

UNDP Management Response**Sustainable Natural Resource and Forest Management in Key Mountainous Areas Important for Globally Significant Biodiversity (UNDP PIMS #5438)****Date:** December 2019**Prepared by:** Abbos Akhadov *Abbos Akhadov* Project Manager Unit/Bureau: UNDP UzbekistanGaukhar Kudaybergenova *Gaukhar Kudaybergenova* Programme Associate**Cleared by:** Bakhadur Paluaniyazov *Bakhadur Paluaniyazov* Position: Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action Unit/Bureau: UNDP Uzbekistan**Cleared by:** Doina Munteanu *Doina Munteanu* Position: DRR Unit/Bureau: UNDP Uzbekistan**Input into and update in ERC:** Kamila Alimdjanova *Kamila Alimdjanova* Position: RMU Associate Unit/Bureau: UNDP Uzbekistan

Overall comments: Sustainable Natural Resource and Forest Management in Key Mountain Areas Project focuses on landscape conservation and management to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the biodiverse high-altitude mountain ecosystems of Uzbekistan. The project aims to develop landscape-level planning and management decision-making, strengthen key biodiversity areas, develop sustainable economic incentives for communities, and promote cooperation and collaboration. The Mid-Term Review was conducted using methodologies and techniques suitable for the evaluation purpose, objective and evaluation questions as described in the TOR, based on the developed specific design and methods in consultation with UNDP and other stakeholders.. The evaluation covers the period from project development and approval, through October 31, 2019.

Evaluation Recommendation 1:	It is recommended to set up multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral technical working groups to oversee the implementation of the project and review the strategies being piloted. These working groups could include thematic working groups such as pasture management, forestry management and biodiversity conservation monitoring but also taking into account a landscape/spatial approach such as a working group on the Gissar area including national and regional government agencies but also representatives from local communities and NGOs.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project team will work with key stakeholders to determine the specific coordination mechanisms that will be most feasible and appropriate to fulfill the MTR recommendation, including considering implementing thematic or geographic working groups.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1 Set up multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral technical working groups to oversee the implementation of the project and review the strategies being piloted	June 2020	Project manager supported by Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		

Evaluation Recommendation 2:	It is recommended to explore the possibility to open 2 local offices in project areas in partnership with local relevant institutions. Having local offices with 1 or 2 staff would provide the project with greater regional and local “connections” and also provide the project with an “ear to the ground” to facilitate the implementation of project activities. It would also provide a place to meet, network and exchange on project achievements as well as providing a more effective and efficient way to implement local activities.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project team will discuss with the UNDP CO and key project national partners the feasibility of contracting a part-time local coordinator in the Gissar landscape, and possibly a part-time local coordinator in the Ugam-Chatkal landscape. This may or may not include a specific physical office location, as the project team and partners have the potential to use the Protected Area headquarters buildings in both areas when needed for physical meeting locations, etc. A major potential constraint on contracting local coordination staff could be the need to provide transportation, as the landscapes cover large areas. Therefore, the feasibility of transportation options for local coordination staff would be a major point of assessment for the feasibility assessment.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
2.1 Analyze financial, institutional, and practical feasibility of contracting 1-2 part-time or full-time local coordinators to support the implementation of project activities at the local level in both the Gissar and Ugam-Chatkal project landscapes.	June 2020	Project manager, National Project Coordinator, Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action	Status	Comments
Evaluation Recommendation 3:	It is recommended to increase the participation of the project in related policy and legislation development. Reforming the enabling environment (policy, legislation and institutions) is a rapidly evolving process in Uzbekistan. It is also an important aspect for the project to monitor carefully; it will play an important part in ensuring the long-term sustainability of project achievements. Ultimately, the value of the project is for the government to internalize project findings and eventually, adapt its enabling environment. It is important that the project implementation team increase its participation in the review and update of the enabling environment, possibly to use working groups, to communicate project results and participate in the drafting of new policy and legislative instruments. This participation could take the form of workshops on particular topics to review the existing enabling environment, results from demonstrations and proposal(s) to improve the policy and/or legislation around these topics. It could also be studies requested by relevant government entities to review the existing situations of particular areas; a proposal to improve the policy/legislation in a particular area, etc.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project will work to increase the integration and attention with policy and legislation related aspects of the project. The project was heavily involved in the drafting and adoption of the Law on Pastures in the first half of the project implementation			

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
3.1 Assess feasibility of contracting a policy specialist on a short-term contract to 1. Analyze current legislative and policy enabling environment relevant for the project and identify future SWOT for the project objectives; 2. Develop a small number of policy / legislation recommendations and next steps relevant for the project objective	June 2020	Project team		
3.2 Conduct at least one workshop for national level stakeholders on particular topics to review the existing enabling environment, results from demonstrations and proposal(s) to improve the policy and/or legislation around these topics	December 2020	Project team		
Evaluation Recommendation 4:	It is recommended to develop a project communication strategy and action plan, including the need to rapidly increase the visibility of the project. Despite that the project has been producing many good deliverables in several areas, the visibility of the project is poor, and its implementation is somewhat compartmentalized with limited coordination among focal areas. The result is the constitution of a good body of knowledge on managing snow leopard landscapes but with limited cross-fertilization across thematic areas and limited dissemination/use of this knowledge. A communication strategy and action plan is needed, detailing how to increase the visibility of the project, identify information products and information channels to use.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project has had a good level of visibility in the media in certain formats. There is always the opportunity to improve the communications aspect of the project, particularly in terms of GEF and UNDP branding of project outputs in field sites.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
4.1 Draft a project communications strategy and action plan 4.2 Recruit a project Public Relations and Outreach Assistant to increase project visibility.	June 2020	Project manager, UNDP CO HR Head		
Evaluation Recommendation 5:	It is recommended to conduct capacity assessments and allocate project resources to consolidate capacities during the remaining implementation period of the project. It is an ambitious project with a broad scope and with limited resources to do it all. There is a risk that capacities developed with the support of the project may not be enough to ensure the long-term sustainability of project achievements. Conducting capacity assessments and action plans of key organizations are needed to identify possible capacity gaps and how they can be addressed, focusing on skills and knowledge but also on strengthening organizational processes and systems; and including the allocation of project resources.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project team will work with key national partners to conduct capacity assessments for relevant partner institutions, with a particular focus on ensuring institutional sustainability at the end of the project.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments

5.1. Conduct capacity assessments of main national partner institutions to identify potential risks for institutional sustainability at the end of the project and ensure capacity gaps are addressed through additional capacity development activities as relevant conducive to achievement of project targets.	December 2020	Project manager, supported by key national partners (e.g. State Ecology Committee, State Forestry Committee, etc.) and UNDP Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		
Evaluation Recommendation 6:	It is recommended to review the strategies guiding the pasture management programme and the micro-grant programme. Regarding the pasture management programme, it is already a recommendation from the international pasture expert to review and define more systematically the objective of this programme. Regarding the micro-grant programme, it is effective in creating alternative sources of incomes for remote communities. However, its logic to fund alternative activities to reduce pressure on natural forests and pastures should be reviewed and used more directly as incentives in the same communities where other project activities are taking place such as improving the management of pastures and forests.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project team will work to review both the pasture management and micro-grants activities under Component 3 to identify opportunities for strengthening, and improving strategic targeting.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
6.1 Review key Component 3 activities on pasture management and micro-grants in order to make small adaptive improvements to the strategic implementation of these activities	May 2020	Project manager, Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		
Evaluation Recommendation 7:	It is recommended to strengthen gender mainstreaming in project activities. To date, there is a limited focus on mainstreaming gender in project activities. As reported in progress reports, gender is being considered mostly within the implementation of the micro-grant programme. In this area, the project seeks to involve as many women as possible, including as beneficiaries of micro-grants. A <i>Gender Analysis and Plan</i> was developed during the inception phase of this project. It contains an extensive set of guidelines on how the project will mainstream gender in project activities. It is recommended to review this plan and identify actions to be implemented to mainstream gender in project activities.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The project team will further work to strengthen gender mainstreaming into the project implementation			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
7.1. Review and update the revised gender analysis and action plan for project implementation	June 2020	Project manager, UNDP CO gender task force team		

Evaluation Recommendation 8:	It is recommended to increase the use of adaptive management. The project implementation team does not use adaptive management enough to plan activities, allocate project resources and implement these activities. There are opportunities and innovative ways which could be used but are not considered if they are not part of the detailed project strategy. Overall, using adaptive management is one way to review what is working and what is not working and modify the approach to make project activities more effective.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
8.1. Review opportunities for adaptive management regularly, but particularly bi-annually for Project Implementation Review (June), and annual work planning (December).	Ongoing	Project manager., Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		
Evaluation Recommendation 9:	It is recommended to address the inefficiencies in the procurement of goods and services. The procurement of project goods and services is too lengthy, and it is affecting negatively the ability of the project team to quickly respond to investment needs and implement activities efficiently. Within the context of <i>UNDP Support Services to National Implementation Modality (NIM)</i> , the procurement process needs to be more transparent/participative with key stakeholders. The objective should be to reduce the time it takes to procure goods and services to project beneficiaries.			
Management Response:	Recommendation partially accepted. Procurement process follows UNDP rules and procedures notwithstanding the nature of the procurement cases. The project works in mountain areas and highly depends on seasonal periods when there is smooth access, therefore finalization of some of the procurement cases could be lengthy. Therefore, the project will in turn prioritize the procurement cases dependent on seasons.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
9.1. Ensure the project team is supported by a full-time procurement specialist.	Immediately.	UNDP Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action, project manager, UNDP CO Head of HR.		
9.2. Update key partners and stakeholders (especially national execution partner) monthly on the status of any pending major procurement actions.	Ongoing.	Project manager, project senior procurement assistant.		
Evaluation Recommendation 10:	It is recommended to monitor the financial status of the project and request a no-cost time extension of the project if the GEF grant will not be expended by May 2022. As of end of June 2019, total expenditures amount to USD 1.4M that is 23% of the GEF grant versus an elapsed time of 43%. It is doubtful that the entire budget will be expended by May 2022. From an average monthly disbursement of USD 54,502, the project would need to increase its monthly disbursement to USD 140,965. Another important point to justify a time extension is the fact that the few months delay in starting the project, prevented activities to be implemented during the summer season of 2017.			

Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. In addition to the relatively low disbursement so far, the timing and nature of project activities greatly benefit from the opportunity to be carried out during the summer field season, so it would be beneficial if the project were able to take advantage of the summer of 2022 to complete field-based activities.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
10.1 Monitor project financial delivery rate at least bi-annually at Project Implementation Review (June), and annual work planning (December).	Ongoing	UNDP Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		
10.2 In 2021 assess potential feasibility, practicality, and cost-effectiveness for a 7-12-month no-cost extension to at least December 2022.	By April 2021	UNDP Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action, UNDP CO Senior Management, Project manager		
Evaluation Recommendation 11:	It is recommended to monitor project management expenditures in order to keep them aligned with the allocated budget of 4.8%. To date, 47% of the project management budget has been spent, which represents a ratio of just under 10% of total expenditures to June 2019. This ratio is more than twice the planned ratio of 4.8% allocated to project management. The actual ratio needs to be monitored carefully to stay in line with the budgeted ratio of 4.8%.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
11.1 Monitor project management costs budget line to ensure project management expenditures do not exceed the planned 4.8% of the total project budget, particularly keeping in mind a potential 7-12-month no-cost extension.	Ongoing	Project manager, UNDP Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action, RMU		
Evaluation Recommendation 12:	It is recommended to review co-financing commitments and request yearly estimates from the State Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection. To date, limited reporting has been made on co-financing contributions. The cash contribution from UNDP is available in the Atlas system, however, no figures are available from the State Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted. The State Ecology Committee co-financing commitments are not indicated in ATLAS, and will be collected in writing officially. Moreover, the project also has in-cash co-financing contributions from the micro-grants programme grantees.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
12.1 Request co-financing updates from project co-financing partners annually at the Project Implementation Review	Annually	Project manager, UNDP senior management, RMU, Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action		

Evaluation Recommendation 13:	It is recommended to develop an exit strategy for the project. Since its inception, the project has been supporting various additional activities, including procurement of equipment, seeking to improve biodiversity of these ecosystems. After the end of the project, some of this procured equipment will need at times to be replaced and some new activities will need to be supported by extra resources such as the Snow Leopard Monitoring Programme. It is recommended to develop an exit strategy, setting key milestones to reach before the end of the project, laying out what, when, where and how much some activities need to be continued, and handover procedures for some activities/products.			
Management Response:	Recommendation accepted.			
Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
13.1 Complete detailed exit strategy 12 months prior to completion of project activities, outlining a. handover procedures, b. specification of future financial requirements for any ongoing project activities and sources of funding, and c. Outlining expected depreciation schedules for any large-scale assets supported by the project. All necessary partner sustainability and exit strategy commitments to be documented in writing.	By May 2021	Project team, Programme Specialist on Environment and Climate Action	Status	Comments

* The implementation status is tracked in the ERC.