**Terminal Evaluation**

**of the Project “*Transforming management of biodiversity-rich community production forests through building national capacities for market-based instruments (00071603 GEF –UNDP - PIMS)*”**

**Operational Program**

**UNDP**

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GEF IA | GEF Implementing Agency |
| RP | Responsible Partner |
| APR | Annual Project Review |
| PTA | Preventive Technical Audit; Certification Scheme |
| HCVF | High Conservation Value Forests |
| BD | Biodiversity |
| BPM | Best Practices Manual |
| CCBA | Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance |
| CCMSS | Mexican Civil Council for Sustainable Forestry |
| CIFOR | Center for International Forestry Research |
| CITES | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora |
| CO | Country Office |
| COC | Chain of Custody |
| COINBIO | Biodiversity Conservation Project in Indigenous Communities |
| CONABIO | National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity  |
| CONAFOR | National Forestry Commission  |
| D&D | Deforestation and Degradation |
| ECOSUR | College of the South Border  |
| CFE | Community Forest Enterprise |
| ERA | Environmental Risk Assessment  |
| ETFRN | European Tropical Forest Research Network  |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  |
| FCPF | Forest Carbon Partnership Facility of the World Bank |
| FIRA | Trusts Instituted in Relation to Agriculture |
| FIRCO | Shared Risk Trust  |
| FLEGT | Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| FSC | Forest Stewarship Council; Certification Scheme |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| INE/INECC | National Institute of Ecology (during the design of the project), currently the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change  |
| INEGI | National Institute of Statistics and Geography  |
| IR  | Inception Report |
| PB | Project Board (Project Steering Committee) |
| LEED | Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design |
| LGDFS | General Law on Sustainable Forest Development |
| LGEEPA | General Law on Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection  |
| MDG | Millennium Developent Goals |
| SFM | Sustainable Forest Management |
| LF | Logical Framework |
| NBSAP | National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans  |
| NMX | Mexican Standard for Sustainable Forest Management. Certification Scheme |
| NTFP | Non-Timber Forest Products  |
| NGO  | Non-Governmental Organization or Civil Society Organization (CSO) |
| CLUP | Community Land-Use Planning  |
| PIR  | Project Implementation Review |
| AWP | Annual Work Program |
| PPG | Project Preparation Grant |
| PROCYMAF | Community Forest Development Program  |
| RA | Rainforest Alliance |
| REDD | United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation  |
| SAGARPA | Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries, and Food  |
| SEMARNAT | Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources  |
| M&E | Monitoring & Evaluation  |
| TFSs | Technical Forest Services  |
| IPW | Initial Project Workshop  |
| TOC | Theory of Change |
| PCU  | Project Coordinating Unit |
| UMAFOR | Forestry Management Unit (of CONAFOR) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme  |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme  |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change  |
| RPU | Regional Project Unit  |
| WRI | World Resources Institute |
| WWF | World Wildlife Fund |

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Executive Summary**

*Project Synopsis*  *7*

*Brief Project Description*  *8*

*Conclusions*  *9*

*Lessons Learned* *14*

*Recommendations*  *16*

*Evaluation Rating Table*  *20*

**Part I: Introduction** **20**

*1.1 Purpose of Evaluation and Key Issues Addressed* *21*

*1.2 Evaluation Methodology* *21*

*1.3 Evaluation Structure* *26*

*1.4 Overall Project Assessment* *26*

**Part II: Concept, Design, and Development Context of Project**

*2.1 Project Description and its Development, Start-up and Duration*  *28*

2.1.1 Project Background *28*

2.1.2 Long-Term and Immediate Project Objectives *28*

2.1.3 Expected Results *29*

2.1.4 Baselines *29*

*2.2 Main Participants/ Beneficiaries – Interested Parties* *29*

*2.3 Context of Project Development* *30*

*2.4 Barriers for the Project to Address According to the ProDoc* *33*

**Part III: Evaluation Results**

***3.1 Project Formulation/Design*** *36*

*3.1.1* *Relevance of Design* *36*

*3.1.2* *Replication Approach*  *39*

*3.1.3* *Stakeholder Ownership/Participation in the Design* *39*

*3.1.4* *Design Phase Risk Assessment* *40*

*3.1.5* *Design for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Targeting the Project*

*(Analysis of Logical Framework (LF) and Results Framework)* *40*

*3.1.6 Administrative Provisions*  *46*

*3.1.7* *Links between the Project and Other Interventions within the Sector and*

 *Lessons from Other Relevant Projects*  *48*

***3.2 Project Implementation***  ***49***

***3.2.1 Relevance*** *49*

***3.2.2 Effectiveness*** *– Progress in Achieving Results*  *51*

*3.2.2.1 Achieving Results*  *51*

*3.2.2.2 Achieving Impact - Local Objectives* *55*

*3.2.2.3 Impact Achievement – Overall Objectives* *57*

*3.2.2.4 Connection to other efforts*  *64*

*3.2.2.5 Compliance with UNDP Mainstreaming Criteria* *65*

*3.2.2.6 National Ownership during Implementation*  *66*

***3.2.3 Efficiency***  *67*

*3.2.3.1 Implementation focus*  *67*

*3.2.3.2 Management Arrengements* ***–*** *Implementation Partnership Agreements*  *67*

*3.2.3.3 Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)*  *72*

*3.2.3. Coordination of UNDP4 and the Executing Agency to Manage Operational Issues*  *74*

*3.2.3.5 Adaptive Mangement.*  *74*

*3.2.3.6 National Ownership during Execution* 76

*3.2.3.7 Compliance with Disbursement Timetable and Financial Management of GEF Grant 79*

*3.2.3.8 Co-financing*  *81*

***3.3 Sustainability***

**Parte IV: Lessons learned and recommendations** **90**

**4.1 Lessons learned**  **90**

**4.2 Recommendations 92**

##### **ANEXOS**

Anexo 1 TdR Evaluation Contracting

Anexo 2 Code of Conduct

Anexo 3 Mission Agenda

Anexo 4 People Interviewed

Anexo 5 Questions Matrix

Anexo 6 Evaluation Survey for Regional Managers

Anexo 7 Documents Consulted

Anexo 8 Forest Management Methods

Anexo 9 State / Municipal Policies with BD Inclusion

Anexo 10 Follow-up Matrix of Advances by Logical Framework Indicators

**Executive Summary**

***Project Synopsis***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project Name** | **“Transforming management of biodiversity-rich community production forests through building national capacities for market-based instruments”** |
| **ATLAS ID:** | 00071603. |
| **GEFSEC Project ID:** | 4015. |
| **PIMS No.:** |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Region:** | **Latin America and the Caribbean** |
| **Country:** | **Mexico** |
| **GEF Strategic Focal Area:**  | **Biodiversity** |
| **GEF 6 Strategic Objective (July 2014-June 2018):** | **No. 4: Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use in Production Landscapes and Sectors**  |
| **Implementing Agency:** | **UNDP** |
| **Executing Agency:** | **National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR)** |
| **Other partners involved**: | **Rainforest Alliance** |
| **Execution Modality:** | **National Implementation Modality** |
| **Start Date** | **November 12, 2010** |
| **Expected Closing Date** | **December 31, 2015** |
| **Closing Date Authorized by GEF** | **December 31, 2016** |
| **GEF Financing** | **$6,900,000 USD** |
| **IA:** | **$71,500 USD** |
| **Government:** | **$14,400,000 USD** |
| **Other (Rainforest Alliance):** | **$3,000,000 USD** |
| **Scheduled Total Co-Financing:** | **$17,471,500 USD** |

***Brief Project Description***

1. “***Transforming management of biodiversity-rich community production forests through building national capacities for market-based instruments***" is a large project with non-reimbursable GEF funds totaling 6.2 million USD, with co-financing anticipated at the project start-up in the estimated amount of $17,471,500 USD.
2. The project was approved by the GEF Council in March 2010 and was designed as a five-year project (2010-2015). It started in September 2010 and was set to conclude in December 2015. However, its closing date was extended to December 2016 by approval of the Project Board and with the respective notifications made through the annual Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs) submitted to GEF.
3. **Ultimate Project Goal:** This project’s ultimate objective has been defined. However, it is expressed in such a way that it cannot be categorized as a goal in strict terms. A goal is expected to state the achievement to be made in specific terms (for example, "conserve biodiversity," as stated on page 6 of the PIF).[[1]](#footnote-1) In turn, the goal described in the ProDoc reads as follows: ***“Market-based sustainable forest management enables the conservation of biodiversity and environmental goods and services.”*** We note that this sentence as written could more accurately be construed as a hypothesis[[2]](#footnote-2) (see analysis of Design). Furthermore, this sentence is stated as such—i.e., as a hypothesis—on page 7 of the PIF.
4. **The Result/Overall Project Objective** is to “***Integrate biodiversity management into forestry practices on community lands via market-based instruments.***”
5. The specific project results are:
	* ***Result 1****: Technical assistance for community forest certification is institutionalized within national programs*
	* ***Result 2****: Community capacity is strengthened to achieve and maintain certification and to manage their forests in a sustainable and BD-friendly manner.*
	* ***Result 3****: Economic incentives are in place to attract and keep the CFEs commited to sustainable forest management and biodiversity management practices.*
	* ***Result 4:*** *Monitoring, learning, adaptive feedback*, *and evaluation systems are in place for quantitative and qualitative assessment of project impacts*
6. **Objective and Scope of Evaluation**: The purpose of this evaluation is to comply with GEF's and UNDP's Monitoring and Evaluation policy, which includes an independent mid-term evaluation and a terminal evaluation (TE) for the initiatives funded by GEF and implemented by UNDP. To this end, the evaluation methodology designed by GEF and UNDP for this purpose[[3]](#footnote-3) was applied. The evaluation covers the phases of design, implementation, and future sustainability. According to the UNDP-GEF guide, the criteria to be evaluated are *Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability*. The evaluation was carried out using secondary information provided by the project, and other information gathered by the evaluator via interviews and field visits during a field mission (see annexes on interviewees and sites visited). The evaluation approach was participatory and proactive in order to ensure the usefulness of findings and recommendations for future GEF-UNDP and CONAFOR initiatives (see Part II, Expanded Information).

***Conclusions:***

1. The main conclusions are:

**Relevance**

1. Since the project was designed and during its implementation, it has demonstrated international relevance[[4]](#footnote-4) to GEF's mandate in its three replenishments (2006-2018)[[5]](#footnote-5), with the UN Development Assistance Framework 2008-2012, and with the UNDP Assistance Program 2008-2012 with Mexico. It has also demonstrated relevance to the policy, legal, and institutional framework, as well as to the participants' local priorities.
2. Despite this formally accepted relevance, which may be very strong when analyzed according to GEF objectives and the Mexican government's conservation and sustainable management objectives, the evaluation revealed disparities in the understanding of what is meant by such complementarity or alignment of GEF's mandate with governmental objectives to the point that several stakeholders or documents express different interpretations of what is meant by this project's ultimate objective[[6]](#footnote-6). While projects are expected to have the ability to complement GEF's objectives with national objectives, the ultimate objective of a GEF-financed project should also be clearly recognized by the stakeholders. An additional element that could have interfered with identifying the Project's ultimate objective is its recognition as a project or initiative on its own and not as a simple instance of "co-financing" by CONAFOR. The ProDoc mentions GEF as a “co-financier” and, as expressed by UNDP, GEF's policy of funding incremental costs enables GEF projects to "co-finance" national initiatives. While it could be argued that the understanding that national funds co-finance GEF's project or vice versa may not have great importance, it is found that it has an impact in the ability to identify the ultimate objective and the results sought from the GEF-financed activitiesTo this end, it is appropriate to apply the conceptualization of the objective of GEF funds as being to finance incremental costs: “*GEF funds the incremental or additional costs associated with transforming a project with national benefits into one with global environmental benefits.”[[7]](#footnote-7)* As the evaluator recognizes and accepts that UNDP does not agree with the analysis carried out in this paragraph, its opinion is included in a footnote below.[[8]](#footnote-8)
3. It should be clarified that GEF has a mandate to seek biodiversity (BD) conservation and identifies several strategies for this purpose. While it acknowledges that protected areas constitute the main strategy to achieve it,[[9]](#footnote-9) another important strategy is seeking conservation synergy within production systems.
4. Additionally, due to GEF's policy of financing "*Incremental Costs*," a GEF project may act as an enabler to create synergy within government actions, which may involve a budget several times greater than GEF’s. According to this policy, during the design stage, this project fit or was effectively aligned with the forest priorities of the Mexican government, as it had (and still has) an important political, legal, institutional, and budget framework to support forest producers. While CONAFOR had a structure to deliver support to forest producers, as laid out by several executors and authorities during interviews, there were also budgetary and management constraints. In such conditions, the GEF-financed initiative constituted a clear example of the benefits that may be offered by a grant to cover incremental costs needed to create synergy for biodiversity conservation within a production process and to develop a new management paradigm, taking advantage of a situational need that would allow it to concurrently provide local benefits by supporting enabling or bridging processes between the technical and coordinating aspects of the Mexican government's institutional policy and the producers. Graph 1 below exemplifies this relationship:

**Graph 1: Role of GEF's Incremental Costs**

Policies, Laws, Operational lines of forest subsidies-CONAFOR

UNDP-GEF Project: Incremental Costs

Enabling/bridging, establishing synergy for BD conservation

 Forest producers and industrialists (ejidos, communities, private entities)

**Effectiveness**.-

1. The Project has demonstrated high effectiveness in achieving defined goals for the indicators of each result of the Logical Framework. Furthermore, for most of them, the project has surpassed the goals several times over. Achieving these goals created national and local benefits of utmost importance that undoubtedly have strengthened the forestry sector and a high number of participating producers. Although some goals have not been achieved, they have acceptable levels of progress (between 70% and 90%), and are contextualized in the different reports prepared, including this one. Additional achievements not included in the ProDoc also took place.
2. Despite the foregoing, in the evaluator's opinion, there is a significant weakness, perhaps largely attributable to LF constraints (see Efficiency), that involves a certain disjunction or disconnection between achieving several of these goals and the indicators of the overall objective, which increases the difficulty of visualizing or evaluating the project's ultimate objective, i.e., the global benefits sought. The details of this observation are provided in the body of the report.

**Efficiency**

1. The efficiency of the project's administrative and financial management has been extraordinary with the implementation of nearly the entirety of funds and the achievement of more than two times the co-financing by the Mexican government. To meet all the set goals, management arrangements were defined based on strategies (roadmaps/schemes) that enabled their achievement with a high level of professionalism.
2. Management at the regional level was not heterogeneous for several reasons, including regional contexts, the organizational capacity of the enterprises and ejidos, the conditions of safety and participation schemes, as well as the management capacity of the regional managers and the amount of time they hold their positions, in consideration of high staff turnover in some regions. In any case, the competent management (leadership and efficiency) of the Northern and Central Eastern regions is worth highlighting.
3. The arrangements for the implementation of the project's monitoring and evaluation plan were generally efficient, although several interviewees stated that monitoring processes improved with the second professional in charge. Two monitoring and evaluation weaknesses were identified, namely: (i) the Mid-Term Evaluation/Review was late (although the reasons for this were stated and explained in the annual reports in the mid-term review itself); and (ii) adaptive management of the LF did not take place as set out in the GEF-UNDP evaluation guide[[10]](#footnote-10) in order to correct some of the Logical Framework's deficiencies, which ultimately affected effectiveness. While it is not mandatory for every project to undertake adaptive management under the two criteria of the guide, it would have been necessary in this case to have generated a revised version of the LF with adjustments to the order and type of identifying indicators in order to ensure these were indicators of achievements. We note that the project made other types of adjustments during implementation, which included the addition of new indicators, expansion of some goals (coverage and number of participating ejidos) and the improvement of monitoring instruments.

**Sustainability**

1. In Mexico, there are conditions that are specific or unique to the Latin American context that benefit sustainability of the project's achievements. These are recognized as a project's exogenous and endogenous conditions (drivers and assumptions) within the Theory of Change. They must be considered when executing a project in order to understand limitations or opportunities for replication in Mexico and other countries.
2. Mexico's legal and political conditions (known as exogenous conditions within the theory of change) benefit the sustainability of the achievements because the project had the capacity to become embedded in important planning policies, regulations and instruments at the land level (forest management programs) and the regional level (regional biodiversity studies).
3. The project also created or improved political conditions (known as endogenous conditions within the Theory of Change) by supporting the establishment of the National Certification System[[11]](#footnote-11) and making contributions to ENAIPROS and to the Law on Sustainable Forest Development.
4. Institutional conditions are favorable, thanks to the training received by the technical forest service (TFS) officers assisting the producers, to the ownership of the subject taken by state governments and universities, and to guidance documents (methodologies and thematic documents) prepared for ongoing use, which have even been included in curricula for new forest technicians in training. However, several authorities have highlighted a weakness or challenge based on significant staff layoffs that will complicate CONAFOR’s continuance of the the Project’s enabling actions at the same pace, which may even affect the quality[[12]](#footnote-12) of some of the institution's routine activities and Project-supported activities.
5. Social conditions are favorable for sustainability, as the producers' (CFEs') governability was strengthened in great measure (albeit to varying degrees and not an all regions), business associations for wood processing were created, and global-level market process routes were established in some cases[[13]](#footnote-13). We highlight that the building of a collaborative culture, which was very weak before the Project, is not a minor point; this culture has already been exemplified in several cases and contexts.
6. There is not enough information to predict with certainty, due to the dynamic of the ecosystems, whether there are environmental conditions to ensure conservation of the biodiversity (particularly flora and fauna of global importance) present in the assisted CFEs and/or in HCVFs. Moreover, it is not possible to ensure that the favorable ecological conditions promoted with the best practices are sufficient[[14]](#footnote-14) and/or will be those required by BD in the future.
7. The effects of the project's results on the ecosystems require constant evaluation to find out whether "islands" of conservation are appropriately sized for species to continue evolutionary processes, whether there is connectivity between "islands of conservation," and whether the species have opportunities to make altitudinal migrations in the face of new conditions caused by climate change. Moreover, with subsequent monitoring and evaluations, it could be determined whether the conservation-friendly practices are suitable and sufficient and whether forest management systems have allowed for conservation of species in need of conservation, and for maintaining biodiversity and variation within species. To this end, some similar projects identify long-term indicators of impact as a guide for relevant authorities or stakeholders in charge of continuing the actions in the future. According to the UNDP office, while it agrees that the Project's results or records do not offer conclusive evidence of its contribution to BD conservation, it indicates that there are studies[[15]](#footnote-15) conducted since the 1980s concluding that forest management for the regions of Northern Oaxaca and Northern Puebla have been favorable for biodiversity conservation.

**Lessons Learned**

* Sustainable development is feasible: Results in terms of local benefits provided by the project have taught us that it is feasible to promote sustainable economic development in tandem with sustainable management of production processes (in this case, forestry practices). We clarify that sustainable economic development is not synonymous with continuous economic growth, but rather a balance dependent on the load capacity of the ecosystems.
* Empowerment and social development are feasible: The project has also taught us that it is feasible to promote the empowerment of the communities, many of which are in poverty, and that such empowerment is tied to the creation of economic opportunities as well as to emotional growth paired with human dignity, which arises from the communities’ sense of capability to carry out proactive processes for themselves[[16]](#footnote-16), their families, and their communities. We highlight that self-management capacity within parameters of coexistence and social organization is the foundation for the functioning of healthy societies. Consequently, these types of projects can contribute indirectly to a country's improvement.
* It is feasible to achieve synergies in biodiversity conservation practices within production systems: The project's results have taught us that it is feasible to achieve synergy for GEF's mandate in areas outside Protected Natural Areas and as part of production processes, as long as the necessary conditions are present. Based on the interviews conducted in the different regions, the cultural context of rural Mexican populations was found to offer favorable conditions for conservation due to their traditional attachment to the earth. Additionally, the high technical capacity of their professionals and academics offer favorable conditions for conducting specific studies to attain such synergy.
* Weaknesses in design and in the Logical Framework in particular may hinder the executors' vision of the ultimate objective in accordance with the mandate and rationale of the GEF grants, which in this case is the Strategic Focal Areaof Biodiversity. This is especially evident when those in charge of a project's execution are not the same as those involved in its design. In this project, the LF's weaknesses interfered with identifying the ultimate overall objective and with achieving and/or reporting on the ultimate overall objectives (see Effectiveness and Efficiency).
* The emphasis on meeting the goals drawn up for each indicator may result in the perfect fulfillment of the indicators, but if there is no strategy articulating components in terms of a higher level ultimate objective, there is a risk of failing to establish conditions to fulfill them in the long term once the project is concluded. (In this project, the ProDoc does not clearly present the ultimate objective, and different executors identified different ultimate objectives). While it was not mandatory, the project undertook an exercise to define a Theory of Change (TOC) diagram, but this did not visualize the interactions between the different results (project components) to achieve the ultimate overall objective.
* The participation of different stakeholders with different visions and institutional interests may increase the difficulty of implementing a joint project and, if such differences are not resolved during the design stage, there will be problems during the execution phase. In these conditions, the role of the Implementing Agencies of GEF is fundamental to ensure that greater weight is given to visions more closely aligned with GEF's mandate[[17]](#footnote-17), and even greater weight to ensuring full alignment with this mandate. If differences between joint executors are irreconcilable, the departure of one of the parties may be beneficial to the project, as occurred in this project. As reported, conceptual differences and differences in approach arose between RA and CONAFOR in this project, which culminated in RA's withdrawal.
* Conditions of context have a strong impact on the execution of a project (or on a zone of a project). As these differences may be institutional, social, or environmental, strategies for monitoring and support must also be differentiated. In this project, differences between regions were evident. However, based on a similar overall framework, the project was able to establish different management strategies according to different regional contexts.
* A project's success is also influenced by the type and level of professional training of the staff involved and therefore by the executors' ability to recruit them and provide them with proper guidance. Several executors reported that one of the challenges requiring a concerted effort was recruiting the appropriate staff despite the offer of competitive salaries, and that they were successful in most cases but also had some deficiencies that affected the products for which they were responsible.
* Successfully institutionalizing a project's objectives and goals is one of the most important strategies to ensure institutional sustainability, i.e., continued implementation of the processes and monitoring in the long term. In the case of this project, this strategy's success was a result of empowering government and non-government staff and involving them in the forestry structure.
* Projects may have positive environmental and social effects or unwanted effects that must be considered within their planning. Therefore, one of the implementers' challenges is to identify them in order to promote positive effects and mitigate the negative ones. In the case of the project, positive social and economic processes were detected during the evaluation. No rapid analyses of possible environmental effects were encountered.

**Recommendations**

* **Initial Report and Adaptive Management:** We suggest revisiting a practice employed in other GEF-UNDP projects, which involves conducting an initial review of the Logical Framework enabled by an international expert in indicators to ensure that the LF meets standards such as having a clearly established ultimate goal, indicators that reflect achievements (not only performance) and are SMART, and that the conception of the ultimate objective pursued is clear and consistent. Based on this analysis, we recommend applying adaptive management to the LF at the start of the project[[18]](#footnote-18). Additionally, if there is a new version of the LF, it must be officially authorized[[19]](#footnote-19). This initial analysis conducted by an external expert who has not been involved in the project design is healthy as quality control. (We note that in the project, throughout its implementation, changes were documented in the PIRs, but no new version of the LF was officially authorized). Another recommendation[[20]](#footnote-20) is to confirm that there is a TOC diagram at the start of the project, as this is important tool to understand a project path and the conditions that must be produced to achieve the ultimate objective; if it does not exist, it is advisable to construct it. It is necessary to prove that this tool defines the achievements expected by the project, mid-term results, an ultimate objective consistent with GEF's mandate, and the determinants necessary to achieve them. Finally, it is crucial for the Implementing Agency to ensure that a project's executing team has absorbed the concepts, principles, logic, and procedures of GEF-UNDP to the point of fully assuming their mandate.
* **Timely Mid-Term Reviews/Evaluations:** We recommend conducting MTRs according to the schedule set out in the M&E Plan, as MTR delays cause a project to lose its opportunity to punctually correct lingering mistakes and/or reinforce strengths. A timely MTR is advisable even if a project has had initial difficulties and has few products to show. In the case of this project, its efforts to carry out the MTR in a timely manner[[21]](#footnote-21) are recorded; however, they were problems in obtaining interested evaluators. While there may be different causes for this, we suggest conducting an analysis of the terms of reference of the evaluations and correcting their weaknesses to demonstrate that they do not constitute barriers that discourage the evaluators.
* **International and Local Responsibility for Replicability**

International Responsibility: Considering the Mexican context—which is unique in the institutional, legal, economic-financial and ecosystemic spheres—and considering that Mexico is a benchmark for other countries, particularly in Latin America, it is crucial for the documents (e.g. best practice guides, systematizations) generated by the project and that might enable replication of actions/strategies in other countries[[22]](#footnote-22) to clearly highlight the national context (political, legal, and ecological), as processes that may be very successful in Mexico may cause ecosystem degradation in other countries. For example, Mexico's tropical forest ecosystems are subject to devastating climatic events and are distant from the centers of speciation of the Amazon rainforests. Because systems subject to constant catastrophic events contain fast-growing opportunistic species, tend to be less complex (with fewer species as well as fast-growing opportunistic species), and have greater regenerative capacity, their management can be much simpler than that of climax tropical rainforests.

Application of equity criteria in future replications:While equity criteria are difficult to conceive at the moment of application, by taking into account the lessons learned during the evaluation, recommendations may be offered in two areas: (i) Equity in selecting CFEs, considering that, as reported by some authorities and implementers, more mature CFEs were selected for the implementation of the project, and that it was anticipated that replicating the actions without the project would be a slow process, particularly in less mature CFEs that would have required more time from authorities. In view of this challenge, although is understandable that it would be preferable to start with CFEs that would progress faster[[23]](#footnote-23) due to project time constraints, for future CONANP-led replications and in the interest of equity criteria, we suggest that less mature CFEs also be included in the selection process; (ii) Another area of equity that we mention for future reference is the protection of ejido members' benefits. The evaluation did not reveal that these rights had been affected, although many ejido members were found to be vulnerable due to their humble conditions and to the fact that, on account of the project's and CONANP’s actions, ejido members' rights may become attractive based on the profitability of efficiently managed forests and sawmills. During the project, ejido members reported on purchase and sale processes for ejido members’ rights and the interest that some people had in purchasing them. In such circumstances, we recommended that authorities who are involved in future advising for CFEs include topics on the benefits of reappraising these rights and the long-term benefits of ejido members' rights so that ejido members do not make disadvantageous transactions if they should they decide to sell their rights. We note that the evaluation lacked analysis of purchase and sale processes for ejido members' rights. However, it was identified that many original ejido members are people of modest means (which is not the case for some ejido members who bought their rights). Therefore, it is possible for original ejido members to suffer adverse effects if people from outside the ejido discover the economic benefits offered by some CFEs or their well-managed sawmills and seek to purchase their rights at prices advantageous to themselves before the a CFE may be advised on the matter.

Responsibility for possible processes to replicate project practices in Protected Areas: This recommendation is made regarding the fact that both the project's final report[[24]](#footnote-24) and several executors interviewed during the evaluation mentioned the idea that the employed practices and management could be replicated in Mexican Protected Natural Areas. The recommendation references the fact that any project replication within Protected Areas must be carried out with great responsibility. Prior to any replication, there must be sufficient proven information that certain types of management or environmental practices ensure integrity of ecosystems and conservation of their biodiversity. We highlight this point because there may be an occasional temptation to promote replicating project actions in PNAs without sufficient evidence demonstrating that a certain type of management will ensure ecosystem integrity and continued existence of species and their variation.

* **Systematization of project-generated information:** Because the project has executed a wide range of activities with which it has created several information products, it is important to systematize the processes employed in each thematic area, and to process the acquired information in order to connect it to the project's ultimate objective and/or to its highest-level achievements wherever possible. This recommendation is not in reference to knowledge products, but rather to information on objects of conservation identified in CFEs via monitoring support, which, if systematized, could enhance knowledge to ensure their conservation and discover integrating inputs, whether at the regional or national level. A full understanding of long-term impact cannot feasibly be achieved from information presented in PIRs and in the final report.
* **Exchange of biodiversity records containing information generated from Biological Monitoring Sessions by CONAFOR, CONANP, and CONABIO:** In consideration of the fact that FMP-generating processes and forest certification will involve ongoing biological monitoring of HCVs, other voluntary conservation areas, and production zones where biodiversity-friendly practices are applied, it is advisable to ensure that such records are shared with CONANP and CONABIO (this interaction was recorded in two State Forest Councils during the field mission and was not found to be reported according to the Board of Directors’s meeting minutes, but during the final review period of the document, it was reported that indicators were jointly defined by CONAFOR, CONANP, and CONABIO). In any case, it would be advisable in the future for CONABIO to have information from FMPs’s biodiversity records, and to jointly monitor the presence and status of the species being conserved in both production zones and voluntary conservation areas (HCVFs or restricted use areas) and, based on information that they later collect with CONAFOR and CONANP, to refine indicators that would enable them to understand changes in status of conservation objects, the effectiveness of good biodiversity management practices, and monitoring to determine whether such areas present favorable conditions for climate change adaptation.
* **Final Reports/Systematizations and Exit Strategy:** The first draft of this evaluation report recommended the preparation of an Exit Strategy and the inclusion of a systematization in the Final Report. As the project executors produced the Final Report and Exit Strategy in tandem with this evaluation, this recommendation has been modified and directed toward future projects. The final report adequately documents project results. For future interventions, this recommendation means including an analysis of overall contributions to global and national goals in terms of achievement, as well as reporting results according to the indicators identified in the LF in the final reports. To this end, we also suggest mentioning interactions between different project components in order to reinforce the ultimate objective.

Concerning information systematization, in addition to future ongoing monitoring of the presence of species on designated lands, we suggest seeking mechanisms to obtain systematized information from groups of either CFEs or regions in order to determine overall progress toward global and national conservation objectives (this recommendation is complementary to the recommendation for the exchange of data records with CONABIO).

With regard to the Exit Strategy, we suggest including the defined information to be collected in the future, in addition to identifying the institutions and their responsibilities in order to ensure the permanence of project results. For example, as it will be possible in this case to continue land-level and perhaps regional monitoring activities, it would be important to seek to add such information (such as by applying the previous recommendation) in order to determine progress toward the highest level objectives.

The Exit Strategy should ideally include mechanisms for ongoing legal/institutional support; environmental, social, and economic sustainability; and ongoing monitoring of key indicators.

* **Developing a Theory of Change Diagram**: The project’s TOC diagram, while interesting, has weaknesses; therefore, we suggest using the TOC diagram based on the ROtI methodology[[25]](#footnote-25) created specifically for GEF projects in other projects (as it cannot currently be used in this one).

**Evaluation Rating**

1. In accordance with the ToR, the project was assessed under the methodology and ranges established by GEF/UNDP (see criteria of ranges in full text). The assessment results are summarized below in Table 1:

**Table 1. Project Ratings**

|  |
| --- |
| **Project Performance Ratings** |
| 1. Project Formulation/Design | ***Rating*** | **2. Monitoring & Evaluation** | ***Rating*** |
| Conceptualization/Design | SS | LF Design | SU |
| National Ownership  | HS | M&E Initial Design | S |
| Participation of Stakeholders in Design | HS | Execution of M&E Plan | S |
| Replicability  |  | Overall M&E Quality | S |
| **3. Execution of IA and EA** | ***Rating*** | **4. Evaluation of Results**  | **Rating** |
| Implementation Approach | S |  |  |
| UNDP Implementation Quality | S | Relevance  | R |
| Quality of Execution: Executing Agency  | S | Effectiveness in Overall Objectives | SS |
| General Quality of Implementation and Execution | S | Effectiveness in National Objectives | S |
| Stakeholders' Participation | HS | Efficiency  | S |
| Financial Planning | HS | Overall Rating for Project Results | S |
| **5. Sustainability of Results Achieved** | **Rating** |  |  |
| Financial Resources: | SL |  |  |
| Socio-Political Results: | L |  |  |
| Institutional Framework and Governance: | L |  |  |
| Environmental Results: | SU |  |  |
| Overall Probability of Sustainability | SL |  |  |

HS (Highly Satisfactory), S (Satisfactory), SS (Somewhat Satisfactory), SU (Somewhat Unsatisfactory), L (Likely), SL (Somewhat Likely), R (Relevant)

***Part I: Introduction***

* 1. **Purpose of Evaluation and Key Issues Addressed**
1. This evaluation was carried out to comply with GEF’s and UNDP’s monitoring and evaluation policies for projects financed and managed by them. Such policies provide for an independent Mid-Term Evaluation and a Final Evaluation.
2. According to the ToR (page 10),[[26]](#footnote-26) the purposes of this evaluation, which are consistent with GEF's and UNDP's objectives when their projects require evaluation, are the following:
	* Monitor and evaluate the level of progress/achievement of project objectives, evaluate their results, and identify options for future impacts;
	* Provide elements for decision-making and make necessary modifications and improvements;
	* Promote transparency;
	* Promote accountability in the use of resources;
	* Provide information on recurrent issues in GEF's and UNDP's portfolio in need of attention; and
	* Document, provide feedback on, and disseminate any lessons learned that can be helpful in selecting, designing, and implementing future GEF and UNDP interventions.
3. The ToR also mention that: "*The final evaluation also intends to provide strategies to achieve long-term sustainability of project results and improve stakeholder performance in other projects.*"This ToR statement reflects a weak understanding of the scope of an evaluation with objectives that include identifying lessons learned and analyzing whether the project has established strategies and sustainability, as well as making suggestions. However, the design of strategies is not the objective of an evaluation.
	1. **Evaluation Methodology**
4. For the evaluation, the **criteria** set out in the ToR and consistent with GEF's M&E policies were analyzed. These are as follows:
	* **Relevance** or consistency with policies, and importance for fulfillment of GEF's mandate;
	* **Efficiency** (which also covers monitoring actions);
	* **Effectiveness** of actions implemented to achieve expected global and local benefits; and
	* **Sustainability** of achievements or expected achievements, including required determinants.
5. Other important aspects that are considered:
* National ownership, stakeholder participation, and replicability options;
	+ Identifying problems or obstacles in the project's design and implementation and in achieving the results, and identifying recommendations for measures to improve the project's sustainability or effectiveness and future projects’ feasibility;
	+ Risk analysis;
	+ Identifying opportunities and compiling and analyzing specific lessons and good practices concerning strategies used and implementation arrangements that can be disseminated among the regional and national authorities and stakeholders involved in the project’s execution and in charge of its future monitoring; and
	+ Consistency with other UNDP criteria (gender, equity, South-South cooperation), particularly the Millennium Development Goals first and later the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the ToR, a brief analysis of the results is considered in the context of the objectives of the country program document (CPD) and the UNDP strategic program (SP). The ToR specifically request an illustration and explanation of how and how much the project influenced the indicator "Number of jobs and livelihoods created through management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste, disaggregated by sex, and rural and urban"). This has been reported in relation to the UNDP-provided information.
1. The evaluation focuses on the different project stages, i.e., design, implementation, and future sustainability.
2. The evaluation was adapted to the evaluation methodologies established in the ToR, as well as to the GEF and UNDP evaluation guides for this type of evaluation[[27]](#footnote-27), and also included considerations of UNDP evaluation guides for the Project’s evaluation of Results Management[[28]](#footnote-28). Among the methods included are: the review of secondary information, a mission visit from August 29 to September 17 in which interviews with key stakeholders and direct field observation took place, and subsequent analysis based on triangulation of available information.
3. The evaluation was participatory in order to promote its use and ownership by the main stakeholders. The spirit of the evaluation was one of collective learning based on identifying and analyzing processes, activities, and indicators to determine that it has worked well and that it requires strengthening or changes, according to the ultimate objective.
4. Several GEF and UNDP methods for this type of evaluation were applied to the evaluation in order to achieve triangulations of information from different sources. We emphasize that the quality of triangulations depends on access to different sources and the possibility of exchanging criteria with different stakeholders involved or participating in the project, as well as the evaluator's prior technical knowledge. **Sources consisted of project documentation, interviews, and direct observations,** which, in a sequential manner, included the following:

The review of documentation provided by Mexico's UNDP country office and by the project executors (CONAFOR and the Project Coordinating Unit) including the ProDoc, quarterly reports, annual reports (PIRs), the mid-term evaluation, information on systematized cases, etc., as well as complementary information obtained via internet to determine design conditions, indicators for the planned goals, evidence of progress toward expected results, and the project’s development context.

Interviews with stakeholders (executors, participants, and interested parties) (see Annex 2). Most interviews were conducted in person. The methodology treats the interviews as evidence.

Field visits: We sought to enhance the vision of the context, project actions, and the barriers to confront through field visits, which enabled direct observations and exchange with beneficiaries (see Annex 3 for sites visited). ***In the methodology, direct observations are treated as evidence of findings for the evaluation.***

1. The in-person presentation was given at the end of the field mission. This meeting was held on September 15, 2016. For this meeting, the evaluator explained the preliminary findings to the authorities of CONAFOR, UNDP, and the Coordinating Unit in order to obtain clarifications, fill in information gaps, obtain feedback from the stakeholders' perspective, and reach agreements. This report contains the comments and suggestions made during that meeting, as well as the review of the draft document.
2. Product development: During the evaluation process, three documents and a Power Point presentation were prepared using project-generated and UNDP-generated inputs. Two documents were used as inputs for discussion in the spirit of reinforcing stakeholder participation. These products were:
3. Work Plan (Inception Report): Prior to the start of the evaluation, the evaluator prepared a draft work plan that included the matrix of evaluation questions, the Methodological Data Sheet required by the ToR, the planned agenda (the agenda of proposed visits and interviews was prepared in conjunction with the project monitoring officer and through close interaction with the executors to determine the feasibility of the visits).
4. Power Point Presentation: Used for the preliminary discussion held at the field mission opening meeting.
5. Terminal Evaluation Draft Report: Submitted to UNDP for feedback in the form of the executors’ and UNDP’s comments and clarifications.
6. Final Evaluation Report: Took into account the comments on the draft report, including clarifications or modifications, as applicable, but always with respect for consistency with the evidence gathered via direct evaluator observations or triangulation of documentation and interviews.
7. Evaluation phases and evaluated period: Documentary information and interviews have been used to analyze the different phases: *Project Design, Execution, and Future Sustainability.*
8. Conceptual Framework: To develop the evaluation, the list of questions designed for it (Annex 4) has been taken as a guide, with the clarification that this guide has been used for reference and that the depth of its answers has depended on the types of information recorded by the project. During interviews, the questionnaire given to stakeholders was semi-structured with the flexibility to focus on the points most relevant to the stakeholders interviewed.
9. Structure of the evaluation document/organization of content: This evaluation document’s contents adhere to the guidelines of the *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects*. The first part contains project background and guidelines for evaluation. The second part offers a detailed analysis of the design, the main criteria of which are Relevance, Effectiveness (including Impact), Efficiency, and Sustainability. The third part provides the analysis of the implementation, giving attention to the criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability. The fourth part presents the conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned.
10. Evaluability - Evaluation Limitations: GEF project evaluations do not solicit analysis of a project's "evaluability." However, at the request of UNDP in the ToR, some reflections on elements considered in an evaluability analysis have been listed below, such as:
	* **Evaluation Time**: Intermediate or final project evaluations take three months on average, with a field mission of approximately two weeks. This evaluation had a longer mission of three weeks due to the project's broad coverage and complexity, which included visits to representative ejidos of the five regions in marathon workdays. Although longer field missions are not considered in this type of evaluation, the time was insufficient for more comprehensive interviews or to be able to interview all key stakeholders and universities involved. Taking time into account, the Evaluation Team made the best efforts for analysis under the circumstances. A lesson for similar future evaluations with broad coverage and highly diverse stakeholders is that it is necessary during planning to indicate travel times to reach project sites in greater detail and to better identify local technicians and stakeholders.
	* Because of the evaluation’s magnitude, the convening document and the ToR had envisioned a national evaluator, but no such evaluator was hired. Although a national evaluator's participation is not mandatory for all evaluations, it would have been important due to Mexico’s complex institutional and local structure and to the multiple, diverse stakeholders involved in the project. The project decided not to include a national evaluator, as the project team would be able to provide contextual and supporting information to systematize any necessary project information. While this arrangement caused initial problems in preparing the start-up report and lengthened this process, these problems were overcome once the project team's support came about. In this manner, the PCU staff provided the national context.
	* **National Context**: Prior to an evaluation, a work plan is jointly prepared with the national evaluator and the executors. In this case, the start-up report took much longer than expected because the project expected a level of detail for context that the evaluator could not provide because of her lack of familiarity with the information, which did not appear in the in the documents initially delivered to her. This problem was solved when the project team provided this information and established a working scheme of mutual cooperation to prepare the work plan (inception report) with the project monitoring specialist. In order to increase stakeholders' understanding of the context, CONAFOR's national and regional directors and officers later showed their willingness to explain management contexts as well as complex cultural contexts in detail.
	* **A clearly defined Ultimate Objective and analysis of the indicators to confirm whether properly verify indicator results:**[[29]](#footnote-29) As there is an exhaustive analysis of this subject within the analysis of the project’s Design, it is unnecessary to repeat it in this section (see Section 2.1.2 and Paragraphs 72 to 77).
	* **Statistical Data**: An element beneficial to the evaluation was the project’s compiled statistical data on beneficiary ejidos and enterprises, and its technical documents and partial product documents that provided a better understanding of the project. However, there were gaps in processed information on some subjects. For example, there are important land-level biological studies, but no comprehensive processed information (i.e. ejidos have information in their FMPs on their protected species, but no compiled project information and/or ecological data on the species). We note that this type of evaluation does not envisage the direct collection of ecological field data or statistics through surveys, and that data collected during an evaluation at implementation sites (ejidos) are not expected to be statistically representative due to small sample sizes. Data collected during visits therefore serve only as evidence for case studies.
11. **Scope:** We emphasize that this is an overall evaluation of the design process, of results obtained during the implementation phase, and of the sustainability of such results. The evaluation scope does include a financial audit, a management/occupational evaluation, or a professional-technical capacity evaluation, nor does it include an evaluation of social benefits. This evaluation will not enter into a discussion of which mandate—that of UNDP or GEF—has greater weight, which is best left to a different forum. The evaluation will instead deal strictly with adherence to the proposed methodology to evaluate this type of GEF-funded, UNDP-implemented project.
	1. **Evaluation Structure**
12. The final evaluation of the project "Transforming the management of biodiversity-rich community production forests through building national capacities for market-based instruments" was carried out by international evaluator Clemencia Vela Witt, a specialist in evaluation of environmental programs and projects and in natural resource management.
13. The evaluator was hired by Mexico's UNDP country office based on the agreed-upon terms of reference (Annex 1). The national evaluator that the convening document envisaged was not hired because UNDP noted its insufficient budget to pay the amounts offered, and indicated that such support to the evaluator would instead be supplied by the project officer in charge of monitoring, who would also be in charge of information gathering, logistical arrangements, contextualizing the national environment, etc. (all tasks envisaged for the national consultant). The mission agenda was developed by the evaluator and the project monitoring officer through an ongoing exchange with regional managers. The offices of UNDP, CONAFOR, and the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) were the focal points for the evaluation of the project. The evaluator was responsible for coordinating with UNDP and the PCU to define the work modality and timetable of inputs, prepare the different versions of the report, and conduct the final review based on project-generated inputs and proposals, which were accepted by the evaluator.
14. During the mission, the evaluator worked closely with the project’s executing team members and the UNDP office.
	1. **Overall Project Assessment**
15. In compliance with the ToR, the project was assessed according to the methodology and ranges set out by GEF/UNDP under the criteria of Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Range of Ratings Used to Assess the Project**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Ratings for project formulation, results, effectiveness, efficiency, M&E, and execution of Implementing and Executing Agencies.*** | ***Sustainability ratings:***  | ***Relevance ratings:*** |
| 6: Highly satisfactory (HS): No deficiencies 5: Satisfactory (S): Minor deficiencies4: Somewhat satisfactory (SS)3. Somewhat unsatisfactory (SU): Important deficiencies2. Unsatisfactory (U): Important deficiencies1. Highly unsatisfactory (HU): Severe deficiencies | 4. Likely (L): Regligible risks to sustainability. | 2. Relevant ® |
| 3. Moderately Likely (ML): Moderate risks | 1. Irrelevante (I) |
| 2. Moderately Unlikely (MU): Significant risks.1. Unlikely (I): Severe risks. |  |
| *Additional ratings where applicable:* Not Applicable (N/A) Unable to Assess (U/A) |

The assessment results are summarized in Table 3 below

**Table 3. Project Ratings**

|  |
| --- |
| **Project Performance Ratings** |
| 1. Project Formulation/Design | ***Rating*** | **2. Monitoring & Evaluation** | ***Rating*** |
| Conceptualization/Design | SS | LF Design | SU |
| National Ownership  | HS | M&E Initial Design | S |
| Participation of Stakeholders in Design | HS | Execution of M&E Plan | S |
| Replicability  |  | Overall M&E Quality | S |
| **3. Execution of IA and EA** | ***Rating*** | **4. Evaluation of Results**  | **Rating** |
| Implementation Approach | S |  |  |
| UNDP Implementation Quality | S | Relevance  | R |
| Quality of Execution: Executing Agency  | S | Effectiveness in Overall Objectives | SS |
| General Quality of Implementation and Execution | S | Effectiveness in National Objectives | S |
| Stakeholders' Participation | HS | Efficiency  | S |
| Financial Planning | HS | Overall Rating for Project Results | S |
| **5. Sustainability of Results Achieved** | **Rating** |  |  |
| Financial Resources: | ML |  |  |
| Socio-Political Results: | L |  |  |
| Institutional Framework and Governance: | L |  |  |
| Environmental Results: | MU |  |  |
| Overall Probability of Sustainability | ML |  |  |

***Part II:***

**Concept, Design, and Development Context of Project**

**2.1** **Description of the Project and its Development, Start-up, and Duration**

2.1.1 Project Background

1. The project was approved by the GEF Council in March 2010 and the start-up workshop was held in November of the same year.
2. This UNDP-GEF project seeks to conserve biodiversity in Mexican production forests using a strategy of improved management and incorporating a market-based instrument, such as forest certification.

***2.1.2 Long-Term Goal-Objective, intermediate Objective of the Project, Expected Results***

1. **The Ultimate Goal-Objective of the Project** as set out in the Logical Framework[[30]](#footnote-30) does not qualify as a goal in strict terms. A goal is expected to specifically express what is to be achieved (e.g., "conserve biodiversity," as stated on page 6 of the PIF).[[31]](#footnote-31) The goal described in the ProDoc reads as follows: ***"Market-based sustainable forest management enables biodiversity conservation and environmental goods and services by contributing to the scope of national, regional, and local development priorities."*** We note that this sentence as written could be more accurately construed as a hypothesis[[32]](#footnote-32) (see the analysis of Design). Furthermore, this sentence is stated as such—i.e., as a hypothesis—on page 7 of the PIF.

***2.1.3 Expected Results***

1. *The Overall Project Objective (Intermediate Objective) is to “****Integrate biodiversity management into forestry practices on community lands via market-based instruments.***”
2. The expected results for the project set out in the Logical Framework (LF) are:
	* ***Result 1****: Technical assistance is institutionalized for community forest certification and BD conservation;*
	* ***Result 2****: Community capacity is strengthened to achieve and maintain certification and to manage their forests in a sustainable and BD-friendly manner;*
	* ***Result 3****: Economic incentives are in place to attract and keep the CFEs commited to sustainable forestry management and biodiversity management practices; and*
	* ***Result 4:*** *Systems for monitoring and evaluation project impacts* *are in place* (this result in itself is not a result of effectiveness. Its indicators should have been included in the Overall Objective and some of its actions should have been included in the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan of the project, which has some indicators that are repeated for the overall objective)– See the discussion in the Design section.
		1. ***Baselines***
3. In the Logical Framework, baselines are set for each of these results. These baselines are:
* **For *R.1.1***"Number of persons and forest technicians with increased capacity, certification expansion strategy, BD criteria integrated into proposal evaluation, increased investment in BD, policies benefiting products of Mexican Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs), and the number of new contracts."
* **For *R.1.2*** *“*Number of ejidos/communities receiving support, number of hectares under some form of certification: Technical Preventive Audit (TPA), Mexican Standard (NMX), and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)"
* **For *R.1.3*** *“*Percentages of reduced production costs, increased sawmill coefficient, increased investment in BD, increased sales to certified buyers, number of C certifications, number of partnerships, and number of certified CFEs that have received REDD payments, increased amounts invested in the sector, and number of certified CFEs accessing credits."

**2.2 Main Participants/Beneficiaries - Interested Parties**

1. Stakeholder participation during the design phase is described in the ProDoc, which mentions that four consultation workshops were held during the design process, particularly to refine the Logical Framework, which included participating authorities[[33]](#footnote-33), such as government institutions, regional and municipal governments, financial institutions, para-forest units, academia, the private sector involved in the value chain (forestry services, wood processors, purchasers), NGOs, and multilateral institutions.
2. To implement the project, the ProDoc proposes the participation of a national institution (CONAFOR) and an institution for technical support in certification and private markets (Rainforest Alliance) as the responsible partner. It also proposes strategic partnerships with federal, state, and local institutions, including SEMARNAT, state governments, and municipalities, and it identifies the Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs) as participating beneficiaries.
3. The description of the stakeholder participation strategy set out in the ProDoc is partial because, despite the detailed description of the stakeholders to be involved at the central level, its local-level description is very superficial, and a detailed description should replace it in the Inception Report. However, the start-up report does not describe the direct participants (ejido members, landowners, communities, residents, ejido inhabitants) either, nor does it explain that there would be work done by forest technicians; furthermore, their role is not defined within the structure. Finally, the project’s role and interaction with the sawmills and/or processing companies/associations where COC certification would be applied also remain unexplained.
4. Additionally, the description of management arrangements at first seems correct and based on knowledge of Mexican institutions. However, the problems of joint execution mentioned during implementation reveal that the parties needed more detailed agreements during the design phase[[34]](#footnote-34), starting with agreeing on a shared vision of the project’s ultimate objective. The LF design weaknesses (see analysis of Design) could have been due to the different parties’ inclusion of their perspectives without articulating a common vision. The lack of clarity in the common vision is apparent in the ProDoc (see analysis of Design) and in interviews with project executors, who admitted that there were problems arising from differences in vision between the partners. RA’s frustration concerning its initial expectation of being a joint executor rather than the responsible partner (see Paragraph 86) is also palpable.
5. To understand the magnitude of the CFEs’ achievements and the project's contribution, we must understand that, according to reports, the CFEs have undergone a maturation process, which began gradually some decades ago, and which the project helped to advance in several ways as mentioned in the section on analysis of results.

**2.3** **Context of Project Development**

**Biodiversity Context:**

1. The Project Design (ProDoc) includes a description of the context of the forestry sector and issues related to the project at its start-up. These include:
2. Mexico is one of the world's 12 megadiverse countries. The biodiversity of its forests is particularly significant, with more than one thousand recorded species of trees, a great wealth of species including mammals and reptiles, and high levels of endemism of all kinds. Such globally important biodiversity is increasingly at risk.
3. At the time the ProDoc was written, the country's deforestation rate was estimated at 330,000 hectares per year, or 0.6% of the area containing vegetation cover, which is one of the highest deforestation rates in the world.
4. The majority of Mexico's temperate and tropical forests are located in production areas under the legal jurisdiction of communities and ejidos (slightly over 80% of the total forest area of 55.3 million hectares).
5. There are two forest types (temperate coniferous forests and tropical forests), and the management of the second type is the most critical in terms of BD conservation, due to reductions in wild flora and fauna and to selective felling of commercially valuable tree species.
6. The evaluation found that this information remains applicable (we note that the evaluator was unaware of whether there were updated deforestation estimates when the evaluation took place or whether there were data on deforestation processes (in terms of replacing forests with other land uses) within the project’s intervention areas).

**Context of Socio-Economic Aspects:**

1. The project’s design also included a description of the socio-economic situation and the problems and risks considered by the project to be causes of biodiversity reduction. These include:
2. Some highlighted problems are low competitiveness in forest production, a low number of certified CFEs, and difficulties in accessing markets for certified timber with awards for conservation actions. The description also explains how these problems reduce incentive for certification and establishing private protected areas, and tells of low CFE investment in biodiversity. For example, it mentions that Mexico contained a large number of forest communities with considerable forest areas, but that only a few had achieved an appropriate level of competitiveness. Of the 8,928 forest communities at the project start-up, CONAFOR identified 3,056 ejidos and communities with potential to turn forest production into their main economic activity. It points out that around 80% of the communities in Mexico with strong potential to develop their forestry activities lacked forest management plans, or were rentiers, and these communities were the ones where deforestation, illegal logging, and poverty were the main causes of degradation and loss of biodiversity in Mexico.[[35]](#footnote-35)
3. As baseline information, the ProDoc indicates that the number of certified CFEs at the project start-up was low (35). Only five of these CFEs were reinvesting substantial amounts in biodiversity management and conservation, which reflected a lack of available resources to reinvest, as well as a lack of access to information and guidances on how to reinvest.
4. Similarly, the design mentions Mexico’s generally high level of state investment in forestry activity compared to other countries in the south. For example, CONAFOR's budget increased considerably (from $200 million USD in 2006 to more than $500 million USD in 2008). Pro Árbol had an annual budget of more than $300 million USD, and PROCYMAF II invested $21 million USD in community forest development during the 2004-2008 period. Most of these investments were directed at primary production, while forestry investments were low, and only a small fraction of CONAFOR's budget was earmarked for CFE development.
5. According to the ProDoc, most investments for ejidos and communities were used to lay foundations for community development (social organization, land use plans, and operational measures), which, according to the ProDoc, enabled the communities to achieve one of the best community development models worldwide. Meanwhile, few resources were allocated toward transformation operations or toward increasing business competitiveness in the markets.

**Context of the Legal Framework**

1. As a Baseline, the ProDoc's description of the legal context indicates that Mexico had an existing legal and institutional framework for forestry[[36]](#footnote-36) and biodiversity conservation[[37]](#footnote-37) at the project start-up that was highly developed in comparison to those of other Latin American countries.[[38]](#footnote-38)
2. The existing Legal Framework at the project start-up already identified different possibilities for defining and establishing private Protection Areas:
	* Private Protected Areas: The evaluation revealed that the pre-project legal framework for establishing Private Protected Areas was based on the General Law on Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection of May 16, 2008. According to this Law, areas are voluntarily set aside for conservation and the Federal Government is in charge of monitoring them, as stipulated in Article 46, Section XI, of the aforementioned Law.
	* Conservation and Restricted-Use Areas (within the forestry sector): At the same time, Forest Management Plans within the forestry production sector include Conservation and Restricted-Use Areas, which are established voluntarily by ejido members in accordance with their values. Additionally, the forest certification process envisages the establishment of several categories of High Conservation Value Areas. The ProDoc notes that, within CONAFOR and at the private level, BD monitoring and management suffered from weaknesses with regard to certification and conservation, and unsustainable management was common, posing a threat to biodiversity.
	* High Conservation Value Areas: The evaluation found that, according to updated regulations, certified forest lands must delimit High Conservation Value Areas (HCVAs) and High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs). To do this, they must prepare biological inventories, identify protected species, and develop a species protection and conservation strategy, and, as reported, "*in Mexico, most certified lands contain HCVFs and have started to develop their conservation programs for forests of this type*."

**2.4** **Barriers for the Project to Address According to the ProDoc**

1. The ProDoc establishes that Project implementation aims to address the barriers identified during design, which are:
* **Barrier 1.** **Weak institutional capacity:** Although CONAFOR’s strong institutional status with regard to forestry enabled it to advise CFEs and private technical consultants known as Technical Forest Services (TFSs), the ProDoc also indicated that it had gaps in technical capacity on Biodiversity issues and in aspects of forestry such as business competitiveness, certification, and markets. Weak technical capacities in BD were a CONAFOR-specific issue, as other national institutions (CONABIO and INE) and academic institutions had extensive experience in BD.
* **Barrier 2. Weak CFE competitiveness:** The ProDoc states that CONAFOR identified very few CFEs[[39]](#footnote-39) that had reached a satisfactory level of business development and profitability. Causes of this included but were not limited to technological weaknesses, decision-making problems, poor sawmill performance, poor-quality timber production, and a lack of business plans.
* **Barrier 3.** **Limited markets for sustainable wood:** The ProDoc mentions that there was almost no national demand for wood from forests under management and certified forests at the project start-up. The project preparation grant (PPG) analyses identified that 787,763 m3 were being produced, but only 32% of this volume went to certified purchasers. The ProDoc also states that many of the non-certified purchasers argued that they did not seek certification because of a lack of markets and because the higher production costs that sustainable management and BD investment entail would preclude certified wood producers from competing with prices for normally harvested wood (let alone illegal timber), specifically if the wood passed through the entire chain of custody (COC)[[40]](#footnote-40) process that mandates certification of every link in the value chain and record-keeping of the wood's origin. Additionally, as only 20% of tropical forest species provided desirable wood (mahogany, cedar), good forestry and good forest business practices would be hampered without an increased market for unknown secondary species (the other 80% of tropical forest species).
* **Barrier 4. Investment limitations for markets:** The forestry business requires high investment and the ProDoc noted that CFEs had serious difficulties in this regard because: (i) community CFEs were viewed largely as a source of work for their members and did not invest in machinery that would replace manual labor; (ii) the government (CONAFOR) had a high forestry investment budget,[[41]](#footnote-41) but a large portion of such investments were aimed at internal processes such as social organization, land use plans, and operational measures, but not competitiveness or markets[[42]](#footnote-42); (iii) access to credit in the forestry sector was highly limited and came mainly from the government. In addition to CONAFOR subsidies, credit came mainly from FIRA (Trust Instituted in Relation to Agriculture), a government agency that provides credit to the rural sector with government funds from the Bank of Mexico and private bank funds.[[43]](#footnote-43) According to SEMARNAT/CONAFOR data, only 0.88% of primary forest production credits in Mexico were used for forestry, and only 1.5% of the credits went toward forest industries (as a percentage of all credit granted to the industrial sector). While the institutions determined that FIRA increased forestry sector investments during the 2005-2008 period, most were for private forestry industries that had managed to capitalize strongly (only 11 CFEs had access to FIRA funding, which were among those with a high level of social organization); (iv) the GEF-COINBIO project was aimed at building biodiversity conservation capacities in three states (Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán) and lacked the capacity to monitor protected community forests; (v) there were few examples of successful investments to improve competitiveness;[[44]](#footnote-44) (v) there were no private credits[[45]](#footnote-45) and interest rates were extremely high (around 35%, compared to 18-20% of FIRA rates); (vi) there was only one example of a CFE that formed an association with an international timber company (Ejido El Balcón), which first partnered with Boise Cascade and then with Westwood Forest Products;[[46]](#footnote-46) and (vii) up to the project start-up, the CFEs had not made progress in carbon capture payment processes via REDD mechanisms, which were still very recent.
* **Other underlying barriers to CFEs' access to funding from state sources:** (i) banks and private sector entities were generally hesitant to form associations with the forestry sector, particularly with communities[[47]](#footnote-47); (ii) lack of community experience in loan management; (iii) the custom of financing operations through monetary advances with local purchasers;[[48]](#footnote-48) they also had little experience in timber shipment and receipt of payments in 60-90 days, and almost no experience in product sales or in the different markets; and (iv) poor cash flow management due to poor administrative capacity and a lack of business planning.

**Part III: Evaluation Results**

**3.1. Project Formulation/Design**

***3.1.1 Relevance of Design***

*Consistency with the GEF Mandate and UNDP Organizational Goals*

1. The ProDoc explains the project's consistency with the mandate of GEF-4 and its funding line, which is Strategic Objective 2 (SO2 - SFM): "To promote sustainable management and use of forest resources." This is identical to Strategic Program 2 (SO2/SP5) of GEF-5, which is: "Include biodiversity in GEF marine and terrestrial production sectors."

*Consistency with UNDP Organizational Goals*

1. The project is aligned with UNDP objectives[[49]](#footnote-49) in different areas:
	* It is consistent with Millennium Development Goal #7: “*Ensure environmental sustainability.”* According to the 2006 Progress Report, United Nations-SEMARNAT, it also responds to a priority of Target 9, "*Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources,*" considering the fact that, despite expansion of protected areas, much of the country's natural wealth is outside the protected areas system, such as temperate and tropical forests owned by ejidos and communities.
	* It is consistent with UNDP's 2008-2012 Country Program Document (CPD) for Mexico, which contemplates UNDP’s contribution of providing technical assistance to meet Mexico's international biodiversity conservation commitments, as well as strengthening national and local capacities for sustainable development. Furthermore, the project specifically seeks to promote stronger institutional and personal capacities for environmental recovery and natural resource conservation. More specifically, it is aligned with the CPD’s direct effect 6.1, "Public policies are consolidated for sustainable development," and indicator 6.1.6, "A forest certification model is developed as a financial mechanism for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction."
	* In addition, one of the direct effects of the CPD, which encompasses this project, is the strengthening of institutional and personal capacities to counteract environmental degradation, conserve natural resources, promote participatory management and natural resource management, and promote human development through sustainable development policies and programs.
	* It is aligned with Priority Three of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2008-2012 (UNDAF), which is based on *ensuring the enjoyment of a healthy and productive environment, conservation of natural heritage, and participation in development processes based on the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources*, the direct result of which is: "*Institutional and personal capacities to halt and/or reverse environmental degradation, conserve the natural resource base, and promote human development through sustainable development policies and programs.*"
	* Additionally, it is consistent with UNDAF on point **3.1.1** concerning the *implementation of programs and projects that link the aspects of population, environment, and sustainable development in priority regions of the country, including the national system of protected natural areas*; point **3.1.3** on *programs for assessing and conserving environmental goods and services and for reducing GHG emissions, including the use of economic instruments for environmental management;* and point 3.2.4 concerning *the participation of indigenous and farming communities trained in biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.*

*Consistency with National Priorities*

1. According to the ProDoc and information collected during the evaluation (through interviews or comprehension of CONAFOR’s legal framework), the Project's design **was found also to be consistent with national priorities**, as its approaches fit into the objectives of Mexican forestry policy and its legal framework, and it was consistent with the existing institutional framework during the design phase, which remains in force as demonstrated by the following evidence:
* The project was designed within the action framework of SEMARNAT, the national authority in charge of supervising the forestry sector and the institution responsible for implementing and enforcing environmental and forestry laws. SEMARNAT deals with forestry matters through the General Forestry and Soils Office, whose objective is to apply forestry regulations related to harvesting, forest health, genetic resource conservation, and soil conservation. This office was responsible for designing and adapting mechanisms for the implementation of the Mexican standard concerning good forest management, among other responsibilities.
* The design calls for the project to be executed by CONAFOR, a decentralized branch of SEMARNAT created in 2001 to be in charge of all work relating to forest development, production, conservation, and restoration, as well as the design and development of plans and programs to implement forestry policies. CONAFOR is the operational institution responsible for implementing Mexico's forestry policy.
* Accordingly, this policy is articulated in CONAFOR's Institutional Program (2007-2012), which in turn is a medium-term program arising from the Strategic Forestry Program 2025.
* According to the ProDoc, the Strategic Forestry Program 2025 contains the key forest policies included in the Environmental and Natural Resources Sector Program of SEMARNAT and the National Development Plan 2007-2012. This Program contains objectives aligned with project objectives: (i) contribute to forest resource protection and conservation; (ii) increase production, productivity, and competitiveness in the forestry sector; (iii) restore degraded forest ecosystems; (iv) promote participation of forest producers; (v) strengthen education, training, awareness, and technology transfer processes; (vi) promote intersectoral and interinstitutional cooperation, and (vii) implement and consolidate forestry and planning policies.
* The project proposed joint work with PRONAFOR (during the ProÁrbol design process), which is CONAFOR’s operational/central instrument for forestry policy implementation and has 13 priorities, including soil conservation and restoration and environmental services.
1. The project design contemplated the project's alignment with Mexico's Environmental Legal Framework as well, which also remains in force, particularly with:
	* General Law on Sustainable Forest Development (LGDFS) (in force since May 2003): Its purpose, according to the ProDoc, is "to regulate and promote the conservation, protection, restoration, production, planning, management, and use of the country's forest ecosystems." This law sets general guidelines for *planning and operating forest management and defines roles and responsibilities for different sectoral stakeholders*. The LGDFS gives rise to a wide range of technical matters in *forest management, protection, and harvesting*.
	* General Law on Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection (LGEEPA): More closely related to environmental protection and establishes a series of measures to reduce ecological impacts on forest management. This Law *defines federal, state, and local responsibilities for planning, administration, management, monitoring, and environmental issues.*
	* The ProDoc does not clarify whether forest certification was a national government priority prior to project implementation (although market mechanisms are emphasized without directly naming forest certification). On the one hand, the ProDoc highlights that the Federal Government expressed its commitment to provide certified wood in 2007 in order to increase demand, along with a similar state-level commitment in Oaxaca, while other Mexican organizations, such as the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) and PEMEX, displayed a lack of knowledge, as they did not have enough information on options to provide certified wood. The evaluation found that forest certification was a national priority, as there was a legal framework[[50]](#footnote-50) and financial support to promote national certification through CONAFOR's operational programs.

*Consistency with Local Priorities*

1. The ProDoc does not explain whether certification was a priority for producers or TFSs. On the contrary, it identifies the subject as a barrier. Accordingly, the Pro Doc does not mention whether conservation is a priority for local project stakeholders (the description of the local level is overall very superficial, as mentioned in the stakeholder participation analysis). On the other hand, the document containing project success stories[[51]](#footnote-51) provides background showing that key stakeholders, such as Providers of Technical Forest Services (TFSs), perceived that "*biodiversity conservation and forest certification were complex and costly matters of no apparent value for Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs), ejidos, or forest communities in general.*"During the evaluation, several implementers—especially in the Northern region—reported that, although some CFEs were certified prior to the project (especially under the FSC certification scheme) and the first forest certifications worldwide took place in Mexico, certification was not a priority for CFEs or for many TFSs at the project start-up, as their expectations of selling their product at a higher price were unmet. This meant that it was a challenge to convince them to continue the certification process or start a new one.

***3.1.2 Replication Approach***

1. The ProDoc argues that the project had the necessary conditions (which appeared feasible during the design phase) for local, national, and international replication. The arguments presented are:
	* At the national level, the project sought to build national and technical experiences and capacities within CONAFOR, which could integrate project strategies into its operational programs and replicate them in other spheres.
	* At the international level, the design envisaged replication through the Rainforest Alliance, which, according to the ProDoc, was active in 58 countries and its FSC certification program, Smart Wood, was the largest in the world. In turn, the Rainforest Alliance envisaged replication of project-generated experiences by implementing its own Smart Wood and TREES programs in most Latin American, Asian, and African countries.
	* The project also planned to promote replication by disseminating experiences through the GEF, UNDP, and RA websites; through official project-generated publications; and through the exchange of experiences at forums[[52]](#footnote-52) and fairs between communities and certified industries.

***3.1.3 Stakeholder Ownership/Participation in the Design***

1. Strong national ownership of the project existed from an early PPG stage. Although the ProDoc provides no information on the source of the project idea, stakeholders who remembered the PPG stage mentioned during the evaluation that it came from the Rainforest Alliance with UNEP. As UNEP withdrew its offices from Mexico, the project was transferred to UNDP as the Implementing Agency (IA). On the other hand, in order to define the Executing Agency (EA), and with the need for CONAFOR's endorsement, joint execution by CONAFOR and RA was originally planned. However, since this arrangement was not feasible, it was decided that CONAFOR would be the EA, later taking the lead throughout the project.
2. Significant national ownership of the Project Design also existed among regional governments. According to the ProDoc, during the PPG phase, UNDP and CONAFOR, the project's Implementing Partner, held regular meetings with a wide range of federal, state, and municipal government partners, as well as with community producers, the private sector, academics, NGOs, and representatives of other stakeholders. The ProDoc specifies that during the PPG, consultants on various subjects were commissioned specifically to interview for the highest level of input from varied sources, analyzing and synthesizing conclusions based on experience in Mexico with forest communities, while identifying new ways to remove barriers. The consultants were guided by the PPG team, achieving high levels of participation from key stakeholders as part of their inputs, particularly in community-level needs and capacities, as well as in the discussion of the strategic results of the Logical Framework Workshop for which key stakeholders were selected to discuss barriers, solutions, strategies, priority regions, and priority activities for the implementation of the Project.
3. The ProDoc states that the project design had strong support from the Mexican Government since its inception, particularly from those who implement public policies in CONAFOR, such as the General Coordination of Production and Productivity, the Forest Development Office, the PROCYMAF Office, and especially the Productive Chains Office of CONAFOR, which was highly involved in project planning, as the project was aligned with this Office’s working approach, which consists of building markets and establishing links with the private sector. It also states that, in order to ensure close collaboration with state counterparts, as well as with communities and the private sector, four workshops were held with CONAFOR and other partners during the PPG stage, in addition to the thematic consultancies. A regional workshop in Oaxaca was also held.
4. For the Project Design, government entities' skills were taken into account, as they participated in the design process, as well as the RA’s skills; at the same time, other partners were involved at the federal, state, and municipal levels, such as private companies, government institutions, and national and international NGOs.
5. During the design phase, it was proposed that the project would work jointly with the Environmental Services Office during implementation in order to connect the project with the Mexican REDD initiative, but this ultimately did not occur.
6. The ProDoc does not document any involvement by ejidos or local communities.

***3.1.4*** ***Design Phase Risk Assessment***

1. The ProDoc has a risk analysis section for the risks that the project might face. The section accurately refences possible problems during project implementation such as problems with co-financing, government-level conflicts of policy or economic interest, and problems with private projects and community projects. The proposed strategies appear to be consistent and articulated to prevent such problems.
2. The design does not identify risks for the post-project phase, i.e., its future sustainability, although some of the measures discussed, such as awareness campaigns, could have an effect on both implementation and the subsequent phase.

***3.1.5 Design for Project Monitoring, Evaluation, and Targeting. -***

***Analysis of Logical Framework (LF) and Results Framework (Logic and Strategy of Project, Indicators)***

Content and Use of the Logical Framework (LF)

1. According to GEF's requirements, the project design aptly includes a Logical Framework, which is compatible with the implementation methodology for GEF-UNDP projects.
2. The LF structure contains the required items: *Overall Objective, Results, Baseline Indicators and Expected Goals, Sources of Verification, and Risks/Assumptions*, which provide an important guide to the project path. However, the LF displays weaknesses that must be analyzed in order to understand their influence on the effectiveness of project achievements and to improve future designs. One weakness is that some items have not been worded clearly and need to be expressed in a more usual manner.

Ultimate Objective - Goal

1. The purpose of this section is to describe the Ultimate Objective (Goal in the ProDoc) identified for the project. The Project's PIF uses the term “Ultimate Objective,” and the LF uses “Goal” (Ultimate Objective). However, analysis of these documents and subsequent discussions with the executors revealed a conceptual disparity regarding the proper means of identification or wording to refer to an Ultimate Goal-Objective and the occasional confusion of the Goal-Objective with what is actually a Hypothesis or a Strategy. While these disparities might seem somewhat superfluous, they can affect a project in practice, as they prevent different audiences from having a shared understanding and/or a common vocabulary. Below are statements that include similar ideas used interchangeably in different project documents or document sections that reflect the need to clarify the use of terms (Goal-Hypothesis-Strategy) to convey a single message (see footnote[[53]](#footnote-53)).

1. As the terms ultimate Goal and Ultimate Objective are used interchangeably in the PIF and ProDoc, they will be referred to exactly as stated in these documents in the following analysis. **The PIF**[[54]](#footnote-54) mentions that *the* ***Ultimate Objective*** *(Goal in the ProDoc)* ***is to conserve biodiversity***(which is correctly stated and is understood as an Ultimate Objective-Goal). However, **in the ProDoc**, **in the LF, another *Goal*** **is stated**, which says: ***“Market-based sustainable forest management enables the conservation of biodiversity and environmental goods and services.”[[55]](#footnote-55)*** In this regard, the following is noted: (i) The evaluator deems that this "*Goal,*" as it is written, could be considered a hypothesis (it does not express what is to be achieved in the infinitive tense, but rather states that the market enables something, which implies that would need to be proved); (ii) in the PIF document, the same sentence is stated as a hypothesis;[[56]](#footnote-56) *(iii) in the ProDoc, this statement*is also included under the heading of "rationales" on which the project is based, and it is expanded with additional benefits attributed to the market for sustainable management products: “… ***Strong national and international markets for wood products from sustainably managed forests bring about economic benefits and incentives to reward sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation, while improving the ability of producers to participate in this market****”[[57]](#footnote-57)*; and (*iv*) within the text of the ProDoc, the Goal (Ultimate Objective) is described with proper syntax (infinitive) “***To enable the market based on sustainable forest management and conservation of biodiversity and environmental goods and services to support priority development at the national, regional, and local levels***"**[[58]](#footnote-58)**, but this broad sentence includes several purposes, creating a lack of clarity about which one is the ultimate objective. Moreover, the description is ambiguous, since enabling the market cannot be an ultimate objective in itself, as this type of action is usually considered as a strategy to achieve something; and (*v*) in the ProDoc, under the heading of rationales to obtain GEF funding,[[59]](#footnote-59) the project states that its *"strategy"* ***"is to prioritize biodiversity conservation within the production of landscapes in community forests."*** In practice, this statement would be an Overall Objective and not a Strategy as it is usually understood within the ROtI methodology and within the TOC diagram.
2. Using the different definitions encountered as a reference and analyzing them under the TOC diagram, and considering the rationale for GEF grants, the evaluator judges that the Objective of the project is Biodiversity Conservation, and that the Strategy is to strengthen the markets for wood from sustainably managed forests while boosting competitiveness and revenue, which is verified through forest certifications, and the transformation of forest management is proposed for this purpose in Mexican temperate and tropical production forests, thereby creating knowledge products and changes in policy instruments to support this process.
3. We highlight that, during the evaluation, various interpretations of what the Ultimate Objective was were encountered (see implementation phase).
4. We also highlight that it is not mandatory for GEF projects to identify a hypothesis. Moreover, many projects do not identify one in their designs; however, during the process of drafting this report, the executors also offered different interpretations of what the Project Hypothesis might be, and although this section seeks to identify the Ultimate Objective set out in the project documents, additional reflections on the understanding of the Project Hypothesis are added in a footnote for the reader’s information.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Overall Objective and Results of Project

1. The LF includes the following properly stated Overall Objective: *"****To integrate biodiversity management into forestry practices on community lands via market-based instruments.***" Within a TOC diagram, and in analyzing its relationship with the Project's Ultimate Objective, the integration of biodiversity management could be considered as an Intermediate Result.
2. The expected results established in the project’s Logical Framework (LF) are clear in themselves and have guided its management. These are:
	* ***Result 1****: Technical assistance for community forest certification is institutionalized within national programs;*
	* ***Result 2****: Community capacity is strengthened to achieve and maintain certification and to manage their forests in a sustainable and BD-friendly manner;*
	* ***Result 3****: Economic incentives are in place to attract and keep the CFEs commited to sustainable forestry management and biodiversity management practices; and*
	* ***Result 4:*** *A system for monitoring and evaluating project impacts is in place* (this result in itself is not a Result of effectiveness and should have been included in the Overall Objective and some of its actions within the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan – see discussion within the section on Design).

Logical Framework (LF) Indicators

1. Regarding the analysis of whether the Project's LF indicators are SMART[[61]](#footnote-61), the indicators are confirmed to be quantifiable/measurable, attainable, relevant to project results/components, and time bound within the project. However, there are some weaknesses that might have influenced the project guide, such as:

* + - 1. The Project’s Overall Objective is expressed in the Logical Framework (LF) as a ***Goal***.We highlight that the use of the word “***Goal”*** may lend itself to confusion, as it is used interchangeably with "Objective." In the LF itself, it is used for two levels, i.e., for the highest level objective (Ultimate Objective) and, as it is usually used, to establish the level of compliance to be achieved for each indicator (i.e., to measure compliance with results or performance indicators). Additionally, as discussed in Paragraphs 84-86, this ***Goal*** as set out in the LF could be considered a Hypothesis based on its wording, rather than the highest-level Overall Objective.
			2. The Overall Objective of the Logical Framework is more consistent with a process (introducing BD into Forest Management) than with a Result (such as "Achieving BD Conservation").
			3. All the identified indicators would make it possible to provide relevant information for the monitoring of the goals established for the project results; however, several indicators are compliance results (number of hectares, number of people trained, amounts invested) rather than achievements, and the information they provide, while helpful, is not sufficient in itself to understand project results/achievements and progress towards the overall project objective.
			4. As mentioned in the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTR), the ProDoc does not clearly define the long-term ultimate objective (such as the ***Achievement*** of the BD Conservation) and therefore, based on the LF, it is not possible to visualize **long-term expected impacts, and their indicators do not offer the ability** to answer larger questions, such as progress towards the project’s overall goal or confirmation of the project hypothesis.
			5. In Result 4, which seeks to identify impact indicators, the indicators are designed in a very limited way to characterize potential long-term global and local benefits. It would have been fitting for the LF to include the indicators for this result within indicators for fulfillment of the Overall Objective, especially as there are some indicators repeated in both parts.
			6. There are limitations with LF indicators, as the information they are meant to collect does not clearly reflect their contribution to final achievements (i.e., if we take up the concept of evaluability, "they do not fully serve to verify final results"). For example, a reduced reforestation rate does not in itself reflect a contribution to protecting conservation objects[[62]](#footnote-62) and increased revenue provides indications of improved quality of life, but it is unknown whether it is considered a conservation incentive, especially if there is no baseline information to link deforestation and forest reconversion rates to intervention sites[[63]](#footnote-63). This weakness is accentuated during implementation if one considers some indicators that were not defined during design and have no relation with the result to be reported; for example, to report the rate of change in biodiversity (which refers to the richness of species at the site studied), the indicator of basal area is used, that is to say, vegetation cover or the number of species, which is not sufficient in itself to determine the contribution to global biodiversity. In order to obtain information on the project's contribution to global objectives, a record of project-protected species of global interest and their status could have been created[[64]](#footnote-64).
			7. When discussing impact, it does not refer to the situation with or without the project, and/or in relation to controls. The MTE also mentions this weakness, for example: “*The impact statement indicates that the expected impact is integration of biodiversity management into forestry practices on community lands. We consider this statement to be more closely related to results than to impact," or "we believe that reversing deforestation, degradation, and biodiversity loss are the ultimate impacts expected from the intervention... The project result indicators reflect the mechanisms that will contribute to this purpose, such as incorporation of biodiversity criteria into management and production practices," or the "LF proposes 'strengthened institutional capacity to support biodiversity conservation through certified community forest management' as an impact; however, the MTR-MTE evaluators and the evaluators of this evaluation identify it as a result."*
			8. The ProDoc did not include a Theory of Change diagram to visualize the project’s long-term direction, which coincides with the Items i and ii mentioned above, because, when it was designed, it was not an entrenched consideration or one required by GEF or UNDP.
			9. The LF includes a Follow-up and Monitoring result (Result 4) designed to monitor the indicators of the Overall Objective. It would have been sufficient to include these Overall Objective indicators (since the LF is intended to guide the project's **effectiveness**) and to describe the actions for such monitoring in a complementary fashion in the ProDoc's text within the activities required for Project Monitoring.

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

1. In accordance with GEF's and UNDP's M&E policy, the project design included a detailed *Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Plan*, which is appropriately articulated to monitor results and to chart progress toward achieving the objectives, as well as to enable conditions for adaptive management. The M&E Plan includes a list of actions and reports.
2. Actions that enable observation of constant monitoring include: (i) Conducting a Start-up Workshop to review the indicators, organizing a meetings program between project partners (described in Item ii), and establishing the organizational chart for implementation; (ii) Tripartite annual and terminal reviews; (iii) Project Board meetings (the frequency of which is not described in the M&E section, although the section describing functions mentions that quarterly meetings will be held); and (iii) Mid-Term and Terminal Evaluations.
3. The expected reports include:
	* *Initial Report at Execution Start-up*: (*Inception Report* –IR);
	* *Quarterly Progress Reports (PCU in charge of preparing them to be sent to the UNDP Country Office in Mexico and the Regional Office of Panama*);
	* *Annual Work Plans (In charge of preparing AWPs: PCU with UNDP-GEF team) and daily monitoring of their indicators;*
	* *Annual Project Report (referred to in the ProDoc as the PIR) to be prepared by the project team according to UNDP parameters and to be reviewed prior to the TPR. The ProDoc states that it may be discussed in the TPR*);
	* *Project Implementation Review* (PIR), which must follow GEF's format;
	* *Final Project Report* (*Project Terminal Report*);
	* *Specific Thematic Reports as required by the project.*
	* *Mid-Term Evaluation Report* according to the UNDP–GEF methodology; and
	* *Final Evaluation Report (In charge:* PCU, UNDP Mexico. UNDP-GEF, Regional Unit, External Consultants) according to UNDP-GEF methodology.
4. Although the reports and general reporting and monitoring mechanisms are clear, the Plan has some weaknesses that make it difficult to understand:
* In the Spanish translation, there is a duplicated PIR[[65]](#footnote-65) description that can confuse the reader about PIRs and UNDP Annual Reports.
* The terms Project Board (described in the text on stakeholders) and the National Steering Committee (included in the Project's organizational chart) are used interchangeably without describing them independently. With regard to the Board and the NSC, another weakness is that a slight difference in their component authorities appears, and it would be necessary to explain whether the two are equivalent[[66]](#footnote-66).

***3.1.6*** ***Administrative Provisions***

1. The Project Document provides detailed information on proposed management arrangements at the national and regional levels, describing the competencies of the authorities that would make up the authorities to be established, but this description also has weaknesses. These arrangements are:
2. **Project Board (PB)/ Project Steering Committee (PSC) / Board:** Made up of UNDP, RA, and CONAFOR officials, as well as the project manager. We note that the ProDoc mentions the PB, but the organizational chart uses the abbreviation PSC, which creates confusion and makes it impossible to state with certainty whether they are fully equivalent.
3. **Project Coordinating Unit:** To coordinate actions at the national level.
4. **Regional offices of the project in four cities for four regions: (**1) Chihuahua, for the Northern region, including the states of Durango and Chihuahua; (2) Michoacán, for the Central region that will include the states of Puebla, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Jalisco, and Michoacán; (3) Oaxaca, for the Southern region, including the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, and (4) Quintana Roo, for the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo.

***Graph 2: Original Organizational Chart of the Project***

 GEF Project

Organizational Chart

CONAFOR UNDP Mexico Rainforest Alliance

Project Steering Committee (PSC)

PSC: Co-chaired by a UNDP representative, a CONAFOR representative, and an RA representative

In charge of approving operational plans, annual reports, and project budgets.

Project Coordinating Unit (PCU)

PCU: In charge of general management of project actions

Regional Offices: Will establish coordination of field work for activities financed by this project

Regional Office Regional Office Regional Office Regional Office

Northern Region: Central Region: Southern Region: Southeastern Region

Chi./Dgo. Mich./Jal. Oaxaca/Gro. Roo/Camp.

1. The description of the Management Arrangements in the ProDoc is highly accurate and detailed; however, it contains the following weaknesses:
2. The ProDoc section describing the project authorities/stakeholders does not give a name to a Tripartite Review Committee (TPRC); additionally, while the M&E Plan mentions that it is the highest-level meeting/group for the policies of the groups directly involved in project implementation and that the report will be delivered to UNDP Mexico and Panama, it does not clarify what the institutions would belong to it. This TPRC is not listed in the organizational chart and, according to UNDP, it is a meeting held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) at the close of the Project. The tripartite meeting is considered alongside administrative closure in the first quarter of 2017.
3. Management arrangements also consider the capacities of executing institutions and identify their roles and responsibilities in detail within the project, including CONAFOR’s role as an "*Implementation Partner*"[[67]](#footnote-67) and RA’s role as the “*Responsible Partner*,”[[68]](#footnote-68) but this distinction is not sufficiently clear in the ProDoc. This distinction was clarified in interviews with stakeholders and is also detailed in the agreement signed between CONAFOR (implementing partner) and RA (responsible partner). It would have been desirable from the outset for the ProDoc to clarify the procedural constraints to appointing RA the executing partner.
4. With respect to governance, the ProDoc only clarifies that forestry sector governance consists of a group of federal, state, municipal, and local agencies, as well as educational and research institutions, community groups, and private sector and civil society entities, but provides no details. For readers outside Mexico, it would have been important to explain the role of CFEs and TFSs and how CONAFOR interacts with them in greater detail.
5. The ProDoc also has significant weaknesses in its description of local-level management arrangements. The ProDoc describes that the implementation of measures in the field will be supported by RA and Technical Forest Services but does not describe precisely how the implementation mechanism at the local level (communities/ejidos/TFSs) would work, i.e., whether the relationship would be regional-local or regional-municipal-local. The ProDoc also describes proposed national-level partnerships, but is unclear about proposed regional- or local-level partnerships. As a palliative, ProDoc proposes that an ***Initial Report*** will be prepared to define and detail local-level management arrangements and complementary feedback processes before starting up project implementation, and will define the local project implementation structure.
6. The ProDoc includes a section describing the main stakeholders, but contains no specific section describing Management Arrangements, making it difficult to visualize their location and interaction; furthermore, if we also consider local gaps, a foreign reader may struggle to accurately understand the planned field arrangements. As it is understandably difficult to accurately define management arrangements during the design phase, especially local-level ones, the ProDoc anticipates that these would be described in the "Start-up Report," but this did not occur.

***3.1.7 Links between the Project and Other Sector Interventions and Lessons from Other Relevant Projects***

1. The project has no section that specifically lays out its future partnerships with other initiatives or lessons from such initiatives, which would have enhanced the understanding of the project scope. However, different ProDoc sections contain references to other initiatives, which include the following:
2. The ProDoc references the inclusion of analyses by previous or existing initiatives such as: internal CONAFOR analyses, an FAO analysis of the forestry sector, World Bank studies for PROCYMAF III, and related work on REDD readiness by the REDD National Working Group with support from the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility.
3. The ProDoc also references the project *"Improving Sustainable Forest Management Schemes in Tropical Forests,"* which is a regional GEF project implemented in Brazil, Cameroon, and Mexico and operated by UNDP with the following executing agencies: CIFOR, FSC Internacional, ProForest, The Brazilian FSC national initiative, the FSC Regional Office in Cameroon, and the FSC national initiative in Mexico. The ProDoc also states that, in this project, “*it would be necessary to develop and adapt tools to apply them to variable ecosystems by identifying specific steps to manage biodiversity in production forests 'via [biodiversity-]friendly use', threats to HCVFs, and biodiversity in other Mexican forest areas*.”

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1. The ProDoc section on barriers also mentions the GEF-COINBIO project as a precursor, but does not specify whether it would be directly connected to this project. This is mentioned in relation to the fact that this project has been oriented toward building biodiversity conservation capacities (Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán) and lacks the capacity to monitor community forests under such production. It also mentions the project's relationship with the REDD group, led in Mexico by CONAFOR's Environmental Services Office, which was developing a Readiness Plan (in an Accessible Plan) with financing from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility of the World Bank.
2. In addition, the MTR/MTE also refers to the project's inclusion of CONAFOR's prior experience in the training and participation of Technical Forest Service Providers (TFSPs), but does not specify details.

***3.2*** ***Project Implementation***

***3.2.1 Relevance***

1. **During implementation,** the project became more relevant to CONAFOR and SEMARNAT at the national government level. As stated by the authorities, the **Forestry Sector**, despite representing less than 1% of Mexico's GDP, has become important because it involves a large number of people (11 million)[[69]](#footnote-69) and because temperate and tropical forests cover 33% of Mexican territory (64.8 million ha)[[70]](#footnote-70) and offer environmental services, especially in water, to a significant number of cities and towns. Therefore, it is in the sector's interest to prevent forest transformation/deforestation and ensure that those involved manage forests sustainably and earn sufficient income.
2. The interviews revealed that, at the local level, the project also became highly relevant to most forest landowners (ejido members/communities/private landowners) due to the benefits that it offered them. Relevance, defined as consistency with local needs, was particularly important in the Yucatan Peninsula, as it had been stricken by Hurricane Dean in 2007 shortly before the project began, destroying a large part of its forests and leading forest landowners to think they could never be productive again. The project restored the hope of forest landowners who had planned to give up forest management. As stated by the executors, those in other areas such as the North initially required a major lobbying process to move the project forward, even with CFEs that had been certified or were about to obtain certification.
3. During implementation, the project also maintained its international-level relevance with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The project start-up coincided with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2008-2012. The project is consistent with the current global framework of the United Nations Global Agenda 2030 (the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs), as its highest goal would be related to the five pillars of the SDGs: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships (PPPPP).
4. The project also remains strongly aligned with the GEF mandate in its three replenishments (2006-2018)[[71]](#footnote-71). Despite this formally accepted relevance, which may be highly apparent when analyzed according to GEF's objectives and the Mexican government's conservation and sustainable management objectives, the evaluation revealed disparities in the understanding of what is meant by complementarity or alignment of GEF's mandate with governmental objectives, to the point that the ProDoc mentions GEF as a "co-financier" and/or different stakeholders or documents express different interpretations of what was meant by the objective of the this GEF project (for some, such as RA, the ultimate objective was international certification, while for others, such as 2/5 of the regional directors, it was increased forest production, and even the MTR mentions sustainable forest management as the objective). This lack of alignment and understanding of GEF’s role has been lingering in a certain way since the Design[[72]](#footnote-72) (see discussion in the Ultimate Objective section).
5. It should therefore be clarified that GEF has a mandate to pursue biodiversity (BD) conservation, and although GEF acknowledges that protected areas constitute the main strategy to achieve it, another important strategy is to seek conservation synergy within production systems. Additionally, due to GEF's policy of financing "*Incremental Costs*," a GEF initiative may act as an enabler to create this synergy within government actions, which may involve a budget several times greater than GEF's. This GEF policy fit or was effectively aligned with the forestry priorities of the Mexican government, as it had (and still has) an important political, legal, institutional, and budget framework to support forest producers, but it had staff and management constraints with reaching them. In such conditions, the GEF-UNDP project constituted a clear example of the benefits that may be offered by a grant to cover incremental costs to create synergy for biodiversity conservation, and to include sustainable management in public forestry investment policy while acting as an enabler or bridge between the Mexican government's institutional policy and producers.

***3.2.2 Effectiveness – Progress in Achieving Results***

**3.2.2.1** **Achieving** **Results**

1. Execution of outlined goals: When analyzing compliance with the indicators of the project's LF, we find that the project not only managed to meet the proposed goals for most of its indicators, but even surpassed some of them considerably.
2. In order to analyze compliance with goal indicators, the total number of CFEs that meet a given attribute (e.g. HCVA studies) is taken as a reference. However, it must be clarified that several LF indicators state compliance as a percentage of **certified CFEs** (for example, the figure will change if the number of CFEs that have completed the HCVA study is stated rather than the number of certified CFEs that have completed this study).
3. Following this clarification, below are emblematic examples of achievement of goals:
	* Number of trained officials: 2130 (the goal was 100); and forest technicians and trained dispatchers: 183 (the goal was 10);
	* A 235% increase ($611,390 USD per year) in the amount invested by CONAFOR under the support heading of "specialized technical studies for the establishment of community conservation areas with high biological diversity in the project's area of focus," which is four times the proposed goal of 50%;
	* Actions favoring BD conservation within the production forests of CFEs: 126 High Conservation Value Areas (HCVAs) have been identified and diagnosed there (three times the proposed goal of 40); 1,200 CFEs with Forest Management Plans, including best practices, such as species identification within the Mexican standard;
	* Guides/tools for BD conservation and monitoring: Nine prepared (three times the goal of three);
	* Certified area totaling 2,094,000 hectares within all the systems (very close to the proposed goal of around 2,200,000 ha); and
	* Number of additional ejidos receiving support for certification: 300 (the goal is 50).
4. There were few exceptions in which the proposed goals were not met, such as the number of hectares receiving payments through the REDD scheme (which could not be implemented since the REDD payment scheme is not yet operational) and the creation of five state policies conducive to government purchases of certified products, which was not easy to achieve, as is the case for any project that seeks policy changes, although one state-level change and five changes at the municipal level have been achieved[[73]](#footnote-73).
5. Overall achievement of the outlined goals has been so important that the project would have a rating of Highly Effective if overall goal achievement were the only criterion for the project's effectiveness rating. However, there are some weaknesses in goal achievement that need to be taken as lessons learned for similar future projects. One of them is the different levels of achievement among regions, ranging from extraordinary progress in the Northern and Central Eastern regions (even though the latter began later than the other regions) to limitations in the Southeastern region and weak execution in the Southern Region (Oaxaca and Guerrero). Other weaknesses have been detected concerning achievement of global and local benefits, which will be discussed in subsequent sections. Perhaps one of the elements causing these weaknesses is attributable to the shortcomings of the Design (both the lack of clarity of the ultimate objective, or goal in the LF, and the hypothesis, as well as the weaknesses of LF indicators, discussed above) and perhaps to limited adaptive management during implementation (with adaptive management referring to the changes in LF indicators and the formalization of a new LF[[74]](#footnote-74)).
6. Execution in Relation to Project Results/Components: When conducting analysis with an integrative approach, achievement of Project Components/Results shows that three of the four results are linked together and provide support for certification processes from different perspectives and for integration of biodiversity elements into certification processes. This approach is aligned or consistent with the assumption that the project hypothesis is a fact, i.e., that certification enables BD conservation, although there are actions aimed at verifying it to a limited extent. This should be tested in the analysis of the highest-level objective via Result 4.
7. The project's contribution to achieving the goals set out for each component/result required implementation of a series of activities and products in terms of production, wood processing, and marketing. Not all products have been applied in every region; however, overall findings for each result are expressed below.
8. **In Result 1**, which aims to institutionalize technical assistance for forest certification in CFEs and the integration of BD concepts, there are important project contributions. However, as several indicators are for performance, the understanding of what has been carried out in terms of achievements is only partial. A significant contribution has been made for the allocation of investment funds (subsidies) from CONAFOR's lines of operation for BD studies, some of them as support to update Forest Management Plans[[75]](#footnote-75) (1200 FMPs were prepared). The project has also contributed by training a large number of officials (4,757 people) and TFS dispatchers (183) in forest management (49%), biodiversity conservation, certification schemes, CFE competitiveness and markets (workshops on demolition, sawmilling, sharpening, sales, etc.), and in identifying High Conservation Values. A perception and capacity evaluation study found that trained TFSs obtained an average rating of 82%, while the non-trained TFSs obtained an average rating of 65%, which serves as evidence of the project's achievement.
9. In terms of influence on policy (which will be analyzed below), progress has been variable. On the one hand, the project has made a very important contribution in terms of integrating BD criteria into CONAFOR's operating rules and into updated national and international certification standards,[[76]](#footnote-76) and in terms of creating instruments/support guides on integrating BD into FMPs and certification. On the other hand, the contribution has been small in terms of influencing policy to increase government demand (although contracts have been concluded with municipalities, and five municipal policies have been promoted).
10. **In Result 2**, which relates to the project's contribution to increase the practice of conservation and certified areas through conservation, there is a high level of achievement that surpasses the goals for indicators under two headings, which are an increased number of CFEs that received CONAFOR support for certification that was six times greater than the goal, and an increased number of "High Conservation Value Areas" three times greater than the goal, while the planned number of certified hectares was almost achieved. We highlight that the certified area is in reference to the three types of certification and that the certification type with the greatest area is NMX Standard certification (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Increase in Certified Area in the Project's Areas of Focus**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Baseline | Goal (ha) | Attained (ha) |
| PTA Area |  776 | 500,776 | 324.426 |
| NMX Area | 0 | 500.000 | 878.232 |
| FSC Area | 708.361 | 1,208,361 | 891,950 |
| Total | 709,137 | 2,209,137 | 2,094,608 |

Source: CONAFOR, as of June 30, 2016

1. When analyzing achievement according to certification type, we take into account that obtaining certification is generally a voluntary decision by CFEs, which ultimately decide on the modality under which they wish to become certified, which also depends on market demand for their products. It was reported that the project did not universally push for a specific certification scheme. However, it was also reported that, during the first years of implementation, there were tensions between RA and CONAFOR, precisely because RA pushed for the need to meet international certification goals, while CONAFOR, according to the ProDoc, proposed a gradual process from PTA to FSC and proposed that, as the process was voluntary, the most important measure was to support CFEs to prepare them in case they wished to obtain international certification at some point. In practice, this gradual process occurred, as 2013 saw peak PTA certification figures, while the peak in NMX certification occurred in 2014 and 2015. FSC certification peaked in 2012, which might represent CFEs that were nearly ready before the project and/or that had prior knowledge and wished to obtain such certifications again. We note that most certification costs were funded by CONAFOR. Overall, the certification results were spectacular; however, when analyzing this indicator in relation to the methodology, the evaluator identifies that "the number of certifications obtained or certified area" is an indicator of performance and this indicator in itself does not confirm the initially interpreted hypothesis that "certification aids biodiversity conservation."
2. There are important regional differences in certification. This is largely explained by great regional differences in context. Interviews, focus groups, and the secondary information analyzed revealed that the regions have different contexts from an ecological, social, economic, and political perspective; for example, people have different cultures and motivations, different land sizes and ejido areas, and, above all, highly different ecosystemic features by region. The Northern, Central Eastern and Central regions have temperate forest ecosystems, while the Southern region has a transition zone with high endemism, and the Southeastern region has tropical forests semi-altered by hurricanes and cyclones. As mentioned above, the intrinsic heterogeneity of the regions would partially explain their different results. However, while we note that this evaluation is not a management assessment, and therefore does not analyze management, we nevertheless note that management differences were pointed out during the evaluation, such as different convening capacities to create partnerships, different managerial and technical experience[[77]](#footnote-77) among some regional coordinators, as well as differences in people's openness and/or capacity to work as a team.

**Table No. 5 Number of CFEs that Received Project Support by Region:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Type of Support** |
| **Region** | **Total CFEs** | **HCV/BD in FMPs** | **Certification** | **Competitiveness** | **BD Monitoring** |
| Northern | 173 | 93 | 133 | 33 | 51 |
| Central | 33 | 16 | 21 | 17 | 6 |
| Central Eastern | 68 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 50 |
| Southern | 47 | 26 | 33 | 22 | 13 |
| Southeastern | 15 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 11 |

**Source: Project** (\*HVC/BD in Monitoring: support for identifying BD prior to Certification, \*\*BD Monitoring after Certification)

1. **Result 3** focuses on generating increased revenue in CFEs as a strategy to keep CFEs interested in these processes and to increase the landowners' quality of life. To do this, there are three main lines of action: (i) increasing competitiveness (reducing production costs and increasing the sawmill coefficient, i.e., reducing waste); (ii) building marketing and demand capacities; and (iii) increasing access to credits and CONAFOR funds. This result encompasses highly impressive results that represent important contributions to increase competitiveness by providing advisory for waste reduction and/or by increasing revenues by using parts that used to be discarded[[78]](#footnote-78), and by improving accounting systems[[79]](#footnote-79); there are also contributions to increase marketing capacity and demand through support for chain-of-custody certificates[[80]](#footnote-80) (42), promoting associations to ensure consistent volumes, and promoting producers' direct rapprochement with purchasers[[81]](#footnote-81); there is also support for, or access to, important CONAFOR investments aimed at improving sawmills[[82]](#footnote-82) and, in some cases, at obtaining access to credits, although these are only feasible in highly mature CFEs or private companies.[[83]](#footnote-83)

**3.2.2.2** **Achieving Impact - Local Objectives**

1. At the local level, the project generated results that have benefited the project participants, i.e., forest producers (ejido members, communities, and private landowners) and their communities, and thus have been highly welcomed. In terms of local benefits, the project achieved highly spectacular products, as demonstrated by the achieved goals described above, which translated into achievements. Although performance indicators were the main indicators identified according to the methodology, several achievements were reported within most of the CFEs by those interviewed during the field mission, which include:
	* Many participants[[84]](#footnote-84) interviewed felt they had received economic benefits for different reasons, and although the amounts may be small, they are not negligible for their economies. On the other hand, while others state that certification has not enabled them to obtain differential pricing in most cases, ejido members report that it has afforded them other benefits, as mentioned below in the following points.
		1. Strengthened community organization is reported as part of the certification process, which, according to ejido members, allows them to act as companies and have more transparent accountability systems.
		2. One important benefit reported is that some CFEs and their sawmills have become important employment sources, both for ejido members and for settlers and inhabitants of the ejido, to the point that some reported the need to introduce outsiders.
		3. One achievement reported in connection with job creation is reduced migration and consequent reduced familial separation. In fact, it has been mentioned that some ejido members who have left to study, or gone abroad, have returned (Northern Region and Central Region).
		4. As part of the certification processes, the amount of healthcare[[85]](#footnote-85) and educational community services provided to ejido communities is also reported.
		5. Approval time reductions for Management Plans are reported. There is no time-related loss of capabilities, particularly in seasonal cases. At the same time, swifter timings to obtain CONAFOR sponsorships, or CITES[[86]](#footnote-86) permits in the Southeastern Region, were also reported.
		6. In the Southeastern Region, the communities’ renewed interest and hope in undertaking forest management actions were reported with special distinction, as the devastation of Hurricane Dean slightly before the project start-up had invalidated their FMPs use permits, international certifications, and markets. Therefore, the recovery of their international trading capacity is also notable..

1. As an increase in revenue is an important result indicator, the project monitored annual revenue, boardfoot costs, and the the sawmill coefficient of the supported CFEs. Up to 2012, 9 CFEs had been monitored. By June 2015, the sample had risen to 35 CFEs, only to shrink to 32 CFEs in 2016 due to safety concerns that made one of the areas difficult to access. According to the 2016 PIR, an average 35-44% increase is reported for all 9 CFEs. Such increase exceeds the expected goal of 33%. Furthermore, a 20% increase was reported last year for the 32 CFEs monitored between 2015 and 2016 While these results may seem "remarkable," the following considerations need to be taken into account: though the interviews, as well as the information gathered, show that the project's actions and results alike (i.e. technical and administrative training, technical support, investment plans, and the opening of markets) resulted in substantial revenue increases for CFEs and sawmills, we can observe from the data provided to the evaluator that the reported increases showed some recording or reporting issues that make it impossible to directly link to either the project or certification, as indicated in the following paragraph.
2. The analysis of revenue increases or reductions does not differentiate project contributions from other factors. In turn, there are some reasons for some CFE increases that may reflect project contributions, although the analysis does not differentiate between intervention contributions during the wood production cycle and those during the value chain process. For instance, the following is reported by region: (i) that the Northern Region (NR) shows some degree of modernization in primary sawmill activities across all CFEs, as well as improved cost control processes and training in good sawmill and administrative practices; (ii) in Puebla, the sawmill coefficient has increased; (iii) in the Central Region, the project provides technical support to develop advertising of forestry products (brochures) and implement better administrative controls; (iv) in Chihuahua, good sawmill practices are followed; (v) in the Southern Region (SR), there support to optimize raw material use, cost and process restructuring, and potential customer outreach; and (vi) in Guerrero, there is modernization of primary sawmill activities. On the other hand, the analysis also notes other aspects such as increases or reductions in authorized volume use unrelated to the project. The Southern Region has seen an increase in processed volume when compared to the previous year. In Chihuahua, there are sales of wood from the previous year. In Guerrero forestry has intensified. Puebla & Quintana Roo have experienced increased wood prices at the regional level. In Jalisco there was record of a sawmill being sold. It would have been interesting to have a record which kept project-related information separate from other factors.

**3.2.2.3 Impact Achievement - Overall Objectives**

1. In order to analyze the highest-level achievements, three main aspects are considered: i) achievements in policy-making and in national and local-priorities; ii) BD conservation achievements (area and species indicators based on tracking tools); and iii) BD conservation awareness achievements at various levels. In general terms, the project undertook several important efforts, with some academics involved, resulting in **important achievements concerning the three aforementioned aspects**. There were, however, some weaknesses. Achievements by subject are described below:
2. I. Policy Synergy: The project **achieved remarkable milestones in conservation-friendly policy-making**. It helped to include BD-related topics in some CONAFOR national policy instruments, such as: i) the National Forestry Strategy (ENAIPROS); ii) further inclusion in the National Certification Strategy, particularly in Standard NMX 143[[87]](#footnote-87), and in Preventive Technical Audits; iii) some degree of inclusion in CONAFOR and PRONAFOR’s Operating Rules to allocate financial support to Forest Enterprises (i.e. grants), which is contingent upon the inclusion of BD practices (including monitoring) in such Enterprises’ Forest Management Plans[[88]](#footnote-88); iv) starting in 2013, CONAFOR included a mandatory BD inclusion criterion for FMPs funded by them, particularly in the states of Chihuahua and Durango, where every FMP must include this criterion. All this was achieved after the project's participation in the creation of the 2013-2018 National Forestry Program, whose Strategy 1.3 outlines integration of better forestry and biodiversity-conservation practices; and v) CONAFOR has increased subsidies for biodiversity conservation, especially with respect to technical expertise for the creation of highly biodiverse community conservation areas[[89]](#footnote-89).
3. II. Contributions to biodiversity conservation: GEF's tracking tools, or indicators that usually determine global BD conservation benefits, include the increase of conservation areas and conservation of conservation objects/globally-important species (endemic and endangered species). Despite the project's greatest efforts, whose indicators state the products attained, LF indicators do not allow us to corroborate the project's contributions to these global indicators with full certainty. The project possesses highly valuable information that nevertheless has not been systematized as required in order to quantify or understand its global contribution.
4. Information about conserved area: The indicators that come closest to identifying new voluntary reserves to be conserved within CFEs as a project contribution would be new ***High Conservation Value Areas (HCVAs)*** to be included as part of the FSC[[90]](#footnote-90) international certification process and restricted and protected areas to be defined upon preparing the Forest Management Plan[[91]](#footnote-91) for a given piece of land. It is worth mentioning that these two voluntary conservation categories under the auspices of CONAFOR are different and separate from *private areas voluntarily set aside for conservation***[[92]](#footnote-92)** as qualified and recorded in CONANP’s Protected Area System.
5. **Concerning HCVAs,** the project supported 126 CFEs in carrying out studies aimed at identifying HCVAs, which currently account for a total area of 566,668 hectares, and which could potentially reach 580,800 hectares by the end of the project across the 188 municipalities covered by the project. Additionally, Regional Biodiversity Studies are used to identify important HCVAs within forest management units (FMUs). Nevertheless, there is no gathered information that cross-references ejido HCVAs and their relation to FMUs. **With regard to restricted use areas**, the project has supported 1,200 pieces of land covering 2.2 million hectares for the creation of Forest Management Plans (FMPs), all of which include a restricted use area. This information is recorded in each FMP, but has not yet been systematized to report the overall restricted use area broken down either by FMP or its compiled value.
6. Although these are extraordinary figures, they are not sufficient to aquaint us with the actual contribution to BD conservation through the strategy of defining habitat conservation areas on private lands, as HCVAs can be defined both as voluntary areas based on various attributes[[93]](#footnote-93) (i.e. some conservation values as opposed to others), and as restricted use areas based on different criteria[[94]](#footnote-94). Furthermore, some were already defined in previous FMPs.
7. Another element that hinders or precludes the permanent impact of conservation objectives is the highly variable size range of HCVAs (21 ha-25,000 ha). Within HCVAs themselves, conservation areas may be even smaller than overall HCVAs; for instance, the ejido Vencedores claims to have a certified area of 21,343 ha, 404 ha of which constitute HCVAs. In turn, 30 ha are classified as HCV 3 as they contain rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems. On the other hand, despite the HCVA being so small, there are 1,706 hectares of restricted use area within the FMP.
8. An additional constraint is the fact that, for the time being, there is no information gathered and processed on how CFEs intend to use HVCAs. Thus, there is no way of knowing the the project’s contribution to protection in terms of area.
9. Furthermore, the evaluator lacks information on the requirements of HCV habitats vs the minimum required area for their conservation and to maintain their evolutionary processes, or whether such processes are compatible with the ways in which communities may wish to use the area. While there is evidence[[95]](#footnote-95) that some CFEs are committed to concluding agreements with residents to expand voluntarily protected areas and reduce impacts such as hunting, it is not sufficient (perhaps given the time constraints of the mission) to connect protected areas and allow for evolution and adaptation to climate change to take place.
10. Information on globally-critical protected species: Regarding the contribution to preserving globally important protected species, while individual HCVA studies are reported to possess information on the globally important protected species existing in them, the project does not have an indicator that allows us to visualize gathered data on identified species and/or whether or not such species meet conditions to persist over time. Thus, the evaluator cannot report on them. In the future, as HVCAs are further monitored, ecological data is expected to be gathered in order to determine whether or not the conditions for conservation of populations can be ensured in the long term. Therefore, information on their presence or absence is not sufficient.
11. In terms of land, including production areas, the project has identified protected species in the Mexican Standard, as well as regional BD-friendly conservation practices and their application (RN, RC-CO, RSE). This was done while supporting the creation of FMPs (2.2 million hectares surveyed). Despite such progress, the project did not generate compiled ecologic information that could identify what worked, where, and why.
12. The project also undertook regional efforts in particular to obtain more information[[96]](#footnote-96) on the presence of species listed in the Mexican Standard in areas known as FMUs (which can encompass several municipalities) via Regional Biodiversity Studies.
13. The main products that the project has contributed are:
	* Its nine guidelines developed with biodiversity-friendly criteria to be implemented in productive areas and adapted to the unique contexts of the Nothern, Central, and Southeastern regions. The project has also successfully made such considerations mandatory in FMPs in accordance with species encountered.
	* As stated above, the project has provided guidance to 1,200 pieces of land covering an area of 2.2 million ha in creating their FMPs. The project has also provided support for initial biological monitoring to identify species present and for incorporating biodiversity criteria.
	* It has fostered 30 Regional Biodiversity Studies (RBSs) spanning more than 12 million hectares. These studies have been carried out in areas that may encompass several municipalities in order to identify flora and/or fauna and provide information that may have reference value for biological diagnostics on pieces of land.
	* The project has trained 131 CFE focus groups on how to design land-specific biological and habitat-quality monitoring programs. So far, 99 of the 131 groups have already prepared their programs. CFEs must implement such monitoring programs once they are certified, as they require species and habitat-quality records for annual or semi-annual audits in accordance with their certification type. Such information is used to determine possible impacts on their productive activities. This information is also necessary in order to determine whether the CFEs' productive activities have an impact on the presence of species
	* Universities became involved to provide support for information management. For example, Dr. Corral from Durango was recruited to address biodiversity indicators. Corral established the methodology of Permanent Sites for Floristic Diversity Evaluation (SPED for its initials in Spanish) for quantitative comparison of forest management programs and to assess the effects of production methods on ecosystems. The project provided resources to further a study involving 185 plots of land that had been in progress before the project start-up. Study schemes that were mainly to evaluate the number of trees, changes in basal area,[[97]](#footnote-97) and the number of species were defined for each site. While 128 of the monitoring sites fall within the ejidos of intervention,[[98]](#footnote-98) the evaluator lacked the processed and compiled information necessary in order to verify the actual effects of conservation criteria on the lands where such criteria were applied and to define, based on the study, the project's contribution in terms of benefiting species through conservation measures or mitigating the problems that may arise from forestry activities.[[99]](#footnote-99)
	* In a supplementary manner, the project has also encouraged Chain of Custody certification to ensure the legal provenance of certified wood.
14. In brief terms, there has been an increase in BD information in the ejidos. However, management of ecological information remains a weak point, as the majority of the information obtained indicates an increase in recorded species but does not enable understanding of the project's contribution to BD conservation in Mexico.
15. III. BD Conservation Awareness: While the project has made important contributions toward raising awareness of BD conservation among the project's participants, it has not been without certain weaknesses.
16. In most of the CFEs that the project has visited, ejido members are found to express keen interest in managing their forests sustainably, as they wish to ensure a permanent source of livelihood. The project's *Perception Study and Capacity Assessment Concerning the Main Stakeholders in Forest Management in Durango and Puebla* corroborates this appraisal, as the surveys conducted in CFEs of intervention and CFEs outside the project showed 68% of CFEs of intervention consider the continued existence of forests to be important, while 61.7% of those surveyed in CFEs outside the project expressed the same opinion. Such interest in sustainable development already constitutes important progress.
17. The project has also helped the communities to be more conscious of their BD values, , which represents a change from the previous situation where communities chose to establish voluntary protection areas but were unaware of the presence of some species, such as jaguars or cougars,[[100]](#footnote-100) or their conservation value., Furthermore, as part of the certification protocol, landowners/ejido members have set up control brigades to protect their HCVs. Regarding the impression that BD conservation is important, the Perception Study reports that the percentage of stakeholders under project intervention who consider BD conservation to be the second most important aspect of forest management is greater than that of the group of stakeholders outside the project.[[101]](#footnote-101)
18. Despite the project's aforementioned important contributions, there are weaknesses that stood in the way of the highest-level achievements and/or constrained understanding of achievements already made, as discussed below:
19. Conception of the Objective of Conservation: Interviews revealed that the conception of what the project's ultimate objective was varies widely among stakeholders (including executors). For some, the objective was conservation, while for others, it was to obtain certification, and for others still, it was to increase or intensify forest production. Even the MTR states that the project's central focus was sustainable forestry. Trivial as it may seem, this is an important weakness. This could be due to the lack of clarity in the hypothesis and in the highest-level objective of the ProDoc, a shortcoming that remained uncorrected during project implementation (see the section on Adaptation).[[102]](#footnote-102) Another cause may be that no clear message was conveyed.[[103]](#footnote-103) In this respect, there is a discrepancy between UNDP's conception and the evaluator's conception. According to UNDP, once certified area encompassing biodiversity criteria has been increased, forestry has been improved, HCVs have been identified, and training has been given on the importance of sustainable management, stakeholders' interpretations of such efforts are irrelevant to the results. However, the evaluator affirms, based on her experience with previous projects, that communities are more likely to continue to protect their biodiversity out of conviction rather than temporary convenience if they have an internalized sense of awareness of the importance of biodiversity, and if they have gained an understanding of what the project's ultimate objective was (i.e., they have received support on account of their high biodiversity values and to ensure long-term conservation of these values) and the importance of conservation as a foundation or instrument for their future sustainability and adaptation to climate change.
20. Conception of BD: As reported by ejido members, while they had restricted use areas prior to the project, they had no information on the species these areas contained. Through the project and its monitoring processes, the positive effects of ejido members' and communities' expanded knowledge of biodiversity, particularly in their own High Conservation Value Areas (HCVAs), were reported. However, interviews revealed that several ejido members and communities have focused more on "how to use them" than "how to conserve them" (for example, in the king vulture's habitat in the SE Region), or that conservation knowledge has been imparted only to a certain portion of ejido members (particular examples occurred in the Central and Southern Region, where the evaluator was able to speak with inhabitants). In some ejidos (for example, in the Southern Region), inhabitants expressed their concerns or discontent with protecting species such as big cats, as they argue that they kill the deer that they seek to protect for commercial purposes in the Evnironmental Management Units (EMUs).[[104]](#footnote-104) As biodiversity consevation is the ultimate objective and rationale for GEF funding, it is necessary to distinguish between the vision of "maintaining an area and becoming acquainted with mangement options to ensure conservation of its ecosystem" and that of "learning that patches of forest previously thought to be unusable by foresters contain species that they can also exploit." In the latter case, increased information may be turned into a resource for greater revenue. If we revisit the example of the king vulture, some ejido members reported that several ejido members spontaneously started to bring in outsiders to watch the vultures unchecked once their value became known, and there was even a proposal to build a road to their nesting area. However, such practices or ideas were halted by other ejido groups, particularly CONAFOR-paid promoters.
21. To gauge the understanding and perception of topics of project intervention, an interesting perception study was conducted in the states of Durango and Puebla. This study uncovered evidence of changes in perception among the group under project intervention and the group outside the project. For example, it was found that a greater percentage of the group under project intervention deems that "guaranteeing the continued existence of forests" is one of the most important aspects of forest management. In contrast, the group outside the project has greater economic expectations, as a greater percentage of this group deems that conservation and certification could provider greater economic benefits[[105]](#footnote-105) and opening of markets.[[106]](#footnote-106) The interviews also showed that the ejido members under project intervention conceived of additional benefits of good forest management and certification, a positive demonstration of a deeper understanding of the project's results.
22. An important weakness with respect to BD conservation is that, for the perception study, the project considered two opposing conservation paradigms, referred to as active and passive conservation, respectively: (1) "biodiversity conservation can only be achieved by implementing good forestry management practices," and (10) "biodiversity conservation in forest areas can only be achieved by avoiding felling in certain areas"[[107]](#footnote-107)/[[108]](#footnote-108). Although this dichotomy might be understood as an exercise to determine the scale of current trends, it is worrisome that the two paradigms are seen as being in opposition, as both are ecologically necessary according to the status of species and to their ecological needs, as well as to the status of the ecosystem and sites where they are implemented.
23. Additionally, while the study appropriately identifies three questions[[109]](#footnote-109) relevant to its analysis, it did not delve into examining the causes or reasons for the answered received.
24. Other weaknesses found during the mission were the following:
	* Although species-friendly actions have been identified within productive areas (e.g. leave trees for nesting or troughs), no evidence was found of an evaluation process or of a design process for future evaluations[[110]](#footnote-110) to valuate and verify their actual contributions to the species (for example, exposed dens that may remain unused, troughs that may be death traps for small animals).
	* The project's objective was clearly to promote the best biodiversity conservation practices in the context of forest management, which it did appropriately. On the other hand, the TFSs' technical assistance in forestry practices was an undertaking independent of the project and pursuant to Mexican law.[[111]](#footnote-111) However, in some areas and regions, there were people involved in the project who prompted or promoted changes to “forest management”[[112]](#footnote-112) in favor of more intensive methods that could have significant negative effects on genetic variability (for example, clear cuts in the Southern Region,[[113]](#footnote-113) and the encouraged practice of planting nursery-grown trees at the expense of parent trees in various regions[[114]](#footnote-114)). While the scope of this evaluation does not cover the analysis of the effects of different types of management[[115]](#footnote-115) in regular and irregular forests, concern as to whether the types of management are consistent with or opposed to the project's biodiversity conservation objectives is palpable.[[116]](#footnote-116) In other words, although species-friendly practices introduced by the project (for example, leaving trees with nests or in conditions fit for nesting) may offer favorable conditions to species, the question of whether forest management methods enable or diminish positive effects of such practices, as well as that of whether global species’ ecological requirements can be considered when defining the type of forest management to implement. The evaluator does not intend to define whether one forest management system is preferable to another, but rather to highlight that any encouragement of changes would require prior evaluation in light of ecosystem behavior and seeking to make them resilient to climate change (for example, by working toward greater variability) and validating the species' ecological conditions.[[117]](#footnote-117)

***3.2.2.4 Connection to other efforts***

1. Throughout the mission, the regional executors mentioned that they did not interact with other iniciatives until the project was near its end. However, the Project Coordinating Unit reported that the project successfully established collaborative mechanisms with other projects, resulting in the following joint efforts and resources:
* Biodiversity Conservation Program in the Sierra Madre Oriental- GIZ. This project has reportedly been the one with the highest documented levels of collaboration;
* Collaboration in the exchange of biodiversity monitoring methodologies[[118]](#footnote-118);
* Business Round Tables at the Expo Forestal with project-certified companies, as well as companies such as Volkswagen and AUDI;
* A project by the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservation (FMCN), and the World Bank to support SMEs operating in ejido-FIP forest environments;
* FMCN coordination to outline the scope of the "Support and Technical Assistance for Community Forestry Enterprises" advisory program aimed at encouraging complementary efforts (governance, administrative systems, marketing and credit) for the 2016-2018 forest development of the El Empedrado ejido CFE. There is also a unique intervention by FMCN through an advisor in training, equipment, and operations for the saw-sharpening center of the CFE Baranca de Calabozo (Pihuamo);
* GEF-CONANP-PNUMA-WW’s Tarahumara Sustainable Project; and
* An exchange of experiences involving GEF projects, held in September 2016.
* Forest Investment Program (PROINFOR) - German Bank KFW–FIRA: PROINFOR seeks to enable credit lines for ejidos and communities committed to environmental and biodiversity protection through forest certification. Project goals for 2016 included creating diagnostics and investment plans, so that 30 Forestry Enterprises (10 in Chihuahua, 10 in Durango, and 10 in Oaxaca) could be funded through credit. The BBPMC project has been involved in the selection process of such enterprises, encouraging project-supported enterprises to apply. Most BBPMC-supported companies were preselected.
* Additionally, the project participated in the following contests as part of the efforts to promote project-supported enterprises:[[119]](#footnote-119) 2015-2016 CESMO Sustainable Production Innovation Award, into which project-supported enterprises were entered. The winners were selected with the involvement of CONAFOR and its project CONAFOR-PBBPMC. Five of the project’s enterprises were among the winners and were awarded mentorships (with an estimated value of 250,000 pesos) to strengthen their production processes.

***3.2.2.5 Compliance with UNDP Mainstreaming Criteria***

1. UNDP’s mainstreaming criteria detected in the project were:
2. Sustainable Development: By the project’s very nature, its contribution has been of central importance to this criterion. Indeed, the project itself is founded on the pillar of sustainable development of forest production processes, and simultaneously seeks to ensure sustainability of economic initiatives and social structures.
3. Gender: Although forest production is regarded as a predominantly male activity, the project undertook vital efforts for inclusion of women. The Central Coordinating Unit is recorded to have engaged a consultancy on gender. Subsequently, the Regional Coordination Units promoted five training events with a specific focus on gender issues[[120]](#footnote-120) and the empowerment of women.[[121]](#footnote-121) These events were replicated in the Northen Region, thanks to the involvement of local authorities.
4. The project recorded information disaggregated by gender for reporting purposes. The project afforded special attention to the inclusion of women at several types of training sessions. For instance, in 2015, 510 women reportedly attended training events (20% at events on competitiveness and markets, 17% at events on biodiversity, 16% at events on Foresst Management, 3% at events on identifying HCV attributes)[[122]](#footnote-122).
5. Furthermore, the evaluation clearly demonstrated women’s participation in various types of work that do not demand extraordinary physical strength. Such employment activities included basic jobs such as collecting branches (Oaxaca), building handicrafts (Oaxaca and Puebla), and executive positions at forest enterprises and sawmills (Northern Region), CONAFOR forest promoters (Central Region-Gudalajara), and carpentry (to provide supplies to industrial facilities) (Central-Eastern Region).
6. Equity: This UNDP criterion is often difficult to quantify, so it is not strange that this project lacked the information needed to make an assessment. However, it is worth highlighting that participant selection may be a point for considerable in term of equality. In this project, several CONAFOR executors and officials stated that more CFEs with more mature social organization were selected, which included several that previously attained certification. This could encourage the idea that, at least initially, those who benefited were those who had already received support. Moreover, the CONAFOR executors and officials revealed some concern about replicating project activities in the future with less mature, unsupported CFEs. The project then replied that more advanced CFEs were indeed those addressed at first (37), but that the project's coverage was expanded to include CFEs all types of CFEs, and that it did not necessarily support only the most advanced ones.[[123]](#footnote-123).
7. With regard to ejidos, some aspects were found that would merit analysis under this criterion, such as solidary within CFEs, as some ejido members mentioned that they distributed profits among all inhabitants (that is, ejido members, settlers, and inhabitants), while others restricted profit-sharing to ejido members but also employed everyone. Some ejidos used production profits to provide social services in an equitable way, such as free healthcare to all inhabitants and education for all children.
8. Another element may be considered under this criterion and analyzed is the effect that a project may have on the financial value of the ejido member's rights to such resources. Some ejido members mentioned during interviews that their income had been low in the past, as many CFEs did not report on their handing of economic resources, let alone profits. With CONAFOR’s and the project’s support, some CFEs have become highly efficient companies. Therefore, there is a sense that ejido members' rights now may be highly desirable. Some interviews involved remarks on purchase and sales processes and the interest of outsiders in purchasing ejido members' rights. Although the evaluator did not possess more information, and understands that people have the right to sell or purchase assets in a free country, it is important for projects to take the necessary measures to enable participants to appraise their resources and warn them of possible harm, as many ejido members are of very modest means.

***3.2.2.6 National Ownership during Execution***

1. A strong sense of national ownership arose during implementation at different levels: CONAFOR, at the national level and among the Regional (North, Center, West, and Southeast) delegations[[124]](#footnote-124); SEMARNAT, mainly at the federal level, though in some regions as well (the Northern Region, with beginnings in the Southeastern Region). This was also observed in most participants: Community Forestry Enterprises (CFEs) and private entities, whose sense of ownership resulted from the benefits they have enjoyed.
2. The sense of ownership among Forestry Service Providers has been variable. Reportedly, the TFSs’ willingness to become involved in activities promoted by the project was varied for a number of reasons, such as whether or not they were willing to make inroads into new subjects and/or to learn. One of the project's strategies was to engage with TFSs who had a positive view of the proposal. The executors generally see promoting involvement of TFSs as a persistant challenge.

***3.2.3 Efficiency***

***3.2.3.1 Implementation Focus***

1. The National Implementation Modality (NIM) was established for the project’s implementation. UNDP offered both financial support and substantial monitoring.

***3.2.3.2 Management Arrangements - Implementation Partnership Agreements***

1. Initial Conditions. - Conditions were in place at the start of implementation to begin the activities: CONAFOR and RA had well-established institutional structures, CONAFOR had co-financing resources and facilities for the project, and there was also the legal framework. In spite of this, the project took almost six months to hire the officials to organize both the Central and Regional Coordinating Units for the official project start-up.
2. Project Management Structure. - As reported, during project preparation, the intention was to respect the stakeholders involved the Project Design, appointing Rainforest Alliance, and CONAFOR as joint executors. Nevertheless, since the arrangement was unfeasible, UNDP[[125]](#footnote-125) agreed to name CONAFOR as the Executing Agency to be in charge via a Coordinating Unit with hired staff, while RA would act as the Responsible Partner through an agreement with CONAFOR and hold a seat on the Project's Board of Directors with a voice and vote, except on budget-related discussions, where it would have only a voice.
3. As established by the ProDoc, during implementation, the staholders responsible for the project were identified: UNDP as the Implementing Agency, CONAFOR as the Executing Agency, and RA as the Responsible Partner.
4. For implementation, especially at the project start-up, the institutional arrangements set out in the ProDoc were established,[[126]](#footnote-126) according to the following institutional management structure:
	* Project Steering Committee/Board (chaired by one representative each of UNDP, CONAFOR, and Rainforest Alliance (RA)): In charge of steering the project, Annual Working Plans, Annual Reports, and the Project Budget);
	* Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) responsible for the project’s coordinated execution; and
	* Four Regional Offices responsible for regional project execution.
5. Over time, changes or adjustments were required by these structures, proving to be beneficial for management:
* During implementation, and due to conceptual differences with RA, and a failure to generate the products for which it was responsible (with methodological and technical contributions),[[127]](#footnote-127) CONAFOR and RA agreed for the latter to withdraw from the project. This change had a positive effect on the project’s efficiency, as there were many profound conceptual differences regarding the ultimate project goal. For RA, the goal was achieving international certification, while CONAFOR reported that its main idea was to promote gradual access to different certification levels, from the most basic to the most advanced (TPA-MX Standard, and FSC certification), and to allow participants to adopt certification as a process to improve their processes and advance BD conservation.
* During implementation, a fifth Central Eastern office was created, starting operations in May 2013 in the states of Puebla, Hidalgo, and Veracruz. The decision was made because the Central Region was overwhelmingly large, and the time needs of RCU officials were too great to address those states.
* During implementation, changes in the structure of the central and regional offices (Graph 2) were made:
	1. At the Central level, a communications specialist was included, and the market specialist position was removed, with regional market specialists being hired instead.
	2. ii. At the regional level, from the outset, Regional Directors and Specialists in interaction with Community Forestry Enterprises (to support their organization, support in the further development and review of the Forest Management Plans and certification, monitoring of consultants) were hired. As mentioned before, over time, market specialists were included on the work team (to support marketing and improve competitiveness in the value chain, i.e. production starting from the sawmill).
1. A challenge faced by the project during implementation was staff turnover, including the PCU’s General Project Director position. Few officials indeed were present throughout the project’s lifespan (with exception of those of the Northern Region). This situation arose despite salaries that were competitive with respect to those of public servants. It was reported that, while all contracting processes were open and competitive, in some cases, CONAFOR staff were selected who were previously involved in CONAFOR's project monitoring,[[128]](#footnote-128) which facilitated the continuity of the project. (The Project Director and the Director of the SE Region). See Graph 2 of the Project Structure for the number of people in parentheses who held the position.

**Graph 3. Structure Established during Project Implementation**

**Project Board**

**CONAFOR-PNUD**

**Project Director**

**(2)**

Manager (1)

Communications Specialist (1)

M&E Specialist (2)

BD & Certification Specialist (2)

**Central Regional Director (3)**

**Central Eastern Regional Director (1)**

**Southern Regional Director (4)**

**Southeastern Regional Director (4)**

Markets and Financial Specialist-(2)

Central CFE Specialist (3)

Central Eastern Markets and Financial Specialist (1)

Central Eastern CFE Specialist. (1)

Southern Markets and Financial Specialist (1)

Southern CFE Specialist (2)

SE Markets and Financial Specialist (1)

 SE CFE Specialist (3)

**Northern Regional Director (1)**

Northern Markets and Financial Specialist (1)

Northern CFE- Specialist (2)

1. An additional management strategy, at the national level and more particularly at the regional level, involved hiring special consultants to support CFEs, including FMP review, RBSs, community monitoring programs, and documented control systems, the last of which is a requirement for chains of custody, knowledge and awareness products, and cretification processes in Durango and Chihuahua.
2. In addition to the project structure, during the implementation, the PCU designed management structures or institutional schemes on specific topics or information gathering for project indicators, which included defining conceptual aspects of the project approach and the pathway for its in-field implementation, with which they were able to achieve the planned goals. For example, for implementation of the subject of biodiversity, particularly for synergy of biodiversity in forest production, a structure consisting of three consultants at the central level was established to develop the conceptual framework, who in turn would be connected with the regional CFE specialists and would coordinate actions with hired consultants to support preparation and monitoring for the approval of the forest management plans.

**Figure 4. Diagram for Inclusion of Methodological Development of Best BD Practices in Forest Management Plans**

**Methodology developed with 3 consultants hired by the PCU**

**1 Technic.**

Northern Region

S Region

**2 Technic.**

**2 Technic.**

 CE Region

Central Region

1. Strategic Partnerships: One of the Management Strategies that allowed the project to generate all its products and make all its achievements was the establishment of Strategic Partnerships, both by the PCU at the federal level and the RCUs at the state level.
2. The PCU established direct communication with SEMARNAT at the federal level (as foreseen in the ProDoc, as it is directly responsible for the GEF Focal Point and conservation of Protected Areas); however, this was not a constant at the regional level.[[129]](#footnote-129) One weakness of the project was not having established close communication with CONABIO at all levels as planned in the ProDoc, or with CONANP.[[130]](#footnote-130)
3. At the regional level, the RCUs established different types of inter-institutional alliances conducive to project implementation and achievements. The main partners at the state level were the state delegates of the joint executors, but not in all regions. Nearly all regions, except the South, report a close relationship with CONAFOR.[[131]](#footnote-131)
4. Interaction with RA to achieve International Certification was variable. In some regions (SER, NR, and ER[[132]](#footnote-132)), the partnership has continued even after RA's withdrawal from the project. On the other hand, in the SR, RA's departure from its position as CONAFOR's counterpart went to the extreme of dividing the CFEs: RA gave more direct support to FSC-certified CFEs and CONAFOR began work to incorporate lands into a gradual certification process.
5. Through CONAFOR, the Regional Directors (except in the SR)[[133]](#footnote-133) participated actively in the monthly meetings of the State Forest Councils.[[134]](#footnote-134) Their participation in these meetings provided support, among others matters, for the inclusion of biodiversity criteria in the forest management plans (by SEMARNAT), the incorporation of the project concept in some legal and political authorities, and policy setting in their role of approving forest management plans. However, the establishment of these regional partnerships varied by region. For example, a very close relationship with SEMARNAT was detected in the Northern and Central Eastern Regions, along with a late onset of such a relationship in the SER; a relationship with SEMARNAT was non-existent in the SR.
6. The reported regional partnerships are:
	* RC: Universities; technological institutes; organizations of foresters, producers, and manufacturers; state governments; municipal governments; other initiatives; the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservation. To strengthen governance, management, and marketing aspects of CFEs in the Sierra Occidental of Jalisco.
	* CER: GIZ-CESMO,[[135]](#footnote-135) INIFAP,[[136]](#footnote-136) Higher Technological Institute of the Sierra Norte of Puebla,[[137]](#footnote-137) and Higher Technological Institute of Zacapoaxtla[[138]](#footnote-138).
	* NR: Durango and Chihuahua State Governments, Reforestamos México, A.C. on the subject of competitiveness, ANCE (Association of Standardization and Certification) / on the subject of certification. And support in training with the Technological Institute of El Salto, the Department of Forestry Sciences, and the Institute of Forestry and Industry.
	* RS: In the Southern Region no formal partnerships were forged. There was an rapprochement with the Technological Institute of San Miguel El Grande for the design and establishment of an advertising platform for sales to purchaser who recognize certification. However, this initiative was not concluded.
* SER: With CONABIO[[139]](#footnote-139) in Quintana Roo for wood exports and biodiversity criteria in certification and management programs; Fundación COPADE-Arte Latino,[[140]](#footnote-140) North America Wood Products,[[141]](#footnote-141) the Faculty of Visual Arts at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León[[142]](#footnote-142), INIFAP, ECOSUR, CONABIO, CONAFOR, and the offices of SESISA (Q Roo) and SOSETEC (Campeche),[[143]](#footnote-143) Comunidades de Aprendizaje Campesinas e Indígenas A.C[[144]](#footnote-144) to promote funding in two regional CFEs.

***3.2.3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)***

1. To monitor the project, a Monitoring System, was established, which included monitoring of the indicators of the Logical Framework (LF) and preparation of reports. A person position for someone in charge of such monitoring was created.
2. In compliance with the M&E Plan, the project created quarterly and annual reports[[145]](#footnote-145) and AWPs. Additionally, a theory of change diagram was prepared, though it is somewhat deficient and there are no reports of its use during implementation. For example, one deficiency is that the TOC diragram prepared includes a column of activities, as opposed to a more customary column of results. Project results are included in intermediate results, while post-project results are usually included in the TOC methodology. Furthermore, The TOC diagram prepared identifies what the TOC usually would consider to be intermediate results as end results. Lastly, no End Result is identified. Moreover, no strategies to achieve the results area identified, despite the fact that these are usually part of a TOC diagram (please see the overall diagram under Recommendations).
3. Concerning the monitoring system’s efficiency, several stakeholders reported that management problems occurred at first because of weak leadership by the first person in charge of monitoring, who put great pressure on the staff while offering them little guidance. This aspect has been so deeply felt that some stakeholders considered this factor to be a partial cause for the departure of project staff.
4. Stakeholders also mentioned that this process was improved with the replacement head of monitoring. First, the monitoring process was refined, as the focus shifted from quarterly reports to a weekly activity plan delivered every Friday, along with a report on activities completed the previous week, which is delivered on Mondays, all of which helped to ensure closer monitoring and the quarterly reports along the way. Second, the staff’s tension regarding the AWP & PIR preparation process was eased and lowered, as regions were asked to work beforehand with their Institutional Technical Committees and to bring proposals and reports prepared in advance rather than having to prepare them jointly at tense, unceasing meetings.
5. To monitor and formulate reports such as the PIR, Baseline information and the LF indicators were used for reference puposes (which proved evident in the precise achievement of most goals for the indicators, as mentioned in the section on Effectiveness). Within the Monitoring System, a new project indicator matrix was created, which included traffic lights for each expected result to indicate the level of progress or risk in place. This enabled close monitoring and served to provide information to the Project Coordination Unit and the Project Board for decision-making.
6. RCUs were in charge of monitoring regional activities, such as the rendering of services engaged, validation of deliverables, and the overall appropriate use of resources at the regional level to ensure achievement of goals in the Annual Work(???) Plans.
7. As regards the question of the UNDP–GEF guidance evaluation of whether or not the M&E plan's budget and funding were sufficient during the project’s preparation and implementation, a budget of $30.000 USD[[146]](#footnote-146) for the mid-term evaluation/review and a budget of $35.000 USD for the final evaluation were assigned in the ProDoc. These budgets were not fully disbursed (see Table 6), but this fact does not necessarily mean that these costs were overestimated during project planning.

**Table 6: Evaluation Costs in USD**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Mid-Term Evaluation (includes national and international evaluators)** | **Final Evaluation (international evaluator only)** |
| Evaluators | $21,092 | $17,520 |
| Field Visits | $5,965 | $5,202 |
| Translation | $1,478 | $2,000 |
| Total | **$28,536** | **$24,723** |

**Source:** Table prepared by project management. The original table presented travel expenses in Mexican pesos, which were then converted into dollars at a rate of 18 Mexican pesos per US dollar. The original version of the table did not include the final evaluation translation cost, but the MTR cost was used as a reference.

1. Project monitoring costs are not presented, as those are included in the management budget. We note that monitoring of specific local actions was the responsibility of the PCUs, while inclusive project monitoring was the responsibility of the NCU. Furthermore, while monitoring is an activity that cuts across several technical, management, and compliance aspects, a monitoring specialist provided support for it.

***3.2.3.4 Coordination of UNDP and the Executing Agency to Manage Operational Issues***[[147]](#footnote-147)

1. As the interviews, the PIRs, the analysis of the minutes, and the management/financial system reveal, UNDP provided close support to the project.
2. Moreover, it is evident that the meetings of the Project Board or Steering Committee represented not only an opportunity to approve the AWPs and PIRs, but also performed a strategic role to define conceptual aspects (for example, the project’s ultimate objective itself or the emphasis to put on certification). The Board also had to face the issue of differing visions between the executors (CONAFOR and RA), and which ultimately led to cancellation of the internal agreement with RA.

***3.2.3.5 Adaptive Management***

1. LF Modifications; This section demands analysis of whether or not LF indicators/objectives were modified[[148]](#footnote-148), and whether any such changes were due to weaknesses during the inital conception of the project, or to changes in social, political, and/or environmental circumstances,as well as whether such changes were officially recorded[[149]](#footnote-149).
2. UNDP executors and officials reported no changes to the LF. The structure of the project’s LF remained the same up to the end of the project. No changes to the project’s LF, products, or original results indicators were made, with exception of the indicators still to be defined in the ProDoc. Furthermore, The LF matrix was used accurately in the PIRs.
3. Despite the foregoing, the LF was adapted in practice. A key modification corresponding to adaptive management and/or reinterpretation of the LF is the discussion of whether or not the Overall Objective indicators should be linked to the conditions of certification. This is even truer when some LF indicators should are expressed as percentages of CFEs (for example, the number of reserves within certified CFEs), particularly in reference to FSC certification, as expressed during the interviews. This change was reported by executors and authorities alike, though it was not formally recorded as part of a Project-Board-approved new version of the LF. According to reports, this was a major point of divergence with RA, which strongly sustained that the ultimate objective was FSC international certification, while the authorities did not consider certification to be an end in itself. The authorities sought to promote and implement the process and elements of certification, but did not necessarily expect the CFEs to obtain FSC certification. Additionally, they saw that CFEs could first attain the more reachable national certifications, and then gradually pursue FSC certification if they were interested. The evaluation deemed this decision the correct one, as GEF projects are formulated in a way that considers certification as an intermediate result or strategy to achieve the ultimate objective, but not as the ultimate objective itself. While this was the final decision, and work was carried out accordingly, the indicators continued to reference certification (for example, the number of certified CFE reserves, as mentioned above).
4. Another change found in the PIRs is that, while the quantification of the Baseline or the proposed ultimate goal remained unchanged, indicators to report progress on the Ultimate Objective and on some Results were "re-defined or made more specific."
5. An example is the indicator "Number of CFEs implementing biodiversity conservation tools," which is stated generally in the LF and refers to the number of CFEs implementing the Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) guidance and the Best Practices Manual (BPM); however, in the PIRs and Monitoring Matrix, the column for reporting progress redefines four categories: the number of CFEs having HCVs, the number CFEs having Forest Management Plans (FMPs), and number of CFEs having Biological Monitoring Plans (BMPs). Furthermore, the LF includes an indicator for biodiversity regional studies. Such studies are aimed at providing information on the existing BD in an area, and so they encompass areas more extensive than a CFE.
6. Such redefinitions help the project to distinguish specific points, and show that the Project management and the Project Board had internal conceptual discussions on the understanding of the meanings of indicators proposed within the LF. Nevertheless, such changes were not recorded as part of a revised version of the LF approved by the Project Board.
7. We also note that, due to the LF weaknesses discussed in the Design Evaluation section, it was worthwhile to make other changes to the LF and have a new version of the LF officially approved by the Project Board. This new version was to include, among other matters, the elimination of repeated indicators and to increase or modify other indicators to determine the “attributable” effects/achievements or those that the project “has contributed” to biodiversity conservation (which is the highest-level objective). Moreover, it was worthwhile to review several performance indicators (for example, **the number of studies** such as RBSs) and to redefine them as achievement indicators.
8. In the Mid-Term Review, changes to the sequence of the LF[[150]](#footnote-150) were suggested, but were not at all well received by the project. Although the argument not to implement this recommendation was the project's short remaining timeframe, this recommendation as stated in the MTR would not have been been feasible in practice, as changes to the objective pr the results require the approval of the GEF Council. A possible and positive measure would have would have been to review Result 4 indicators, which could have been placed within the Ultimate Objective, depending on their connection to the type of ultimate objective required by GEF.
9. As an important attempt at adaptive management, the project prepared a TOC diagram, which would have been highly valuable if it had been properly articulated, as it would have allowed for a better understanding of the project's logic, route, ultimate objective, conditions required by the project (many of which were put in place), and linkage between different components.
10. Legal and Institutional Adaptation – Although Adaptative Management usually leaves aside management adaptations, we highlight the project's capacity to adapt its management arrangements to the situation in context, as expressed by the Mid-Term Evaluation and exemplified by Skype- and email-based monitoring in highly dangerous States.
11. Likewise, we highlight the project’s management capacity, which expanded in coverage from 46 originally anticipated municipalities to 118 municipalities and nearly 400 forestry enterprises, both community-based0 and private, in response to the demand by producers from municipalities that were not originally part of the project but later requested project support.

***3.2.3.6 Report Quality***

***Annual Reports (PIRs)***

1. The project's PIRs contain the expected structure and contents. Furthermore, they provide a wealth of valuable information on the progress of results. Although the evaluation acknowledges that the platform itself is not particularly user-friendly and has word count limits, it also considers that the information as presented in the PIRs must be addressed to readers not connected to the project or even foreign readers who are not necessarily acquainted with the Mexican context and/or the depty of the project.[[151]](#footnote-151) The way in which the PIR is written represents a barrier for outside readers, who may not have the opportunity to witness the project's interventions firsthand. When writing these reports, we must ensure that they are self-explanatory.
2. The evaluator deems that the text of the project’s PIRs is not user-friendly, as the column for reporting progress is not directly connected to either the Baseline indicators or the proposed goals. It would appear as though the reader is assumed to be familiar with both the project and the focal points. Although the column for progress provides important information, it is advisable to first report indicator data directly and relate the text to the result, BL, and goal, and then to include any additional information to clarify concepts. For example, the progress report for the indicator “*institutional capacity... is strengthened through sustainable forest management*” begins with a distracting general statement.[[152]](#footnote-152) Then, products, coverage and achievements of the perception study concerning the stakeholders are reported. Nevertheless, the texts do not connect them to *institutional capacity*. Furthermore, the information overlaps with the second result indicator, “*staff training.*”
3. The section on LF Adaptation mentioned that the PIRs defined some indicators in greater detail. On the subject of quality, it is worth mentioning that measurement units (for example, hectares, USD/boardfoot) monitored and reported in the PIRs are generally consistent with those of the proposed indicators. However, relationships indicators have with each other may not seem obvious at times, such as the deforestation rate with forest cover[[153]](#footnote-153) at tree-harvesting sites, or the rate of biodiversity change with the biodiversity index. In practice, the section reports information from new records based on increased knowledge and not necessarily based on a new presence of species. It would have been salient to clarify the meaning of the indicators used in order to make known beforehand what information is being verified.

***Mid-Term Evaluation/Review & Management’s Response***

1. The Mid-Term Evaluation and Review were conducted late.[[154]](#footnote-154) While this delay was justified, it diminished the opportunity to enhance the project through feedback.
2. The document fulfills the general parameters expected for such documents. However, it does not analyze some elements important to such evaluations, particularly to GEF-UNDP evaluations. For example, there is no analysis conducted on indicator type (whether they are SMART, performance, or results indicators) or of whether the project outlines the route to attaining global benefits (a GEF requirement) as well as local benefits (local relevance). Within the management arrangements, it is unclear what local implementation strategy was employed. Moreover, the GEF-UNDP evaluation guidance poses a series of questions that remained unaddressed.
3. The MTR provided interesting and appropriate recommendations, such as conducting a perception survey to discover the effect of training sessions. However, the suggestion for LF modifications reveals a lack of knowledge of GEF provisions. There is also an interesting analysis of a project's vertical logical that identifies a number of goals at different levels. Nevertheless, it later suggests that the Overall Objective should be categorized as an additional project Result, something nearly impossible to achieve, as it would have required the GEF Council’s approval. Conversely, due to the project's interpretation of the indicators on the deforestation rate and the rate of biodiversity change, such indicators do no qualify as as ultimate objective/impact indicators. Another element is that it strongly correlates effects with certification, even though project executors and CONAFOR authorities alike reported that the decision had been made not to make certification an end in itself.
4. Management’s response[[155]](#footnote-155) is presented as comments on the MTR, as a response by management usually includes a matrix indicating each recommendation and how it will be approached and/or whether or not it is feasible. The project accepted and implemented several recommendations (for example, expanded coverage of several studies, or conducting perception studies), but the response of management also mentions that several recommendations were generic, and that they therefore had no response to them. As stated previously, the project would have benefited from creating a table indicating all the recommendations, and a column of observations indicating whether they were able to be addressed and how, or whether they could not be addressed on account of being overly general.

***Project Inception Report/Final Report and Exit Strategy/Final Report***

1. The ProDoc stated that a **Project Inception Report** would be prepared and would describe management arrangements at the regional and local level adjustments that were previously omitted from the ProDoc. While this report was prepared, it did not include a detailed description of these arrangements. The MTR does not present them either. This represents a gap for any future interventions wishing to learn from the project.
2. The MTR/MTE suggested an **Exit Strategy** be prepared with some specific suggestions.[[156]](#footnote-156) During the evaluation, the preparation of this strategy was reportedly scheduled and was completed prior to the end of the project.
3. A compiled **Final Report** was also prepared and submitted as input for the final version of this evaluation.

***3.2.3.7 Compliance with Disbursement Timetable and Financial Management of GEF Grant***

1. Compliance with Timetable: The ProDoc envisaged that the Project would need five years for its disbursement. In practice, the disbursement period was extended to six years. As a six-month delay occurred before implementation began, September 2010 is considered as the project start date. In 2015, an extension was requested, rescheduling the closing date for December 2016.
2. Financial Performance: The project has spent and/or plans to spend all funds granted by GEF ($6,768,934.11 USD had been spent by the end of 2016; as of August 2016, the month of the evaluation mission, $6,840,221 of the total $6.9 million USD grant had either been pledged or spent, leaving a modest balance of $62,160 USD).
3. No strict comparisons can be made between the proposed disbursement timetable and what had actually been executed due the extension of the the project's implementation period. However, it has been logically identified that annual disbursement was, overall, less than planned, except in 2014. In any case, the positive side of this is that the way in which funds were disbursed allowed for implementation to be fully covered throughout the project's lifespan.
4. Table 7 below illustrates the project’s scheduled disbursement by year and by result, while Table 8 presents annual expenditure in comparison with the ProDoc budget.

**Table 7. Planned Expenditure by Year and Result**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Year 1** | **Year 2** | **Year 3** | **Year 4** | **Year 5** | **Total** |
| **Result 1** | 273,030 | 289,180 | 276,850 | 279,615 | 278,325 | 1,397,000 |
| **Result 2** | 296,750 | 262,850 | 357,300 | 348,100 | 306,000 | 1,571,000 |
| **Result 3** | 460,500 | 612,100 | 615,800 | 592,500 | 467,100 | 2,748,000 |
| **Result 4** | 96,000 | 101,150 | 103,350 | 104,750 | 94,750 | 500,000 |
| **Result 5** | 134,670 | 129,720 | 133,370 | 136,870 | 149,370 | 684,000 |
|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | **1**,**260**,**950** | **1**,**395**,**000** | **1**,**486**,**670** | **1**,**461**,**835** | **1**,**295**,**545** | **6**,**900**,**000** |

**Source: ProDoc.**

**Table 8. Scheduled Expenditure and Actual Financial Performance**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Scheduled in ProDoc (USD)** | **Performance (USD)** |
| 2010 |  | $           40,333.18 |
| 2011 | $1,260,950 | $          906,864.98  |
| 2012 | $1,395,000 | $       1,087,001.81  |
| 2013 | $1,486,670 | $       1,343,307.62  |
| 2014 | $1,461,835 | $       1,551,695.26  |
| 2015 | $1,295,545 | $          939,208.21  |
| 2016 |  | $          900,613.05  |
|  | 684,000.00 |  |
| **Overall Expenditure** |  | **$       6.768.934.11**  |
| GEF Budget | $6,900,000.00 | $       6,900,000.00  |
| **2017 Budget** |  |  **$        131,065.89**  |
| **Remainder** |  | **0** |

**Source: Project Executors with supplementary information from the ProDoc.**

1. For the financial disbursement, the ProDoc envisaged a modality of quarterly advance payments to be made to the Project Coordinating Unit in accordance with an Activities Plan and with the financial requirements of the corresponding period.
2. The funds have been administered by the UNDP, which directly managed procurement and hiring based on the annual planning approved by the AWPs (at the regional level, resource needs were established according to the region’s AWP, which included operational expenditure). The different parties deem that this was an efficient and timely modality of managing funds and that the process was positive, as it freed the project from an administrative burden. Only in one case were initial delays reported due to a lack of clarity in the procedures, but they were later streamlined when UNDP procedures were taken into account. It is also reported that the management of financial resources for activities considered in the AWP did not affect the execution of the actions.
3. In turn, UNDP received annual disbursements from its Headquarters in New York. Such disbursements were made according to the AWPs. As the disbursements were in dollars and because there was an exchange rate difference from the project start-up (from 13 Mexican pesos per dollar, initially, to 18 pesos per dollar at the end of the project). This difference benefited the project in a certain way, as it received more money in Mexican pesos than originally planned. Some payments were made in dollars, others in pesos.
4. As reported, the PCU received a smaller repayable fund, referred to as an advance of funds in accordance with UNDP regulations, and from this, a small revolving fund would be transferred to the Regional Coordinating Units (RCUs), mainly to cover mobilization expenses (fuel and vehicle maintenance). In some cases, these funds also served to support training workshops, covering some participants’ expenses, mainly food and support materials. Reports regarding the use of these resources were also audited with a favorable result, i.e., containing no observations.
5. The majority of the parties consider that the time allotted for the implementation of the planned activities was suitable. Some RCUs stated that the planning processes enabled excellent execution of the scheduled actions. For example, the Northern RCU states that *"[t]he strategic planning of the Northern Zone RPU always took into account the time needed to achieve its goals, as these were based on the Annual Working Programs (AWPs), Quarterly Budgets, and weekly activities reports, which are sent to the PCU*. *In general, as all the activities were undertaken in accordance with the planning carried out, the allotted times were suitable".* At the other extreme is the Southern Region, which faced a more challenging context in terms of social organization and of the personalities of the ejido members, as mentioned by the regional executor: *"... communities are characterized by their lack of business vision regarding forestry activities, as decisions are made in general assemblies, often without suitable information. This lack of vision is aggravated by the mobility of members of representation and monitoring bodies, and by the CFE’s attitude of dependency on institutional subsidies instead of undertaking investment projects using their own resources or by way of credit.”*

***3.2.3.8 Co-financing***

1. According to the Pro Doc, the project was to receive cash and in-kind co-financing in the sum of $17,300,000 USD from various sources. It was estimated that the Rainforest Alliance would provide $3 million USD in co-financing in a combination of financial and in-kind resources, while the Mexican Government would contribute $14.4 USD million through National Forestry Commission’s support programs. In practice, RA’s contribution was much lower ($560,981 USD) than was provided in the first year of the project. (It is unknown whether the RA only had funds to contribute to the first year’s co-financing or whether it did not make the pledged contributions in subsequent years owing to differences that began to emerge between the executing agencies). On the other hand, the Mexican Government’s contribution was much greater ($34,826,392 USD). The co-financing resources were not channeled through UNDP, as it was stated in the ProDoc that these would be in accordance with support headings established by CONAFOR.
2. With regard to the evolution of the co-financing executed, we have found that it has been increasing over the years. The first years were exceptions, with less co-financing, which is reasonable while a project is being structured, as was the last year, with co-financing far superior to that of other years at US $12.3 million.

**Table 9 Grant Amounts and Co-Financing**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Pledged****Co-Financing US$** |  | **Co-Financing Executed (USD)** |
| **2010-2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **Total** |
| **GEF GRANT** | $6, 900,000 | 2,034,200 | 1,343,308 | $1,551,695 | $939,208 | $333,286,09 | $6,201,697 |
| **CONAFOR** | $14,400,000 | 5,494,604 | 4,561,872 | $5,413,768 | $7,051,470 | $12,304,678 | $34,826,392 |
| **RA** | $3,000,000 | 560,981 |  |  |  |   | $560,981 |
| **TOTAL** | $17,400,000 | 8,089,784 | 5,905,180 | $6,965,464 | $7,990,678 | 12,637,964 | $41,589,070 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

 Source: Project

**3.3 SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICATION**

**3.3.1 Replication of Activities or Methodologies**

1. The project has generated products that have great potential for replication at the local, national, and, in some cases, at the international level. At the national level, we refer to CONAFOR’s mandate, which can use the tools generated and the processes established for implementing the incorporation of BD-friendly conservation measures into CFEs other than those that were subject to project intervention. A condition in favor of this is the existence of subsidies/lines of investment for the forestry sector. One limitation, as expressed by the authorities, is that this process is much slower because of the lack of staff and resources for the enabling processes undertaken by project officials. An additional debilitating challenge is that CFEs in need of assistance have lower levels of social organization than those that have been assisted by the project, as this condition is of paramount importance due to the time it takes to generate.
2. Elements that enable replication are the technical documents that have been created and that may serve as guides for implementing project methodologies. Additionally, a considerable number of CONAFOR officers and service providers (TSFs) have received training.
3. At the national level, some management methodologies have the capacity to be replicated within Protected National Areas via CONANP, provided they are validated by that institution.
4. At the international level, CONAFOR has carried out a process to disseminate and share the experience as a success story for the Mexican forestry sector at national and international events and forums.[[157]](#footnote-157) This could elicit replication elsewhere, and the publications produced would contribute to this. It is worth mentioning Mexico’s influence on other countries, especially in Latin America, which means that it behooves us to be highly explicit about the social and environmental conditions under which the project was implemented.
5. Similarly, the project’s idea and the experience gained could be a cause for replication in other projects. For example, the preparation of a large GEF Project was reported that would occupy a large part of GEF’s funding for Mexico, the objective of which would be to achieve synergy of biodiversity conservation in productive sectors such as tourism, fishing, and agriculture.

**3.3.2 Sustainability**

1. The project has generated conditions that could be conducive to its future sustainability (known as a project’s endogenous conditions). Also, Mexico has conditions that are specific or unique in Latin America and that are conducive to the sustainability of project achievements. These are recognized as exogenous conditions. It is necessary to understand these conditions (drivers and assumptions within the Theory of Change), and that they must be considered during a project’s execution and in order to understand the limitations or opportunities for replication within Mexico and in other countries. In addition, some barriers to sustainability may be detected that merit recognition, either in case there is an opportunity to improve them or as a lesson for future projects.

***Legal and Institutional Sustainability***

1. There are legal and institutional conditions that are conducive to sustainability of the project’s achievements, as Mexico has political conditions and a legal/institutional framework (known as exogenous conditions within the TOC) that are conducive to the sustainability of the achievements made, as a result of which, during its implementation, the project managed to embed its conceptual proposal and some technical guidelines in important policies, regulations, and planning instruments with regard to land-level planning (forest management programs) and regional policy (regional biodiversity studies). For example, it managed to incorporate the implementation of best biodiversity practices at the forestry policy level (within PRONAFOR and ENAIPROS), at the level of environmental law (the Mexican Standard[[158]](#footnote-158)), and the Rules of Operation of the National Forest Program(PRONAFOR),[[159]](#footnote-159) which determine the allocation of government subsidies to the adoption of best biodiversity management and conservation practices as well as to strengthening community enterprises.
2. Additionally, the project succeeded in generating or improving political conditions (known as endogenous conditions in the TOC) by supporting the creation of the National Certification System[[160]](#footnote-160) and contributing to ENAIPROS and the Law on Sustainable Forest Development.
3. From a structural point of view, at the level of the CFEs that received assistance with management plans and certification, we can be certain that there is continuity, at least in the medium term, as long as they remain in force, and we hope that once the CFEs recognize their advantages and TFSs are familiar with the processes, they will wish to renew them and have the capacity to do so. In the Southeastern Region, they also have up-to-date environmental impact authorizations.[[161]](#footnote-161)
4. At the institutional level, there are also conditions conducive to the sustainability of the project’s achievements and their continuity, because, at the central level and within the regions (with the exception of the Southern Region), not only was the project based on CONAFOR’s institutional structure, but it was also reported that there has been institutional ownership of the project and training of staff in project-generated tools. Even though the project was managed with executing units, it was noted that there was an attempt to transfer their responsibilities to the Central Offices and State Management Offices. The project was also founded on strong inter-institutional coordination for the forestry sector through State Forestry Committees[[162]](#footnote-162) and CONAFOR’s coordination structure with technical forestry services providers (TFSs) and producers (CFEs). The authorities that were interviewed affirmed the interest of CONAFOR and State Committees in continuing to manage the project, even though they recognized that its progress will be much slower, owing to budget and staff issues. At the regional level specifically, some have established inter-institutional coordinating structures, for example, in the Southeastern Region, for mahogany export processes.
5. Institutional conditions are favorable, thanks to the training received by officials and technical forestry assistants (TFSs) who support the producers, and due to the fact that some state governments and universities have taken ownership of the issue, as well as through the guidance documents (methodologies and thematic documents) generated for continual use, which are even being included in study plans for new forestry technicians in training.
6. However, several authorities have expressed that there is a weakness or threat to institutional sustainability within CONAFOR, owing to rapid staff turnover and CONAFOR’s significant layoffs, along with the expectation of significant further reductions in 2017. The layoffs have been so significant that Management Offices have been amalgamated and delegates have been eliminated. As a result of these layoffs, CONAFOR will have difficulty continuing the enabling actions taken on by the project at the same pace, and it could even affect the quality[[163]](#footnote-163) of some routine activities within the institution, which the project supported (for example, by reducing the quality of Management Plans, the review of which was supported by the project).

***Financial Sustainability***

1. There are important financial conditions that could lead to continuity of the project’s activities, but there are also significant limitations.
2. At the government level, it is expected that the significant budget reductions will continue, reflected in the reductions of staff and salaries in recent years. This may reduce monitoring capacity to promote management in the CFEs, as well as the quality of the FMPs. On the other hand, it is expected that the subsidies for various forestry activities concerning biodiversity conservation, silvicultural practices, monitoring, certification, business strengthening, and training will continue through the National Forest Program (PRONAFOR).[[164]](#footnote-164) Indeed, according to reports, these subsidies have been maintained as a matter of policy, despite the budget cuts, although if the crisis escalates, it is possible that these too will be reduced, though probably not eliminated.
3. At the local level, the majority of project-supported CFEs and sawmills (processing companies) saw an increase in revenue (in the case of the Southeastern Region, revenue was reported at levels similar to previous years, but with less forest exploitation), generating interest in continuing with the management scheme. The evaluator did not have sufficient information to determine whether the enterprises had become self-sustainable, although at several sites this characteristic was reported, as well as an increase in their capacity to negotiate directly, without the need to resort to loans from intermediaries, which would otherwise block their product. Additionally, pathways into international market processes have been established in some cases.[[165]](#footnote-165)

1. At the level of localized groups, as in the case of groups of women ejido members in the Central Western Region, where commercial initiatives have been commenced, there is a potential for them to continue with their sustained income prospects. Even if these have not yet been finalized, they still have training and a work route that has already begun.
2. At some sites visited. It was also mentioned that there were other sources of financing, for example, from credit[[166]](#footnote-166) or programs and associated projects with similar and/or complementary activities.[[167]](#footnote-167)
3. Even if the enterprises or focus groups continue to work due to their profitable management, the key question is whether such financial conditions will in themselves portend the continuity of BD conservation actions. The answer is not easy nor the same for all areas. Voluntary conservation areas may be maintained on certified lands, particularly those that are receiving economic benefits due to the certification, as is the case in the Southeastern Region, whose forests contain precious woods, the legal marketing of which is controlled at national and international level (CITES). Like the CFEs that request financing to carry out their FMPs, they need to include the implementation of the best biodiversity-friendly practices manual. We hope that, when the time comes for them to renew their FMPs, they will do so, unless they decide to put them together through their own economic means.

***Social Sustainability***

1. Social conditions are conductive to sustainability. During the implementation, the governability of the producers (CFEs) was strengthened to a considerable degree (although to different degrees and not in all regions). In the best cases, some forestry companies (CFEs) have managed to consolidate, or are in the process of consolidating themselves, and to a greater or lesser degree report greater maturity of association, with greater empowerment in administrative and commercial terms for forest community producers, which benefits their management capacity to request accounts from commissioners and to negotiate their products directly.[[168]](#footnote-168) It is notable that the creation of a culture of association and collaboration, which prior to the project was very weak, was no minor accomplishment, and can now be seen in various cases and contexts.
2. Similarly, business associations have been created for wood processing. Some CFEs have formed associations to manage sawmills and wood processing and/or External Associations. These function as businesses.
3. There is an association-based support structure from the Forestry Technicians towards the CFEs, although the high dependency of the CFEs on their technicians could make them vulnerable.
4. One condition conducive to biodiversity conservation is that forest owners (ejido members, communities, and private owners) who are project participants have received training, as have forestry technicians.
5. A social risk with regard to the association of some CFEs (especially in the Southern Region) is their need to strengthen and/or increase their conflict resolution capacity.
6. The risk to future sustainability of CFEs’ rich biodiversity depends on social aspects. It stems from the fact that the degree of understanding and, in consequence, of commitment of the project participants (CFEs and STFs) is variable. A large portion of those interviewed understand the value of sustainable productive forest management, but not the value of biodiversity conservation per se. Furthermore, some demonstrated a greater knowledge of biodiversity resources, but with a vision based on their possible use, and considering the size of many HCVAs, this could pose a greater threat to biodiversity.
7. With regard to sawmill companies, few demonstrated any understanding of the connection that receiving this type of project support as a strategy for a better standard of living as compensation had with any community efforts to protect biodiversity. Based on the few ejido residents who were interviewed, it was observed that they had received information regarding biodiversity at their meetings, but they did not know much about the issue or the need for its conservation. In a few cases, there was an attitude of fear or negativity toward learning about the existence of species such as the cougar, or toward the possible impact of these animals on their populations of deer, which they keep in an EMU for economic reasons.

***Environmental Sustainability***

1. There is insufficient information to predict with certainty whether, due to the very dynamic of the ecosystems, there are environmental conditions that can ensure the conservation of the biodiversity (particularly flora and fauna of global importance) found within the CFEs addressed in the areas of exploitation and/or in the HCVs and restricted use areas. Similarly, it is not possible to ensure that the beneficial ecological conditions promoted through best practices are sufficient[[169]](#footnote-169) and/or are those that will be required by the species in the future.
2. With respect to communities and the complete biodiversity protected within the HCVs, it is not feasible for the evaluator to predict whether all the conservation areas contain the necessary conditions to guarantee long-term conservation, considering their environmental/biotic factors. What can be noted is that it is feasible for tracts of land designated as HCVs to be maintained insofar as the CFEs remain certified, but forming “islands” with the same ecological characteristics. Those of greater size and those that have altitude corridors would probably have greater possibility of maintaining their species in the long term. The ecological reason is that the conservation areas as such constitute forest islands with biodiversity that may tend to diminish for natural reasons, depending on the size of the area and its intrinsic ecological characteristics. Logically, while larger ones tend to be more resilient, their capacity to be conserved depends on their connection with other nearby areas and/or whether they form part of more extensive protected areas.[[170]](#footnote-170)/[[171]](#footnote-171) Therefore, it is necessary to continue evaluating the project’s results in ecosystems in the future in order to find out whether the HCVs and restricted use areas are sufficiently large for species to continue their evolutionary processes, whether there is any connectivity among “conservation islands,” and whether species have the possibility to carry out altitudinal migrations when faced with the changes generated by climate change.
3. With regard to species that are important for conservation and included on the lists of the Mexican Standard and identified within the zones of production, it is predicted that monitoring will continue to determine their presence or absence. However, it is unknown whether population monitoring will be carried out to determine their abundance or whether any ecological analysis will be carried out or any analysis of the effects of the measures that have been applied in order to confirm whether they are making a positive impact in the long term. With the previous monitoring and evaluations, it would be possible to know whether the conservation-friendly measures are appropriate and sufficient to meet the ecological requirements and whether the forest management systems have enabled species to be conserved, which is the objective of conservation, and biodiversity and variability within species to be maintained.
4. For this reason, some similar projects identify long-term impact indicators, such as guidances for the relevant authorities or stakeholders in charge of continuing actions in the future. According to the office of UNDP, even if it is agreed that the results and records of the projects fail to provide conclusive evidence regarding the contribution to conservation of the biodiversity, there are studies[[172]](#footnote-172) that have been carried out since the 1980s that conclude that forest management in the regions of Northern Oaxaca and Northern Puebla has been beneficial to biodiversity conservation.
5. With regard to forest species, an ecological aspect that could benefit the conservation of intra-species variability is to continue to implement best practices in the selective extraction practices, thereby ensuring the continued existence of young specimens, rotation cycles long enough to enable their growth and replacement, as well as an increase in the diversification of species extracted, which would help to reduce pressure on a small group of species. Future monitoring will need to be able to demonstrate that this proposal fulfills its aims, particularly when there are different methods of exploitation employed in the CFEs subject to intervention.
6. The effects of climate change may influence the conservation of species within CFEs. During the interviews with CFEs, it was noted that the effects of climate change are already evident to land owners, who observed such effects in altitudinal migrations of plant populations. It is therefore believed that HCVAs and restricted areas with altitudinal corridors will have greater potential than those restricted to just one altitude.
7. The conservation of migratory species will depend on their opportunities to move into territories according to their needs (for example, cougars require extensive territories and move thanks to corridors enabling them to do so), as well as on the attitudes of populations towards protecting species and the degree of possible disturbance they have on their habitats.

**Part IV: Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

**4.1 Lessons Learned**

**Lessons Learned**

* Sustainable development is feasible: The results in terms of local benefits generated by the project prove that promoting sustainable economic development, along with sustainable management of productive processes (in this case forestry processes), is feasible. We should clarify that economic sustainability is not synonymous with continuous economic growth, but refers to a balance, depending on the capacity of the ecosystems.
* Empowerment and social development are feasible: The project also made it clear that it is feasible to promote empowerment of communities, many of which are in poverty, and to promote generation of economic opportunities as well as emotional growth to accompany such empowerment, with an increase in the communities’ sense of human dignity upon gaining a feeling of capability toward undertaking pro-active processes for themselves,[[173]](#footnote-173) their families, and their communities. Most important is their capacity to manage themselves within parameters of collaboration and social organization, which form the basis for the functioning of healthy societies. Ultimately, this type of project can contribute to improving a country as a whole.
* It is feasible to achieve synergies between biodiversity conservation and productive systems: The results of the project prove that it is feasible to achieve synergy with the GEF mandate in areas outside Protected Natural Areas as part of the productive processes, provided the necessary conditions exist. From interviews conducted in different regions, it was discovered that the cultural context of rural Mexican populations offers favorable conditions for conservation, due to their tradition of connection with the land. In addition, the high technical knowledge of professionals and academics offers further beneficial conditions for the development of specific studies in order to achieve this synergy.
* Design weaknesses, particularly in the Logical Framework, can compliace the vision of the ultimate objective for the executors in accordance with the mandate and purpose of the GEF grants. In this case, it was the Strategic Focal Area of Biodiversity. This is particularly evident when those in charge of executing the project are not the same people who designed it. In this project, the weaknesses of the Logical Framework inhibited the clear identification of the ultimate global objective and the achievements and/or reporting of the ultimate global objectives (see Effectiveness and Efficiency).
* Emphasis on achieving the goals established for each indicator can lead to perfect compliance with the indicators. However, if there is no a simultaneous strategy that articulates the components in relation to a highest-level ultimate objective, it runs the risk of failing to establish conditions that guarantee long-term achievement of the objectives once the project has concluded. (In this project, the PRODOC did not clearly outline the ultimate objective, and different participants identified different ultimate objectives). Although it was not mandatory, the project undertook the exercise of defining a Theory of Change (TOC) diagram, but this did not succeed in visualizing the interactions between the different results (project components) in order to achieve the ultimate global objective.
* The participation of different stakeholders with different visions and institutional interests can hinder the implementation of a joint project. Furthermore, if these differences are not resolved during the design stage, there will be problems during the execution stage. Under these conditions, the role of GEF’s Implementing Agencies is fundamental for ensuring that greater weight is given to the visions that are more closely aligned with the GEF mandate[[174]](#footnote-174), and more importantly to ensure full alignment with this mandate. If the differences between joint executors are unresolvable, the withdrawal of one of the parties may be beneficial to the project, as occurred in this project. According to reports, there were disparities of both concept and focus in this project between RA and CONAFOR, which lead to the withdrawal of the RA.
* Context has a strong influence on the execution of a project (or an area of a project). As contextual differences can be institutional, social, and environmental, monitoring strategies also need to be be differentiated. In this project, differences among regions were evident. However, within a similar general framework, the project managed to establish different management strategies according to the different contexts.
* The success of a project is also influenced by the type and level of professional training of the staff involved, and therefore, by the executors’ skills in recruitment and providing adequate guidance. Various executors reported that one of the greatest challenges was finding ideal staff, despite offering competitive salaries. While they were successful in most cases, there were some deficiencies that affected the products under their responsibility.
* Achieving the institutionalization of a project’s objectives and goals is one of the most important strategies for ensuring institutional sustainability, i.e. the continuation of the implementation of the processes and long-term monitoring. In the case of this project, this strategy was successful to empower and involve government and non-government staff in the forestry structure.
* Projects can generate positive environmental and social effects or undesirable effects that need to be considered at the planning stage: Consequently, one of the challenges for the executors is to identify them in order to promote the positive ones and mitigate the negative ones. During the assessment of this project, positive social and economic processes were detected. No rapid analyses of possible environmental effects were found.

**Recommendations**

* **Inception Report and Adaptive Management**: We suggest revisiting a practice implemented in other GEF-UNDP projects in Mexico, which consists of an initial review of the Logical Framework enabled by an international expert in indicators in order to ensure that the Logical Framework meets standards such as: having the ultimate objective clearly established, having indicators for achievements (not just performance), ensuring that they are SMART, and that there is clarity and conformity in the conception of the ultimate objective. Based on this analysis, it is recommendable to carry out adaptive management of the Logical Framework at the beginning of the project.[[175]](#footnote-175) In addition, should a new version of the Logical Framework emerge, it is necessary to make it official.[[176]](#footnote-176) For quality control, it is healthier for this initial analysis to be carried out by an external expert who has not been involved in the design of the project. (Note that in this project, throughout the implementation, changes to the PIRs were documented, but no new version of the Logical Framework was made official). Another recommendation[[177]](#footnote-177) is to ensure that at the beginning of a project it has a TOC diagram. This is an important tool for understanding the route of a project and the conditions that need to be generated to achieve the ultimate objective. If the project does not have one, it should be constructed. It is also necessary to ensure that this tool contains a definition of the expected achievements of the project, intermediate results in the medium term, a ultimate objective that is consistent with the GEF mandate, and the conditions necessary to achieve them. Finally, it is essential for the Implementing Agency to ensure that the project team take absorbs the concepts, the logical framework, and GEF-UNDP project procedures to the extent that they fully accept their mandate.
* **Timely Mid-Term Reviews/Evaluations**: We recommend carrying out Medium Term Reviews (MTRs) as established in the M&E Plan, as a delay in the MTR causes a project to miss the opportunity to correct any errors that could emerge and/or reinforce any strengths. A timely MTR is recommendable, even when a project has had initial difficulties and there are not many products to show. In the case of this project, its efforts to procure MTRs in a timely manner were recorded[[178]](#footnote-178); however, it had problems in obtaining interested evaluators. Although there may be different reasons for this, it is suggested that an analysis of the ToR of the assessments be carried out and their weaknesses corrected, in order to prove that they do not create barriers or disincentives for evaluators.
* **Local and International Responsibility for Replicability;**

International Responsibility.- Considering the Mexican context, which is unique in institutional, legal, economic, and financial terms, as well as its ecosystems, and also bearing in mind that Mexico is a benchmark for other countries, particularly in Latin America, we emphasize that documents generated by the project (e.g. best practices guides, systematizations) that may enable replication of actions and strategies in other countries[[179]](#footnote-179) must clearly emphasize the national context (political, legal, and ecological), as processes that prove highly successful in Mexico may cause ecosystemic degradation in other countries. For example, Mexican tropical forest ecosystems are subject to devastating climatic events and are distant from the centers of speciation of the Amazon rainforest. Such systems subject to constant catastrophic events contain opportunistic fast-growing species, tend to be less complex (with a smaller number of species and the mentioned presence of opportunistic, fast-growing species), and have greater regenerative capacity. Therefore, their management may be simpler than that of climax tropical rainforests.

Applying equity criteria in future replications: Although equity criteria are difficult to conceive while being implemented, in consideration of lessons learned during evaluation, recommendations can be provided on two aspects: i) Equity in selecting CFEs: According to reports from some authorities and some executors, during project implementation, the CFEs selected were more mature, as it was predicted that replicating actions without the project would be slow, particularly for less mature CFEs, which would require greater effort by the authorities. While a preference for starting with CFEs that are likely to progress more rapidly[[180]](#footnote-180) is understandable in light of such challenges and the limited project time, for future CONANP-led replications and in terms of equity criteria, we suggest that the selection process for new CFEs should also include less mature ones; ii) Another equity aspect that we mention as part of future concerns is the protection of ejido members’ rights. Although such rights did not seem to have been affected during the evaluation, they are vulnerable due to the modest conditions of ejido members and to the fact that the project’s or CONANP’s intervention could make these rights attractive to others in the future on account of the revenue generated by efficiently managed forests and sawmills. During the project, ejido members did comment on the process to sell their rights and the interest shown by some potential purchasers. In such circumstances, we recommend that authorities involved in advising CFEs include the subject of the benefits of reappraisal and the long term-benefits of their ejido rights in the future. In this manner, if ejido members opt to sell them, they will not conclude disadvantageous transactions. We note that the evaluation did not include an analysis of the sale and purchase process for ejido rights. However, it was indicated that many original ejido members are very humble people (though this is not the case for some who have bought ejido rights). Thus, it is possible that original ejido members were exploited by outsiders who were aware of the economic potential of well-managed CFEs or sawmills, and sought to buy the rights at prices advantageous to themselves before the advisory process cound begin.

Responsibility in possible replication processes of project practices in Protected Areas: We make this recommendation considering that both the terminal project report[[181]](#footnote-181) and interviews with various executors during the evaluation mentioned that the project’s implemented practices and management could be replicated in the Protected Natural Areas of Mexico. The recommendation is for any project replication in Protected Areas to be performed with utmost responsibility. Prior to any replication, it is necessary to have sufficient proven information that certain types of management or application of environmental practices ensure integrity of their ecosystems and conservation of the biodiversity contained therein. This point must be emphasized, as it is easy to be tempted into promoting replication of a project within Protected Natural Areas without sufficient evidence that the type of management in question ensures the integrity of the ecosystems and the preservation of species and their variability.

* **Systematization of information obtained by the project:** Bearing in mind that the project has deployed a whole host of activities through which it has generated a series of informative products, it is important to systematize the processes undertaken for each issue, and to process the information obtained in order to connect it as much as possible with the the project’s ultimate objective and/or highest-level achievements. This recommendation does not refer to knowledge products, but to information concerning the objects for conservation identified within the CFEs following the the monitoring support. If it is systematized it will be possible to increase knowledge to ensure their conservation and identify unifying contributions at regional or national level. It is not feasible to gain a comprehensive understanding of long-term impact from the information presented in the PIRs and the final report.
* **Exchange of biodiversity information produced from Biological Monitoring between CONAFOR – CONANP and CONABIO**: In view of the fact that biological monitoring of HVCs and other voluntary conservation areas where biodiversity-friendly practices are implemented will be continued in the processes of generating FMPs and Forest Certification, we suggest ensuring that these records are shared with CONANP and CONABIO (this interaction was recorded within two State Forest Councils during the field mission, but was not reported in the minutes of the Board meetings. During the final review period of the document, it was reported that the indicators were jointly defined by CONAFOR, CONANP, and CONABIO). In any case, it will be recommendable in the future for CONABIO to be given information regarding biodiversity records in FMPs and for the different agencies to jointly undertake comprehensive monitoring of the presence and status of the species subject to conservation, both in foresting areas and voluntary forest conservation areas (HVCs or restricted use areas). Additionally, based on ongoing information, if necessary, we recommend that CONABIO work jointly with CONAFOR and CONANP to refine indicators that enhance understanding of the evolution of the status of conservation objects and the effectiveness of good biodiversity management practices, and to monitor whether conditions remain conducve to climate change adaptation.
* **Final Reports / Systematizations and Exit Strategy:** The first draft of the report on this evaluation recommended carrying out an Exit Strategy and including a systematization in the Final Report. As the project executors prepared the Final Report and the Exit Strategy in tandem with this evaluation this recommendation has been modified and directed at future projects. In the Final Report the results obtained from the project were reported appropriately. This recommendation for future interventions suggests that, along with reporting results against indicators identified in the Logical Framework, final reports should also include an analysis of the aggregate contribution to national and global objectives in terms of achievements. We also suggest that reference be made to the interaction between the different components of a project in order to underpin the ultimate objective.

With reference to the systematization of information, in addition to ongoing monitoring of the presence of species on lands contemplated for the future, we suggest that mechanisms should be sought in order to obtain systematized information from groups of CFEs or regions, in order to determine the contribution to national and global conservation objectives (this recommendation complements the recommendation to exchange data records with CONABIO).

With regard to the Exit Strategy, we suggest that, beyond identifying the institutions and their responsibilities in continuing the results of the project, a definition of the information to be collected in the future should be included. For example, in the case of this project, as the possibility exists that monitoring activities will continue at the land level, or even the regional level, the addition of such information will be crucial (for example, by applying the previous recommendation to determine the contribution to the highest-level objectives.

The Exit Strategy will preferably include anticipated mechanisms for the continuation of legal/institutional support, environmental, social, and economic sustainability, and the ongoing monitoring of key indicators.

**Development of the Theory of Change Diagram:** Although the TOC carried out by the project is interesting, it has weaknesses. We therefore suggest that other projects use the TOC diagram based on the RotI methodology (as it cannot be used in the project at hand) designed for for GEF projects. Its main components are outlined below:

**Graphic 5 Components of the TOC with ROtI methodology**

**Ultimate Objective/**

**Impact (Global Benefit)**

**Project Results (Direct Effects)**

**Assumptions (exogenous conditions)**

**Drivers (Endogenous Conditions)**

**Strategy/ies**

**IntermediateStates (After the Project)**

**Risk Reduction**

**Annexes**

**Annex 1 TdR Contracting the Evaluation**

**Annex 2 Code of Conduct**

**Annex 3 Mission Agenda**

**Annex 4 People Interviewed**

**Annex 5 Questions Matrix**

**Annex 6 Evaluation Survey for Regional Managers**

**Annex 7 Documents Consulted**

**Anexo 8 Forest Management Methods**

**Annex 9 State / Municipal Policies with BD inclusion**

**Annex 10. Follow-up Matrix of Advances by Logical Framework Indicators**

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1. This project’s highest level objective is to create a more favorable national enabling environment and environmental governance system ***for biodiversity conservation.*** In other words, according to PIF, the highest-level objective of the Project is biodiversity conservation. This is consistent with the Agreement between GEF and UNDP, which states that the project is financed within the Strategy for Sustainable Forest Management, and the description of this strategy states that biodiversity conservation is sought. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This section does not intend to point to the Project Hypothesis. However, we note that many GEF projects do not literally write a Hypothesis, though some formulate one implicitly and test it during implementation. In addition, we note that UNDP states that another idea in the ProDoc could be considered a hypothesis, which is: *Improving market competitiveness could be a solution in order to postpone threats to biodiversity: “PRO DOC Paragraph 22: One of the most important long-term solutions in the forestry sector to postpone threats to biodiversity and strengthen management in production forests is to assist ejidos, communities, and private landowners to improve their market competitiveness. Increased competitiveness in forestry will change the cost-benefit ratio that is accompanied by forest conversion, making forest maintenance an attractive financial option for producers.* However, in several projects previously evaluated by the evaluator, similar statements have been considered as a "Strategy" within the Theory of Change (TOC) diagram. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects (2001)*

*http://procurement-notices.undp.org/view\_file.cfm?doc\_id=11932* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Understood as alignment/consistency according to the UNDP-GEF Evaluation Guidance: *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects (2001)*

*http://procurement-notices.undp.org/view\_file.cfm?doc\_id=11932* UNDP- GEF. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. From the design to present, the project has coincided with three GEF replenishment periods (GEF 4 2006-2010, GEF 5 2010-2014, and GEF 6 2014-2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For RA, the ultimate objective was international certification, while for others, such as 2/5 of the regional directors, it was increased forest production, and even the MTR mentions “*sustainable forest management”* as the objective.Although several actors identify the project's orientation as being to integrate BD into management, improve competitiveness and profitability to make better use of the forest, etc., several actors do not necessarily identify conservation as the highest level objective or that the support of the Project to increase competitiveness or profitability are strategies to reach the ultimate objective, but some identify them as the project objectives in themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.thegef.org/documents/incremental-costs “*GEF funds the "incremental" or additional costs associated with transforming a project with national benefits into one with global environmental benefits”.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. UNDP states that, *under the heading of incremental expenditures, GEF funds constitute a co-financing of CONAFOR.* It also states that*:* *A project is not an island that moves in a parallel manner, but is institutionalized, and therefore what is sought is to improve the national environment and capacities in order to continue this process. It is well understood that, from UNDP's point of view, this initiative and project are identified as a CONAFOR project, because in the end it is the institution that will remain active after the project*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The project and UNDP executors argue that “*the conservation paradigm as a single strategy has shown that it is not entirely feasible*.” Source: GEF: [www.thegef.org/topics/productive-landscape-and-seascapes](http://www.thegef.org/topics/productive-landscape-and-seascapes). *While it is widely agreed* ***that protected areas are the conservation community’s most successful management response to conservation*** *…” “… they can never be the entire solution to biodiversity crisis”*. That is, while it is the main strategy, complementary options are also sought. One of these options is to finance sustainable development initiatives with **the objective of conserving biodiversity** as stated in [www.thegef..org/topics/productive-landscapes-and-seascapes](http://www.thegef.org/topics/productive-landscapes-and-seascapes): “*The use of natural resources in these landscapes and seascapes must be done sustainably in order to maintain biodiversity and the ecosystem goods and services it provides*” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. UNDP 2012: Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects. Page 19. Adaptive management refers to: (i) Modifications in the LF of project objectives/indicators, i.e., having a new LF as the macro guiding instrument of the project, and (ii) the acceptance of the new LF by UNDP-GEF, meaning that this new LF is formalized. There are other documents that expand the interpretation of adaptive management such as that elaborated by the consultant Santiago Carrizosa, but these do not constitute the official guide, but rather a teaching presentation <https://prezi.com/akg0tir3ou3s/adapt-mgmt-me-spa-/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This includes national PTA certifications and certifications under Mexican Standard NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2015 for Sustainable Forest Management Certification (national certification scheme). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Authorities interviewed expressed fears that even the quality of the FMPs could be reduced by staff layoffs. Authorities recognize the role of stakeholders outside CONAFOR such as TFSs, but also recognize the institutional challenges in guiding them, training them, and confirming the technical quality of their products in case of major budget cuts. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Mainly important in the Southeastern Region, whose products could not otherwise be marketed. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Understood as ecological conditions that satisfy the needs of the species for survival and that allow them to reproduce to maintain healthy populations with the number of individuals needed to maintain themselves over time and that allow them to adapt to climate change and its evolutionary processes. This can be determined through ecological studies of the species. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Patricia Hernández de la Rosa COLPOS. The evaluator did not receive these studies, which in any case were beyond the scope of this evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The capacity to be independent adults is the antithesis of paternalism, which generates dependency and reduces human dignity. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. According to the UNDP office, the objective was not to implement an environmental, but rather a development project. In this regard, there is a discrepancy wirh the evaluator's interpretation, which takes the GEF objective found at the following link as a reference: <https://www.thegef.org/topics/biodiversity> “*implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*” and the concept of the CBD as the global policy to maintain biodiversity for future generations. In this regard, while GEF's objective is to finance environmental projects that generate global benefits (such as biodiversity conservation), it can apply alignment and promotion of local benefits– sustainable productive projects (which are a local responsibility) – as a strategy for the participants to engage in conservation processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In the present project, a start-up report was prepared, which included, among other points, the project execution strategy and the refining of functions between the parties, but the LF problems were not corrected (see LF analysis) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. UNDP 2012: GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING TERMINAL EVALUATIONS OF UNDP-SUPPORTED, GEF-FINANCED PROJECTS [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. UNDP points out that this can be taken as a suggestion to be considered occasionally, but cannot be taken as a requirement, because if it were necessary, something would be requested by GEF at the outset in all submitted PIFs. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The convening document to carry out the MTR of the Project was published since 2014 on three occasions, and there was no offer of candidates. In addition, direct invitations were sent twice. Due to the above, the recruitment was delayed by a year and a half. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. There is a tendency in some international agencies and government agencies of different governments to replicate actions without endorsing them first or without a real understanding of the ecological contexts where they have been successfully implemented. Sometimes the people who design these projects are not ecologists. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The evaluator understood that this selection was made considering the limited time that the projects have, and considering that some CFEs in both the North and the South had previous certification experiences, which would allow movement towards the new paradigms proposed by the project. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Final Report of Project: “*The success of the knowledge products generated by the project has been so great that work is being done with CONANP staff to adapt them the Protected Natural Areas, and even the General Coordination of Conservation and Restoration is taking them as a basis for replicating them for support pertaining to forest restoration and/or generate new forests."* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. http://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/ieo/ieo-documents/ops4-m02-roti.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A compilation of the objectives has been created, since the ToR section contains repetitions of the objectives in different sections and paragraphs, so they are intermixed with the evaluation criteria, with the subject evaluation (co-financing), and with the evaluation approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Guía de evaluación PNUD – GEF: *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects (Final Draft, 2011)*

[*http://procurement-notices.undp.org/view\_file.cfm?doc\_id=11932*](http://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_file.cfm?doc_id=11932)

UNDP 2012: Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results, UNDP 2009 http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/handbook/english/documents/pme-handbook.pdf* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. [www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/46436210.ppt](http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/46436210.ppt)

[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—-ed\_mas/](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/)eval/documents/publications/wcmc\_165984.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Pro Doc. page 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. PIF: “*This project’s highest level objective is to create a more favorable national enabling environment and environmental governance system* ***for biodiversity conservation”.*** In other words, according to PIF, the highest-level objective of the Project is biodiversity conservation. This is consistent with the Agreement between GEF and UNDP, which states that the project is financed within the Strategy for Sustainable Forest Management, and the description of this strategy states that biodiversity conservation is sought. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This section will not aim to indicate the Project Hypothesis. However, we note that many GEF projects do not literally write a Hypothesis, though some establish one implicitly and test it during implementation. In addition, we note that UNDP states that another idea included in the ProDoc that could be considered a hypothesis is: *Improving market competitiveness could be a solution in order to postpone threats to biodiversity: “PRO DOC Paragraph 22: One of the most important long-term solutions in the forestry sector to postpone threats to biodiversity and strengthen management in production forests is to assist ejidos, communities, and private landowners to improve their market competitiveness. Increased competitiveness in forestry will change the cost-benefit ratio that is accompanied by forest conversion, making forest maintenance an attractive financial option for producers.* However, in several projects previously evaluated by the evaluator, similar statements have been considered as a "Strategy" within the Theory of Change (TOC) framework. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Pro Doc. pp. 143 – 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. As the MTR reveals, since RA had conceived the initial project idea during its implementation, this organization felt that its role was somehow relegated to becoming a project partner. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The typology covers the 12 States where PROCYMAF II implemented its activities in 2009: Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, State of Mexico, Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, and Veracruz. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. CONAFOR and Forest Technical Services, which are technical service providers to operationalize CONAFOR programs. Most (137) are private contractors engaged by forest producers and there are also few communities that have their own TFSs. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. CONABIO and INE, academic sector, 137 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. There are national certification standards and there is legislation for the protection of private areas. In addition, during the design, CONAFOR was creating a new department dedicated to establishing a National Forest Certification System. This new department will support CONAFOR in operating a staggering mechanism to achieve forest certification with international standards, initially implementing Preventive Technical Audits (PTAs), the Mexican Standard for Good Forest Management (NMX 143), and finally international standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Of 8,928 communities with forests, CONAFOR has identified 3,056 ejidos and communities where there is potential for afforestation to be the main economic activity, but only about 20% of these communities are classified by PROCYMAF as type III or a higher level. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. In Mexico, as of January 1, 2009, only 22 companies had achieved COC certification. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. CONAFOR increased its budget from $200 million USD in 2006 to more than $500 million USD in 2008. ProÁrbol had an annual budget of more than $300 million USD, and PROCYMAF in particular II had $21 million USD invested in community forest development during the 2004-2008 period. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. PROCYMAF does not have a budget line to develop business plans or market plans. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. In addition to FIRA, there is another SAGARPA body called FIRCO, which manages public funds and makes loans to CFEs in Mexico. FIRCO has made interest-free loans to four highly developed CFEs. However, the process of selecting communities to access such funds is highly politicized (political support is required for projects to be selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Since 2002, the TREES reforestation program of the Rainforest Alliance has worked intensively in the states of Durango, Oaxaca, and Chihuahua. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. There is an example of a company carrying certified wood that accessed a loan from an international bank and that bank required FSC certification for its raw materials as a precondition for the loan–an important case for creating greater demand for certified wood in the markets. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. These agreements were dissolved, the first one due to a lack of clarity in the agreement and the second one due to the American company's economic problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. One of the problems is that the banks demand pledges for their loans; as the CFEs are community-owned, is required that the requests must be made by the Assemblies, which is not easy to achieve with the mistust that the people have, and this process is complicated by regular changes in the board of directors. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Many communities sell their annual production in advance to secondary processors and distributors who then dictate the terms of purchase and sale. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Although the project's relevance to UNDP's mandate and its mainstreaming approach in accordance with UNDP's objectives are not mandatory for this project (whose consistency with GEF's mandates is indeed mandatory), they provide an opportunity to find compatibilities with UNDP and support its objectives due the project's nature. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Preventive Technical Audits and Mexican Standard NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2015 for the Certification of Sustainable Management of Forests [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Annual Report 2015 - Success Stories Template [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Forestry Expo in Mexico, Forest Congress in Latin America, and furniture fairs. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Ultimate Objective* (*Goal* in the LF) is expected to express specifically what is to be achieved in the long term, i.e., impact, while *Hypothesis* is understood as a statement that requires testing whether the objective of the project and its results will contribute to the impact/ultimate objective of its intervention. Finally, the Strategy, within the ROtI Methodology (TOC) would be the mechanism applied to reach the pursued objective. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. PIF page 6: This project’s highest level objective is to create a more favorable national enabling environment and environmental governance system ***for biodiversity conservation.*** In other words, according to PIF, the highest-level objective of the Project is biodiversity conservation. This is consistent with the Agreement between GEF and UNDP, which states that the project is financed within the Strategy for Sustainable Forest Management, and the description of this strategy states that biodiversity conservation is sought. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. As in the ProDoc, the Goal does not specify what is meant by ***“market-based sustainable forest management,”*** but as the text of the ProDoc makes reference to certifications, the hypothesiscould be considered to be ***certification would enable the conservation of biodiversity and environmental goods and services***. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. PIF, page 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ProDoc, page 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ProDoc, page 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ProDoc, page 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. UNDP states that another idea included in ProDoc that could be considered a hypothesis is: *Improving market competitiveness could be a solution in order to postpone threats to biodiversity: “PRO DOC Paragraph 22: One of the most important long-term solutions in the forestry sector to postpone threats to biodiversity and strengthen management in production forests is to assist ejidos, communities, and private landowners to improve their market competitiveness. Increased competitiveness in forestry will change the cost-benefit ratio that is accompanied by forest conversion, making forest maintenance an attractive financial option for producers.* However, in several projects previously evaluated by the evaluator, similar statements have been considered as a "Strategy" within the Theory of Change (TOC) framework.

UNDP adds its interpretation that an additional hypothesis would be that "*one of the most important long-term solutions in the forestry sector to postpone threats to biodiversity and strengthen management in production forests is to assist ejidos, communities, and private landowners to improve their market competitiveness. Increased competitiveness in forestry will change the cost-benefit ratio that is accompanied by forest conversion, making forest maintenance an attractive financial option for producers."*  Faced with this reflection, the evaluator deems in fact that **"an increase in revenue from forest management can prevent the reconversion of forests," and this would have a very important positive environmental effect**; however, it is noted that, within the ROtI methodology (TOC), "the increase in the revenue and quality of life of the participants" is usually identified as a "strategy" (which, in conjunctoin with other elements, contributes to the ultimate objective of conservation) rather than a hypothesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time Bound [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Deforestation is usually understood as replacement of vegetation cover with another land use, such as agriculture, mining, etc. In Mexico's case, it is sometimes understood as deforestation to reduce the density of vegetation cover within patches of forests or stands, but in this case it would be more appropriate to speak of reduction of vegetation cover or reduction of forest density. In any case, this would be a partial indicator that in itself would not confirm a BD conservation result. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Questions related to this subject could have been included within the project’s perception study to understand whether this is an incentive for preventing forest reconversion. In addition, information on increases in CFE revenue includes elements such as the sale of a sawmill, which are specific circumstances. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. With the information collected by each CFE, it was possible to cross-reference databases of the institutions responsible for conservation and keep information on their ecological requirements. To do this, all that was required was to improve the information records that the project had to collect anyway in its FMP generation processes and certification processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. ProDoc, Paragraphs 176 and 177, Items b and c [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. During the evaluation, it was reported that the Board of Directors and the NSC are synonymous, but the ProDoc does not specify this. The ProDoc includes the PCU within the Board and not within the NSC diagram. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. According to the ProDoc, it is “*the entity responsible for the project, and which is accountable for its management, including monitoring and evaluation of activities [...] it may enter into agreements with other organizations or entities.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. According to the ProDoc, it is “*the authority assigned by the Implementation Partner (CONAFOR) to support the planning, execution, and/or monitoring of certain activities/components within the framework of the project, taking advantage of its technical capacities.”* In other words, it is a very powerful technical adviser, as it is part of the Project Board and the Tripartite Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Interviews with CONAFOR authorities [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Taken from the Manual of Best Practices in forest management for biodiversity conservation in temperate ecosystems of the northern region of Mexico. Page 10. Presentation prepared by the Director General of CONAFOR. 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. From the design to present, the project has coincided with three GEF replenishment periods (GEF 4 2006-2010, GEF 5 2010-2014, and GEF 6 2014-2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. In some parts of the ProDoc, GEF is ascribed a minimized role as a simple *"co-financier"* of the government. However, the ProDoc itself follows the scheme and standards set by GEF–i.e. as a GEF project–and argues in favor of its alignment with GEF's mandate. Similarly, UNDP is presented as GEF's "*Implementing Agency*." [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Durango, Durango (November 2015), Chignahuapan, Puebla (June 2016), San Juan Evangelista Analco, Oaxaca (July 2016), Pihuamo, Jalisco (August 2016), Nuevo Parangaricutiro, Michoacán (November 2016). State Policy for Sustainable Purchases of the State of Michoacán (November 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. PNUD – GEF: *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects (2012)*  [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. The Forest Management Plans are essential to obtain authorizations to extract/harvest the wood. For the FMPs, the project gave support via technical advisory and BD monitoring throughout the ejido. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. PIR 2016: *Since 2014, the project has supported the updating of certification standards (via updating Mexican Standard NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2015, the Manual Establishing the Guidelines for Preventive Technical Audits, and the FSC International Certification Standard), the development of a procedure (national standard) for Chain of Custody Certification and to guarantee the legal origin of the wood, and has made recent efforts for the international recognition of the* Mexican Standard by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PCFE), and has participated in the process to establish the Mexican Council for Forest Certification. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. It was reported that the RCU manager of the Northern region has extensive experience in developing investment projects and many contacts among TFSs, just as the manager of the UCR has broad managerial experience with CONAFOR. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. During the field mission, examples of processing to increase value-added products were observed, especially in the Northern Region and C.E. Region, where involvement of women was also significant. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. The N and C.E. regions developed accounting software programs for large and small ejidos. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Chain of Custody certification is the mechanism to verify that wood used by the processing industry comes from forests managed in accordance with sustainability criteria. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. In the C.E. region, promoting associations among women with manual skills has been a spectacular idea in order for them to learn carpentry and bring them closer to the industry so that they can take direct orders with specific designs so that it does not matter whether or not the women have design capacities. In the N and SE regions, international companies have been approached for the direct provision of certified products. In some regions the preparation of purchase contracts has been promoted by municipalities. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Several regions (N, CE, C, SE) had sawmills that received significant investment funds from CONAFOR. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Access to credit is not an easy process. Lenders require collateral that is not always accessible. Pledging the ejido requires the approval of the Community Assembly, which is not easy to obtain and, as members change frequently, there is no certainty of continuity. CONAFOR has generated a fund to provide support with such collateral. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. They are called participants rather than beneficiaries, because participants in some projects do not perceive that they have received benefits and/or they sometimes report having been affected by unwanted results. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Some coverage is offered to the elderly [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. This permit allows for CITES-protected precious woods exploration, as forest-sustainable management processes have been use for their extraction. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Mexican Standard NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2015 for Sustainable Forest Management Certification (national certification program) [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Companies can prepare FMPs without CONAFOR financial support, but most request for funds given the cost that this entails. Without any FMPs there cannot be any legal forest resource utilization. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Sources Project Monitoring System / National Forest Certification Strategy BD-based Evaluation System; CONAFOR (SIGA) budget reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. According to updated regulations, certified forest lands require to draw their (HCV) High Conservation Value areas – High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs), run their biological inventories, identify high-priority protected species and develop a protection and conservation strategy, it was also reported that, in Mexico, most certified lands possess HCVFs and have begun to outline their conservation and protection programs” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Creating a Management Plan must involve identifying and delimiting several surfaces should there be an overlap with ejido lands. Among them are the Restricted Use and Conservation Areas voluntarily given by ejido members, and, on the other hand, Forest Protection Areas declared so by CONANP. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. According to the order amending and adding several provisions within the General Law on Ecological Balance of May 16, 2008, areas voluntarily set aside for conservation shall be considered protected natural areas under the Federal Executive Power, as set out in Article 46 Section XI. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. HCV 1: Endemic, rare, or threatened species; HCV 2: Landscape-level forests; HCV 3: Rare or threatened ecosystems; HCV 4: Water basin protection; HCV 5: Basic needs in local communities; HCV 6: Traditional cultural identities. HCVAs are defined by the FSC, in its fourth version, Principles and Criteria. 2003 Guieline by Proforest: *The ProForest High Conservation Value Forest Toolkit*. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. There are 5 categories of restricted use and conservation areas: a) Protected Natural Areas; b) Flora and Fauna Habitats to be Protected; c) Riviera Vegetation Protection Strip; d) Surfaces whose steep is far greater than 100% or 145 degrees; e) Surfaces over 3000 above sea level; f) Mangroves and cloud forests. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. In Ejido Vencedores (NR), an altitudinal gradient was found; however, SR had PMF disregarding the connection between HCVFs and the voluntarily-relinquished protection area. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The project supported CFEs to identify important species and habitats inside their lands, so that they could define them as HCVFs as required by FSC certification, or to tailor their BD conservation practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Project documents show reference to deforestation, thus being used as basal area indicators. Deforestation is commonly defined as the employment of forest areas for agriculture, grasslands, and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. The other 57 sites are on lands owned by *Universidad Juárez* in the state of Durango [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. EE received highly technical guidance documents on conceptual aspects and methodologies to identify the measures to be implemented, as well as on measures implemented in individual CFEs. No information was found that pertained to evaluating the implementation of such measures, let alone information that has been processed and compiled. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Camera traps were set in several ejidos, detecting the presence of species unknown to ejido members, for example, jaguars. As there is no information on the populations or their distribution range, it is too early to determine the status of such populations and interactions. HCVs are usually too small to sustain such populations alone. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. 40.3% of producers, 58.1% of TFSPs, and 59.3% of officials of the group under project intervention, versus 28.8% of producers, 50% of TFSPs, and 65.2% of those outside the project. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. As mentioned in the section on LF Analysis, the LF refers to the Highest-Level Objective as a *Goal*; however, it is written as a *Hypothesis*, and different elements (several objectives and mechanisms to achieve them) are included under the term *Overall Objective*, which may distract from the main focus. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. In accordance with the GEF **mandate**, the ultimate objective of project funded within the Strategic Focus Area of Biodiversity is Biodiversity Conservation through different strategies. In this case, the Overall Strategy was Conservation Synergy within a Productive System (more specifically, Sustainable Forest Management). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. UNDP does not consider this a suitable analysis, as this is a sustainable use project, rather than a conservation project. Sustainable use envisages continued existence over time, but does not involve leaving natural resources untouched. These are not protected natural areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. 84.2 % of non-iterated vs 79.2% iterations [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. 75% non-iterations vs 68.6% iterations [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Third question, Perception Study. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. In the face of the evaluator’s above analysis, executors express that such focuses are not opposed, but rather encompass different visions of conservation, which contained statements compatible with an active conservation approach on the one hand, and statements compatible with a passive conservation approach on the other. They also express that the perception study methodology indicates different ways to obtain information, such as through reactions; however, these are merely guidelines rather than strict positions or statements. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Study questions: 1) What is the stakeholders’ prevailing opinion regarding the necessity, relevance, and feasibility of including BD conservation practices for forest management; 2) What is the stakeholders’ prevailing perception of the acceptance and benefits of incorporating BD conservation practices into forest management; and 3) What are the stakeholders’ prevailing expectations on the possibilities and trends of BD conservation practices in forest management. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Although a project's lifespan may not suffice for evaluations of its activities, it does undertake theoretical evaluation exercises prior to its actions and/or defines indicators to be validated in the future. Some projects establish indicators so that institutions in charge of future implementation can measure long-term effects/impacts. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Decisions are made based on technical forestry parameters, and depending on ejido Assemblies, as set out in the General Law on Forest Development. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. The project reportedly did not make technical assistance in forest management an objective, but it was nevertheless observed in practice, as the executors' opinion has been influential. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Fell all the trees that have reached maturity or the end of the cutting cycle in a single cut. Clear the ground for a new mass. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. A number of criteria was found during the evaluation. According to eecutors, forest regeneration techniques are approved in Mexico. Thus, plant nursery does not limit genetic diversity. Parent trees are also not a given with regard to continuity. Additionally, reluctance was found among forest owners regarding planting nurseries as the consider those to be uniform and posing a greater economic risk. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Regular and irregular management. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. There are studies on the effects of practices in forest plantations in the U.K. worth venturing in. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Mexico's legal context covers such evaluation conditions under LGEEPA and LDGFS. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. There is no information on the nature of this cooperation [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. There is no reported conflict of interest because the project and other institutions propose candidates alike. Nevertheless, the final selection is made using technical criteria reviewed by every participating enterprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Source: PIR 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. PIR 2016. R2.2 Indicator on Training [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. PIR 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. For example, the project states: *"...the company with the highest recognition during the 2006-2012 administration (Nuevo San Juan, Michoacán) was not served by the project because it was deemed to have already received too much support and attention from various institutions. Or the Enterprise of San Juan Evangelista Analco, which did not undertake forestry activities until 2014 and was served by the project in 2016 won the Forestry Merit Prize in the category of forest management."* [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. In the Southern Region, the Project was isolated from the authorities [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Explanation on UNDP Procurement about who can be an Implementating Partner and who can only be a Partner: https://info.undp.org/global/popp/ppm/Pages/Defining-a-Project.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See analysis of institutional arrangements set out in the Design. Graph 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Evidence of this assertion is found in the reports recorded in minutes of the Board of Directors and in the MTE [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Examples of officials who went from CONAFOR to the project are the second General Coordinator of the project and the Coordinator of the SE Region. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. No regional partnerships with SEMARNAT were detected in the S Region, and the partnership in the SE Region is recent. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. CONAFOR stated that there was communication at the federal level, for example, to fight fires, but no evidence of such interaction with the project was found. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Interactions with CONAFOR included: investment in preparing management programs with biodiversity conservation criteria, implementation of best management practices to conserve biodiversity, certification of forest management and chain of custody, preparation of business plans, financing for forestry industry modernization to improve competitiveness indicators, holding training workshops on project objectives, transfer of technology to implement control software in CFEs, and, in the case of RCO, the completion of regional studies of flora and fauna associated with production forests, and design of a manual for decorative items and furniture. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. With the Rainforest Alliance, coordinated actions are carried out to bring customers closeer to RA-certified CFEs, and for training and support on international marketing processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The time allotted to the evaluation did not permit a deep understanding of the reasons why there was no opening for the SE Unit Coordinator, but some stakeholders suggested that more political support was required within the RCUs, others suggsted that the approach of the project or the stakeholders' own personalities made this relationship difficult to the point that the Unit was not invited to the meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. State Forest Councils have delegates from CONAFOR, SEMARNAT, PRONAFOR [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. In order to promote and implement biodiversity conservation actions, create monitoring networks in production forests, and promote competitiveness in forest enterprises by building entrepreneurial capacities [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Preparation of technical documents to implement monitoring systems for flora associated with production forests, training workshops on best sawmill practices, sharpening of belt saws, and determination of the sawmill coefficient. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. For formulation of the Best Management Practices Manual for biodiversity conservation on small lands in the Central Region of Mexico. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Incorporation of the electronic calliper into accounting, financial, and production control software in the operations of certified forest enterprises. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. For the export of wood, and biodiversity criteria in management and certification programs. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. A finalized export process: A collaborative link was established in order to facilitate the access of CFEs that have the FSC seal and provide technical support in marketing processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. To forge links with CFEs that have available volumes of FSC-certified wood. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. The corporate images and web pages of 10 CFEs were developed in order to promote forestry-based products and services. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. A regional implementation management system was developed. SOSETEC was advised on the preparation of management programs and non-timber certification is promoted, in collaboration with the Chicle Consortium "Chicza." [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Local provider of support and technical assistance of the Forest and Watershed Conservation Program of the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservation. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. PIRs 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, & 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. The project mentioned that, because of exchange rates, the amount in pesos of what was spent for the final evaluation was greater than planned. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Meetings of the Board of Directors, according to minutes and reports from PIRs: 2011 (Jul-21, Sep-07, Nov-04); 2012 (Jan-31, Apr-26), 2014 (09/11, 10/15, 11/21, 11/24); 2015 (02/04, 06/03, 09/09, 10/11); 2016 (02/15, 05/03, 06-31). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. UNDP guidance for GEF financed projects (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. One of the evaluation questions asked is: Were changes to the project articulated in writing and then considered and approved by the Project Steering Committee? [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Change the Overall Objective to Result, and write a new statement as Impact/Final Result using the Result 4 indicators as impact indicators. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. The evaluation team had a difficult time understanding some of the progress until the field mission, where the team came to comprehend the meanings of several indicators. It would be unusual for readers outside the project to have this opportunity. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. *"The project is convinced that the main legacies it will pass on to CONAFOR and the forestry sector overall will include the knowledge products and technical tools it has generated, which we hope will continue to encourage the incorporation of biodiversity criteria into forest management in Mexico, even after the project concludes."* [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Deforestation is usually associated with areas that are converted for other uses, and success is usually associated prevention of such deforestation (for example, preventing the replacement of forest with avocado orchards because forest management is advisable). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. June 2015. A year and a half before the Project’s conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. UNDP-CONAFOR-PCU remarks on the MTR. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. i) Compilation and distribution of publications; ii) Internalization of the elements/products/expertise within the institutions (CONAFOR, SEMARNAT, PROFEPA, local and state governments); iii) Ownership of field activities taken by CONAFOR (currently the project is highly recognized as an external project rather than as part of CONAFOR, so we must find ways to transfer the central role to CONAFOR). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. National Week for the Promotion of Forestry Culture, Expert Workshop on the Integration of Biodiversity, which took place in November 2015. Expo Forestal, November 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Mexican Standard NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2015 for Certification and Sustainable Forest Management (National Certification Scheme). [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Published in the Official Gazette on December 31, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. This includes national certifications ATP and Mexican Standard NMx [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. The authorizations for impact assessments and CITES are additional specific requirements for the extraction and exportation of mahogany and other precious hardwoods from the jungles of the South Eastern Region. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Inter-institutional coordination for the follow-up to the ENAIPROS goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Authorities interviewed expressed that they feared that even the quality of the FMPs could deteriorate due to layoffs. The authorities recognize the role of external stakeholders such as TFSs, but also recognize the institutional challenges of guiding, training, and approving the technical quality of their products in the event of significant budget cuts. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Published in the Official Gazette on December 31, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Important mainly in the South-Eastern Region, where the products could not be commercialized by any other means. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. For example, the German bank KFW – FIRA (PROINFOR). [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. For example,: Forestry Investment Program (FIP), Investment Programs for the Reduction of Emissions Initiative (IRE), in Quintana Roo and Campeche. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Indeed, the project chose CFEs with greater degrees of association. It has been reported that many CFEs previously had a low level of organization with arbitrary decisions and a lack of transparency and always reported losses. They had few skills for negotiating with buyers and usually used intermediaries, many of which offered them advances, which blocked their possibility of selling their product in a better market when such was ready. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. These are understood to be the ecological conditions that satisfy species’ needs for their survival and that allow them to reproduce to maintain healthy populations with a sufficient number of individuals to maintain themselves over time, and that enable their adaptation to climatic change and its evolutionary processes. This can be discovered by carrying out ecological studies of the species. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. According to the concept of ecosystem islands, the larger these island patches are, the more likely evolutionary processes are to continue within them. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. The project would expect the environmental sustainability of HCVA conservation through the implementation of best practices in the areas being exploited, fulfilling the objective of the project and safeguarding the high conservation values on productive lands in addition to the HCVAs. However, the evaluator considers that the conservation of the species within HCVAs will not necessarily be influenced by the practices in the zones of exploitation because they are different zones and the ability to predict this interaction would require information about the interaction between the two zones. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Patricia Hernández de la Rosa COLPOS [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. The ability to be independent adults is the antithesis of paternalism which generates dependency and reduces human dignity. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. According to the UNDP office, the objective was not the implementation of an environmental project, but a development project. Therefore, there was a discrepancy with the evaluator’s interpretation, as took the objective of GEF as a reference, found at: <https://www.thegef.org/topics/biodiversity> “*To Implement the Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD*” and the concept of CBD as the global policy for maintaining biodiversity for future generations. Therefore, even if the GEF objective is to finance environmental projects that generate global benefits (such as conservation of biodiversity), the alignment and promotion of local benefits – sustainable productive projects (which are a local responsibility) can be applied as a strategy, in order that participants become involved in conservation processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. In this project, a start-up report was carried out in which the strategy for executing the project, among others, was laid out, with fine tuning of functions between the parties, but it did not manage to resolve problems with the LF (see LF analysis). [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. *UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects (2012)* [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. UNDP points out that this could be taken as a suggestion to be considered eventually, but it can not be taken as a requisite since if it were necessary, the GEF would request it for all PIFs submitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. The announcement of the Project MTR was published in 2014 on three occasions and did not receive any candidates. Furthermore, direct invitations were sent on two occasions. For this reason, the hiring was delayed by a year and a half. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. There is a tendency in some international agencies and government agencies under different administrations to replicate actions without evaluating them first or without a real understanding of the ecological contexts in which they have been applied successfully. On occasions the people who design these projects are not ecologists. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. The evaluator made this choice considering the limited time that the projects run, and the fact that some CFEs both in the north and the south, have had previous certification experiences that would allow them to move towards the new paradigms proposed by the project. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Final project report: *“The success that the knowledge products generated by the project have had hasbeen such that they are working with staff from CONANP in adapting them for Protected Natural Areas, and even the General Coordination of Conservation and Restoration is using them as a basis to replicate them for the purpose of forest restoration and /or the creation of new ones”.* [↑](#footnote-ref-181)