Reducing Pressures on Natural Resources from Competing Land Use in Non-irrigated Arid Mountain, Semi-desert and Desert Landscapes of Uzbekistan

ID# 00087414

MID TERM REVIEW

DECEMBER 2016

Project Title: Reducing pressures on natural resources from competing land use in non-irrigated arid mountain, semi-desert and desert landscapes of Uzbekistan

UNDAF Outcomes: Principles of sustainable development integrated into country policies and programs
UNDP Strategic Plan Environment and Sustainable Development Primary Outcome: Strengthen national capacity to manage the environment in a sustainable manner while ensuring adequate protection of the poor

UNDP Strategic Plan Secondary Outcome: Mainstreaming environment and energy

Expected CP Outcome(s): Increased availability of institutional products and services for the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of natural resources

Expected CPAP Output(s):

Concrete interventions on sustainable natural resources use, including water, land, biodiversity resources, and on climate change (mitigation, adaptation and carbon financing) complemented with environment education/ training component; and Strengthened legal and institutional frameworks and enhanced government capacities to meet international commitments and obligations

Executing Entity/Implementing Partner: State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadastre (Goskomzemgeodezkadaster - GKZ)

Programme Period:	2010-2015
Atlas Award ID:	00064916
Atlas Project ID:	00081570
PMIS #	4600
PIMS #:	4649
Start date:	2014
End Date:	2018
Management Arrangements	NIM
PAC Meeting Date	tbd

Total resources required	*12,193,600$*
Total allocated resources (grants)	10,753,600$
- UNDP	700,000$
- GEF	2,313,600$
- Government	6,700,000$
- Forestry Enterprises	220,000$
- ICBA	500,000$
- Sheep Breeding Farms	320,000
In-kind Contributions	1,440,000$

Executing Agency/Implementing Partner and other project partners - State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadastre (Goskomzemgeodezkadaster - GKZ)

Region and countries included in the project, Bukhara and Jizzakh regions, Uzbekistan
GEF Operational Focal Area/Strategic Program

MTR Team Members: Charles Vanpraet and Jasurbek Rustamov

Acknowledgements

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Jasurbek Rustamov Charles Vanpraet

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APR	Annual Progress Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BD	Biodiversity

CACILM	Central Asian Cauntries Initiative for Land Management
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	Community Based Organization
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CO	(UNDP) Country Office
COP	Conference of Parties
CPAP	Country Programme Action Plan
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ELS	Enhancing Living (UNDP/EU)
EU	European Union
FA	Focal Area
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GKZ	State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadastre
GoU	Government of Uzbekistan
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
ICBA	International Centre for Bio-saline Agriculture
ILUMP	Integrated land Use Management Planning
LD	Land Degradation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAWM	Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Products
PEB	Project Executive Board
PIR	Project Implementation Report
RCU	(UNDP) Regional Coordinating Unit
RTA	(UNDP) Regional Technical Adviser
SBAA	Standard Basic Assistance Agreement
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
TBW	Total Budget and Work plan
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USD	United States Dollar
ZEF	Centre for Development Research (ZEF, Bonn)

1. Executive Summary

This 5-year project (2014-2018) is designed to support the improved, more sustainable and more resilient land use management of non- irrigated arid desert, steppe and mountain landscapes of Uzbekistan.

Forty six per cent of the national territory is rangeland (19 million ha), of which a substantial part lies in arid and semi-arid areas. The problems related to the unsustainable management of a great portion of this land is very well documented, and literature highlighting the gravity of the prevailing situation is abundant in various forums: national, regional and international. The Project Document also includes a very good analyses of the existing problems related to natural resources management in the Country.

The Project is defining models for undertaking district level integrated land use planning. On the basis of experiences on the ground it is expected to support the updating and refinement of the relevant national policy, legislation, institutions and mechanisms for improved national coordination and planning for integrated land use management. The Project will further support land use capacity development at all levels from national decision makers to farmers in target districts and lay the basis for developing a national cadre capable of effectively implementing national land use policy and legislation. Lessons learned from the project target districts in regard to sustainable land use practices will thus have an effective vehicle for wider replication within the target landscapes.

The project goal is to "reduce competing land use pressures on natural resources of arid non-irrigated landscapes in Uzbekistan".

The project objective is "to promote integrated management of rangeland and forests at the landscape level (focus on non-irrigated, arid mountain, semi-desert, and desert landscapes) to reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses and improve the socio-economic stability of communities."

The project's interventions have been organized into two Components and five Outcomes.

Component 1: "Field level investment to transform the baseline approach -Promising best practices on sustainable rangeland and forestry management and INRM planning up-scaled in target districts of Uzbekistan".

Outcome 1.1: Improvement in the vegetative cover of approximately 6,000 ha of rangeland and 1,000 ha of forestry fund territory due to enhanced land use management using sustainable INRM best practices, accompanied with approximately 50,000 people with secure and sustainable livelihoods.

Outcome 1.2: Enhanced mechanisms for cross-sector integrated planning of sustainable natural resources management at district level to improve vegetation and forest cover, decrease moving sands and erosion, and reduce dust storms and other such events.

Component 2: Policy, legal and institutional mechanisms- An enabling cross-sector environment and in-country capacity (at system, institutional and individual levels) for applying integrated landscape management in arid mountain, semi-desert and desert areas of Uzbekistan.

Outcome 2.1: Enhanced policy, legal, and institutional framework for implementing integrated and sustainable management of rangeland and forests

Outcome 2.2: Adequate technical and managerial capacity for INRM at all levels of land uses institutions for the development of policies, legislation and field operations

Outcome 2.3: Improved access of policy makers to tested INRM best practices and methodologies for improved land management

In concrete terms, the Project is to facilitate the up-scaling of existing and tested best practices for land management within two ecologically and socio-economically different districts: Zaamin, with an average rainfall of 400-600 mm, and Karakul, in the arid part of the Country, with an average rainfall around 200 mm.

The MTR Mission notes that the scope of the Project, both geographic and ecological, is very wide. Whereas the title refers to non-irrigated arid mountain, semi-desert and desert landscapes, a considerable portion of the project activities is carried out on arable rain fed land in the Zaamin District.

This implies that approaches, land use models, as well as the means for monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of the various practices are specific for each region. It is also worthwhile noting that expertise, required for arid rangeland management is fundamentally different from expertise dealing with the management of arable rain fed and/or irrigated land not only because of the fundamental ecological differences. Often the social and cultural backgrounds of the local land users differ. Working in different landscapes does not necessarily imply working in ecological zones that are fundamentally different.

The State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadaster (Goskomzemgeodezkadastr - GKZ) is the Executing entity/implementation partner.

There are some 12 cooperating entities/stakeholders involved/associated in/to the Project, the complete list of national institutions related to the Project is attached as an annex to this Report.

Ratings by the MTR Mission**		
Measure of achievement		Description
Project objective	4	Objective expected to achieve most of e.o.p.*targets, with significant shortcomings
Outcome 1	4	Outcome expected to achieve most of e.o.p. targets, with significant shortcomings
Outcome 2	4	Outcome expected to achieve most of e.o.p. targets, with significant shortcomings
Outcome 3	3	Outcome expected to achieve most of e.o.p. targets with major shortcomings
Outcome 4	3	Outcome expected to achieve most of e.o.p. targets with major shortcomings
Outcome 5	3	Outcome expected to achieve most of e.o.p. targets with major shortcomings
Adaptive Manag.	4	Implementation of some components is not leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adapt. manag. with some components requiring remedial action
Sustainability	3	Moderate risks, but expectations that at least some outcomes will be sustained due to the progress towards results on outcomes at the MTR

* end of Project

** Please refer to chapter 4 (4.1., 4.2., 4.3. and 4.4.) for more details on the ratings.

The Project Document includes an excellent analyses of the challenges and problems surrounding land management and degradation, in particular in the arid and semi-arid parts of the Country.

Despite the importance of rangelands at a national scale; that the sector has had several projects and activities to contribute towards solutions to the vast problems related to overgrazing and land deterioration, there is no institution vested with the overall responsibility of range management. Possibly for the same reason, it appears that a number of attempts to resolve these problems have so far not had the expected results, while the processes of land degradation appear to continue at an alarming scale. From the above, it appears that the importance of sustainable range management may be undervalued, and lacking the necessary awareness and attention in the Country. More details under 4.1, in particular # 26 to 29.

The consequence of the absence of a single institution responsible for the administration and management of rangelands is that the drafting/updating and endorsement of needed rules, regulations and laws pertaining to the rangelands continues to be difficult.

Several consultants have been hired to analyse the issues surrounding the legal and institutional aspects of the sector. There is a common view that the absence of a sound legal and in particular institutional framework is one of the fundamental problems.
The MTR recognises that such institutional adjustments require time and reflection.

The Project should endeavour to increase its focus on arid rangelands, as clarified in the project goal, the project objective, and included clearly in the project title. Technical issues in the rain fed and irrigated land zones of the Country are very different from those in the arid and semi-arid areas. Also, when assessing the mid-term achievements of the Project, it appears that activities in the Zaamin District have received more attention that those in the more arid parts of the Country. When dealing with too wide a range of land use issues, and covering a broad range of ecosystems, the impact of the project may be too wide spread, and consequently …too weak!

In addition, the MTR is of the opinion that the number and diversity of the current institutional stakeholders in the Project, and in range management as a whole, may complicate the road to solutions. For more details please refer to. 4.3. and under 5.

A sound legislative framework, together with a gradual shift from a shared responsibility to a single legal/technical entity, could lead in a more rational way to the development of more effective approaches in range management, while promoting close contact with other agencies, and supporting integrated land management.

The Project should undertake a practical and objective analyses of the various grazing models that are currently practiced (shirkat, private farmers and –leaseholders, etc.), assess their various characteristics: socio-economic, economic, sustainability, environmental, etc., and provide an answer to the question: who does what and how, and what are the best practices.
Academic institutions could/should be involved in such survey; such study will contribute towards the enhancement of the awareness of range management at the academic level and gradually contribute towards the development/updating of the curriculum.

Arid and semi-arid rangelands (rainfall less or = 200mm) in particular are unique ecosystems with very specific dynamics, resilience and sensitivity. Unsuitable management practices can turn very productive rangelands into wasteland. Traditional users of these lands are very familiar with these aspects, hence the existence of transhumance and nomadism!

A specific and balanced legislative and institutional framework is an indispensable basis, if the 19 million hectares of the Country's rangelands are to be managed on a sound, verifiable and sustainable manner, at every level, and for every kind of ownership/management model.

Recommendations of the Mission

Attempts should gradually be pursued to integrate the various aspects of range management such as policies, rules and regulations, management models, rangeland monitoring and control, grazing policies enforcement, rangeland improvement, rangeland water resources etc. in an institution that has the overall mandate for the planning and management of the rangeland resources, and of the enforcement of the legislation, rules and regulations pertaining to grazing land.

A logical way to start and gradually develop such process, is to give range management a logical and justified place in the curriculum of the relevant training and research institutions (technical colleges and academic), and to enhance the involvement of the national scientists in issues related to rangelands and their sustainable use.

The Mission recommends that the Project enhances its focus on the management of arid grazing lands, that a proper detailed inventory is made of those grasslands and their state, and that an in depth assessment be carried out of the existing models/practices of rangeland use, including the socio-economic, economic aspects, sustainability, and environmental aspects.

The project set up modality prescribed in the Project Document (PMU) reduces the integration/ownership of the Project into the host agency. It considerably reduces capacity building/strengthening, and moreover the financial and technical sustainability of the Project. For details, please refer to 4.4. The current project set up is probably related to the institutional complexity of range management in the Country.

Statement of the Mission:

"Half a century ago, countries with extensive rangelands started to set up their specific range management institution. Today, they all have a range management entity.

Twenty years ago, national parks were administered almost everywhere under the ministries of agriculture. Today, every country, including Uzbekistan, has a specific institution to deal with national parks…."

2. Introduction

Purpose of the MTR and objectives

1. The MTR assessed progress towards the achievement of the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document (including the logframe), and noted successes and weaknesses with the aim of identifying the necessary changes to be made in order to set the project on-track to achieve its intended results. The MTR also reviewed the project's strategy and its risks to sustainability.

Scope & Methodology

2. The MTR reviewed all relevant background information, project documentation and reports, consultants' reports and literature on the subject in Uzbekistan, and in the broad region. The Mission undertook 8 days of site visits to familiarize with the project activities in Zaamin, Samarqand, Bukhara and Karakul, and to discuss matters with the relevant district authorities. A number of Project Stakeholders were visited in Tashkent.

3. Mission made a presentation in Tashkent to the main stakeholders of the Project in order to exchange views on the findings. As the official timeframe allocated for the Mission in the Country was very short, and given the geographic spread of project activities and time needed for the site visits, the available time frame did not always allow to have the necessary in depth discussions with the main stakeholders of the Project in the field.

Structure of the MTR report

4. The Report follows the structure laid out in the TOR of the Mission. It provides background information on the Project, it takes into account discussions with the main stakeholders and made a broad assessment of the project achievements as reported by the Project, based on which conclusions and recommendations were prepared.

3. Project Description and Background Context

3.1. Development context: environmental, socio-economic, institutional, and policy factors relevant to the project objective and scope.

5. The Republic of Uzbekistan has a total area of approximately 44.7 million ha, comprised of mountains (20%) and arid/semi-arid areas (70%), with the rest being intensely irrigated valleys along its two major rivers (Syr Darya and Amu Darya). The largest desert in Central Asia, the Kyzylkum, covers the greater part of the lowlands and plains to the west and south of the country. The total area of grazing lands in the Country covers 19 million ha, some 46% of the national territory. A big share of the land in Uzbekistan is related to rangeland, forestry or unused land (often unofficially used as rangeland). "Forestry" however does not always relate to the term "forest" in the sence of a vegetation type that is composed primarely of trees, but is often referred to as land that falls under the jurisdiction of forestry related entities such as the Department of Forestry, the leshoz (forestry enterprises), the Forest Fund,

whatever the physiognomic vegetation type. Distinction should be made between rangelands and pasture lands. Rangelands are natural grasslands, shrublands and deserts that are grazed by domestic livestock or wild animals. Rangelands are distinguished from pasture lands because they grow primarily native vegetation, rather than plants established by humans on pastureland.
Rangelands mainly occur within 3 broad ecological landscapes: desert (Kyzylkum), steppe, and mountains. Land degradation is widespread in the country; the most affected areas are concentrated in the districts of Bukhara, Navoi, Kashkadarya and the lowlands of the Amudarya River basin, as well as in the Ferghana Valley and the so-called "Hungry" Steppe of the Syrdarya River basin. The drying of the Aral Sea and Amu Darya delta led to significant ecosystem damage and is considered to be the greatest human-caused disaster in Uzbekistan and of global significance. The most serious environmental problems threatening the country's natural resources are incremental soil salinization and water contamination, wind and water erosion, overgrazing, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, and the reduction of productivity of arable lands.

6. During the past 15–20 years, there has been widespread degradation of pasturelands due to overgrazing, lack of pasture maintenance, and other anthropogenic factors. Degradation has led to the area of agricultural land decreasing by 37%, mainly due to the reduction of pasture lands.

7. Land use and agricultural policy is developed principally by the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management (MAWM) in collaboration with the State Committee for Land Resources and Geocadaster (GKZ) but with direction given by the President's Office, and Cabinet of Ministers. Land use relationships are regulated by the Laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Orders and Decrees of the President, Decrees of the Cabinet of Ministers, and territorial State Agencies.
Additional and more detailed information on the history and reviews of the laws pertaining to land use is provided in the Project Document.

3.2. Problems that the project is to address: threats and barriers targeted

8. Owing to its geographical and climatic characteristics, Uzbekistan is highly susceptible to environmental degradation. According to the UNEP aridity index, most of Uzbekistan's territory, except for the foothills and mountains, is classified as a drought zone and is therefore very susceptible to land degradation and desertification. Winds as low as 6-10 meters per second can cause sand and dust storms, and in flat regions there are between 10 to 30 dust storm days per year. Land degradation in arid lands has clearly accelerated over the last 15 to 20 years. This is in part due to the fact that reform has mainly been oriented towards the irrigated agricultural sector as this generates the largest proportion of gross domestic product and directly supports livelihoods of the largest proportion of the population. This means that support towards maintaining or improving effective land use within non-irrigated arid lands has been limited.
While it is evident that the problems of land degradation not only occur in the arid and semi arid landscapes, one can not expect a 5 years project to tackle and resolve all problems of land degradation Country wide. For that reason, the title, goal and objective of the project are very specific.

9. The most important direct causes of the environmental decline are increasing levels of vegetation destruction/utilization and overgrazing. The traditional non-sedentary ranging practices were a vital component of sustainable land use in such arid environments. Sedentarisation has been one of the main contributors to overgrazing. Imbalances in grazing

pressure are occurring with under-utilization of some areas, and severe local over-grazing of others. There is an increasingly sharp imbalance between the availability of summer and winter feed, resulting in severe overgrazing of some winter pastures.

3.3. Project Description and Strategy: objective, outcomes and expected results,

10. The project **goal** is to "reduce competing land use pressures on natural resources of arid non-irrigated landscapes in Uzbekistan".

11. The project **objective** is "to promote integrated management of rangeland and forests at the landscape level (focus on non-irrigated, arid mountain, semi-desert, and desert landscapes) to reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses and improve the socio-economic stability of communities."

12. The project has two distinct components: component 1 relates to field level activities/surveys to transform the baseline approach (2 outcomes), while component 2 relates to policy, legal and institutional mechanisms (3 outcomes).

13. In total, the Project has 5 specific outputs; the first digit relates to the component, the second to the outcome and the third to the output.

Component 1

Outcome 1.1. Improvement in the vegetative cover of approximately 6,000 ha of rangeland and 1,000 ha of forestry fund territory due to enhanced land use management using sustainable INRM best practices, accompanied with approximately 50,000 people with secure and sustainable livelihoods

Output 1.1.1: Carry out an adequate inventory and classification of all types of lands in project sites (pasture, rain-fed arable, dry land forestry, and others)

Output 1.1.2: Promising good practices on pasture management and livestock husbandry, forestry and biodiversity management from Uzbekistan and the region, replicated and up-scaled in project sites

Output 1.1.3: New and refined technical extension services at existing and newly developed local institutions or structures

Outcome 1.2. Enhanced mechanisms for cross-sector integrated planning of sustainable natural resources management at district level to improve vegetation and forest cover, decrease moving sands and erosion, and reduce dust storms and other such events.

Output 1.2.1: Two district level integrated land use plans elaborated by district authorities / local stakeholders, and effectively applied to a landscape of approximately 30,000 ha.

Output 1.2.2: One hundred and forty district level stakeholders receive training in the development and implementation of integrated land use planning and have knowledge / experience necessary to continue the application of such planning in the long term.

Component 2

Outcome 2.1. Enhanced policy, legal, and institutional framework for implementing integrated and sustainable management of rangeland and forests

Output 2.1.1: Updated or newly developed key sector policies and related strategic national planning documents for arid non-irrigated land use.

Output 2.1.2: Linkages and synergies between the above sector policies and strategic planning documents to improve integration of efforts by relevant national institutions.

Output 2.1.3: Relevant legislative changes and regulatory instruments developed and enacted on the basis of field experience gained in Component 1.

Outcome 2.2. Adequate technical and managerial capacity for INRM at all levels of land uses institutions for the development of policies, legislation and field operations

Output 2.2.1: National Coordination Council for Land Monitoring (coordinated by the State Committee for Land Resources and Cadaster) with appropriate set of documents defining institutional responsibilities for ensuring better integration of planning on rain-fed arable land, forestry and rangeland.

Output 2.2.2: Strengthened capacity of key institutions (Department of Livestock, Poultry, Apiculture and Aquaculture, and the Main Administration for Forestry)

Output 2.2.3: Long-term vocational and academic training curricula and programmes at professional colleges, lyceums, and universities to enhance national capacity to sustain the application of sound land use management.

Outcome 2.3. Improved access of policy makers to tested INRM best practices and methodologies for improved land management

Output 2.3.1: Guidelines on good practices for sustainable natural resource management.

Output 2.3.2: The methodology for carrying out Integrated Land Use Planning (ILUP) documented, published and disseminated to facilitate replication.

Output 2.3.3: Mechanisms for practical dissemination and application of land use best practices and the ILUP methodology, utilizing the experience and methods developed under CACILM.

3.4. Description of field sites

14. The two pilot districts where demonstrations are taking place are the Zaamin district located in Djizak province, and the Karakul district in Bukhara province. These districts were selected (see Project Document) from all relevant districts in Uzbekistan via a systematic process that utilized a clear set of criteria, such as:

- Firstly, they are representative of the main arid, non-irrigated landscape areas which are the focus of the project and which cover the majority of Uzbekistan's territory i.e. desert (Karakul district in the Kyzyl-Kum desert) and steppe, foothills and mountain (Zaamin district);

- Secondly, these two districts are representative of the typical socio-economic and land use situation of these landscapes – Karakul contains a large quasi-state livestock (Karakul sheep) farm and has very low population utilizing extensive desert pasture and forestry (shrub) territory, while Zaamin has a combination of steppe and mountain pasture, significant

areas of fragile rain-fed arable agriculture and forests (natural and plantation forests of fruit, nut, timber, and conservation areas), a much higher population, a much larger percentage of livestock and land use in the hands of the non-state sector; and

- Thirdly, UNDP and other development partners have past relevant initiatives in, or close to, these two districts and thus have existing on-ground knowledge, capacity and relationships with local district authorities and stakeholders which will greatly enhance implementation

3.5. Implementation Arrangements and Steering Mechanisms

15. The project is implemented under the National Implementation Modality (NIM); at the national level, the project is executed by the State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadaster (GKZ) as the National Implementing Partner.

16. The Project Executive Board (PEB) is the executive decision making body for the project, providing guidance based upon project progress assessments and related recommendations from the Project Manager (PM). The PEB is lead by the National Project Director, (NPC) who is responsible for the overall implementation of the project. The PEB reviews and approves annual project reviews and work plans, technical documents, budgets and financial reports. The PEB provides general strategic and implementation guidance to the PM. It meets quarterly, and makes decisions by consensus. The specific rules and procedures of the PEB were decided upon at the project inception meeting. The PEB is responsible for making management decisions for the project in particular when guidance is required by the Project Manager. The PEB plays a critical role in project monitoring and evaluations by quality assuring these processes and products, and using evaluations for performance improvement, accountability and learning. It ensures that required resources are committed and arbitrates on any conflicts within the project or negotiates a solution to any problems with external bodies. In addition, it approves the appointment and responsibilities of the Project Manager and any delegation of its Project Assurance responsibilities. Based on the approved Annual Work Plan, the PEB can also consider and approve the quarterly plans (if applicable) and also approve any essential deviations from the original plans that may be necessary.

17. In addition to the Project Executive Board, the project has established together with the State Committee For Land and Geo-cadastre (GKZ) a Technical Working Group (TWG) to ensure synergetic collaboration and effective coordination of efforts by project partners and collaborators (i.e., Departments Of Livestock, Forestry, ICBA, GIZ, ICARDA, etc.). The TCG meets on a quarterly basis to share and coordinate activities and discuss emerging challenges so that a coordinated approach can be used to address them.

18. The PMU (Project Management Unit) is located in Tashkent and appropriate office space was provided by GKZ. Core PMU staff consists of a National Project Manager (NPM) tasked with the day-to-day management of project activities, as well as with financial and administrative reporting. Other core staff includes a part-time Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), responsible for guiding the overall technical direction of the project, and a full time National Technical Coordinator (NTC) who is responsible for day to day supervision of project technical activities, an Administration and Finance Assistant (AFA), as well as a Procurement Assistant and a Project Driver.

19. In addition, the Project has established two Field Operation Offices, one in each of the project target sites located within the District Authorities (Khokimiyat). The functions of the Project Field Offices is to provide: liaison and coordination support with district authorities and other counterparts; logistical support for the project technical team when in the field; a

focal point for district stakeholders to contact the project and access relevant literature and advisory materials. More information on the functioning of the PMU is included in the Project Document.

20. Project Assurance: UNDP has designated a Team Leader within the Sustainable Development Portfolio (UNDP Uzbekistan), to provide independent project oversight and monitoring functions, to ensure that project activities are managed and milestones accomplished. The UNDP CO is responsible for reviewing Risk, Issues and Lessons Learned logs, and ensuring compliance with the Monitoring and Communications Plan. The UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisor located at the Regional Hub in Istambul also plays an important project assurance role by supporting the annual APR/PIR process.

Annex 5 to this report contains a matrix in which the mandates of all Project Partners are described, as well as their roles in the implementation of the Project.

4. Findings of the Mission

4.1 Project Strategy

Design

21. Forty six percent of the national territory is range- and pastureland (19 million ha), of which a substantial part lies in arid and semi-arid areas. The gravity of the problems related to the unsustainable management of a great portion of this land is very well documented, and literature highlighting the gravity of the prevailing situation is abundant in various forums: national, regional and international.
The Project Document also contains an excellent analyses of the problems the project is to address, and which relate mainly to unsustainable use of arid and semi-arid rangelands.

22. As the project title clearly indicates, the focus of the Project is directed towards rangelands and pastures in arid and semi-arid regions of the Country. The problems that prevail in these areas are very well described in the project document and relate to land degradation mainly caused by overgrazing and other unsustainable forms of land use, including unsustainable wood harvesting, which in turn lead to increased aridification of the land and a deterioration of the groundwater.

23. Efforts are being undertaken to alleviate these problems in the Bukhara District. Considerable efforts are also undertaken on arable rain fed land in the Zaamin District, SSW of Tashkent, a region with an annual rainfall of 400-600 mm. While the title of the Project indicates very clearly what kind of landscapes fall under the project, the activities in this second district make not only the geographic scope of the Project much larger but also the technical/ecological scope. Techniques developed in one area cannot be extrapolated to the other area, as the environment is fundamentally different. In addition reference is made here to item #8.

24. The Mission feels that the scope of the Project, from a geographic, ecological, and land use point of view is very wide. Whereas the title refers to non-irrigated arid mountain, semi-desert and desert landscapes, a considerable portion of the project activities is carried out on arable rain fed land in the Zaamin District.

25. This implies that approaches, land use models, as well as the means for monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of the various practices are specific for each region. It is also worthwhile noting that expertise required for arid rangeland management is fundamentally different from expertise dealing with the management of arable rain fed and/or irrigated land not only because of the fundamental ecological differences, but often also because of the different social, cultural and economic differences of the land users.
While the technical, legal and institutional solutions of the arid grazing lands are already a very considerable challenge for a 5 years project, the work programme in the Eastern focal area (Zaamin) increases the project workload considerably.
When dealing with too wide a range of land use issues, covering a broad variety of ecosystems, the impact of the project may be too wide spread, and consequently …too weak! Also, please refer to # 8.

Institutional aspects

26. One of the main challenges of the Project is to improve and strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks related to (arid and semi-arid) rangeland management.
During the visits of the various agencies by the MTR Team, it became clear that a number of agencies have a stake or are relevant to the management of rangelands in Uzbekistan. Also the model of enterprise (state, private, mix) appears to affect the institutional affiliation.
At present, no single entity has the overall responsibility of range management; the aspects of range management are shared by a number if institutions. Such diversity make legislation, regulation and their enforcement difficult, and therefore also…the management of the land resources.

27. Legislative and institutional challenges appear to be considerable and attempts have been made in the past to bring about solutions.
Despite the fact that range management is an extremely important form of land use issue in the country, that the sector has had several externally supported projects and activities to contribute towards solutions to the vast problems related to overgrazing and land deterioration, there is no institution in which the entire responsibility of range management is vested. Possibly for the same reason, it appears that a number of attempts to create an updated legislation pertaining to the administration and management of rangelands were somewhat unsuccessful.
In the view of the Mission, the current institutional network and responsibilities is very complex and appears to lack clarity. There are several national agencies that deal with specific aspects of range management and with animal husbandry, surface water, ground water, pasture improvement, the management of the karakul sheep, etc.
Yet, they are all different entities, either autonomous or under different structures. There is no single agency that deals with the various aspects of range management as there are grazing rights, grazing regulations, stocking control, grassland improvement, water supply, etc.
Such institutional diversity not only makes range management as such difficult, but it makes law making, endorsement and more importantly enforcement, very complicated. Origins of the current situation go back to the Soviet era, and adjustments/adaptations have been very slow and difficult.

28. While the project has produced a vast quantity of reports (some 55 consultancies), there is a risk that the vast quantity of valuable information is not fed into an institution that "deals with the overall management of rangelands", also, as one consultant put it in his report, there is a «lack of integration of the various consultants inputs» into the Project. Also, some of the reports are very academic/theoretical, and seem to lack familiarity with the field reality.

29. The MTR is of the opinion that the number and diversity of the current institutional stakeholders may hamper the development of a sound and clear legislative/institutional framework. The gradual shift from a shared institutional involvement to a clearer legal/technical entity, vested with the overall responsibility of range management, e.g. a range management entity, may well be a better option.
Such shift by no means precludes sound integrated land management.

Project set up and management

30. The project is implemented under the National Implementation Modality. At the national level, the project is executed by the State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography and State Cadaster as the National Implementing Partner.
The Project adopted the Project Management Unit (PMU) modality, as prescribed in the Project Document. The PMU has 5 staff members, recruited by the Project: a project manager, a project technical coordinator, an admin and finance assistant, a procurement assistant and a driver. One project staff was also assigned to each district with project activities.
At the end of the project, this qualified and experienced staff who has benefitted from a variety of training opportunities, will leave the Implementing Partner, as they are hired by the Project. It will weaken the due continuation of the process started by the Project.
In addition, a big proportion of the work appears to be undertaken by consultants: at the time of the MTR, some 55 consultants had been hired by the Project, which again appears to indicate inadequate involvement/ownership of the host agency. Among the participants in the presentation session of the MTR findings a great deal were consultants, while this presentation should have been an opportunity to discuss some of the issues with key project stakeholders.

The Mission feels that the Project should be more embedded/integrated into an institution that deals with range management in its entirety in order to contribute more actively in all aspects of institution building/strengthening.

Results Log frame

Indicators

31. Some of the indicators do not appear very practical/feasible. The target for the number of hectares of degraded or improved rangeland, forest and rain-fed arable land in two target districts that are under improved management will be difficult to verify. «Improvement» has to be clearly defined: does it refer to the management (controlled grazing) or to the restoration/increased productivity of the vegetation. Stocking rates/grazing intensity can be easily monitored, however to assess the rate of rangeland rehabilitation is very difficult. To detect/assess qualitative changes of the rangeland over such short period is extremely

difficult, if not impossible, as the standard error in the measurement is likely to exceed possible changes.
Furthermore, arid pastures are inherently very variable over the years as their production is very dependent on rain and other atmospheric conditions. Likewise, the target for "degraded pasture" is quasi impossible to verify. A much more practical parameter is related to stocking rates and of course the application of suitable grazing regulations, including rotational grazing, stocking rate controls etc. Naturally, monitoring of project activities on rain fed/arable land, is much less complicated.
As also brought up under Chapter 5 of the Report, more attention should have been given to the output/outcome indicators during the inception activities.

Outcomes and outputs

32. In general, the log frame of the Project was very well prepared, defining the two distinct project components: one basically dealing with technologies and focusing on the Zaamin District, and one on the policy, legal and institutional mechanisms of range management. Naturally, the first component is very straightforward (and relatively simple) while the second component is extremely complex, as it deals with regulation, legislation, range resources management, and last but not the least a set of institutions that have a stake in the matter.
For each of the components, all the necessary outcomes, outputs and activities have been very clearly described in the log frame.

33. As indicated earlier, the vast scope and consequently the workload of the Project makes it very ambitious. In addition, while technological outputs can be easily and precisely planned, the undertaking/completion of matters related to legal and institutional adjustments are far less easy to put on a time scale. Past attempts have proved the veracity of this statement.

34. Moreover, when a clear and well defined institutional framework is in existence and operational, all the efforts that are undertaken will contribute towards the strengthening of this institution, enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. If such organized structure is missing, or scattered and fragmented, the expected improvements will be far more difficult to achieve.

35. If the Project is genuinely expected to address the problems of the unsustainable use of arid and semi-arid rangelands, the focus of the Project activities should somehow be redirected towards the second component of the Project, and with focus on arid and semi-arid rangelands.
Given the limited remaining time frame of the Project, the Mission suggests that work is made to assess current practices of range use as detailed in chapter 4.2. below.

4.2 Progress Towards Results

Progress towards outcomes analysis

36. Considerable work has been done, including the demonstration of innovative approaches and techniques, in particular in the Zaamin District. These activities are designed in the local

context, and the landscapes in the Project area are very divers, both in terms of the ecology and of the land use practices, (rangelands vs pastureland).

37. As to the Karakul District, project efforts (support to the district administration) and in the field, (range improvement plots), have been undertaken however the progress is far more difficult to assess, given the fundamental differences of the issues that are to be addressed.
Also please refer to paragraph # 31, as well as to Chapter 5.
So far, some tests have been carried out on a very limited scale, in terms of number of plots and of the size of these plots. It takes years to assess and analyze the results of these treatments, before the results of these measures can be assessed and possibly extrapolated on a wider scale.

38. Furthermore, rangeland improvement on a larger scale can only be achieved unless a functional regulatory management system is in place, in order to effectively exclude or control grazing in areas that are under improvement practices, and assess the effects of the treatment.

39. The Mission feels that the scope of the Project, from a geographic, ecological, and land use point of view is very, if not too wide. Whereas the title refers to non-irrigated arid mountain, semi-desert and desert landscapes, a considerable portion of the project activities is carried out on arable rain fed land in the Zaamin District. One activity is introducing orchard irrigation, be it drip irrigation.

40. If the Project is genuinely expected to address the problems of unsustainable use of arid and semi-arid rangelands, the main focus of the project activities should somehow be redirected towards those areas that are most degraded and that are more vulnerable to overgrazing/unsustainable management.

41. While the project has made significant achievements, in particular for the first component of the project, additional efforts will be required when it comes to the strengthening of the institution(s) dealing with range management, the overall institutional aspects as well as the legal aspects.
Regulation/legislation is an indispensable basis if rangelands are to be managed on a sound, verifiable and sustainable manner, and this at every level, and for every modality of ownership/management model.

42. In the view of the Mission, less emphasis could be put on hardware and infrastructure (e.g. the Karakul Shirkat complex). The arid rangelands still appear to be short of an overall range management policy and regulatory system/framework.
In order to prepare for such development, the Project should prepare a practical but systematic and objective survey/analyses of the various rangeland practices by the various users (shirkat, private owners and –leaseholders, etc.) and assess their values and characteristics: socio-economic, economic, sustainability, environmental, etc. Such information should form the basis for any further work on the regulatory and legal framework.
The question then arises: what agency within the government should use/handle this issues? More under # 26.

4.3 Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

Management arrangements

43. At the time of the Mission, project implementation (management) was carried out very well and according to the modalities spelled out in the Project Document.
It appears however that the startup of the Project, in particular the inception activities, were not entirely carried out in line with the objectives of this important tool in the project cycle.
According to the Project Document a CTA was expected to come on board right from the onset of the project, (March 2014) in order to guide the project during the inception phase. The Inception Report was distributed in October 2014, while the CTA came on board in April 2015 to work for a very short period of time.
The Inception Report did not contain the expected "roadmap" of the implementation of the project, as also stated in the first report of the CTA. Also, more attention should have been given to the outcome and output indicators.

44. The Project has an Executive Board (PEB), the executive decision making body for the project, providing guidance based upon project progress assessments and related recommendations from the Project Manager, as well as a Technical Working Group (TWG) to ensure synergetic collaboration and effective coordination of efforts by project partners and collaborators (i.e., Departments Of Livestock, Forestry, ICBA, GIZ, ICARDA, etc.).
The above bodies also ensure the necessary coordination and engagement among the various stakeholders.

45. At present, no single institution has the overall responsibility of range management in the Country. This is somehow unusual for a country that has such a high share of its territory as rangeland, in particular arid and semi-arid rangelands.
This current institutional diversity makes it probably difficult for the Project to put the necessary emphasis on capacity building in general, and on legal and institutional development activities in particular.
Efforts should be considered to analyse the various institutional options that could lead to a more streamlined and functional landscape that deals specifically with range management in the Country, and ultimately to a more rational use of the rangeland resources, in particular in arid and semi-arid areas of the Country. Please also refer to #26.

4.4 Sustainability

46. As explained under para # 30, the project adopted the PMU approach as prescribed in the Project Document. The PMU has 5 staff members, recruited by the Project: a national project manager, a national project coordinator, an admin and finance assistant, a procurement assistant and a driver. In each of the Districts, the Project also has a staff member to coordinate project activities.
The Mission feels that such management set up reduces to a large extent the necessary integration and ownership of the Project into the host agency, as well as the necessary capacity building and/or strengthening.
Also, a sizable portion of the project work is undertaken by consultants: at the time of the MTR, some 55 consultants had been hired by the Project, which again indicates that insufficient involvement of the host and associated agencies is taken place. Also, out of the 20 participants in the presentation session of the MTR findings, a large number were consultants. The Mission feels that more efforts should be undertaken to involve staff of the

participating agencies in the activities of the Project. The current practices considerably reduce the financial and institutional sustainability of the Project.
The Mission however understands that the Project is opting for such "consultants" modality in the absence of a proper institutional framework that deals with all aspects of range resources management, and of which the staff could be actively engaged and strengthened in all aspects of the project programme.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

General

In broad terms the MTR Mission is of the opinion that the Project Team is implementing the Project according to the rules and regulations pertaining to project implementation.
The main weak point the Mission identified was the Inception Phase and the preparation of the Inception Report. In particular the absence of a proper road map, and the identification of a set of SMART indicators in order to better monitor the progress and delivery of the Project outputs, are signaled here.
Other comments relate mainly to the Project Document, in particular to the very wide scope of the project activities, geographically and technically.
Furthermore, the Mission feels the Project should enhance its focus on the sustainable management of arid and semi-arid rangelands, and to the legal and institutional aspects that are required in order to bring about the necessary changes in range management.

The project document

#1. The project Document contains an excellent analyses of the problems the project is expected to address, and which relate mainly to the unsustainable use of arid and semi-arid rangelands, a problem that is leading to widespread erosion, desertification, soil loss, reduced productivity of the pastureland, deforestation, reduced carbon sequestration and last but not the least to hydrological changes and water salinization.

#2. For the above reasons a joint decision was taken by the Government of Uzbekistan and by UNDP/GEF to set up a facility entitled «Reducing pressures on natural resources from competing land use in non-irrigated arid mountain, semi-desert and desert landscapes of Uzbekistan".

#3. From the extensive literature, national, regional and international that is available on these specific problems, we learn that earlier attempts to address these issues have not always been successful. One of the key reasons is that the economics of arid lands management are far less attractive than those of cultivated/irrigated agro/industrial crops.

#4. Even on this project, it appears that efforts have to be made to ensure that sufficient attention goes into arid and semi-arid rangeland management.

#5. The wide ecological and land use scopes of the Project may cause a de-emphasising on the fundamental problems the Project is to address and which are clearly expressed in the project title. In other words, in the view of the Mission, the Project is very ambitious. While it is evident that the problems of land degradation not only occur in the arid and semi-arid landscapes, one cannot expect a 5 years project to tackle and resolve all problems of land degradation Country wide. For that reason, the title, goal and objective of the project are very specific.

#6. One of the main objectives of the Project is to better define the relevant legal and institutional frameworks related to rangeland management. At present, no single institution has the overall responsibility of range management; many institutions have a stake in the matter. Yet, rangelands are ecological systems, just like rivers and fishponds, forests, national parks…that do have a very clear institutional framework.

#7. In the view of the Mission, the institutional diversity/complexity surrounding rangeland management makes the definition of the legal and institutional aspects very difficult. Under this project, it appears that efforts are spread too thin over too vast an area, in order to clearly effective and durable. Likewise, capacity building/strengthening is complex, widespread and possibly at the expense of its effectiveness and of the sustainability of the Project.

#8. (As an example/comparison): National Parks, for many years, were handled by the ministries of agriculture. Gradually we came to the conclusion that they needed to be dealt with by one specific authority that solely deals with. …National parks.

Project Implementation

#9. The Project Inception Report was produced long after project start up. Moreover the report did not, as expected, prepare a road map for its implementation; it expanded the scope of the Project, and all this prior to the recruitment of the CTA who was expected to assist and guide the inception activities. There is also a serious lack of sound indicators to track the achievements of the Project.

#10. Probably related to the institutional set up complexity, the bulk of the project activities are carried out by consultants. This considerably reduces institutional capacity building and strengthening and the overall sustainability of the Project.

#11. In addition to the previous remark, and as pointed out in earlier consultant's reports, there appears to be insufficient integration of the various consultants' inputs into the overall outcomes and in capacity building/strengthening.

#12. More emphasis should be put on the in depth analyses of the various forms/practices of rangeland use, their environmental, social and economic aspects, their sustainability and practicalities, in order to gradually identify, promote and support best practices. These aspects are fundamental not only for the preparation and formulation of the necessary rules, regulations, and laws, but also for the improvement of the institutional framework.

#13. Large-scale rangeland management/restoration/improvement can be undertaken if and when the necessary operational provisions of rangeland use and control can be implemented

and enforced. Hence the importance to set up a sound set of regulations, and to build/support the institutions that are expected to enact, implement and enforce such provisions.

5.2 Recommendations

#1. The project should be better integrated into the host agency in order to contribute more to its capacity building/enhancement. The Project's PMU staff should be advisors to the staff of the host agency. This would greatly enhance financial and institutional sustainability, and prepare the institution for the post-project continuation of the activities.

#2. Consultants' activities/reports should fit better into an overall and well integrated work programme that leads, at least in part, towards the achievement of the objectives/outcomes of the Project;

#3. The Project should consider the enhancement of its focus on arid and semi-arid rangelands, given the importance of the land degradation problems in those areas.

#4. The Project should carry out field surveys/gather the existing information in order to list and analyse the existing range management practices, in particular in the arid zones of the Country, assess their social, economic and environmental characteristics and suitability, and on that basis, formulate recommendable best practices. This information is indispensable as a good basis for the further development of rules, regulations and a legal framework.

#5. Efforts should be fostered and supported to gradually define/create/promote an institution that could be entrusted with the overall management of rangelands in the Country, given their overall importance, and the critical situation some of the rangelands are currently facing.

#6. Sustainable rangeland and pasture planning; grazing regulation, range restoration and improvement etc. should go hand in hand, as they all are an integral part of range management, whatever the grazing model or land tenure.

#7. The Project could, with its Partners, organise a workshop, where some of the MTR findings and suggestions could be shared and discussed and possibly prepare the basis for an updated road map ahead.

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