Almaty region) Meeting with Akim of Balkhash district Visit to microcredit project on beekeeping in Bakanas village Travel from Bakanas village to Zheltorangy village. Visit to the pilot project on Asiatic poplar conservation Travel from Zheltorangy village to "Dala Karatay" distant pasture. Visit to the pilot project on organization of seasonal pasture rotation on desert pastures of Berekinskiy rural area Travel from Bakanas village to Saryozek village
23 Apr	Meeting with Akim of Kerbulak district. Travel from Saryozek village to Shankhanay village. Visit to microcredit ecotourism project. Travel from Shankhanay village to Basshy village Meeting with Administration of "Altyn Emel" national park. Meeting with Chairman of the Social Council. Visit to "Altyn Emel" national park area
24 Apr	Travel from Basshi village to Almaty city and then from Almaty to Kyzylorda
25 Apr	Meeting with Head of the Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife Use regulation of Kyzylorda region Meeting with Head of the Department of Agriculture of Kyzylorda region Visit to "Madi Kadzhi" pilot farm Departure to Shirkeili village – KazRI of Rice Growing Travel from Kyzylorda to Aralsk town

Date	Item
26 Apr	Meeting with Akim of Aral district. Meeting with Director of Barsakelmes reserve Meeting with Chairman of the Social Council Travel from Aralsk town to Akbai village Visit to Aral forest farm, presentation of the results of the project on water conservation technologies in forestry management Travel from Aral forest farm to Kamystybas village Visit to microcredit projects on guest tourism development Travel from Zhanakurylskiy rural area to Kyzylorda
27 Apr	Travel from Kyzylorda to Astana Meeting with project team Travel from Astana to Aktau
28 Apr	Travel from Aktau to Karakiyanskiy district, "Bakdaulet" Visit to "Bakdaulet" pilot farm Presentation of distant-pasture cattle rearing project results. Travel from Bakdaulet PF to Zhanaozen town, 160 km Visit to Ustyurt reserve office Travel from Zhanaozen town to Aktau city Departure from Aktau to Astana
29 Apr	Meeting at the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife Meeting with UNDP-CO (including DRR) Meeting with Chairman of the Board of "Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture" JSC Meeting with Director of Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan
30 Apr	Meeting with project team Summarizing the results of the midterm mission.
01 May	Departure of international expert from International Airport Astana

Annex 3 List of persons met and interviewed over the course of MTR

This list includes all those consulted over the course of the MTR – both during the mission and in the time that has elapsed since the mission took place.

Name	Position
Talgat Kerteshev	Project Manager (project team)
Gulnaz Abdaliyeva	Administrativa and Finance Assistant (project team)
Assel Zhakupbekova	Procurement specialist (project team)
Akmaral Agazhayeva	Project expert, territorial landscape planning (project team)
Aray Belgubayeva	Project expert Improving the PA Management System (project team)
Georgiy Akhmetzhanov	Project expert, capacity building expert (project team)
Aiman Omarbekova	Project expert of Wildlife Corridors and Improvement of Wildlife Management System (project team)
Zhanel Bessembayeva	Project expert on economic mechanisms of biodiversity management (project team)
Dinara Savazova	Project expert, management and implementation of demonstration projects on productive landscape conservation and sustainable use (project team)
Talgat Taukenov	Project expert, ecological monitoring of ecosystems and biodiversity (project team)
Arman Tlepbergenov	Project expert, sustainable ecosystems management and socio-economic development on Ile-Balkhash project area (project team)
Aizhan Baimukanova	
Nurgul Smagulova	
Smagulov Sairan Seitkemelovich	Deputy Akim of Balkhash district
Rakhymbayev Bakhytbek Rakhymbayevich	Deputy Akim of Balkhash district
Nurlan Imanbekov	Chairman of the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture in Balkhash district
Dossymbekov Tynyshpay Dossymbekovich	Former Deputy Akim of Almaty region
Riyash Stambekov	Executor of bee breeding project in Bakanas village
Arman Tlepbergenov	Site expert of UNDP project in Ile-Balkhash region
Madi Okanov	Director of Kurtinskiy Forest State Enterprise

Rinat Kurmayev	Head of "Alakol Kamkor" Public Association (NGO)
Sailaubek Okanov	Site security (turgai woodland)
Baktiyar Sadyk	Expert on UNDP project sustainable agriculture
Mustafa Kaliyev	Pilot project executor, Head of "Tamshybulak" LLP
Aliyev Bagdat Baishalovich	Akim of Kerbulak district
Aipeissov Kumisbek Abilyashovich	First Deputy Akim of Kerbulak district
Aidarbekov Tanat Yessenkeldiyevich	Deputy Akim of Kerbulak district
Mombayev Bolusbay Togusbayevich	Deputy Akim of Kerbulak district
Talgat Kerteshev	UNDP project manager
Sklyarenko Sergey Lvovich	Director of the Center of Applied Biology of the Republican Public Association "Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan" (ACBK)
Serik Akhlassov	Microcredit ecotourism project executor
Akhmetbekov K.	Chairman of the Public Association
Bayadilov Kalyk Ongarovich	Director of "Altyn-Emel" State National Nature Park
Turgambayev Daniyar Galymovich	Deputy Director of "Altyn-Emel" State National Nature Park
Murat Sydygaliyev	Head of Protection Service of "Altyn-Emel" State National Nature Park
Margulan Mussabekov	Game manager of "Altyn-Emel" State National Nature Park
Yerkin Utegenov	Site expert of the project in Kyzylorda region
Baktiyar Sadyk	Expert on sustainable agriculture of UNDP project
Zhugunissova Bakhytzhamal Azbergenovna	Head of "Aral Aiyelderi" PA (NGO)
Abzal Sarsenov	Director of "Zhalantos" Peasant Farm
Alimbetova Zauresh Zhansultanovna	Director of "Barsakelmes" State Nature Reservation
Abulgaziyeva Khanzada	Chairman of the Social Council
Mukhimov Abzal Sansyzbayevich	Akim of Aral district
Asylbek Sukhanberlyev	Representative of the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture in Aral district
Beknazar Kuanyshbayev	Director of "Kozhagul Ata" Peasant Farm
Adilzhan Abdikov	Performer of microcredit project on fishery
Aidos Baidulatov	Credit expert on funding of Aral district

Abulgaziyeva Khanzada	Project executor
Abiyev Altynbek	Project executor
Aralbay Niyazymbetov	Akim of Akirek rural area
Faizulla Smagulov	Director of Aral state forestry institution
Amankul Anessova	Forestry engineer of Aral state forestry institution
Shadiyar Urkimbayev	Site expert of UNDP project in Mangistau region
Korgan Sagyzbayev	Director of "Bakdaulet" Peasant Farm
Ustadov Zhalgas Adykanovich	Director of Ustyurt State Nature Reservation
Zhaskairat Nurmukhambetov	Deputy Director of Research work of Ustyurt State Nature Reservation
Mendybay Agiyev	Head of Protection Department of Ustyurt State Nature Reservation
Ustemirov Kairat Zhangabylovich	Acting Chairman of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife
Yelemessov Maksat Muratovich	Head of Forest and Specially protected natural areas
Taubayev Almas Zhanatkhanovich	Deputy Chairman of the Management Board of the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture
Munkhtuya Altangerel	Deputy UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan
Rassul Rakhimov	Acting Head of UNDP Environment and Energy Department in Kazakhstan
Zhanetta Babasheva	Strategic support department, Resources monitoring coordinator

Annex 4 Maps of the wildlife corridors

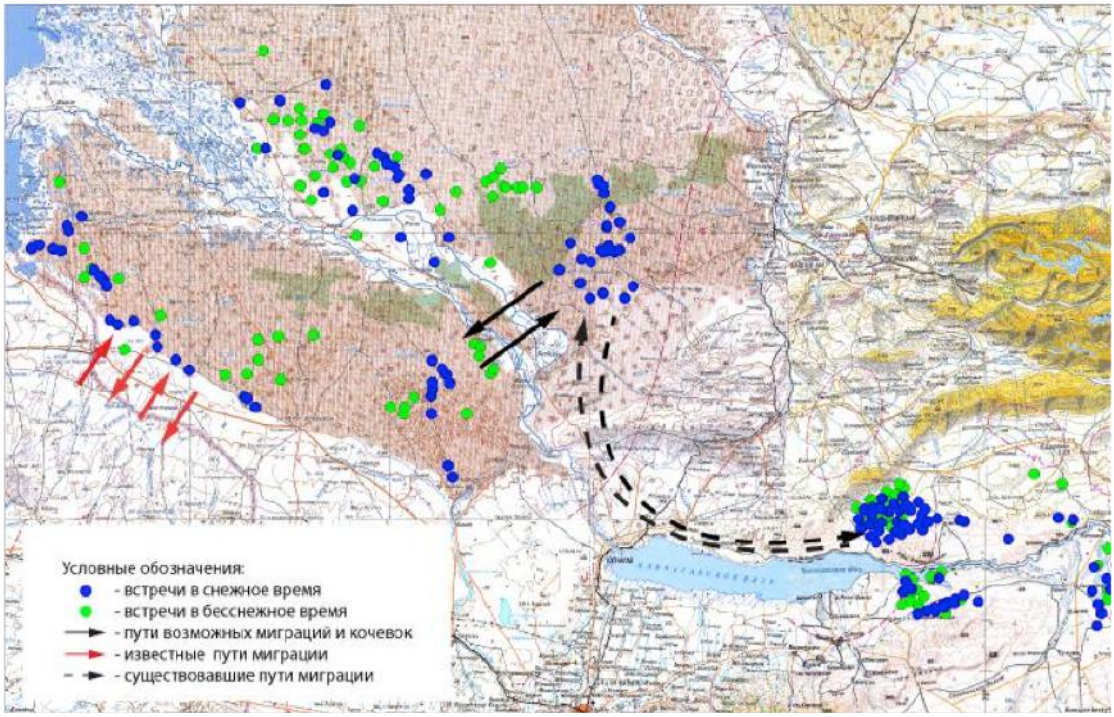


Figure 1. Map showing movements of collared goitered gazelles - data were used to justify wildlife corridor

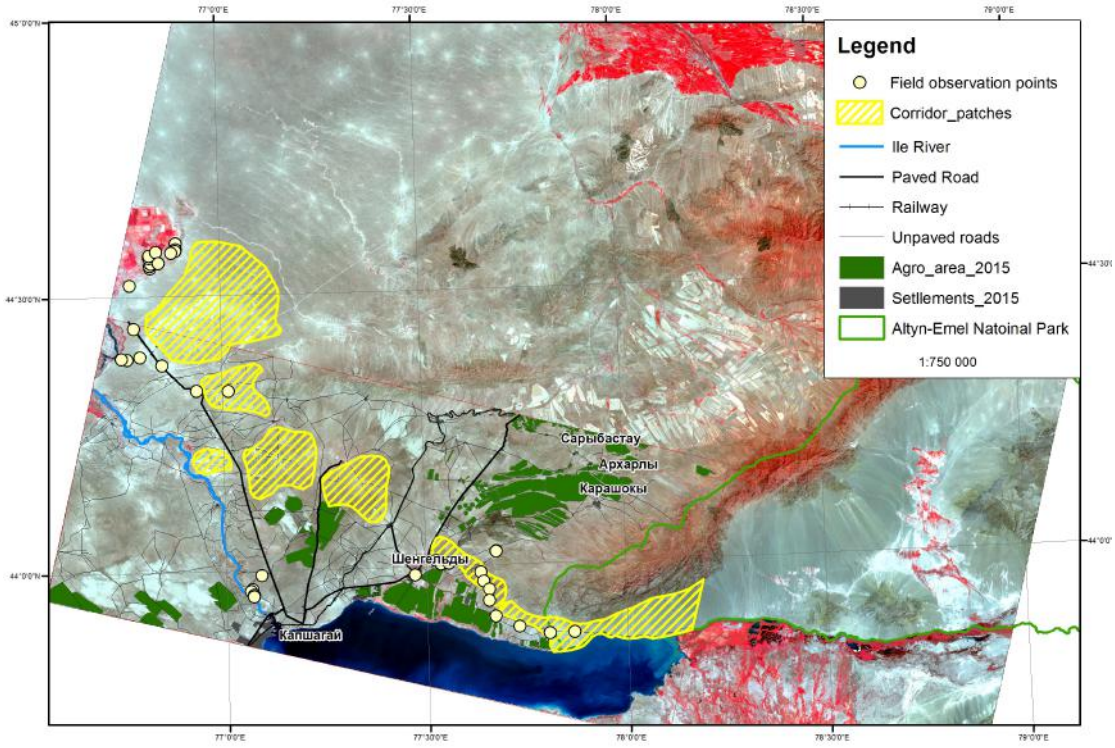
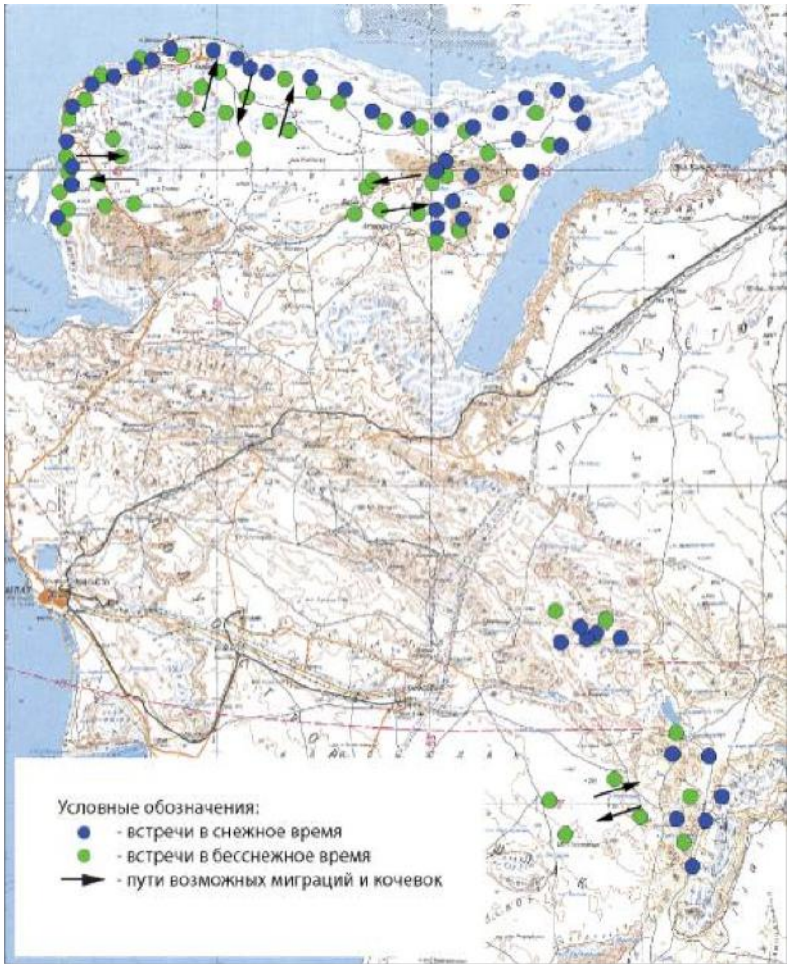
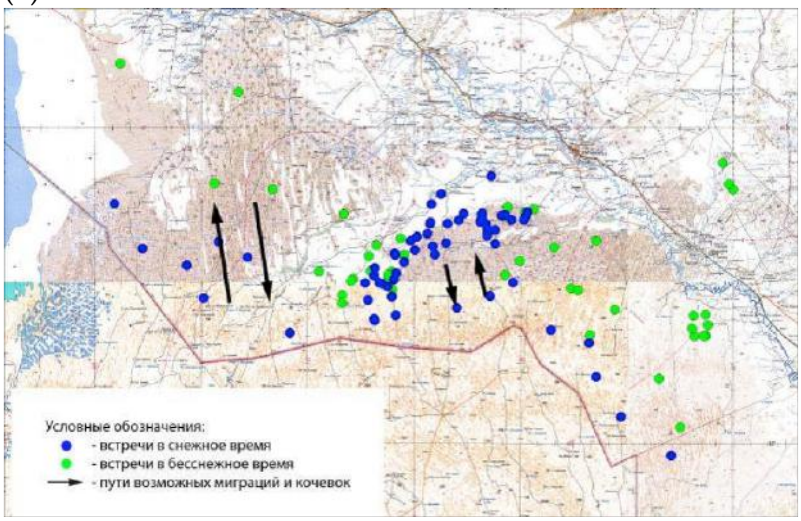


Figure 2. Map showing resulting "corridor patches" for the Ile-Balkash corridor



(a)



(b)

Figure 3a and b. Maps showing movements of goitered gazelles in the Ustyurt – Barsakelmes area used to determine whether a wildlife corridor was justified.

Annex 5 Examples of land use maps developed by the project

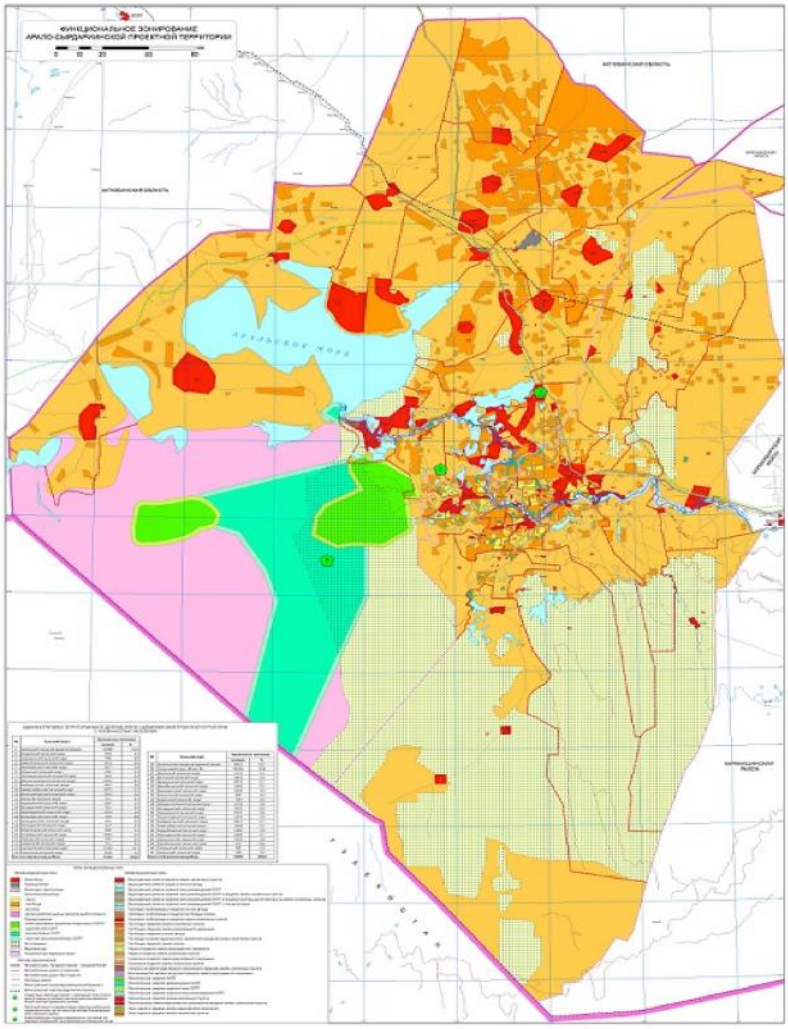


Figure 4. Example of a land use map developed by the project: this is for the Ile-Balkash project area.

Annex 6 The project's results framework (as filled by the project team)

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
Objective: To enhance the sustainability of protected areas in globally important desert and semi-desert ecosystems by expanding their geographic coverage, promoting a landscape approach, and supporting biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PAs	Coverage of under-represented Southern desert in the PA System of Kazakhstan	1,591,800 ha (5.3% of ecological zone)	By 2015 coverage of Southern desert in PA system increases by 2,682,032 ha (8.9% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from the following:	1,591,800 ha (5.3% of ecological zone)	1,591,800 ha (5,3 %)	GIS, Cadaster, Government resolutions
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Mangistau State Reserved Zone) covering 2,676,262 ha	Plan of land boundaries allotment for establishment of Mangistau protected area at total area 2,600,000 ha is being approved by local government (akimat) of Mangistau Oblast.		
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Barsakelmes State Nature Reserve) by 5,770 ha	Works on approval of land use design and feasibility study (TEO) to expand Barsakelmes reserve's area at local government (akimat) level of Kyzylorda Oblast were performed.		

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				A dialogue platform was created for open discussion of issues on Syrdaria river delta area (2,3 000 ha) integration into the reserve.		
			By 2020 coverage of Southern desert in PA system increases by approximately 970,000 ha (3.2% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from:			
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Ustyurt State Nature Reserve) by approximately 220,000 ha	Scientific background report (ENO) for expansion of Ustyurt reserve's area at 704,000 ha (2,3% of ecological zone) was developed. ENO was approved by authorized body, report on the positive state ecological appraisal was obtained. The feasibility study (TEO) to expand the reserve's area is being developed.	ENO for expanding the area of Ustyurt nature reserve, including valuable and representative sites of Ustyurt plateau, is developed, positive conclusion of state expertise is obtained;	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
			Establishment of a wildlife corridor between Barsakelmes and Ustyurt PAs of approximately 750,000 ha	Field studies on habitation of rare ungulate species of animals between Barsakelmes and Ustyurt PAs were conducted. Habitation and animal migration maps were drawn for three routes with total length of 841 km. The results of scientific works will be used to establish the proposed ecological corridor.	Research on large mammals inhabiting in the projected area of eco-corridor (size, population status, migration routes, places of concentration of the ecosystem) has been conducted. Conclusion on futility of creating eco-corridor due to lack of migration routes on the territory has been prepared	
	Coverage of under-represented Mountain-valley subtype desert in the PA System of Kazakhstan	99,704 ha (3.3% of ecological zone)	By 2015 coverage of Mountain-valley subtype desert in PA system increases by 1,602,504 ha (53.4% of the ecological zone). This increase comes from the following:	99,704 ha (3,3% of ecological zone)	276,204 ha (8,1 %)	GIS, Cadaster, Government resolutions
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Ile-Balkhash State Nature Reserve) covering 442,296 ha	Works were performed on land lots reservation at area of 15,2 000 ha to establish "Ile-Balkhash" nature reservat. The	TEO of Ile-Balkash reserve area creation is approved by the order of CFH MEPWR RK (Committee of Forestry and Hunting of the Ministry of	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				feasibility study (TEO) was approved by authorized body, report on the positive state ecological appraisal was obtained	Environmental Protection and Water Resources) dated May 4, 2014 On September 22 this year, the Akimat of Almaty region reserved the area of more than 415 thous. ha for creation of "Ile-Balkash" SNR. The works on approval of the land use documentation with the local executive bodies are completed;	
			Expansion of 1 existing PA (Altyn Yemel State National Nature Park) by 460,208 ha	Draft Decree of RK Government on expansion of the "Altyn Yemel" State National Nature Park's area at 146,5 000 ha is being approved by concerned authorities	By the Resolution of the Government of RK No.1047 dated December 24, 2015, "Altyn-Yemel" national park area was extended by 146 500 ha	
			Establishment of a wildlife corridor between Altyn Yemel and Ile-Balkhash PAs of 700,000 ha	Field studies on habitation of rare ungulate species of animals of Altyn Yemel and Ile-Balkhash PAs were	Research on large mammals inhabiting in the projected area of wildlife corridors (size, population status, migration	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				conducted. Habitation and animal migration maps were drawn for three routes with total length of 664 km. The results of scientific works will be used for establishment of the proposed ecological corridor;	routes, places of concentration of the ecosystem) has been conducted. Satellite collars have been purchased. 9 goitered gazelles have been ringed. Signals come from 9 collars: 2 males, 7 females. Interim reports have been submitted. The development of natural-scientific justification for the creation of wildlife corridor started	
			Establishment of 1 new PA (Arganaty) covering approximately 30,000 ha	The work on the ENO development for PA establishment in Arganaty plot is being performed. The current status of mountain-valley desert ecosystems of the Ile-Balkhash project area was assessed.	Draft ENO of SPNR creation in Arganaty site, the project of "Arganaty" complex wildlife area creation with the total area of 186 960 ha are developed to preserve the unique mountainous desert ecosystems;	
	Size of flagship species populations of	*Ile Balkhash Project Area:*				Monitoring reports (census) of CFH,

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
	desert & semi-desert ecosystems in target areas remains at the baseline level or increase					Research institutes & relevant NGOs
		Goitered gazelle: 1,800	1800≥	Goitered gazelle: 3998	4100	
		Koulan: 1,700	1700≥	Koulan: 2692	2700	
		Argali: 205	205≥	Argali: 205	215	
		Aral Syrdarya Project Area:				
		Goitered gazelle: 80	80≥	Goitered gazelle: 83	90	
		Koulan: 340	340≥	Koulan: 471	490	
		Pallas's sandgrouse: 407	407≥	Pallas's sandgrouse: 467	468	
		Ustyurt Plateau:				
		Ustyurt argali: 1,020	1020≥	Ustyurt argali: 1,074	1,070	
		Goitered gazelle: 270	270≥	Goitered gazelle: 277	270	
		Houbara bustard: 60	60≥	Houbara bustard: 74	74	
Outcome 1: PA system of Kazakhstan	Enhanced management	Altyn Yemel: 50 %	75%	Altyn-Yemel: 59 %	Altyn-Yemel: 55 %	METT Scorecard

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
contains representative samples of desert and semi-desert ecosystems under various conservation regimes and is effective in protecting ecosystems and ecological processes	effectiveness of existing PAs that are expanded under the project (as measured by METT)	Barsakelmes: 42 %	67%	Barsakelmes: 49 %	Barsakelmes: 55%	
		Ustyurt: 43 %	68%	Ustyurt: 43 %	Ustyurt: 53%	
	Enhanced management effectiveness of new PAs that are established under the project (as measured by METT)	Ile-Balkhash: 19%	44%	Ile-Balkhash: 21 %	Ile-Balkhash: 22%	
		Mangistau: 7%	32%	Mangystau: 7 %	Mangystau: 7%	
		Arganaty: 9%	34%	Arganaty: 9 %	Arganaty: 9%	
Outcome 2: Landscape-level conservation planning and management are developed and implemented in target desert and semi-desert environments	Territorial development plans employing landscape management approach	0 ha	9 million ha	0 ha Scheme development for land-use planning of Aral Syrdaria (Aral and Kazaly districts) and Ile-Balkhash (Balkhash district) project areas is being completed. Land-use planning will allow based on the priorities of socioeconomic development and nature-resource potential to create a basis for sustainable	13,0 mln.ha Functional zoning schemes for the lands of Ile-Balkash and Aral-Syrdarya pilot areas of 13,0 mln. ha are prepared and approved	Records of Balkhash and Aralsk rayon akimats

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				land management. Total area for land-use planning is 13,000 000 ha.		
	Number of hectares of restored wetlands & delta lakes	0 ha	2,202 ha	0 ha For the reporting period the current situation for 2 delta lakes was assessed: Aidarkol (Aral - Syrdaria) and Kelte (ile-Balkhash). Hydrological studies on detection of optimum water level, needed for their restoration are being carried out.	in the process The project carries out the complex works on restoration of Aidarkol lakes system	Akimat and CFH records
	Number of hectares of riparian & saksaul forests under sustainable management	0 ha	18,048 ha	1,500 ha For the reporting period the state of saxaul and tugai forests was assessed, the ways of their conservation and restoration were defined. To restore saxaul forests in the Aral-	4 693 ha	Akimat and CFH records

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				Syrdaria region the project on establishment of forest nursery for saxaul and other hardy-shrub species growing is being implemented. As a result, for the reporting period 1,500 ha of saxaul were planted in the Aral pilot area. In the Ile-Balkhash region pilot project on conservation of relict Asiatic poplar (turanga) small woods at area of 1, 800 is being implemented.		
	Quality and quantity of vegetation cover in rangelands in 3 rural districts	Hectares of land with significant signs of soil erosion caused by overgrazing in selected plots	Reduction of the size of the area heavily affected by soil erosion by at least 15% in the Ile Balkhash area and 20% in the Aral Syrdarya target area	At 11, 000 ha of degraded pastures in 2 rural areas, projects on their improvement and demonstration of sustainable distant-pasture cattle rearing practices is being implemented. Monitoring grounds were selected and initial indicators on	Sustainable practices on pastures management are implemented at 2 pilot sites in 2 rural areas on 11,0 ha. At the selected monitoring sites: 1. Nausha Bulak (5000 ha) – lands degradation amounts	Reports of experts from monitoring plots

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				land degradation factor were identified in the pasture plots "Dala Karatay" and "Nausha Bulak". For Nausha Bulak (5000 ha) – the land degradation factor is 30% of monitoring area. For Dala Karatay (6000 ha) – the land degradation factor is 35% of monitoring area. The quality indicator variability will be assessed after the achievement of the outcomes of pilot projects	to 30 % of the monitoring area. 2. Dala Karatai (6000 ha) – degradation is 35 % of the monitoring area.	
	Presence of plant species which negatively affect the function of distant rangelands	Hectares of distant rangelands with significant signs of natural succession due to under grazing	Unwanted plant species in at least 4 rangeland monitoring plots are less than 5% surface coverage	Initial indicators on occupied space of ungrazed ruderal species of plants (bitterling, peganum) were identified in monitoring pasture plots. For Nausha Bulak	The initial indicators on the occupied area of uneaten ruderal plants species (oxtongue, peganum) are identified at 2 monitoring pasture sites. On Nausha Bulak	Reports of experts from monitoring plots

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				(5000 ha) area covered by ungrazed plants at the beginning of pilot project implementation is 750 ha or 15% of total area. For the Dala Karatay plot (6000 ha) this initial indicator of ungrazed plants is 550 ha or 9,1 of total area. The quality indicator variability will be assessed after the achievement of the outcomes of pilot projects	(5000 ha) site, the area occupied by uneaten plants is 750 ha or 15% of the total area as of the implementation start. On Dala Karatai site (6000 ha), this initial indicator on uneaten plants is 550 ha or 9,1 % of the total area. Quality change of the indicator will be obtained in May 2016	
	Average income of families participating in the measures on pasture management	US$ 1,600	Increase by at least 20%	$1600 Pilot projects focused on the average annual income increase of involved farms are being implemented. The indicator variability will be assessed after the achievement of the expected outcomes of	Increase of the average annual revenue of families participating in the projects implementation will be defined in May 2016	Field survey

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				pilot projects.		
	Number of farmer associations that use the experiences of this project as a model	No projects which use participatory bottom-up approaches in the target areas	At least 15 farmer associations or rural consumer cooperatives in the Aral Syrdarya target area and 25 in the Ile Balkhash area use the experience of this project as a model.	More than 20 farms of Aral-Syrdaria and Ile-Balkhash project areas, as well as local authorities, NGOs, scientific institutions are informed on the options and benefits of green technology application in the irrigated agriculture and distant-pasture cattle rearing. As a result, support was obtained in the implementation, demonstration and extensive replication of those approaches by the example of 3 farms.	10 farms of Aral-Syrdarya and 10 farms of Ile-Balkash pilot areas are informed and utilize approaches and technologies of pastures sustainable management demonstrated by the pilot projects	Records of farmer associations/ RCCs
Outcome 3: Community involvement in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in and around PAs is enhanced	Reduction in poaching and illegal logging at target PAs (annual) per unit of patrolling effort, compared with year of initial patrolling	Ile-Balkhash Target Area				CFH and akimats
		Illegal logging violations: 67 Poaching violations: 436 Total violations: 503	Reduction by 40%	Illegal logging: 49 Poaching: 368 Total, violations:417	Illegal logging violations: 7 Poaching violations: 20 Total violations: 27	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
					Illegal logging has been reduced by 32%, poaching (violation of fishing and hunting rules, PA regime and environmental legislation) has been reduced by 74%. Reduction by 53%	
		Aral-Syrdarya Target Area				
		Illegal logging violations: 241 Poaching violations: 157 Total violations: 398	Reduction by 40%	Illegal logging: 212 Poaching: 118 Total, violations: 330	Illegal logging: 1 Poaching: 267 Total, violations: 268 Illegal logging has been reduced by 98%, poaching (violation of fishing and hunting rules, PA regime and environmental legislation) has been reduced by 0.7%. Reduction of the number of environmental legislation violations has been achieved by strengthening the material and technical base of the PA and	

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
					capacities of the territorial inspectorate, ensuring better environmental management outside PAs Reduction by 49%	
	Functioning stakeholder engagement mechanism for transparency in PA planning and management	No PA public committees for mobilizing stakeholders in and around PAs in the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya target areas	Two (2) operational PA public committees	0 In target project areas (Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdaria) an awareness raising campaign was run on targets of social councils establishment. The work on the mobilization of local communities and establishment of two social councils of National Park "Altyn Yemel" and Barsakelmes reserve is being conducted.	2 public committees have been established at Altyn-Emel SNNP and Barsakelmes Nature Reserve. Measures to mobilize local communities and establish two public committees under PAs (Altyn-Emel SNNP, Barsakelmes SNR) have been implemented in the target project areas (Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya) Recommendations for making amendments and addenda to some regulations of the Republic of Kazakhstan in terms of PA public	Meeting minutes

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
					committees were developed and included in the bill of Law on "Protected areas".	
	Functioning stakeholder engagement mechanism for transparency in PA planning and management	No PA public committees for mobilizing stakeholders in and around PAs in the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya target areas	Two (2) operational PA public committees	0 In target project areas (Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdaria) an awareness raising campaign was run on targets of social councils establishment. The work on the mobilization of local communities and establishment of two social councils of National Park "Altyn Yemel" and Barsakelmes reserve is being conducted.	2 public committees have been established at Altyn-Emel SNNP and Barsakelmes Nature Reserve. Measures to mobilize local communities and establish two public committees under PAs (Altyn-Emel SNNP, Barsakelmes SNR) have been implemented in the target project areas (Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya) Recommendations for making amendments and addenda to some regulations of the Republic of Kazakhstan in terms of PA public committees were developed and included in the bill of	Meeting minutes

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
					Law on "Protected areas".	
	Number of PES agreements under implementation in project area	0	2 by project end	0 To implement the payments for ecosystem services (PES) mechanism the following work stages were identified: 1) identification of ecosystem services (determinations of key providers and consumers of ecosystem services (2015); 2) economic assessment of ecosystem services (2016); 3) conduct of negotiations with consumers of ecosystem services, development of PES Agreements and signing of contracts with consumers of ecosystem services	During the reporting period, measures were implemented to identify ecosystem services at the Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdarya project sites. In order to identify ecosystem services at the two project sites the following has been done: 1) ecosystem services have been classified, 2) priority ecosystem services have been identified, 3) major users of ecosystem services have been identified, 4) maps of ecosystem services and methods to identify ecosystem services have been developed. 6 Pilot schemes have been developed for	Approved biodiversity supply agreements

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				(2016-2017). For the reporting period works on identification of ecosystem services in Ile-Balkhash and Aral-Syrdaria project areas were conducted. Providers and consumers of ecosystem services were identified. Map of ecosystem services is being elaborated	introduction of payments for ecosystem services, based on international experience. PES schemes were discussed at the level of implementing agency as well as project areas with participation of land users and other stakeholders	
	Share of registered land users and low-income rural households benefiting from biodiversity microcredit line	0%	5%	2% 48 households with low level of income in project areas were identified as part of conducted social-economic studies. The number of registered land users, located near pilot PAs (730 users) was identified. 16 registered land users (2%) in three project areas obtained	"Eco Damu" microcredit program was launched in October, 2014. During program implementation period, 63 registered land users (9%) at three project sites, including low-income households and women, now have access to micro-credit facilities under Eco-Damu Microcredit Program.102 jobs	FFSA reports

Strategy	Indicators	Baseline levels	EOP target	1st PIR level	MTR level	Means of Verification
				access to microcredit funds through Microcredit program "Eco-Damu".	were created. 48 low-income households have been identified at project sites during social and economic studies. The number of registered land users located near the pilot PAs has been determined (730 land users).	

Annex 7 List of documents reviewed

1. PIF
2. UNDP Project Document
3. Project Inception Report
4. All Project Implementation Reports (PIR's)
5. Project Annual Progress Reports
6. Project Annual Workplans
7. Project audit reports
8. Minutes of the PSC meetings
9. Technical Progress Reports
10. Powerpoint presentations made by the project team

Annex 8 Example questionnaire used for data collection

1. What is the achievement, so far, of which you are most proud?
2. If you could go back in time, what would you change or do differently?
3. If you could go back in time, which activities would you definitely do again?
4. If the project had an extra USD 2 million and an extra two years, what else would you consider doing?
5. What are you doing to ensure take up/replication of the concept and processes in other landscapes?
6. What are the effects of inflation or changes in the exchange rates to the budgeting and/or expenditure?
7. Please give examples of how you are ensuring cost effectiveness?
8. Please provide all information on cofinance to date, including both cash and in-kind expenditure and a summary of the items on which the co-finance has been spent.
9. What is your role/relationship with the project?
10. What are you doing to ensure sustainability of the project's processes and impacts?
11. This (xxx) success seems very good: what did you do to achieve it?
12. Who are the partners (i.e., people actively working to the same goals) on the project?
13. Who would you say *owns* the project?
14. Who are the stakeholders in the project (i.e., people that are involved in the project, either actively or passively or will be affected by the project in some way)?
15. Who prepares the TOR for all contracting?
16. Who signs the contracts?
17. Imagine this scenario: if the Minister phones you up and says that he needs to make a brief report on the project to the President and he needs 5 bullets on the following subjects:
    - Key successes
    - what would you advise the next door country to do if they were to implement a similar project
    - what works and why
    - what does not work and why
    - key challenges
18. Is the project having any useful (but unplanned) spin-offs?
19. Is the project having any detrimental or negative (but unplanned or unintended) impacts?
20. This is a UNDP project – what advantages or disadvantages does this bring? What if it was a World Bank project instead – what difference would that bring?
21. If you were to re-write the Project Document, what would you change?
22. Who are the project's champions?
23. Standard issues:
    - Project Manager Forum

- Procurement rules and efficiencies
- UNDP training/support
- Financial audits
- Cofinance information
- Communication strategy?
- Monitoring awareness/knowledge
- Backing up data and digital information
- Team functionality
- Staff turn over
- If training is provided, how is training is now being used in job?
- How including gender and/or indigenous peoples issues?
- Need to provide all information, including equipment, inputs, infrastructure, tracking tool data.
- If there was a delay, what was the reason?

24. How is the project aligned to the national development plan, region-level development plans and the UNDAF?
25. Is the project trying to increase awareness? If so, among which target groups? How is the project monitoring changes in awareness and attitude? How has any changes in attitude and awareness affected project implementation, and how is it being used in the daily, professional lives of the target groups?
26. Infrastructure has been developed over the course of this project. Was it in alignment with the strategic plan developed at the landscape level? If not, how was the decision made for any given infrastructural input?
27. New institutions have been created over the course of the project (specifically the landscape management committees). How will these be sustainable? In five years' time, how do you imagine the committees functioning?
28. Why did the Financial and Administrative Assistant resign?
29. At a landscape level, what monitoring activities are being undertaken to determine the impact of the project?
30. How does the project interface with the land reform processes in the country?
31. The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) appears to be largely unsuccessful: we aim to propose that no further effort be expended to make it active. However, in the long-term, particularly once the GEF project has ended, will there be a role for i) an umbrella coordination body (to continue the work of the PCU – and if so, should it be independent or remain within govt?) and/or ii) a centralised technical body to assist landscapes with technical issues?
32. It appears as if some key stakeholders are not part of the landscape management committees – e.g., Regional Governments, Roads, Water, etc. Would it be useful to try to include some of these organizations, at least on an ad hoc basis?
33. How is the project – and landscape management committees in particular - interfacing with regional governments?
34. To what extent is the project strategy relevant to country priorities, country ownership, and the best route towards expected results?
35. To what extent have the expected outcomes and objectives of the project been achieved thus far?
36. Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and been able to

adapt to any changing conditions thus far?

37. To what extent are project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, reporting, and project communications supporting the project's implementation?
38. To what extent are there financial, institutional, socio-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?
39.

Six questions to overcome fear of failure:

1. What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?
2. What if I fail — how will I recover?
3. What if I do nothing?
4. What if I succeed?
5. What's truly worth doing, whether you fail or succeed?
6. In this failure, what went right?

Annex 9 UNEG Code of Conduct Form

Evaluators/Consultants:

1. Must present information that is complete and fair in its assessment of strengths and weaknesses so that decisions or actions taken are well founded.
2. Must disclose the full set of evaluation findings along with information on their limitations and have this accessible to all affected by the evaluation with expressed legal rights to receive results.
3. Should protect the anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants. They should provide maximum notice, minimize demands on time, and respect people's right not to engage. Evaluators must respect people's right to provide information in confidence, and must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source. Evaluators are not expected to evaluate individuals, and must balance an evaluation of management functions with this general principle.
4. Sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing while conducting evaluations. Such cases must be reported discreetly to the appropriate investigative body. Evaluators should consult with other relevant oversight entities when there is any doubt about if and how issues should be reported.
5. Should be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty in their relations with all stakeholders. In line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender equality. They should avoid offending the dignity and self-respect of those persons with whom they come in contact in the course of the evaluation. Knowing that evaluation might negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its purpose and results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholders' dignity and self-worth.
6. Are responsible for their performance and their product(s). They are responsible for the clear, accurate and fair written and/or oral presentation of study limitations, findings and recommendations.
7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.

MTR Consultant Agreement Form

Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System:

Name of Consultant: ___Stuart Williams_____

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed at __*Kampala, Uganda*_____ *(Place)* on ___*16 August 2016*_____ *(Date)*

Signature: ___ _____

Name of Consultant: _____ Lina Valdshmit _____

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed at ____*Almaty, Kazakhstan*_____ *(Place)* on ___*16 August 2016* _____ *(Date)*

Signature: _____ _____

Annex 10 MTR Final Report Clearance Form

Midterm Review Report Reviewed and Cleared by:

UNDP Kazakhstan Country Office

Name: Rassul Rakhimov

Signature: _____ Date: 27 October, 2016

UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisor:

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____