

**INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANCY FOR THE  
FINAL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT  
“STRENGTHENING THE MARINE AND COASTAL  
PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM IN VENEZUELA.”**

**PRODUCT 3  
FINAL REPORT**

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## Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ABRAE (in Spanish)	Under Special Administrative Regime
ACPT (in Spanish)	Critical Areas with Priority Treatment
PA	Protected Areas
MCPA	Marine and Coastal Protected Areas
APRA (in Spanish)	Environmental Protection and Recovery Areas
BD	Biodiversity
CMAP (in Spanish)	Deep Water Marine Coasts
CO	Country Office
CTZC (in Spanish)	Technical Committee of Coastal Zones
BOD	Biological Oxygen Demand
FE	Final Evaluation
FUNVISIS (in Spanish)	Venezuelan Seismological Research Foundation
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IGVSB (in Spanish)	Simon Bolivar Geographic Institute of Venezuela
INAMEH (in Spanish)	National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology
INEA (In Spanish)	National Institute of Aquatic Areas
INPARQUES (in Spanish)	National Institute of Parks
INSOPESCA (in Spanish)	Socialist Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture
INTECMAR (in Spanish)	Institute of Technology and Marine Science
MINAMB / MPPAMB (in Spanish)	Ministry for the Environment, Venezuela
MINEA (in Spanish)	Ministry of Ecosocialism and Water, Venezuela
MINTUR	Ministry for Tourism, Venezuela
LF	Logical Framework
NM	Natural Monuments
MPPD (in Spanish)	Ministry for Defense, Venezuela

Abbreviation	Meaning
MPPPF (in Spanish)	Ministry for Planning and Finances, Venezuela
MPPVH (in Spanish)	Ministry for Housing and Habitat, Venezuela
PDVSA (in Spanish)	Venezuelan Petroleum SA
NP	National Parks
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
PORU (in Spanish)	Zonning Plans and Use Regulations
BR	Biospheres Reserves
REFS (in Spanish)	Wildlife Reserves
RF (in Spanish)	Forest Reserves
RFS (in Spanish)	Wildlife Refuges
RNH (in Spanish)	National Hydrological Reserves
RS (in Spanish)	Substantive Review after Midterm Evaluation
SAMARN (in Spanish)	Environmental Services Unit of MINAMB – in charge of crocurement
SAPMC (in Spanish)	System of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas
SFS (in Spanish)	Wildlife Sanctuaries
SHN (in Spanish)	Service of Hydrography, Oceanography, Meteorology and Nautical Cartography
GIS	Geographic Information System
SPV (in Spanish)	System of Venezuuelan Parks
USD	United State Dollars
ZIT (in Spanish)	Areas of Tourism Interest
ZP (in Spanish)	Protected Zone
ZSF (in Spanish)	Border Security Zone
ZS (in Spanish)	Security Zone

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Project Overview Table				
Project title:	<b>Strengthening the marine and coastal protected areas system in Venezuela</b>			
Identification of the GEF project:	4191		At time of approval ( USD million)	At time of finalization (USD million)
Identification the the UNDP project:	00075653	GEF financing:	7.445.455,00	
Country:	Venezuela	IA y EA own:		
Region:	Latin america	Government:		
Area of interest:	Biodiversity	Other:		
Operational program		Total cofinancing:	To be defined	
Executing Agency:	Ministry of Ecosocialism and Water, Venezuela	Total project expenditure:	-	
Other partners involved:	Ministries of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Tourism, Defense, National Institute of Parks and Simo Bolibar Geographic Institute of Venezuela	Signing of the project document (start date of the project):		08/2011
		Closing date (Operative): 31/12/2016	Proposed: 31/12/2015	Real: 31/12/2016 (extension granted on 29/10/2015)

**Table: Evaluation escale**

Evaluation of results, effectiveness, efficiency, M&E and I&E execution		Sustainability rating		Relevance rating		Impact rating	
<b>6</b>	Highly Satisfactory (HS): no shortcomings	<b>4</b>	Likely (L): Negligible risks to sustainability.	<b>2</b>	Relevant (R)	<b>3</b>	Significant (S)
<b>5</b>	Satisfactory (S): minor shortcomings	<b>3</b>	Moderately likely (ML): moderate risks.	<b>1</b>	Not Relevant (NR)	<b>2</b>	Minimal (M)
<b>4</b>	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<b>2</b>	Moderately unlikely (MU): significant risks			<b>1</b>	Negligible (N)
<b>3</b>	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): significant shortcomings	<b>1</b>	Unlikely (U): Serious risks.				
<b>2</b>	Unsatisfactory (U): significant shortcomings				Additional rating where relevant:		
<b>1</b>	Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe shortcomings				Not Applicable (N/A) unable to Assess (U/A)		

**Table: Final grading of the project**

<b>Calificación del rendimiento del proyecto</b>			
<b>1. Formulation / project design</b>	<b>Grading</b>	<b>2. Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>Grading</b>
Conceptualization / Design	S	Strategy design of M&E	S
National Ownership	MS	Plan execution of MyE	U
Actor participation in design	MS	General quality of MyE	U
Replicability	S		
<b>3. Execution of IA and EA</b>	<b>Grading</b>	<b>4. Evaluation of results</b>	<b>Grading</b>
Implementation Approach	MS		
Quality of UNDP implementation	MS	Relevance	S
Quality of execution: execution body	MS	Effectiveness	MS
Overall quality of implementation and execution	MS	Efficiency	MS
Stakeholder participation	S	Overall rating of project results	MS
Financial planning	U		
<b>5. Sustainability</b>	<b>Grading</b>		
Financial resources	AS		
Socio-political	AS		
Institutional framework and governance	ML		
Environmental	ML		

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 EVALUATION PURPOSE**

The main objective of this document is to present the Final Evaluation (FE) of the project “STRENGTHENING THE MARINE AND COASTAL PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM IN VENEZUELA” according to the UNDP standards for these purposes

In general, evaluation refers to the collection and systematic analysis of information on characteristics and results of a project, which serves as a basis for improving its execution and effectiveness and informing decisions of current and future programming. In the present case, it is a final evaluation focused on results and how they were obtained. Thus, it allows to highlight the achievements of the project in the fulfillment of its logical framework and post EMT goals, as well as to identify good practices and lessons learned in the design and implementation of the project.

### **1.2 Scope and Methodology**

The FE was led by Jose Galindo, as International Consultant (IC). The evaluation was carried during the period from the 1st of November to the 28th of December 2016. The methodology used for this document is aimed at achieving the objectives defined for the FE in the ToR (Annex 1). During the process, there was active interaction between the consultant, the UNDP Country Office, the project team, and other stakeholders, in order to speed up the evaluation process and enable timely feedback of findings.

The FE was directed by the guidelines defined in the UNDP Evaluation Guide and its four stated objectives. A participatory and inclusive approach was used, based on data derived from programmatic, financial and monitoring documents, and a reasonable level of direct stakeholders’ participation. The consultant was ruled by the standards of good evaluations of utility, feasibility, accuracy and neutrality.

The evaluation process reached conclusions about the different aspects of the project, the activities carried out and its contribution to the central objective and the four proposed outcomes. It was proposed to identify and understand the factors, challenges, weaknesses and strengths that contributed to its result. The analysis focuses on the products achieved and their actual contribution to the Project results.

As the first key task of the evaluation, the consultant reviewed the project documentation provided by the contractor, and the implementing partners. This includes but it is not limited to, the project document, the EMT, various progress reports, including the GEF area of interest monitoring tools, budget reviews, substantive project reviews, national

strategic and legal documents, and other documents related to the project. Based on this review, the consultant carried out a detailed description of the project covering the identified problem, established objectives and their respective activities, always considering the results of the EMT.

Based on the project description and the analysis of its logical framework, in the second step of the process an evaluation framework was established which combines guiding questions for the five key evaluation criteria and the four performance evaluation categories (Formulation and design of the project, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and results). This initial exercise defined the scope and the qualitative and quantitative indicators, which are fundamental to evaluate the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the interventions carried out for the objectives proposed in the project's logical framework and its sustainability.

During the evaluation mission, 16 interviews were conducted with different key actors, implementing partners, project team and others, detailed in Annex 2. For this purpose, a questionnaire focused on the participation of the different actors by their role in the project implementation was used (Annex 3). The interviews lasted generally about one hour each, were conducted individually, semi-directed and with diverse social actors, always indicating to the interviewees the confidentiality of their answers. Different perceptions were sought against situations of interest, in order to "triangulate" responses and generate less subjective visions. The Project Office together with MINEA coordinated the schedule of interviews and accompanied the consultant to the cities of Caracas, Cumaná, y El Coche (Annex 4).

The analysis of this information enabled the formulation and justification of conclusions and lessons learned, which in turn fed the definition of recommendations for future projects. While the findings were presented in a meeting at MINEA the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, in which more than 13 representatives of the different institution associated to the project implementation participated.

The final evaluation considers the results obtained throughout the project life cycle, from its design and strategic conception to the final evaluation, as it is addressed by the ToR. However, it should be considered that the EMT already contains a comprehensive description of the development of the project in its first stage, which is why this final evaluation will give a greater weight to the progress registered from the EMT. Therefore, the qualification awarded to the project will be based especially on the results obtained in the last stage of implementation after the EMT.

According to the UNDP guidelines, the evaluation of the project performance will minimally cover the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact.

### **1.3 Structure of the Evaluation Report**

This document is structured in three levels, beginning with this introductory chapter to the evaluation and its methodological process. A second level, covering chapters 2,3 and 4, presents the evaluation results for each stage of the project life cycle:

**Concept and Design:** Logical framework, assumptions, risks, indicators, Budget, country context, national ownership, stakeholder participation and replicability.

**Project Implementation:** Approach, stakeholder participation, quality of implementation of institutions involved, financial planning, monitoring and evaluation during implementation.

**Results and sustainability:** Effects, impacts, catalytic effect of results achieved, their integration with other UNDP priorities, as well as their financial, socio-political, institutional, governance and environmental sustainability. The main findings and analysis of the evaluation are summarized in the three final chapters, presenting conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations.

**Acknowledgments:** The evaluator would like to thank the personnel and authorities of the MINEA, UNDS and project partners, for the delivery of valuable information, and for all the support received for the EF. Especially to the engineer Renzo Silva, Deputy Minister for the Environment, and the economist Olga Perez, Protect Director. Also, I would like to thank Yorlandis Chiquito, Carolina Fernández, y Yamel Pérez for their support, coordination and companionship during the mission in Venezuela.

## **2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT**

The Project implemented by the UNDP is under national execution of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, currently represented by the Ministry of Ecosocialism and Water (MINEA) through the General Direction of Territorial Management of the Environment. The Project officially started in August 2011 and continues to date.

The EMT was executed in June 2013, shortly after the MINEA requested a 24-month extension in the project execution period, which was finally granted an additional 16

months. Throughout the project period, eight different Ministers have been in charge of the country's environmental institutions.

The forecast total cost for the Project is US\$23.545.500, of which US\$7.445.455 is from the GEF grant (US\$100,000 for the preparation of the project through a PDFB<sup>1</sup>, and US\$7,445,460 for the execution of the project), and US\$16,000,000 is from co-financing. Until the midterm evaluation, only US\$ 30.832 of the donation had been used, while an additional US\$ 84.530 are committed by December 2013.

## **2.1 Problems that the Project aimed to address**

Venezuela is one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries, in fact, it has been placed number 9<sup>th</sup> in this ranking. Furthermore, it has a wide range of regions that shelter a wide variety of ecosystems, where at least 117 thousand species (9 per cent of the total species described on the face of the earth) have been recorded. Therefore, wealth in biodiversity constitutes one of the important national heritages with the potential to generate sustainable wealth to the country.

A big portion of the country's extraordinary biodiversity is protected in its SPV, as well as in other protected areas such as Refuges, Sanctuaries and Wildlife Reserves, Biosphere Reserves, Protecting Zones and other protection categories. The protected areas of Venezuela offer very important environmental services to the population, for example, that they generate water for 80 per cent of the population, which provides water sources for the generation of hydroelectric energy, and their vegetation cover serves as a buffer against possible natural disasters

The project is located in the coastal zone of Venezuela, which covers 168,054 km<sup>2</sup> (59,269 km<sup>2</sup> of land area and 108,785 km<sup>2</sup> of water area) and is equivalent to 9.8% of the country's total area. Within this area there are 91 ABREA, of which this project prioritized a total of 49 that are located in the coastal zone, which cover an area of 5,6 million hectares.

Venezuela has declared a wide variety of areas under special administrative regime (ABRAEs) throughout its national territory, to which different categories of protection and use are designated, however those concerned in this project are those related to the conservation of biodiversity in the marine and coastal zone. Particularly, 23 areas which

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<sup>1</sup> Only US\$60,000 was used, the remainder was co-financing. Of this money US\$25,000 was used for the external consultant who wrote the project document and the remainder was spent on logistics.

cover 1.6 million hectares and are under strict protection, scientific, educational, and recreational categories; and some of the 38 protected areas with regulated use.

Although these areas are protected, their management presents serious difficulties that put at risk their biological diversity, a very important national and heritage, and at the same time a potential source of income. Among the threats that natural ecosystems face, which justify the development of this project, are: urban growth, petrochemical exploitation and processing, development of tourism activities, agricultural activities, construction of infrastructure, dumping sewage in the sea, maritime commercial activities, mining enterprises and the exploitation of aquatic fauna.

## **2.2 Immediate objectives and project development**

This Project, which original duration is four years, received funding under the premise of strengthening the APMC System of Venezuela. However, as indicated in the EMT, this system did not exist at the beginning of the project, so rather than strengthening it, the basic proposal is to enable conditions for the articulation of such System. In particular, the project mainly focuses on :i) the generation of technical inputs - measurement and monitoring, and geographic information systems - of the Venezuelan marine-coastal region; ii) implementation of the MCPA system - considering its regulatory framework, coordination mechanisms and Master Plan; iii) elaboration and / or updating of management tools (PORU) for existing MCPAs, considering co-management agreements with communities; v) Preparation of a Financial Plan for the System and for individual APMCs, taking into account increase and income diversification ; and vi) Capacity building for the management of financial resources .

According to the Project document, its overall objective is to ensure the existence of an APMC network, which is both operationally and financially efficient and includes representative areas of biota and key ecosystems, in line with existing needs and conditions, as well as considering priorities for local, regional and national development. In order to achieve the Project objective, the following partial results must be achieved:

Outcome 1: Improved institutional, legal, and policy framework, and operational capacities developed for the effective management of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs).

Outcome 2: PA supervisors have access to tools and instruments for the management, design, and declaration of expansion of the PAs within the marine and coastal area.

Outcome 3: The MCPA System is supported by an efficient and sustainable financial system and by the increase in revenue.

Outcome 4: Project management.

### **3. PROJECT DESIGN**

#### **3.1. Conceptualization**

The PRODOC shows insufficient information to describe in general terms the legal, institutional, environmental and productive framework of the ABRAES in the coastal zone of Venezuela. It also briefly describes the global importance of the country's biodiversity, its main conservation objectives, and the problems and threats it faces.

In general terms, the design responds to the areas of interest and political priority of the national authorities. The four outcomes that are expected to achieve, respond to the standards, practices and thematic orientations that are normally found at the international level in the design of projects focused on strengthening national systems of protected areas.

Regarding to its formulation, there is a conceptual weakness particularly in the first result, aimed at improving the legal, institutional and policy framework.

The expectation of having an impact on the current institutional environment and regulatory framework, is somewhat forced, and does not present a concrete proposal of change that guides the execution of the result. The Master Plan for the Development and Management of the Coastal Marine Protected Areas System, which is proposed as a strategic territorial planning tool, yet, is not a binding instrument nor is it recognized in national legislation. Although not a normative tool, the Master Plan aims to guide the planning and management of the APMC, seeking to link the policies and actions of the entities and administrative bodies of the different categories, articulating the instruments of territorial organization.

Consequently, this result places a greater priority on the need for information and monitoring systems, which can also be argued as tools, and consequently could be better accommodated in Outcome 2.

Another aspect particularly weak in terms of design is related to Outcome 3 on financial sustainability. It is first assumed that a system exists, and it promotes the creation of a financial planning tool for a system that does not exist. Thus, the tools proposed are not binding, and are out of phase with the institutional context in which the ABRAE operates. Furthermore, it is not analyzed the nature of the institutions, and the real possibility of influencing changes that generate the conditions to implement financing mechanisms. It does not specify the conceptual framework that supports it and what would differentiate

it from a similar result that was proposed in another project financed by FFAM and executed by INPARQUES, which closed a year ago.

Among other relevant aspects, in which it is considered that the PRODOC presents some weaknesses as a guiding instrument of the project, the following can be mentioned:

- i) The project's path towards the achievement of global conservation objectives is not clearly specified. The way in which the products are presented does not clearly show the connection and sequence between them in order to achieve the desired results and objectives.
- ii) It departs from an erroneous assumption related to the existence of a national system that links all the ABRAE, and that would allow an institutional platform for the execution of the project.
- iii) Indicators for the outputs of activities are not included, meaning that it would be difficult for a reader who is unaccustomed to their use to link it to the indicators of results to which they belong.
- iv) It is complex for projects funded by the Global Environment Facility, to aims to achieve changes and modifications in the institutional or legal framework of the country .
- v) The complexity related to the political and institutional context for the successful implementation of the project was underestimated, particularly in terms of institutional transformation and restructuring that resulted in high turnover of key personnel.
- vi) The teams that configured the project document did not participate in the next phases of this project. In addition, protocols and processes are not generated to address the risks identified for project implementation, particularly those related to institutional instability and personnel rotation.
- vii) The learning of the recent GEF portfolio is not capitalized in terms of the administrative - financial execution modality. The direct execution modality is expected to strengthen the national institutional framework on its own, but there are no specific strategies or investments aimed at strengthening this capacity for implementation.
- viii) The definition of performance indicators and overall objective were very ambitious, given the basic conditions and complexity inherent in mobilizing multiple institutions.
- ix) Weak relationship, with other projects of the FFAM portfolio, although they were closely related in their different components.

### **3.2. National ownership**

The preparation of PRODOC lasted 24 months from the request of the donation in December 2008, until the submission of proposal in November 2010. The project was approved in a record time for the GEF standards, since its approval took only two months. It is estimated that its rapid approval was due to the high relevance of the project to the GEF mandate and its strategic operations.

Another important element was preparing a Project based on the consultancy process and support in technical information. It was reported that for this process 12 workshops and meetings were held during 2009, in which 223 professionals and technicians from 53 organizations (including universities and research institutes) participated in a total of 2,174 hours of work.

According to the interviewees, the design of the project had a broad stage of discussion and involvement of the national authorities. Unlike other experiences, in the design of the project it was proposed to invest in a process of participatory planning that assures an early involvement of the implementing partners. However, even though the PRODOC was fully known at the managerial level, the high turnover of technical personnel and the lack of communication and induction systems could have caused the new authorities not to have sufficiently appropriation of the project and to say that they did not know the PRODOC.

### **3.3. Relevance**

Starting from the international to the national framework, the project is coherent with the Biodiversity Convention, since one of its objectives is to improve the management efficiency and to improve the sustainability of the National Systems of Protected Areas. Likewise, it is in line with the mandate of its financial mechanisms (GEF), which seeks to strengthen the institutions responsible for the management of protected areas, understanding that this would lead to the achievement of the overall conservation objectives of these areas. The project is also consistent with the mandate of the Implementation Agency (UNDP), whose objectives include Sustainable Environmental Development, which precisely one of its pillars is the conservation of biodiversity.

The project was and remains relevant to the institution, and clearly responds to major national policies and institutional priorities. It could be said that there is relevance to the overall policy framework, if it is considered that it is defined by the Constitution and Development Plans, the Coastal Zone Management Program, the Biodiversity Strategy

and the Existing Legal Framework. Possibly, the project is more relevant to the national context today, than 6 years ago when it was originally conceived.

The EMT mentions that the project did not always have the same relevance and significance for national actors, possibly because those who participated in its design did not continue to be linked to the institutions or the project. However, this reading should be more careful, considering that during the implementation period there were at least 9 ministers, and three structural reforms that generated instability in the MINEA. While it is recognizable that there were periods where the project has not achieved sufficient recognition and political priority, it is also true that in other periods as is the case today, the project enjoyed support at the highest level and clear institutional endorsement.

As mentioned above, it is highly sensitive to projects funded by the Global Environment Facility, and in general by any donor or international donor in Venezuela, that seeks to achieve changes and modifications in national legislation or at the level of the competent institutions. For this reason and by mutual agreement between AI and the country's authorities, it was agreed to modify the original scope to adapt it to the creation of proposals, technical documents and other inputs that can support the authorities in their decision-making processes.

#### **3.4. Comparative Advantage of UNDP as implementing agency**

The comparative advantage that UNDP can offer is its ability to execute complex projects in highly dynamic environments, combining a global perspective with specific knowledge of national implementing partners. There are very few actors in multilateral or bilateral cooperation currently operating in Venezuela, particularly in subjects related to protected areas and conservation of biodiversity. In this regard, it is highlighted the potential of the UNDP to generate synergies and relation with other GEF portfolio projects, both in Venezuela and in the rest of the region.

## **4. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

In the first stage, the lack of political commitment and appropriation of the project at the highest levels of MINEA is mentioned, which, together with the high rotation of authorities, did not allow to define key definitions and institutional decisions regarding the scope and focus of the results, and project products. As a result, as of July 2013, only US \$ 30,831 (0.4 percent of the total GEF donation) had been executed.

After the EMT the project received a major boost, thanks to greater political commitment, greater managerial capacity of the technical team, and change in the direct implementation modality. This boost however met a major obstacle at the end of the year 2014, and through the year 2015, when a period of structural reform of the Ministry of the Environment begins, forming three different institutions in a year.

It is only since March 2016, and under new leadership, that the project recovers its pathway and demonstrates significant implementation capacity.

### **4.1. Adaptive management**

The project has two clearly defined stages, both before and after EMT. The first stage had a practically null level of execution, only a fraction of the committed resources were executed and there was a real risk of early closure of the project. Despite this, a comprehensive review of the project was not requested, which could have improved the sizing of the products and the expected results, and reviewed those aspects that showed a low relevance or appropriation by the national authorities. Of course, this alternative would have a significant impact on waiting times and finally there was a risk that the proposal would not be accepted.

Consequently, there is little to be said about this first stage in addition to what is collected in sufficient detail in the EMT, so this final evaluation will have a particular focus on the second stage of the project, which is where it practically concentrates the totality of activities and products executed.

The second stage is characterized by a significant improvement in the levels of implementation and achievement of objectives, thanks to an increase in managerial capacity and authorities political support. Effectively, various of the EMT recommendation were accepted and gave the expected results, as it is the case of the resource execution modality, which went from the MINEA to the UNDP.

At the managerial level, the project planning tools were improved, and decisions were made regarding the scope and expected results of each product. Consequently, some key products were either postponed or not prioritized because they were considered unfeasible within the project deadlines, such as the environmental baseline. Other clarifications regarding the scope of the products also helped to make the project operational, as was the case of products in which the expected result was the change of laws or the promulgation of new Pas when it was objectively possible to develop the documents of the proposal, consultancy and technical inputs for decision makers.

The main barrier encountered for the implementation of the project is the high turnover of directives and key personnel, due to the transformation and institutional restructuring that was accentuated by the political and economic context in the country. This has an impact in a high turnover of key authorities and officials, but also in the structure and operation of the participating institutions. Faced with this, the team demonstrated a high level of commitment to build, from scratch, the institutional backing and political endorsement of the new authorities. With each change of authority, the team had to adapt its planning to the new institutional guidelines and priorities.

The concentration of multiple activities towards the end of the project was the only possible way, to bring the project closer to the expected results. However, this situation has repercussions on the concatenation of products and processes that normally require time to be digested, discussed and appropriated by the institutions. It anticipates the need for an exit strategy and sufficient time to close processes that ensure the sustainability of the investments made.

After the EMT, a two-year extension was requested for the project, which was granted for 16 months. Throughout the report, it is evident that the additional year is today decisive for the sustainability of the investments made, and to ensure the generation of global benefits.

#### **4.2. Agreements and partnerships with relevant stakeholders involved**

In the first stage, it is mentioned the lack of political commitment and ownership of the project at the highest levels of the MINEA, which together with the high rotation of authorities did not allow the realization of agreements and key definitions to involve the relevant stakeholder.

Given the nature of the most representative activities of the project, as it is the case of the environmental information system and the PORUs, the project execution was highly demanding of coordination capacities and intersectoral work, with multiple institutions

operating at different levels of government. Consequently, a critical factor for its implementation was the ability of the team and the MINEA to establish alliances, convene and mobilize project partners.

According to the interviewees, the project team demonstrated a lot of mystique and commitment to their work. This generated important social capital that allowed it to overcome the institutional instability, and managed to call and maintain the commitment of different partners of the project.

From what could be observed during the mission, the commitments acquired by the different key institutions related to the Geographic Information System, have been accomplished or are in the process of being accomplished. For example, the Room on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the MINEA is under development, while the Visualizations Room of the Simón Bolívar Geographical Institute of Venezuela is already operating. In addition, the civil works related to this system are in their final stage and ready to be delivered in the month of December. Finally, it should be recognized that most of the institutions involved in the management of information, operation, safety and security of the real-time monitoring and measurement system in the Coastal Marine Region of Venezuela have participated in the process of developing inter-institutional agreements to operate this system.

Another area of high interinstitutional participation belongs to the management of the PORUs, for which the project is aptly based on a previous existing institutional figure, called the Coastal Zone Working Committee (CTZC), which brings together more than 10 institutions present in the territory. The execution of certain products such as the PORUs through the CTZC, without the need to hire consultants, had repercussions on the empowerment and appropriation of local actors.

#### **4.3. Monitoring, follow up and evaluation**

Possibly one of the weakest aspects of the implementation is related to the monitoring and evaluation of the project. Certain follow-up milestones established by PRODOC were met, such as the inception meeting, the mid-term evaluation and the final evaluation. However, in general terms it was not possible to verify the existence of a plan, system or tools for monitoring and follow up of the project. Toward the end of the project, a product monitoring tool proposed by the UNDP was registered, but it was more related to monitoring the implementation, rather than the impacts of the products and the activities conducted.

Regarding to the monitoring and evaluation tools analyzed, the annual reports practically do not give an accurate account of the evolution of the project indicators, nor do they gather a strategic reflection on how the proposed products and activities bring us closer to meeting the major project objectives. Neither the contributions of co-financing commitments by the different partners of the project are included in any instrument. On the other hand, the Directing Committee only operated during the year 2013, in which 6 meetings were registered.

An adequate document management is not recorded, which becomes more evident at the end of the project, when there are multiple activities that are executed simultaneously and there are difficulties for the orderly delivery of information for this final evaluation. This is greatly hindered by the reduction of personnel, which fell from approximately 15 people in 2014 to the 7 (6 technical and 1 administrative staff) currently operating.

Among the main causes for this performance, it is pointed out that the project did not have enough human resources to carry out the follow up, monitoring and coordination. An example of this is that until the third quarter of 2013 the project only had a general coordinator and another coordinator, but both not necessarily dedicated to it exclusively. However, this situation changed from 2014, when a team dedicated exclusively to the project was created, which is composed of a technical coordinator, three thematic coordinators, a technical assistant, and an administrative assistant.

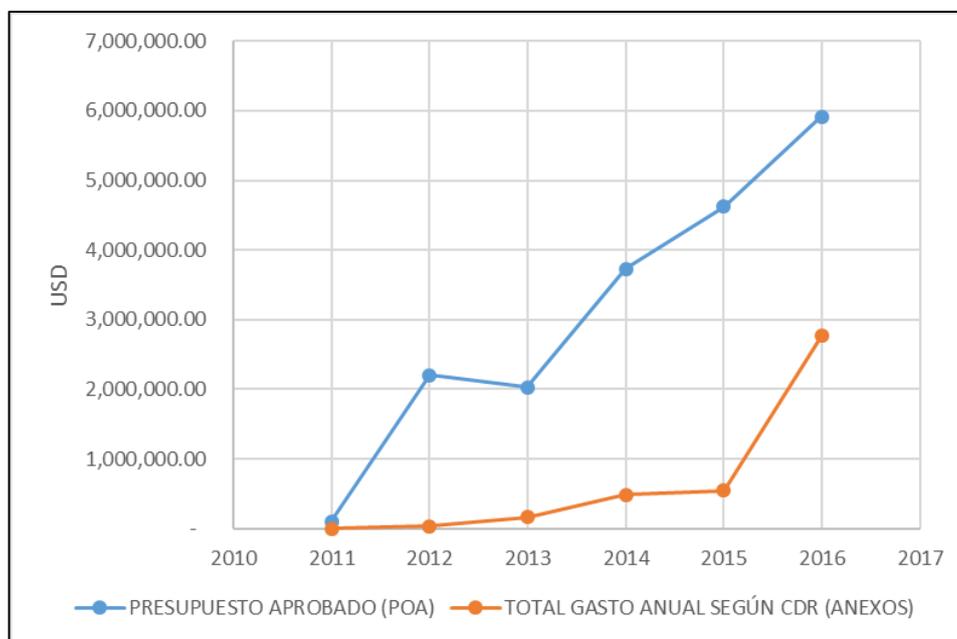
#### **4.4. Project financing**

At the end of the mission, an execution of USD 2.7 million is reported, considering that USD 1.5 million are committed in the execution of the project until the end of 2016. If all committed resources would be implemented, approximately 53% of the GEF funds will have been used. Although there is still a considerable amount of resources associated with the project that cannot be executed, according to the MINEA authorities, this is one of the most successful projects - in terms of budget execution - within the recent portfolio of cooperation international. Indeed, it is possible that this project has executed more than the entire GEF portfolio in recent years.

As can be seen in Figure 1, budget execution shows a significant takeoff from EMT, in part thanks to the new modality of resource management through UNDP. Clearly execution is concentrated in the last year of management, particularly from April 2016, reaching its maximum capacity during the last quarter of 2016. This shows that, with the technical and administrative capacities available to the project, the teams reached an adequate work pace just at the close of the project. This leads one to think that, with the

current installed capacity, the project could finish executing the remaining balance in a period of no more than 12 months.

Figure 1. Financial implementation of the project 2011-2016



In addition, it should be considered that the exchange rate could be better utilized, since the devaluation of the currency effectively implies that certain items are considerably lower than originally budgeted. At the moment, Venezuela would be returning money to the GEF, while there are important needs to strengthen the ABRAE in terms of equipment, means of transport and technology. Therefore, financial management should also provide responses and alternatives to better exploit the exchange rate and to seek opportunities to finance items that are not necessarily circumscribed in the original commitment but which relate more broadly to the objectives of institutional strengthening of the project.

Likewise, efficiency in the implementation of certain products, such as the PORUs, must be recognized and surely rewarded for the benefit of other results, or emerging needs that come to light as progress is made in the execution. In this case, for example, it was decided to execute the PORUs through the CTZC, instead of hiring external consultants. The resulting product was successful and obtained high appropriation from the related institutions, with an investment for the project smaller than planned.

As to the specific weight of each result within the total budget executed during the duration of the project (Figure 2), it can be clearly seen that the first result covers 54% of the total executed. This is justified by the acquisition of high-tech equipment for the Real-Time Monitoring System and Geographic Information System, and related works such as the implementation of Digital and Geomatics Visualization Rooms. The second result consumed 39% of the total executed, showing that relatively modest investments aimed at improving the logistics capacity, conventions and workshops of the CTZC, achieved a high return and leveraged the participation of more than 10 institutions for the elaboration of PORUs and the record files for the extension or declaration of new protected areas. The third result hardly executed 3% of the total of the project, being consistently its weakest result, since only a couple of consulting products are presented, with low national appropriation. Finally, the fourth result - related to the management of the project - reaches 4% of the total executed.

Figure 2. Share of each Result in the Total Project Execution: 2011-2016

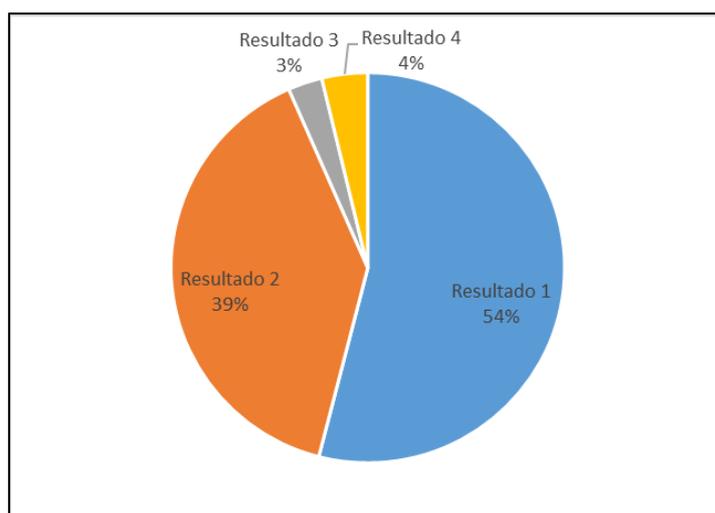
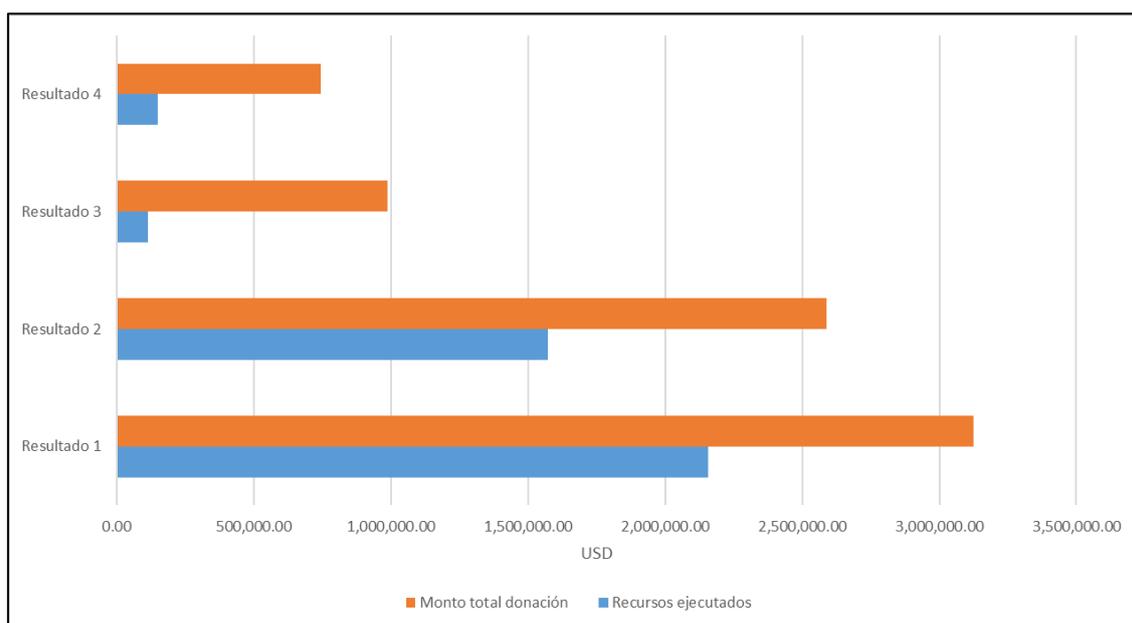


Figure 3 shows the total execution in the period 2012 - 2016 in relation to the original budget allocated to each Result. Results 1 and 2 were the most successful in terms of budget execution, reaching 69% and 61% of the total available resources; while Result 3 only executed 11% of the total available and Result 4 20%. This execution is consistent with the level of achievement of results and impact of the project, as will be seen below.

Figure 3. Total donation amount by Result versus resources executed: 2012-2016



Regarding to the contributions of co-financing, these have not been systematized yet. According to testimonies raised, it is possible that in some cases the institutions have even exceeded the original financing commitments, however, the evaluator has not received a report on the matter.

#### 4.5. Coordination of implementing agency (PNUD) and executing agency (MINEA) and operational aspects.

During the first stage, prior to EMT, the relationship between AI and AE was particularly competent by the financial management of the project. During 2011 the UNDP experienced a drastic reduction in personnel, which changed its management modality, leaving full execution to the executing institution. The MINEA in turn assigned the financial management to SAMARN, an agency attached to the ministry, but with greater operational autonomy. In practice, SAMARN failed to adapt efficiently, which contributed to serious delays in the implementation.

Additionally, according to the EMT, operational relations between the Implementing Agency and the execution unit were not able to be finely tuned to the point that they also contributed to significant delays in the implementation of the funds and thus the project. All of this was aggravated by circumstances beyond the project, such as the change of 9 ministers and three structural reforms to MINEA during the implementation period, as well as the drastic cutback of UNDP staff.

During the last stage of the project, there is a high degree of coordination and joint work between AI and AE, both at the technical, managerial and political levels. Otherwise, the exceptional budgetary execution capacity that has been in place since the middle of the year to date cannot be explained.

While mention is made to the good technical capacity of the project teams, there is a significant weakness in their managerial capacity, particularly reflected in planning, management components, ToR, recruitment of key personnel, etc. This is a common problem for many of the GEF projects in Venezuela, so the design of the new portfolio must find a balance between the technical and operational aspects of the execution.

The complexity inherent in the execution of certain products certainly benefited from international experiences and best practices. The UNDP could have a more proactive role in promoting the exchange of experiences with similar projects in the region, as is the case of initiatives related to the financial sustainability of protected areas implemented by UNDP in several countries of the region. Moreover, the project's relationship with the GEF portfolio was not sufficiently exploited, where the accumulated learning in areas such as demand could be better capitalized, particularly in the approach of Outcome 3, since at the same time in Venezuela, a GEF-funded project was executed, specifically designed for the financial sustainability of protected areas.

## 5. RESULTAS AND SUSTAINABILITY

According to the logical framework matrix described in PRODOC, the results obtained by the project to date are analyzed. For different reasons described in the previous chapter, the project has not yet generated a report on the monitoring of indicators formulated in its logical framework, so it is not possible so far to verify compliance with the major objectives outlined in the logical framework. It is necessary first that the team closes the outstanding products, evaluates them and estimates the fulfillment of the indicators at the general objective and purpose level.

### **Outcome 1. Enhanced institutional legal and policy framework developed to efficiently manage Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPA).**

This result presents a concrete product with clear global and national impact, which is the Real-Time Monitoring System. This system is expected to provide real-time information for an area equivalent to a quarter of the Caribbean. Measure parameters to monitor pollution, climate change, and improve accuracy to estimate tides, among other parameters. It will also be the first tsunami early warning network and extreme events in the country.

The product has been implemented based on the tide information system that always existed in Venezuela, but which during the last years stopped operating due to the obsolescence of equipment. The project clearly contributes to the activation of 7 sites that have always existed for this purpose in the country, expanding the number of parameters to be evaluated, and using modern technology. At the time of the field mission, the station La Guiara was already installed and personnel had been trained, the stations of Cumana and Carupano were already adequate, and the installation and training activities were carried out. This includes the adequacy of civil works, and the installation of measuring equipment. It still requires the operation and adjustment of equipment, training in terms of maintenance, use and calibration of equipment, and the implementation of institutional agreements necessary to operate in a shared information system.

It is necessary to warn that the product has the risk of not entering an operative stage, considering the way in which it was designed. Booths installed require connectivity devices, without which there would be no real-time operation opportunity, and the information would have to be manually loaded into the system. The technology is available in the country, and is expected to enter the operation in the short term. However, the administrative deadline for the project would not give enough time for the

search process. Consequently, the booths would be installed but isolated from each other and without connectivity with the real-time information system and the projected viewing centers.

At the other end of the performance, within this result is the environmental baseline that could not be concreted. This activity was considered as one of the cornerstones of the project, since it would feed other key products such as the Master Plan, the Geographic Information System, the PORU, etc. It is considered a lost opportunity for the country, which maintains the same pertinence and relevance for Venezuela as it did six years ago, when the project was designed.

Other products within this result, do not present much relevance or impact, possibly because they have not yet closed, or are in validation stages. This means that they do not yet have official documents of the MINEA, so they run the risk of remaining as gray literature, or consulting contributions without appropriation and articulation to large national processes and related authorities. The production of documents and consulting reports multiplied during the last quarter of implementation, in direct proportion to the demand for monitoring and supervision by technicians and authorities. The sustainability of these investments depends on an orderly process of exit, involving not only the delivery of the information generated, but also its adequate discussion and institutional validation.

Below, is a detailed analysis for each product, according to the PRODOC:

**Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 1: Marco Institucional legal y de políticas públicas mejorado, y capacidades operacionales desarrolladas para la gestión eficaz de APMC**

Products	Progress	Comments
<p><u>Product 1.1</u> Offshore Integrated Environmental Baseline Study</p>	<p align="center">None</p>	<p>Product not developed. Unfortunately, the evaluator has no further information regarding this product as it is not referred to in the documents provided.</p>
<p><u>Product 1.2</u> Real-time measurement and monitoring system of the conditions of the Venezuelan marine-coastal region</p>	<p align="center">Partial (50%)</p>	<p>So far 3 booths have been installed and equipped (La Guaira, Cumaná y Carúpano) out of the 7 foreseen in the system; while the rest were in process of fitting and installation of equipment that its scheduled to end in December 2016. However, the data transmission protocol has yet to be developed. All institutions have been involved in the process related to the elaboration of Conventions at the technical and middle management levels, in cases such as the SHN, it is necessary to strengthen the involvement of the military high command in order to ratify and specify the Conventions elaborated for its subsequent approval and compliance.</p> <p>Finally, it should be mentioned that the operation of the system, as such, needs to have real-time connectivity and a web platform that allows the information to be disseminated, and at the moment only the Terms of Reference for these components have been defined.</p>
<p><u>Product 1.3</u> Geographic Information System (GIS) generated and maintained for marine-coastal protected areas</p>	<p align="center">Partial (50%)</p>	<p>This product includes the phases: 1) design and implementation and 2) installation and on setting. The first one, presents a progress less than 50% since, at the moment, both the technological structure and the proposal of the GIS website are under development; While the maintenance and control component of the technological platform is in standby until the system is available. The advance in the second reaches more than 70% considering that the technical inputs have already been acquired almost in its entirety and that adjustments are being made to the Environmental Visualization Room of the APMC. However, and as in</p>

**Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 1: Marco Institucional legal y de políticas públicas mejorado, y capacidades operacionales desarrolladas para la gestión eficaz de APMC**

<b>Products</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Comments</b>
		the first phase, the maintenance and control mechanisms of this operation are in stand by until its completion.

**Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 1: Marco Institucional legal y de políticas públicas mejorado, y capacidades operacionales desarrolladas para la gestión eficaz de APMC**

Productos	Avance	Comentarios
<p><u>Product 1.4</u> Coordination mechanisms for the marine-coastal protected areas system.</p>	<p>Partial (80%)</p>	<p>The design of coordination mechanisms was done through a consultancy, but has not yet been validated and ratified at central and state levels.</p> <p>The document contracted for this product, proposes in very general terms a series of recommendations to improve existing institutional coordination mechanisms.</p>
<p><u>Product 1.5</u> Master Plan for the development and management of the marine-coastal protected areas system.</p>	<p>Partial (50%)</p>	<p>Currently the consultancy related to this product is in development and a first draft is under review and incorporating the comments obtained in a socialization workshop. The document is not binding, nor is it formally recognized as a state planning instrument, so it runs the risk of being suspended. This tool was expected to generate the guidelines and procedures for the PORUs, however, it almost reaches the end of the project and it did not affect the planning tools developed in Outcome 2.</p> <p>The delivered product does not accomplish the strategic lines, axes and programs in time, so it does not consider the time dimension. Neither a strategy of implementation of the Master Plan is generated, nor a tentative budget.</p>
<p><u>Product 1.6</u> Updated regulatory framework for the marine-coastal protected areas system</p>	<p>Partial (50%)</p>	<p>There is a diagnostic document of the regulatory framework for the APMC and an update proposal for this. The latter identifies the need to have a legal framework linked to these areas, but it still requires its validation. Within the objectives of the product, no reference is made to the implementation of this proposal.</p> <p>Additionally, it should be mentioned that the diagnosis document dates from the year 2014 and the proposal from the beginnings of 2015, reason why their contingency at the moment of the evaluation is not clear. Moreover, the proposal does not refer to a critical route</p>

Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 1: Marco Institucional legal y de políticas públicas mejorado, y capacidades operacionales desarrolladas para la gestión eficaz de APMC		
Productos	Avance	Comentarios
		<p>for the proposed amendments or analyze the legal, technical and financial feasibility of these modifications.</p> <p>Finally, the activity related to capacity building on the regulatory framework of the APMC system does not present progress to date.</p> <p>It cannot be clearly seen how the documents generated effectively affected the law proposal. Nor have they been mentioned during the interviews, and are not identified as relevant contributions to the achievement of this result.</p>

**Outcome 2. PA managers have developed and updated PA planning and management tools**

This result is the most successful in terms of concretion of the products established in the PRODOC, all its products have been completed or are in a final stage of completion. There are two particularly important products, the first entails the creation of 5 new protected areas and the expansion of two existing protected areas. This product is still in different processes of validation and discussion, depending on the protected area, however, it has already surpassed the technical instances, and a contribution of the project is registered especially in the socialization process of these creation proposals.

A second particularly relevant product within this Outcome is the elaboration and / or updating of 11 of the 13 foreseen PORUs. This exercise was developed through the CTZC, and the project's contribution focused on logistical support and financing of the socialization stage of these plans. This activity is certainly the one with the best prospects for sustainability, due to the high level of participation and appropriation of the participating institutions and technicians, and to the fact that the CTZC will continue to operate after the completion of the project.

In terms of sustainability, it is concerned that progress has not been made in the process of socialization and capacity building aimed at implementing co-management

agreements with communities. The documents were generated two years ago, reason why they could lose validity, or real opportunity to be implemented.

Below, is a detailed analysis for each product, according to the PRODOC:

Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 2: Los supervisores de AP tienen acceso a herramientas e instrumentos para la gestión, diseño y declaración de la expansión de las AP dentro del área marino-costera		
Products	Progress	Comments
<p><u>Product 2.1</u> Elaborated, up to date and completed management tools for the existent MPCs</p>	<p>Partial (80%)</p>	<p>PORUs were developed for 11 of the 13 APMCs selected. These present different levels of detail and some of them still require the verification and / or inclusion of information. The participation of the CTZC in the formulation of the PORUs should be highlighted.</p> <p>To date PORUs corresponding to the ZIT have been approved in the Official Gaceta 3, while the other proposals must be submitted to the approval process that considers: formal public consultation workshop, validation of the traverse by IGVSb, approval of the Legal Consultancy, Ministry of Planning, General Attorney of the Republic, and signature of the President of the Council of Ministers.</p>
<p><u>Product 2.2</u> Specific methodology developed and implemented for the selection and hierarchy of new APMCs</p>	<p>Partial (90%)</p>	<p>The selection and hierarchy methodology has already been validated by the institutions at the central level, and has been used for the definition of an Ecological Corridor Proposal. The latter was validated by institutions at the central level and is in the process of incorporating the observations emitted by them into the final product.</p>
<p><u>Producto 2.3</u> Declaration and development of tools for the management of new MCPAs</p>	<p>Partial (80%)</p>	<p>There are the Technical Documents, cartography and redaction of the Decree Products, as well as socialization of workshops with communities for the proposal of creation of 5 new areas and expansion of 3 National Parks , of which the ZIT Isla La Tortuga already is approved in the Official Gaceta. However, the approval process is still required, which includes:</p>

**Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 2: Los supervisores de AP tienen acceso a herramientas e instrumentos para la gestión, diseño y declaración de la expansión de las AP dentro del área marino-costera**

<b>Products</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Comments</b>
		validation of the traverse by the IGVS, approval of the Legal Consultancy, General Attorney of the Republic, and the signature of the President of the Council of Ministers.
<u>Producto 2.4</u>  Co-Management Agreements with Communities in the MPCs	Partial (50%)	In 2014, there were generated documents linked to the product focused on two pilot National Parks: Los Roques and Mochima. However, to date, validation of co-management agreements with communities and the development of training workshops for the implementation and joint management of agreements with communities in coastal marine MCPAs are pending.
<u>Producto 2.5</u>  Guide for the incorporation of best practices and lessons learned in the planning of marine-coastal protected areas	Completed	The product was generated in 2014 with the compilation of 10 experiences of AP managing institutions, and is currently ready for dissemination. However, it would be ideal to include the set of good practices and lessons learned from the implementation of the last quarter of the project, such as proposals for management tools and creation of APMCs and lessons learned in planning and management resulting from the Project implementation

**Outcome 3. The system of Marine-Coastal protected areas is supported by a sustainable financial system and increased revenues**

This result accounted for 11% of the available resources, with virtually no impact or generation of capacities. Within this result, documents have been generated but these have not yet been validated, and do not compromise actual processes of change or capacity building to generate sufficient, stable and timely resources for the conservation of ABRAE in the long term. It should be noted that the expected goal in the PRODOC for this outcome was not the creation of documents, but a real increase in budgetary allocations for the ABRAE.

There seems to be a lack of strategic direction to accomplish the products, and to deepen the analysis of the conditions and favorable environment for financial sustainability. The complexity is that the ABRAE are made up of autonomous institutions of a different regime, on which there is no binding tool that allows them to share or generate self-management resources, retain them and reinvest them for the benefit of the ABRAE themselves.

From the strategic focus, much of the structural barriers to financial sustainability affecting the ABRAE are housed at a national, a system scale. These barriers within the original design, should have been addressed by the Financial Plan of the ABRAE System, but instead a previous case study was done in Los Roques, which is a mistake.

The Financial Plan should have also be the basis for the design of the product related to capacity building, ideally leaving them installed to ensure its implementation. There is a risk that the exercise will be suspended as a consulting proposal, so it is recommended to first review and expand the current proposal, and strengthen the appropriation and participation of INPARQUES, who also stated that it is developing other innovative financing initiatives in The Morrocoy National Park.

While it is recognized that each country has a different context, the products analyzed under this component could have made much better use of the methodologies and recent learning obtained by other countries in the region, under similar conditions to the project developed in Venezuela. It is based on very thick assumptions, the documents do not show the current uses of the available resources, nor do they show what additionality or value added the ABRAE could offer if there were additional resources. Finally, and after a number of documents have been drafted, it is not possible to clearly communicate how additional resources could be tapped if they were available to the ABRAE, what are the main spending priorities, or what results could be obtained in case of having greater financial resources for the ABRAE.

Below, a detailed analysis for each product, according to the PRODOC:

Resumen de Productos Obtenidos Resultado 3: El Sistema de áreas protegidas marino-costeras se apoya en un sistema financiero eficiente y sostenible y en la mejora de ingresos		
Products	Progress	Comments
Product 3.1 Financial plan for the	Partial	In 2014, financial diagnosis documents were generated, but only for a group of protected areas of INPARQUES.

marine-coastal protected areas system	(30%)	It mentions having worked in other categories, but not in a financial level as it is evidenced in the revised documents. No systematic expenses are collected, neither the uses of which the resources were designated, nor does it provide a technical estimate of financial need.
<u>Product 3.2</u> Specific mechanisms for financial planning and management of individual APMCs	None	Currently a case study is being developed: the Proposal of a Financial Plan for Los Roques National Park. To date this document is still under development, it must be validated and socialized with key actors.
<u>Product 3.3</u> Strengthened mechanisms and capacities for the management of available financial resources for marine-coastal protected areas	Partial (25%)	In 2014 a Diagnosis of the capacities of the supervisors for the management of available funds of the APMCs was generated, whereas in the current year a Program was developed to strengthen the capacities of supervisors and administrators based on previous results. However, the latter still requires its validation by the relevant institutions, as well as the development of a critical path for its implementation.
<u>Product 3.4</u> Mechanisms for increasing and diversifying the income of marine-coastal protected areas	None	A document is mentioned about the Program of Associations and Agreements with the productive sector for capturing new funds in the National Park Los Roques. This document raises only an initial discussion, it does not develop a feasibility analysis of the alternatives, there is no flow of new resources to be perceived by each mechanism, nor a strategy or critical path to put them into effect. The document has not yet been validated, but under international standards it is very far from complying with the contents and methods for this type of studies.

### 5.1. Relevance

The original design of the Project filled an important gap regarding the institutionality and governance of the ABRAE in Venezuela. Unfortunately, this gap remains today with the same validity and relevance as 6 years ago, when the project was originally designed. It

is considered that the project could still ensure a significant contribution to the country and the world, in case it has sufficient time to close the outstanding priority issues and ensure an orderly closure, with sufficient time for the authorities to appropriate the project products.

## **5.2. Effectiveness and efficiency**

Both aspects should be evaluated on the basis of the fulfillment of the major objectives of the project, measured through the indicators agreed in the PRODOC. While it is true that expectations for improvement were too high, the project may yield significant results once the impact indicators are analyzed. Therefore, it is imperative that the evaluator receives the monitoring report of the key indicators of the logical framework.

In terms of effectiveness, the project clearly shows successful achievement of several products of Output 1 and output 2, which have been extensively described in previous chapters. However, there are still many products in progress, which do not exist to date with any type of result or impact. Due to this, it is likely that certain products will end up as consulting reports, documents and contributions with no greater links to the authorities, and with a low capacity to influence on expected transformations. The third result clearly demonstrates very low efficacy, since it is a complex issue that did not have sufficient conceptual clarity and could draw on the recent experience of neighboring countries.

So far, with the exception of PORUs and declarations of new protected areas, the effectiveness of the project is very low. This is mainly because the most important product regarding the impact of the project impact, is not yet in operation, and because the project does not have the formal time to ensure its installation and usability.

In relation to efficiency, understood as the fulfillment of goals with the best use of resources, clearly the PORUs and in general all the work done through the CTZC, showed that relatively modest investments can generate a very important impact. In general terms, the revised products show technical quality and compliance with the terms of reference.

## **5.3. National ownership**

The EMT mentions that the appropriation has been intermittent during the first stage of the project, which is relatively expected in an environment of high turnover of authorities. Subsequent to the EMT, the project had a major boost, but fell back during the year 2015 due to the institutional restructuring of the Ministry. The appropriation reaches its highest

level during 2016, and during the completion of the project a political commitment can be verified from the highest levels of MINEA. The project has generated an institutional endorsement by many institutions related to the most successful products that were implemented, support that could be perceived both politically and technically.

#### **5.4. Impact**

It is still difficult to verify the true impact of the project, since there are still products in the process of delivery, and many others have not been validated or presented to the authorities. However, there are no publications derived from the studies contracted, nor are activities visible on the MINEA website. It will probably take many months, perhaps a year before we can appreciate all that has been achieved during this last period of intensive implementation.

The greatest legacy left by the project, although incomplete, is the Real Time Monitoring System (Multipurpose Stations), which has a regional and global connotation.

The project is also attributed with the stimulation of the Coastal Zone Work Committees, which, through the elaboration of the PORUs and the proposals for expansion and creation of protected areas, have materialized their impact as a working group in the territory. The impact is structural since they update the current instruments for the management of the ABRAE, while generating a capacity and commitment in the institutions responsible for its implementation.

Due to the project the MINAE consolidates its role of coordinator of the environmental competition in coastal spaces and protected areas of the country. The development of products has strengthened its positioning and ability to convene with the different competent authorities.

The execution of the Project has generated a new level of capacity and awareness in the actors of the ABRAE, which allows to think that it is precisely now when it is more important to address the result that the original project design raises. This impact runs the risk of being misused, in case the project has to end abruptly, without the possibility of implementing an exit strategy. Therefore, it is also fundamental to raise new projects and initiatives that give continuity to what has been achieved so far.

#### **5.5. Sustainability**

The sustainability of the investments made is at serious risk, particularly in relation to the Real Time Monitoring System (Multipurpose Stations), Master Plan, GIS, Interagency Coordination Mechanisms and Regulatory Framework. These products have not yet

been delivered and discussed with the authorities, therefore, they have not had time to be used, adjusted or calibrated depending on each case.

There are other activities that have a good possibility of being implemented and maintained over time, such as the PORU, the methodology for hierarchizing new protected areas, the extension and declaration of new protected areas. These products had high participation in the central level and in territory, mobilizing the CTZC.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

- This project is considered the most successful of the recent portfolio of international cooperation of the Ministry of Popular Power of Ecosocialism and Water, both for its budget execution and for the recognition of the results obtained.
- Although not all the expected products were developed and there is still a considerable amount of resources to have not been executed it is important to recognize what has been achieved so far given the political context, institutional changes and the so-called economic warfare that affected the normal performance of the project.
- The project shows an unbalanced performance in terms of expected results. El proyecto muestra un desempeño desbalanceado en cuanto a los resultados esperados. Two of the three outcomes present an important level of compliance, with an acceptable execution of the products, impact, high appropriation and participation of partners. However, Outcome 3 related to financial sustainability shows significant weaknesses in its approach, product quality, relevance and ownership.
- The execution of activities is particularly concentrated in the last year of implementation. At the time of the final evaluation, there are still a significant number of products and activities in the process of closure and delivery. This supposes a risk on investments made, since in many cases the products specially hired at the end will not have sufficient time to be properly appropriated, reviewed and used by the project partners.
- The expectations and results were extremely ambitious, considering the starting point of institutionality and political and economic context of the country. Both the design and implementation of the project underestimated the capacity and resources required to manage change. In the opinion of the evaluator, the inherent complexity of achieving such results in just five years was underestimated.
- On several occasions, it was planned to expand the work team or seek external support, which would have made a considerable difference in the approach and conceptualization of certain products.
- The Project did not meet the main objectives of its initial formulation, however, it demonstrated the capacity of reaction and adaptive management to adjust its products to what was possible to meet given the time available, and considering the institutional and political context of the country. This is not necessarily due to errors in the implementation of the Project, but rather to having too high expectations, and a relatively naive design, and in the end to the lack of time to close the pending products.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The sustainability of the investments made could be significantly affected, if the possibility of an extension of an administrative nature or better still, an extension of at least 6 months in the closure of the project is not considered. Ideally, from the evaluator's perspective, the 12-month extension that was originally requested is needed to have sufficient space to close the products and develop an exit strategy.
- The project needs an exit strategy, agreed between AI and AE, and landed at a fine detail level. A roadmap is required to guide the two possible scenarios, one of completion by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2016, and another scenario of completion on a later date. In either case, it is recommended to maintain a shared planning exercise, which defines the scope and guides the closure of the project.
- Within this process, there is the need for the project to disseminate the products, learning and results achieved. It is recommended that the possibility to publish certain key products be published, posted on the participating institutions website, and generate material to reach a wider audience.
- If there is an extension to the project, it is recommended to prioritize a strategic approach that fills the gap identified in Outcome 3. Financial sustainability is a central and neuralgic process to manage protected area. The project can still generate short-term and high-impact initiatives to set a frame of reference, and allow discussion to take place among the relevant actors. Since this would be the second attempt, after the INPARQUES Project, it would seem risky for this financial issue to drain, or be positioned as an area impossible to improve, precisely now when it is most lacking in the country.
- In this sense, some lines of work have been identified that could recover outcome 3, in terms of its original objective, which is the increase of resources available to the ABRAE
  - Generate an interinstitutional working platform to work on the topic of financial sustainability, like the ones that the project has provided with the Coastal Zone Work Committees, or for the Multipurpose Monitoring System. It is important that an issue as sensitive as the financial one is not treated exclusively through a project or an independent consultant, but through institutional instances that give greater anchorage and facilitate the institutions to share their information and participate.
  - Support the processes initiated by INPARQUES to update the values charged within protected areas, design new financing mechanisms and improve the cost structure of protected areas. The project could be linked directly with

INPARQUES in the design of the payment mechanisms that are currently being designed for the Morrocoy National Park.

- The project could provide very important support in the formulation of the new GEF portfolio. At the moment the MINEA has ideas of projects for the new portfolio, but these are not formulated yet, reason why there is an opportunity for the project to support the acceleration of these processes and to take advantage of these sources of financing of short and medium term.
- Minimally the Outcome 3 should be in the ability to communicate clearly how much is currently spent ?, what is the financial gap that needs to be covered? And, in what could additional funds be used for protected areas in Venezuela? It is essential to rethink the products related to defining the baseline and financing needs of ABRAE. These inputs are key to public policy, are minimal aspects for the construction of financial sustainability and are fully available to the actors of the ABRAE in the country.
- This project, like others within the recent portfolio of international cooperation in Venezuela, has found practically the same barriers and limitations to ensure a rapid and successful start. It seems like each new project recreates the same difficulties in the recruitment of personnel, procurement, administrative and financial arrangements, communication systems, monitoring and evaluation. This is where a niche for the project is verified, in terms of facilitating a national manual or strategy to implement projects with the GEF. This document could capture the lessons learned and guide AI and AE towards arrangements and agreements that favor smooth implementation and faster project startup.
- It has been verified that there is a high demand for capacities related to financing of protected areas. Several countries in the region have recently implemented financial sustainability projects, so there are installed capacities to disseminate lessons learned and successful experiences within the region. The project could finance visits and exchanges so that technicians and Venezuelan authorities can see firsthand the operation and functioning of the financing mechanisms in force in the region.
- Likewise, an introductory course on protected area financing could be proposed, aiming at evaluating the most relevant experiences in the region and helping technicians and authorities to define which ones would be closer to or respond better to the country's public policies.
- It is not appropriate to tie a project to the approval of laws or regulatory frameworks that it is not able to modify, however attractive it may seem on paper at the time of

the project. Projects linked to the approval of mechanisms beyond their control can lead to delays in their implementation. This is a high commitment, which is necessary within the construction of a country's environmental institutionalality, but at the same time is risky and should have more conservative expectations.

- In the course of time it is fundamental that the different tools developed are updated and revised periodically. They should not be allowed to lose their validity, since the objective outlined considers that they are available for when the authorities require it for their decision-making processes.
- The project design should consider change management sufficiently, and not underestimate the complexity inherent in the resistance of individuals and institutions to change. The technical conformation of the teams and their time of dedication should be consistent with this complexity.
- Projects that propose profound changes in the environmental institutionalality should consider that they are long term processes, of high uncertainty and much complexity. Therefore, a project itself should not be the beginning and end of the process, but should be focused as key components that play a catalytic role, but must be strategically constructed and articulated with new projects and initiatives over time
- It is recommended to revise the time frame for the design of this type of projects, possibly to be between 6 and 7 years are needed to concretize them in an appropriate way, without forcing national processes. The recent experience of the GEF projects in Venezuela, and generally in the region, suggests identifying at least one full year for start-up and one for closure, which would leave 4 to 5 years for implementation.
- However, some interviewees also argue in favor of more accurate and realistic projects, with the capacity to generate impacts in the short and medium term. Projects with a manageable number of results that consider fewer products, and shorter periods of design and implementation.
- Much more can still be done by the AI and AE to equip methodologists and technicians for a fast start-up and for the use of appropriate monitoring and tracking tools.
- It is essential that the new projects have a minimum staff assigned with exclusive dedication to the project. Projects of the complexity discussed in this document, require adequate and sufficient profiles in the technical and administrative field.
- Both in this and other projects of the GEF portfolio, it has been noticed that the participating institutions have a certain distrust of international support, the contracting of external support. More could be done from the portfolio projects, to

promote the official exchange of experiences, best practices and capacities with other countries of the region.