



“Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits”

-

Belarus



Mid-Term Review DRAFT Report

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Remarks about conducting evaluations online under COVID-19

Data Collection Process

- Need to pair the international Evaluator with a national Evaluator, both with a good command of English to be able to provide online translation of interviews.
- Spent more time in preparing the data collection phase (interviews and documents gathering), particularly the key questions to use for interviews, which, as much as possible, should overlay the outline of the report. The better the clarity of questions, the better collected data is resulting in a better evaluation report.
- Plan the interviews ahead as if it was a mission agenda, taking into account time differences and allowing a good hour for each interview plus possibly travel time between interviews.
- In addition to the International Evaluator taking notes during online interviews, the National Evaluator should summarize in point-form his/her notes from conducting these evaluations. It provides additional evaluative evidence (including comments on observations and discussion points) collected during the interviews but also possibly before and after interviews and during field visits.

Technologies

- Use video link as much as possible to conduct interviews. Content of these interviews through video link is richer, allowing the Evaluators to better deepen the understanding of particular areas.
- Use WIFI instead of phone network (generally faster bandwidth).
- Try to set up a 2-point web connection (instead of 3 or more) if travel is authorized in-country; i.e. the National Consultant to go and meet the Interviewees on site. It maximizes the quality of bandwidth.
- Chose a video platform that is used comfortably by all such as Skype, Zoom or others. Note that WhatsApp video is only working on smartphones; not the best set up for interviews.
- Use smartphones to record short videos with comments to provide visuals on the project such as surrounding areas of a project area, activities implemented with the support of the project, and “close up” of goods and services procured by the project.
- If possible, record videos/pictures of field activities from drone if available.
- Set up a dropbox folder (or any other cloud-based system) to upload data.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

APR	Annual Progress Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BD	Biodiversity
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CC	Climate Change
CDR	Combined Delivery Report
CEO	Chief Executing Officer
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DO	Development Objective
DPS	Direct Project Services
FSC	Financial Sustainability Scorecard
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
IP	Implementation Progress
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LD	Land Degradation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MNREP	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NPD	National Project Director
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Protected Area
PB	Project Board
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project Management Unit
RBM	Results Based Management
SBAA	Standard Basic Assistance Agreement
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (indicator)
SPNA	Special Protected Natural Area
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
USD	United States Dollar

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DISCLAIMER

This report is the work of an independent Evaluation Team and does not necessarily represent the views, or policies, or intentions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and/or of the Government of Belarus.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the UNDP-supported-GEF-Financed-Government of Belarus Project “*Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits*”. This MTR was performed by an Independent Evaluation Team composed of Mr. Jean-Joseph Bellamy, Team Leader and Mr. Sergei Gotin, National Evaluator on behalf of UNDP.

Belarus is located almost in the geographical center of Europe. As summarized in the project document, forests and wetland ecosystems cover 8.6 million ha and 0.86 million ha respectively and together representing about 43% of the country. These forests and wetland ecosystems are of global significance for the unique biodiversity they harbor. The conservation of these ecosystems is important to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels. Belarus has 26 Ramsar Sites, three Biosphere Reserves and 51 Important Bird Areas. The forests and wetlands of Belarus are home to 25 species that are classified by IUCN as vulnerable and critically endangered. These ecosystems are also of global significance for their role in maintaining climate and land integrity. Peatlands - globally recognized as one of the most valuable and at the same time, most threatened types of natural habitats - are found all across Belarus but are most prevalent in the north and the south. Forested and open natural peatlands are a significant carbon stock being the most carbon-dense ecosystems of the terrestrial biosphere. However, peatlands affected by degradation pressures change from being a carbon sink to a source of carbon emissions and are affected by the loss of soil carbon and soil fertility.

In order to protect and conserve these ecosystems, the need to change the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas was identified. However, in searching to address these changes, it was also recognized that it is critical to understand and address three drivers of degradation:

- Effectiveness and sustainability of management of forest and wetland ecosystems in globally important protected areas is inadequate with respect to protection of species;
- Forest management in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs does not fully meet the requirements of these ecosystems' conservation;
- Inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species.

The project was identified to support the necessary changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The focus on both Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and surrounding landscape was justified from the Aichi Target and ecosystem approach perspectives, recognizing that the protection of natural capital only within Protected Areas (PAs) was too limited and that improving the management of natural resources in a broader landscape was necessary to improve the conservation of these global significant ecosystems.

The project objective is “*to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity*”. It will be achieved through the delivery of three expected outcomes:

1. Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity
2. Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas
3. Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations

Table 1: Project Information Table

Project Title:	Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits.		
UNDP Project ID (PIMS #):	5495	PIF Approval Date:	June 4, 2015
GEF Project ID (PMIS #):	7993	CEO Endorsement Date:	October 3, 2016
Award ID:	00090217	Project Document (ProDoc) Signature Date (date project began):	November 2, 2017

Country(ies):	Belarus	Date project manager hired:	December 1, 2017
Region:	CIS	Inception Workshop date:	February 27, 2018
Focal Area:	Ecosystems & Biodiversity	Midterm Review date:	May – June 2020
GEF-6 Strategic Programs:	BD-1; LD-3; CCM-2; SFM-1 & SFM-3	Planned closing date:	November 1, 2022
Trust Fund:	GEF-6	If revised, proposed closing date:	n/a
Executing Agency:	Ministry of Natural Resources & Environmental Protection		
Other Execution Partners:	Ministry of Forestry		
Project Financing	at CEO endorsement (USD)	at Midterm Review (USD)	
(1) GEF financing:	4,263,561	4,263,561	
(2) UNDP contribution (cash):	35,000	35,000	
(3) Government (parallel):	10,900,000	16,000,000	
(4) Others (parallel):	3,295,000	2,215,000	
(5) Total co-financing [2+3+4]:	14,230,000	18,250,000	
Project Total Cost [1+5]:	18,493,561	22,513,561	

This mid-term review report documents the achievements of the project and includes four chapters. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the project; chapter 2 briefly describes the objective, scope, methodology, evaluation users and limitations of the evaluation; chapter 3 presents the findings of the evaluation, chapter 4 presents the main conclusions and recommendations and lessons learned and relevant annexes are found at the back end of the report.

Key Findings

A summary of the main conclusions of this MTR is presented below.

Project Strategy

a) The project is fully relevant; it is part of a much larger approach to improve the conservation and management of peatlands in Belarus: The project supports the government to address three drivers of degradation by changing the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The project is well aligned with several key national strategies, programmes and priorities. It is also part of a series of projects supporting the government to improve the conservation and management of peatlands in Belarus. Together, these projects have been instrumental in steadily developing local and national capacities for conservation of peatlands and enhancing awareness of key issues among government staff, technical experts, and policy makers.

b) The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for biodiversity conservation and community livelihood: The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for biodiversity conservation and community livelihood; particularly addressing three drivers of degradation of peatland ecosystems, including the hydrology of peatlands and the management of biomass. The project “*chain of results*” – activities, expected outputs, expected outcomes, and objective - is logical. The project document is well structured and has been used as a “*blue-print*” by the project management team for the implementation of project activities.

Progress Towards Results

c) The progress made by the project so far is satisfactory: The implementation adheres to the project strategy. It has made good progress so far under its three outcomes and it has almost two and a half more years of implementation. It should meet most if not all its targets by October 2022. Progress highlights under each outcome include:

- **Under Outcome 1** the project supported the development of the Law on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Peatlands, which was approved by the government in December 2019, and the

formulation of secondary legislation to improve the legal framework for the conservation of globally threatened species. It has piloted new financially self-sustaining approaches for managing forest and mire protected areas, aiming at the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity and the improvement of the sustainable management of floodplain meadows. As a result, biodiversity indicators show that the conservation of key threatened species has been improving, including the improvement of the European bison habitat conditions decreasing their negative impacts on surrounding agricultural land, and on increasing the population of several bird species.

- **Under Outcome 2** the project has identified a total of 122,866 ha of rare biotopes on the territory of 33 forestries on biodiversity-important forests outside protected areas. Recommendations for the sustainable use of these protected biotopes are being incorporated in forest management plans in several forestries. A comprehensive inventory of hydro-forestry systems was carried out on an area of 65,911ha, including guidelines on how to use them. Then, proposals to use forest hydro ameliorative systems on a total area of 257,000 ha were developed and accepted by forestries.
- **Under Outcome 3** the project has implemented innovative biotechnological measures seeking to eliminate the most significant threats to globally important species in selected areas. It includes measures to restore habitats of globally threatened bird species through control of the spread of shrubs and reeds and optimization of the hydrological regime; measures to improve the genetic status of the European bison through exchange of individuals across micro-populations of European bison; measures to stabilize populations of globally threatened species such as the installation of artificial nests for rare bird species. The project has also been supporting the monitoring of key elements affecting biodiversity conservation, including the monitoring of the dynamic state of globally threatened species (such as population dynamics of the Aquatic Warbler and breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle); the monitoring of vegetation dynamics and of ground water levels before and after the project supported measures to optimize and restore ecosystems; and, finally, the monitoring of carbon benefits from a greater carbon dioxide absorption by wetlands and forest ecosystems due to project supported activities.

d) The project is addressing the three drivers of degradation but the challenge to render these new approaches financial sustainable remains: The three-fold strategy of the project has been effective in addressing three drivers of degradation: (a) inadequacy of the management of forest and wetland ecosystems to protect biodiversity in globally important protected areas; (b) management of forests in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs are not effective enough for conservation of ecosystems; and (c) inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species. However, following demonstrations of new forest and wetland management approaches to improve biodiversity conservation, the challenge to render these approaches financially sustainable remains; it is confirmed by the FSC scorecard.

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

e) The management arrangements are conducive for a good implementation of the project: The project is implemented by a good technical team of professionals supported by short-term experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in conservation of forests and wetlands and peatland management. The PMU, based at MNREP, developed agreements detailing activities and budgets to be implemented between UNDP and 7 Implementing Partners to facilitate the mobilization of project resources and coordinate project supported activities. Key Partners, including MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, National Academy of Sciences, and the Administration of Reserves, are all members of the Project Board. They meet regularly, review the progress made by the project, and endorse annual work plans. Key decisions for the implementation of the project are made collaboratively among members of the Project Board. The outcome of this collaboration is a well-coordinated project enjoying a good ownership by national Partners, contributing to an effective delivery of project activities and resulting in a good institutionalization of project achievements.

f) The disbursement of the GEF grant is well on track and the entire GEF grant should be expended by the end of the project: As of end of May 2020, the project expended USD 2,797,410, representing 66% of the GEF grant versus an elapsed time of 52% (31 months out of 60 months). So far, project expenditures are somewhat ahead of the timeline but this is mostly explained by the fact that most of the planned procurement of equipment was completed during this first phase. The remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 1,466,151 (34%) and, when considering the timeline and plan for the second phase of 29 months of implementation, the entire budget should be expended by October 2022.

g) The monitoring framework in place is workable but only one indicator focuses on the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach: The monitoring framework is composed of a set of 32 indicators with their respective baseline and targets used to measure the progress made by the project with a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. However, only one indicator “*Funding gap for the management of targeted globally significant PAs*” – with its target “*Financing gap reduced by half*” by the end of the project - measures the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach. Additionally, no methodology is provided in the project document on how this funding gap was calculated and it is not clear as to how this indicator should be calculated and reported over time. Yet, the financial sustainability of the new measures piloted by the project is one critical success factor of the project.

h) Communication activities and knowledge management are excellent and provide a good visibility of project achievements: Overall, the project has been well covered by the Belarusian media and also by foreign outlets. So far, a total of 369 communications were released through Belarusian and foreign media. Project results are also communicated through social media and the project produced a short video presenting the objectives of the project that is available online. Following these communications and a good branding of UNDP and GEF support, the project and its achievements enjoy a good visibility.

Sustainability

i) Project achievements should be sustained over the long-term, though the challenge of management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes to be financially sustainable remains: When assessing the risks to sustainability, no socio-economic, nor environmental risks were found to hamper the sustainability of project achievements. The same is true for institutional and governance risk, following the support of the project to strengthen the legislation of peatland conservation (new Law on Peatlands). However, there is a certain financial risk to the long-term sustainability of project achievements. Within the context of an underfunded protected area system, the project has been supporting the procurement of equipment to several pilot sites to pilot new management approaches. However, once the project will end, financial resources will still be needed to run and maintain this equipment (recurrent costs) and later to replace it. Additional financial resources will also be needed to expand these measures to other areas in Belarus. As it stands currently, there is a risk of a lack of financial resources to support these new measures for the management of peatlands after the project end.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this mid-term review, the following recommendations are suggested. The full details for each recommendation are presented in Section 4.2 of this report.

Recommendation 1: Focus on the development of a “*financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands*” during the remaining period of implementation.

Recommendation 2: Develop a plan for increasing the engagement of civil society and private sector; particularly for the conservation of biodiversity outside KBAs.

Recommendation 3: Undertake a socio-economic valuation study of peatlands. It would provide critical information on gauging the importance of these ecosystems on livelihoods of surrounding local communities and demonstrate the socio-economic value of these ecosystems.

Recommendation 4: Organize annual technical reviews with “field day(s)” to exchange knowledge and observe piloted measures bringing together stakeholders including national decision-makers, local administrations, civil society and private sector.

Recommendation 5: Conduct comprehensive capacity assessments of park and reserve administrations to identify capacity gaps and needs and allocate project resources to consolidate key capacities.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the gender mainstreaming approach of the project and assess how men and women can be part of the solution to restore and conserve peatlands.

Recommendation 7: Review the indicator measuring the funding gap and establish a more meaningful target for the financial sustainability of the pilot reserves.

Recommendation 8: Add the risk of a lack of financial resources to sustain project achievements after the project end.

Recommendation 9: Develop a project exit strategy (in early 2022).

Lessons Learned

Several lessons learned are presented below:

- In order to ensure a good participation of civil society in the implementation of a project, it is critical to engage Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) early in the formulation process of this type of projects.
- A project that is a response to clear national needs and priorities is often highly relevant for stakeholders and its chance of being implemented effectively are maximized.
- A good design leads to a good implementation, which in turn leads to good project results.
- Implementation through government entities as custodians of project achievements is conducive to good long-term sustainability of project achievements.
- When a project is part of a long-term strategy to address national needs and priorities in one area, it has a stronger baseline to start with, benefits from learning from previous projects and it is more effective in producing the desired changes.
- When gender considerations are limited in the project strategy/project document, there is a high risk that gender mainstreaming will be limited throughout the implementation of the project.
- A strong participation of stakeholders (both state and non-state actors) in the implementation of a project including its decision-making process enables conflict minimization and improve development of innovative solutions.
- Project management driven by consensus among stakeholders provides a good platform for an effective project.

MTR Ratings and Achievement Summary Table

Below is the rating table as requested in the TORs. It includes the required performance criteria rated as per the rating scales presented in Annex 9 of this report. Supportive information is also provided throughout this report in the respective sections.

Table 2: MTR Ratings and Achievement Summary Table

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Progress Towards Results		
Objective Achievement:	S	The objective is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 1 Achievement:	S	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 2 Achievement:	S	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 3 Achievement:	S	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	S	Implementation of most of the seven components: (i) management arrangements, (ii) work planning, (iii) finance and co-finance, (iv) project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, (v) stakeholder engagement, (vi) reporting, and (vii) communications are leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management except for only few that are subject to remedial actions.
Sustainability	L	Negligible risks to sustainability, with key outcomes on track to be achieved by the project's closure and expected to continue into the foreseeable future

1. CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT¹

1. Belarus is located almost in the geographical center of Europe, covers an area of 207,600 square kilometers, and is bordered by Poland in the west, Lithuania in the northwest, Latvia in the north, Russia in the northeast and Ukraine in the south. Belarus hosts a divide between two geobotanic regions: the region of European Broad-Leafed Forests and the region of Eurasian Coniferous Forests. Forests and wetland ecosystems cover 8.6 million ha and 0.86 million ha respectively (together accounting for about 43% percent of the country).

2. Belarus' forests and wetland ecosystems are of global significance for the unique biodiversity they harbor. The conservation of these ecosystems is important to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels. Belarus has 26 Ramsar Sites, three Biosphere Reserves and 51 Important Bird Areas. The forests and wetlands of Belarus are home to 25 species that are classified by IUCN as vulnerable and critically endangered. These ecosystems are also of global significance for their role in maintaining climate and land integrity. Peatlands - globally recognized as one of the most valuable and at the same time, most threatened types of natural habitats - are found all across Belarus but are most prevalent in the north and the south. Forested and open natural peatlands are a significant carbon stock being the most carbon-dense ecosystems of the terrestrial biosphere. However, peatlands affected by degradation pressures change from being a carbon sink to a source of carbon emissions and are affected by the loss of soil carbon and soil fertility.

3. In order to protect and conserve these ecosystems, the need to change the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas was identified. However, in searching to address these changes, it was also recognized that it is critical to understand and address three drivers of degradation:

- Effectiveness and sustainability of management of forest and wetland ecosystems in globally important protected areas is inadequate with respect to protection of species;
- Forest management in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs does not fully meet the requirements of these ecosystems' conservation;
- Inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species.

4. The project was identified to support the necessary changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The focus on both Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and surrounding landscape was justified from the Aichi Target and ecosystem approach perspectives, recognizing that the protection of natural capital only within Protected Areas (PAs) was too limited and that improving the management of natural resources in a broader landscape was necessary to improve the conservation of these global significant ecosystems.

5. The project objective is "*to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity*". It will be achieved through the delivery of three expected outcomes and 12 outputs (*see more detailed about the project strategy in Annex 2*):

1. Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity
2. Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas
3. Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations

6. This is a project supported by UNDP, the GEF, and the Government of Belarus. It is funded by a grant from the GEF of USD 4,263,561 and a total co-financing of USD 14,230,000; including a cash contribution from UNDP (TRAC) of USD 35,000 and a further in-kind contribution of USD 1,465,000, an in-kind

¹ Information in this section has been summarized from the project document.

contribution from the national government (Ministry of Environment (MNREP) and Ministry of Forestry) of USD 10,900,000 and in-kind contributions from other entities of USD 1,830,000. The total financing of the project is USD 18,493,561. The project was approved by GEF on March 1, 2017; it started on November 2, 2017; the inception workshop was held in Minsk on February 27, 2018; and the project duration is 5 years to be completed by November 2, 2022. It is implemented under the "*National Implementation Modality (NIM)*". The implementing partner is the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environmental Protection (MNREP).

2. REVIEW FRAMEWORK

7. This mid-term review (MTR) - a requirement of UNDP and GEF procedures - was initiated by UNDP Belarus, the Commissioning Unit and the GEF Implementing Agency for this project. This review provides an in-depth assessment of project achievements and progress towards its objectives and outcomes.

8. This assignment was conducted during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic; the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two. The virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica and all countries are racing to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients, carrying out contact tracing, limiting travel, quarantining citizens, and cancelling large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts, and schools. We are in uncharted territory. Across the world, businesses are closing, and people are losing jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Within this context, UNDP has already been hard at work, focusing on three immediate priorities: supporting the health response including the procurement and supply of essential health products under WHO's leadership; strengthening crisis management and response; and addressing critical social and economic impacts. In the meantime, the GEF and its Partners have continued the implementation of their work programme using more online and remote communication means to conduct their business.

9. Regarding the assignment at hand, UNDP and the Government of Belarus decided to proceed with the MTR following the local guidelines with regards to precautions against the spread of COVID19. The Evaluation Team composed of an International Evaluator (Team Leader) and a National Evaluator conducted the assignment in a way to minimize epidemiologic risks. The International Evaluator led the team remotely from his home in Ottawa, Canada using communication tools such as email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and other convenient tools. The National Evaluator was responsible to conduct the interviews face-to-face and using communication tools such as phone, Skype, Zoom or other means to connect with the Team Leader. Each interview was prepared by the Evaluation Team; using the evaluation matrix (*see Annex 5*), key evaluation questions to collect evaluative evidence required by the assignment were selected. As much as possible, the International Evaluator participated remotely to these interviews. In addition, the National Evaluator was involved into direct observations by visiting project sites as per his TORs. He provided all collected data (including photo/video) to the Team Leader and provided translation from/to English during all interviews and site visits as well as of documents as needed. Where relevant and where it was technically possible, the National Evaluator organized field video-calls from project site to help the Team Leader in observing directly relevant project outputs and activities. It was an opportunity to witness project impacts on beneficiaries. Observations made during these visits were documented in short (point form) reports accompanied by photos and short videos where possible.

2.1. Objectives

10. The objective of the MTR is to assess progress towards the achievement of the project objective and outcomes as specified in the Project Document and Project Inception Report, and assess early signs of project success or failure with the goal of identifying possible changes to be made in order to keep/set the project on-track to achieve its intended results. The MTR also reviewed the project's strategy and its risks to sustainability.

2.2. Scope

11. As indicated in the TORs for this MTR (*see Annex 3*), the scope of this review covered four categories of project progress, in accordance with the "*Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects*". A summary of the scope of this MTR is presented below:

A. Project Strategy:

- Problem addressed by the project and the underlying assumptions
- Relevance of the project strategy
- Country ownership
- Review decision-making processes
- Review of the Results Framework/Log-frame
- Review gender issues and project approach

B. Progress Towards Results

- Progress Towards Outcomes Analysis
- Analyse the GEF Tracking Tool
- Identify remaining barriers to be addressed by the project

C. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

- Management Arrangements
- Work Planning
- Finance and co-finance
- Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems
- Stakeholder Engagement Reporting
- Communications
- Risk Management
- Safeguard and Gender Mainstreaming

D. Sustainability

- Review risks and risk ratings
- Assess risks to sustainability in term of financial risks, socio-economic risks, institutional framework and governance risks, and environmental risks.

2.3. Methodology

12. The methodology that was used to conduct this mid-term review complies with international criteria and professional norms and standards; including the norms and standards adopted by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

2.3.1. Overall Approach

13. The MTR was conducted in accordance with the guidance, rules and procedures established by UNDP and GEF as reflected in the UNDP “*Guidance for Conducting Mid-Term Reviews of UNDP-supported, GEF-Financed Projects*”², and the UNEG Standards and Norms for Evaluation in the UN System. The review was undertaken in-line with GEF principles which are: *independence, impartiality, transparency, disclosure, ethical, partnership, competencies/capacities, credibility and utility*. The process promoted accountability for the achievement of project objective and outcomes and promoted learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the project’s partners and beyond.

14. The evaluation adopted an *Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE)*³ approach, which is predicated on maximizing the practical value of the evaluation to project stakeholders. The MTR was planned and conducted in ways that enhanced the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance of the project. Using this approach, the Evaluation Team did not make decisions independently of the intended users, but they rather facilitated decision-making amongst the people who will use the findings of this mid-term review.

15. The Evaluation Team developed gender sensitive review tools in accordance with UNDP and GEF policies and guidelines to ensure an effective project review. The review was conducted, and findings are structured around the GEF six major evaluation criteria; which are the six recently revised internationally accepted evaluation criteria set out by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁴. There are:

- *Relevance* is the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change;
- *Coherence* is the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution;

² UNDP Evaluation Office, 2012, *Project-Level Evaluation – Guidance for Conducting Mid-Term Review of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects*.

³ http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization_focused_evaluation

⁴ OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation : Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use*

- *Effectiveness* is the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups;
- *Efficiency* is the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way;
- *Impacts* is the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects;
- *Sustainability* is the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

16. In addition to the UNDP and GEF guidance for reviewing projects, the Evaluation Team applied to this mandate its knowledge of review methodologies and approaches and its expertise in biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihood, land and forest management and more generally in environmental management issues. It also applied several methodological principles such as (i) *Validity of information*: multiple measures and sources were sought out to ensure that the results are accurate and valid; (ii) *Integrity*: Any issue with respect to conflict of interest, lack of professional conduct or misrepresentation were immediately referred to the client if needed; and (iii) *Respect and anonymity*: All participants had the right to provide information in confidence.

17. The evaluation was conducted following a set of steps presented in the table below:

Table 3: Steps Used to Conduct the Evaluation

I. Review Documents and Plan the MTR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start-up teleconference ▪ Collect and review project documents ▪ Draft and submit Inception Report ▪ Prepare data collection: Interviews and site visits 	III. Analyze Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-depth analysis and interpretation of data collected ▪ Follow-up interviews (where necessary) ▪ Draft and submit draft review report
II. Collect Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview key Stakeholders and conduct field visits ▪ Further collect project related documents ▪ Mission debriefings / Presentation of key findings 	IV. Finalize Review Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Circulate draft report to UNDP-GEF and relevant stakeholders ▪ Integrate comments and submit final Review Report

18. Finally, the Evaluation Team signed and applied the “*Code of Conduct*” for Review Consultants (*see Annex 4*). The Evaluation Team conducted review activities, which were *independent, impartial* and *rigorous*. This MTR clearly contributed to learning and accountability and the Evaluation Team has personal and professional integrity and was guided by propriety in the conduct of its business.

2.3.2. Review Instruments

19. The review provides evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. Findings were triangulated through the concept of “*multiple lines of evidence*” using several review tools and gathering information from different types of stakeholders and different levels of management. To conduct the review the following review instruments were used:

Review Matrix: A review matrix was developed based on the review scope presented in the TOR, the project log-frame and the review of key project documents (*see Annex 5*). This matrix is structured along the six evaluation criteria and includes all review questions; including the scope presented in the guidance. The matrix provided overall directions for the review and was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing project documents.

Documentation Review: The Evaluation Team conducted a documentation review in Canada and in Belarus (*see Annex 6*). In addition to be a main source of information, documents were also used to prepare interviews with Stakeholders. A list of documents was identified during the start-up phase and further searches were done through the web and contacts. The list of documents to be reviewed were completed after the data collection phase.

Interview Guide: Based on the review matrix, an interview guide was developed (*see Annex 7*) to solicit information from stakeholders. As part of the participatory approach, the Evaluation Team ensured that all parties viewed this tool as balanced, unbiased, and structured.

List of Stakeholders to be Interviewed: A list of Stakeholders to be interviewed was constituted during the preparatory phase of this MTR (*see Annex 8*). This list was reviewed to ensure that it represented all project Stakeholders. On this basis, dates and time slots for interviews were planned in advance with the objective of ensuring a broad scan of Stakeholders' views during the data collection phase of the MTR.

Interviews: Stakeholders were interviewed (*see Annex 8*). The semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview guide adapted for each interview. Interviews were conducted in person and/or remotely using phone, Skype or other communication platforms with some follow up using emails when needed. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees and the findings were incorporated in the final report.

Field Visits and Direct Observations: As per the TORs, visits to project sites (*see map of project sites in Annex 1*) were conducted by the National Consultant to the Berezovsky and Drogichinsky districts (Brest region), Zhitkovichi district (Gomel region), Volozhinsky district (Minsk region) and Lida district (Grodno region) (*see Annex 8*). It ensured that the Evaluation Team had direct primary sources of information from the field and project end-users (beneficiaries). It gave opportunities to the Evaluation Team to observe project achievements and obtain views from stakeholders and beneficiaries at the national but also local levels.

Achievement Rating: The Evaluation Team rated achievements according to the guidance provided in the TORs. It includes a 6-point rating scale to measure progress towards results, project implementation and adaptive management and a four-point rating scale for sustainability (*see Annex 9*).

2.4. MTR Users

20. This MTR, initiated by UNDP Belarus, provides Project Implementing Partner Managers at national and local levels and UNDP-Belarus with an in-depth review of how well the project is progressing and – as needed – recommendations to correct and adjust the overall project strategy, work plan and timetable for the purpose of enhancing the achievement of project objective and outcomes. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for these managers.

2.5. Limitations and Constraints

21. The approach for this mid-term review was based on a planned level of effort of 70 days for the Evaluation Team composed of an international evaluator and a national evaluator. It comprised an effort of 15 days to collect documents, interview stakeholders and collect evaluative evidence through field visits to project sites where the project support activities. Within the context of these resources, the Independent Evaluation Team was able to conduct a detailed assessment of actual results against expected results and successfully ascertains whether the project will meet its main objective - as laid down in the project document - and whether the project initiatives are, or are likely to be, sustainable after completion of the project. The Evaluation Team also made recommendations for any necessary corrections and adjustments to the overall project work plan and timetable and also for reinforcing the long-term sustainability of project achievements.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

22. This section presents the findings of this MTR adhering to the basic structure proposed in the TOR and as reflected in the UNDP project review guidance.

3.1. Project Strategy

23. This section discusses the assessment of the project strategy – including its relevance - and its overall design in the context of Belarus.

3.1.1. Project Design

24. As presented in Section 1 above, Belarus' forests and wetland ecosystems are of global significance for

their role in maintaining climate and land integrity and for the unique biodiversity they harbor. The conservation of these ecosystems is important to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels. Peatlands - globally recognized as one of the most valuable and at the same time, most threatened types of natural habitats - are found all across Belarus but are most prevalent in the north and the south. Forested and open natural peatlands are a significant carbon stock being the most carbon-dense ecosystems of the terrestrial biosphere. However, peatlands affected by degradation pressures change from being a carbon sink to a source of carbon emissions and are affected by the loss of soil carbon and soil fertility.

25. As discussed in the project document, recognizing the importance of these ecosystems, the government of Belarus has been focusing on protecting and conserving these ecosystems; in and outside of key biodiversity areas. However, in addressing the need to better protect and conserve these ecosystems, it has been recognized that it is critical to understand and address three drivers of degradation:

- Effectiveness and sustainability of management of forest and wetland ecosystems in globally important protected areas is inadequate with respect to protection of species
- Forest management in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs does not fully meet the requirements of these ecosystems' conservation
- Inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species

26. To address the management issues of forest and wetland ecosystems, finding long-term sustainable mechanisms to manage the vegetation in wetlands in protected areas on an ongoing basis are needed. It has also been recognized that when management plans for these areas were formulated, little attention was given to finding partnerships with local farmers or businesses to make this happen. Yet, their participation could play a key role in implementing active conservation management practices such as physical removal of shrubs at a large scale to maintain the health of peatland ecosystems. Overall, a financially sustainable mechanism for the creation or restoration of meadows within forests, accompanied by carefully designed paths and observation points (for research and tourism purposes) need to become a standard forest management approach in such areas.

27. Outside of PAs, mature broad-leaf and small-leaf forests, as well as peatland forests, play an important role in maintaining high biological diversity. However, these forests are mostly production forests – including in biodiversity important areas - and are exploited without taking into account the presence of biodiversity; resulting in habitat loss for many species. There is a deficit of technologies for effective (from conservation and financial perspective) use of forest and wetland resources in harmony with biodiversity conservation principles; including the maintenance of bogs to avoid overgrowth. Weaknesses include the lack of data collection, identification techniques, poor knowledge of the value and conservation approaches to protection and wise management of such habitats in the forest sector. Additionally, inappropriate management of the groundwater table in drained peatland forests has resulted in the degradation of habitat, drying out of peat soil, release of carbon dioxide through soil mineralization, and loss of small rivers. Despite the existence in Belarus of mechanisms to officially designate protected biotopes and habitats of protected species as protected, there are not implemented as they should.

28. Finally, there are gaps in monitoring several globally important species and a poor understanding of their habitat requirements as well as an insufficient understanding of their value. Meanwhile, the potential for habitat management and restoration techniques to contribute significantly to strengthening populations of threatened species has not been demonstrated. Nevertheless, there is a need to include all globally important species in the monitoring network managed by the Academy of Sciences. Additionally, the genetic diversity of the population of several species remains low. There is a need to develop the capacity of experts to strengthen the genetic of some micro-populations such as the European bison and the aquatic warbler.

29. Within this context, the project is fully relevant for Belarus, supporting the government to address these drivers of degradation by changing the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the

conservation effect. The project is also well aligned with several key national strategies, programmes and priorities:

Strategy for the Conservation and Wise (Sustainable) Use of Peatlands (2015)

30. This strategy was adopted by the government through a Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of December 30, 2015 (No 1111). It was developed to balance national interests pertaining to the environment and the industry (mostly used in the energy sector), as well as to guarantee the fulfilment by Belarus of the international commitments under the CBD, Ramsar, UNCCD, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. This strategy was also developed in the context of the Presidential Decree of November 2010 (No. 575) on the adoption of the national security concept, which stated that degradation of lands, forests and natural systems, depletion of mineral, water and biological resources are recognized among major threats to national security.

31. The strategy stated that disturbance of the hydrological regime of peatlands by the drainage network of channels and the overgrowing of open peatland ecosystems with forests, shrubs, reeds after discontinuing their traditional use, and eutrophication of surface waters, are part of key issues pertaining to the conservation and wise use of peatlands. The strategy lists key principles and focus areas for actions to ensure conservation and wise use of peatlands in Belarus; including a typology of peatlands. Finally, it sets key expected results (targets) for 2030.

Law on the Protection and Use of Peat Bogs

32. Following this strategy, this project being evaluated has been instrumental in supporting the government in formulating and adopting the *Law on the Protection and Use of Peat Bogs*. This Law (No. 272-Z) was approved by the Council of the Republic on December 3, 2019. The Law covers swamps, wetland ecological systems, peat deposits, drained lands with peat soils, peatland resources and rights to use peat resources. It establishes the legal basis for the protection of peatlands; the rational (sustainable) use of these resources; the preservation of swamps; the conservation and restoration of ecosystem functions of swamps; while providing the legal framework for the use of these resources by civil society. The Law states the basic principles for the protection and use of peatlands; the management framework of peatlands; the participation of civil society in the management of peatlands; the dissemination of environmental information related to the protection and use of peat; and the requirements for the protection and use of peat bogs and the rehabilitation of peat bogs.

State Programme for the Development of Specially Protected Natural Areas (SPNAs) for 2015-2019

33. This state programme was approved by an Edict of the President (No. 367) of July 24, 2014. It was developed in line with the Socio-Economic Development Programme (2011-2015), which stated that the leading role in the conservation of biological and landscape diversity belongs to the Specially Protected Natural Areas. The goal of this programme has been to conserve natural ecological systems, protect biological and landscape diversity through supporting the operations of an effective SPNA system.

34. The programme laid out a set of activities to develop, operate, protect and manage the SPNA system such as the development and implementation of SPNA management plans, training of employees of state environmental agencies in charge of SPNAs, restoration of disturbed ecosystems, creation of artificial nests for rare bird species, development of additional recreation infrastructure facilities in SPNAs, organization of festivals, conferences and other similar events, and publication of books and booklets in order to raise public awareness about the SPNAs.

Strategic plan for the development of the forestry economic sector (2015- 2030)

35. The aim of this Strategic Plan is to create highly productive and sustainable forests while preserving and sustainably using their biological and landscape diversity, taking into account climate change and the interests of the green economy. This plan is also to develop an integrated forest management system based on scientific knowledge, modern equipment and technologies, and to develop the capacities of forestry workers. It seeks to increase the profitability of the forestry sector by expanding the production of high-quality wood and non-timber forest products; and to contribute to local economies through the creation of jobs. This strategic plan detailed an extended list of activities to be implemented.

National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD)

36. The first NSSD was elaborated and approved by the Government in 1997 (NSSD-1997). It was predicated on the precepts and guidelines of “Agenda 21” formulated by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). The second NSSD was developed in 2004, setting goals and objectives for the period to 2020 (NSSD-2020). It is a national development strategy collating all key national plans and sectoral programmes focusing on a balanced approach between social, environment and economy sectors.

37. Under the section “*Environmental Management and Nature Conservation for Future Generations*”, it details the need to improve the environmental policy framework and the economic mechanisms to use natural resources. It also details the need to conserve drained lands, especially drained peatlands, to reclaim degraded lands, to conserve and enhance biodiversity of forest ecosystems and to maintain the sustainability of forest ecosystems. This NSSD also states that “*the biological diversity of Belarus might turn into the most important resource essential for both national and European development. Its conservation requires favorable conditions for the sustainability of these ecosystems.*”

38. Then in 2018, the government of Belarus started the development of its next NSSD for the period to 2030. The strategic objective of this current NSSD in the environmental area is to protect the environment through public policies. Its goals include the increase of the efficiency of the use of natural resources while ensuring the integrity of natural systems and meet the needs of society; the restoration of ecosystems functions; and the reduction of harmful economic effects on the environment. Under this area, the strategy focuses on 4 sub-areas: ecological safety and healthy environment; rationale use of natural resources; conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity; and effective waste management. Some key environmental priorities include the expansion of civil society and private sector participation in implementing environmental policies; increase the capacity of environmental managers; and develop a national environmental monitoring system.

39. At the time of the formulation of this project and in addition to these key government instruments presented above and related to the protection and conservation of peatlands, the government of Belarus has also developed: a state program “*Environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources*” for the period 2015-2019; a state program “*The Belarusian Forest (2016-2020)*”; and an action plan on “*conservation and management of European Bison (2015 – 2019)*”.

Lessons from other Relevant Projects

40. In addition to a good alignment with national priorities, this project is also part of a series of projects seeking to improve the conservation and management of peatlands in Belarus. As of the time of the formulation of this project, several internationally funded projects had focused on the conservation and sustainable use of peatlands; they provided the foundations for this project.

41. Even though, broadly, they all addressed the same issue namely, the conservation and sustainable use of the multiple benefits generated by healthy peatlands, each project varied in scale and approach to the issue and responded to the identified national priorities and desired directions at the time these projects were formulated. Several of these projects included:

- The UNDP/GEF funded project - *Renaturalization and Sustainable Management of Peatlands to Combat Land Degradation, Ensure Conservation of Globally Valuable Biodiversity, and Mitigate Climate Change* (2006-2010); also called *Peatland 1*. This project focused on the re-naturalization of extracted/mined peatlands with the overall goal being to mitigate climate change, prevent land degradation, ensure biodiversity conservation, and prevent radioactive pollution by rehabilitating degraded peatlands (15 sites).
- The GEF funded project - *Catalyzing Sustainability of the Wetland Protected Areas System in Belarusian Polesie through Increased Management Efficiency and Realigned Land Use Practices*, which focused on bringing more wetland areas into the fold of the national protected area system and improving the management effectiveness; focusing on the Polesie landscape in the southern part of the country.
- The GEF funded project - *Landscape Approach to Management of Peatlands Aiming at Multiple Ecological Benefits*, which brought oligotrophic and mesotrophic peatlands in the Poozerie landscape in the northern part of the country that were least-represented ecosystems into the

national PA system.

- The UNDP/GEF funded project - *Landscape Approach to Management of Peatlands Aiming at Multiple Ecological Benefits (2013-2017)*, also called *Peatland 2*, focused on the development of a National Strategy and Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Peatlands, on the restoration and sustainable management of peatlands in agriculture, as well as on the expansion of IUCN Category IV protected areas on peatlands. The project contributed to the development of the policy and regulatory framework for managing and conserving peatlands, including the legal protection through the extension of the PA network on peatlands.
- At the time of the formulation of this project, consultations were also taking place with the World Bank to develop a Forest Sector Loan and a GEF-6 project focusing on forestry within the climate change context. There was also the government of Lithuania, which developed a project under the EU Life program aimed at managing the habitat of the aquatic warbler, including the nesting conditions. Implemented in parallel with this project based in Belarus, it was increasing the chance for the stabilization of this species.

42. These projects have been instrumental in steadily developing local and national capacities for conservation of peatlands and enhancing awareness of key issues among government staff, technical experts, and policy makers. As discussed in the project document, these projects have contributed to the development of a body of knowledge and experience in Belarus that has enabled national stakeholders to continue to push the boundary when it comes to conserving the multiple global benefits generated by peatlands.

43. These capacities and knowledge related to conservation and sustainable use of peatlands have been taken into consideration during the formulation of this project. It includes the involvement of several national experts from these projects whom participated in the formulation and implementation of this project. Additionally, several key lessons emerged from these previous projects: (1) in order to secure multiple benefits from peatlands, there is a need for supporting active habitat management and conservation; passive protection is insufficient; (2) Need for direct conservation efforts to areas that harbor globally significant biodiversity but lie outside formal PAs; and (3) Need to dedicate resources for regular monitoring of biodiversity, water tables, and soil and carbon benefits of the project so that measures can be appropriately adapted. These lessons helped national stakeholders to specifically focus the project on forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity, are important for climate and land integrity, and to identify activities focusing on conservation and sustainable financing for peatland and non-peatland areas, as well as areas within and outside PAs.

Gender Considerations

44. Gender considerations were included in the design of the project. In Part II of the project document (Strategy), there is a detailed section (2.5) discussing socio-economic benefits including gender dimension. In this section, it says that Belarus was ranked 31st in the 2014 Gender Inequality Index (GII) and states that gender inequality is far less severe relative to other countries, including Russia, which is ranked 54th in this index.

45. The strategy of the project was to ensure that women would be appropriately represented in all meetings and discussions on planning income-generating activities; to conduct a gender analysis of income generating activities (understand of gender-specific roles and gender-differentiated vulnerabilities/ impacts); and to set a target of at least 50% of women - living in surrounding communities near the pilot sites – will participate in the implementation of income-generating activities. It was planned that under the first component, activities to develop the gathering of cranberries would mostly benefit women since they represent about 80% of the traditional gatherers. They would also benefit from the development of eco-tourism at pilot sites. Under the second component, women were to be able to equally access the specialized training in forest management and were also encouraged to participate in the restoration of forested peatland sites. Finally, the performance of the project was to be measured with gender-differentiated indicators.

46. Despite that gender was considered in the project document, the Evaluation Team found that the consideration of gender throughout the implementation of project activities is limited. Despite that a gender analysis on income generating activities was planned in the project document, nothing has been done so far. In progress reports, few gender-disaggregated (number of women and men) indicators are used to report participation of women and men to some activities supported by the project. In the PIR-2019, the section on

gender (H. Gender) described an activity conducted in partnership with the NGO Birdlife Belarus where women were encouraged to start a craft business using natural resources and to be actively involved in environmental protection. The main consideration of gender, as detailed in the project document, was to be in the sustainable use of cranberry, since women represents over 80% of the cranberry gatherers. Yet, little focus has been placed on gender consideration. As part of local communities, women can also play key roles in monitoring biodiversity in protected areas. It is recommended that the project strengthen its gender mainstreaming approach in its activities.

UNDP Strategy in Belarus

47. UNDP entered into an agreement with the Government of Belarus in September 1992 to assist the Government in carrying out its development projects, and under which UNDP-assisted projects shall be executed. It required UNDP *“to support and supplement the national efforts at solving the most important problems of its economic development and to promote social progress and better standards of life”*. This assistance is to be provided by UNDP only in response to requests submitted by the Government and approved by UNDP. The agreement provides a framework for UNDP assistance detailing the forms of assistance, how projects should be executed, how information related to projects should be managed, the participation and contribution of the government in executing projects, the payment of programme costs in local currency, and other more general clauses such as termination, settlement of disputes, etc.

48. In 2010, the UN agencies acting in Belarus developed their first joint strategy in consultation with the government of Belarus; the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2011-2015). This framework focused on five strategic areas within the mandate of the UN in order to most effectively respond to key national priorities: 1. Sustainable social and economic development; 2. National health care system; 3. Environmental sustainability; 4. National migration management in line with international standards; and 5. National governance system. These areas set the direction and scope of action of the UN development assistance to Belarus for the period 2011-2015.

49. Then, in October 2015, the United Nations agencies and the government of Belarus signed the UNDAF 2016-2020 underscoring their joint commitment for the development of Belarus. This framework focuses on four strategic areas aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030 (NSSD-2030): 1. Inclusive, Responsive and Accountable Governance; 2. Sustainable Economic Development; 3. Environmental Protection and Sustainable Environmental Management Based on the Principles of Green Economy; 4. Sustainable Development of Human Capital: Health, Education, Social Inclusion and Protection, Comprehensive Post-Chernobyl Development. Under the third area, several agencies including UNDP were to implement measures aimed at environmental education and awareness raising on environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources.

50. Within these frameworks for UN development assistance to Belarus, UNDP developed its Country Development Programme Documents (CPD) for the respective periods (2011-2015 & 2016-2020). The first one focused on four main thematic areas aligned with the UNDAF 2011-2015: 1) Economic Development and Social Security; 2) Energy and Environment; 3) HIV/AIDS and TB; and 4) Effective and Accountable Governance and Human Security. Under the second area, UNDP actions were to address country priorities in environmental protection, ensuring national ownership of results by involving all stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities. Actions included the development of the country's capacity for the sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity conservation, combating land degradation and promoting integrated ecosystem management.

51. The CPD 2016-2020, aligned with the UNDAF 2016-2020, the NSSD-2030 and national development programmes, focuses on three priority development areas: stronger systems of inclusive and responsive governance; growth and development are inclusive and sustainable, incorporating productive capacities that target employment and create livelihoods for vulnerable groups; and institutions are strengthened to progressively deliver universal access to basic services, with a focus on vulnerable groups. Through this CPD, UNDP has been assisting Belarus in applying the principles of green economy and gender sensitive green urban development. It supports the protection of rare species and biotopes of national and international significance by building national capacity to develop and implement policies on integrated ecosystem management, including the preservation and expansion of protected areas and management of the country's significant forest resources. The project is particularly aligned with output 3.1 - *Solutions developed at national*

and subnational levels for the sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste; and output 3.2 - Legal and regulatory frameworks, policies and institutions able to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, in line with international conventions and national legislation.

GEF Focal Area Strategy

52. As described in the project document, the project was developed (and is funded) under the GEF-6 cycle. The project has been consistent with the objectives of, as well as contributing to several outcomes and outputs of the GEF's Biodiversity, Climate Change, Land Degradation and Sustainable Forest Management Focal (SFM) Focal Area Strategies for the GEF-6 period. In particular, the project is well aligned with the Biodiversity BD-1 Program 1 (Improving Financial Sustainability and Effective Management of the National Ecological Infrastructure); the Land Degradation Objective LD-3 (Reduce pressures on natural resources by managing competing land uses in broader landscapes), and specifically Program 4 (Scaling-up sustainable land management through the Landscape Approach); the Climate Change Mitigation CC 2 (Demonstrate systemic impacts of mitigation options), and specifically Program 4 (Promote conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks in forest, and other land use, and support climate smart agriculture); and the Sustainable Forest Management Objective SFM 1 (Maintained Forest Resources: Reduce the pressures on high conservation value forests by addressing the drivers of deforestation) and the SFM 3 (Restored Forest Ecosystems: Reverse the loss of ecosystem services within degraded forest landscapes).

3.1.2. Results Framework / Log-frame

53. The *Project Results Framework* formulated during the design phase of this project presents a well-articulated set of expected results. No changes were made during the inception phase to the project strategy (expected results) stated in the project document. The review of the objective and outcomes indicates a good and logical “chain of results” – **Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Objective**. Project resources have been used to implement planned activities to reach a set of expected outputs (12), which would contribute in achieving a set of expected outcomes (3), which together should contribute to achieve the overall objective of the project. This framework also includes - for each outcome - a set of indicators and targets to be achieved at the end of the project and that are used to monitor the performance of the project.

54. The aim of the project is to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and a more efficient management with respect to the conservation effect. The focus on both KBAs and surrounding landscape is justified from the Aichi Target and ecosystem approach perspectives, recognizing that protection of natural capital only within PAs is not going to improve its status. The project was designed through three components, addressing the three drivers of degradation identified during the formulation of this project (*see Section 3.1.1*).

55. The review of the *Project Results Framework* confirms that this project is well aligned with national priorities and its logic is appropriate to address clear national needs/priorities. The logic model of the project presented in the *Project Results Framework* is summarized in table 4 below. It includes one objective, three outcomes and 12 outputs. For each expected outcome, indicators to measure the progress of the project were identified.

Table 4: Project Logic Model

Expected Results	Indicators
Project Objective: To introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biodiversity: Funding gap for management of targeted globally significant PAs -- Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, and Olmany Mires 2. Protected area management effectiveness score -- METT applied at Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, Olmany Mires, Dikoe and Servech 3. Sustainable Forest Management: Area of high conservation value forest identified and maintained

Expected Results	Indicators
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Land Degradation: Application of INRM practices in wider landscapes 5. Climate Change Mitigation: Area under low GHG management practices with monitoring of low GHG impact undertaken
<p>Outcome 1 – Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 1.1: Improvement of nature conservation legislation aimed at conservation of globally threatened species and their habitats, as well as of the system of registration of nature protection areas ● Output 1.2: Improved habitat conditions for the European bison micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve through creation of mosaic meadow grounds among dense forests ● Output 1.3: Profitable use of cranberry reserves as an effective way of mire ecosystem conservation ● Output 1.4: Financially self-sustaining wetland biomass harvesting and processing program launched at two PAs (Sporovsky and Zvanets) in partnership with private sector ● Output 1.5: Improved financial sustainability of measures for conservation of floodplain meadows (key habitats of globally threatened species) through introduction of technology of sustainable use of meadows for mowing and grazing and through development of ecological tourism ● Output 1.6: Ecological tourism developed at key protected areas, resulting in improved financial sustainability of protected areas and raised awareness about importance of globally biodiversity conservation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Number of business organizations involved in sustainable habitat management at target PAs (Zvanets, Sporovsky, Mid-Pripyat, Turov Meadows) that is profitable for them 7. Representation of women in sustainable use activities associated with business plans developed under Outcome 1 8. Area of natural, highly productive foraging grounds within the living territory of the European bison's micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve (50,000 ha) 9. Spatial distribution of bison throughout the micro population's living area 10. Area of open sedge mires where sustainable resource use and vegetation management is practiced 11. Dynamics of water level throughout the year 12. Population size of indicator species in Zvanets and Sporovsky Reserves 13. Area of open, sustainably used meadows at Turov and Pogost Meadows 14. Population size of species during spring migration (Widgeon, Ruff, Black-tailed godwit) 15. Population size of nesting indicator bird species (Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit, Terek sandpiper, Redshank) 16. Numbers of organized tourists in the PAs
<p>Outcome 2 – Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 2.1: Forest biotopes, subject to special protection, are identified, approved and sustainably managed at an area of 150,000 ha. ● Output 2.2: Avoided degradation of inefficiently drained forest peatlands (260,000 ha) as a result of development and implementation of the Scheme of Sustainable Use of Drained Forest Peatlands, defining ways of use of each peatland, and ecological rehabilitation of inefficiently drained peatlands demonstrated at an area of about 12,456 ha. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Area of forest biotopes transferred to the protection category 18. Number of Forestries that envisage forestry management plans in line with sustainable use of protected biotopes 19. Number of employees of the Ministry of Forestry trained in the sustainable use of protected biotopes 20. Official policy and document on future use of forest hydro amelioration systems
<p>Outcome 3 – Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 3.1: Restored habitats (about 1,820 ha) of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) within the most important protected areas (Servech, Dikoe) through control of vegetation succession (control of the spread of shrubs and reeds) and optimization of hydrological regime ● Output 3.2: Program on exchange of individuals across micro-populations to improve the genetic status of the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison developed and realized ● Output 3.3: Targeted measures to stabilize populations of insufficiently studied globally threatened species ● Output 3.4: Assessing the efficiency of implementation of project measures (monitoring of globally threatened 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Area of territory with associations of sedge mires 22. Population size of globally threatened species: Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Curlew, Great snipe. 23. Area of restored sedge fen mires 24. Area of vegetation associations on restored mire 25. Greenhouse gas emissions at following pilot sites: 12,456 ha of forest peatland; 1,025 ha of open peatlands 26. Number of genetically valuable bison transferred from different micro populations in Belarus and Poland to Nalibokski to increase diversity 27. Number of genetic passports issued for the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison 28. Population dynamics of the Aquatic warbler in the Zuvintas Reserve (Lithuania) 29. Number of breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle in Olmany Mires

Expected Results	Indicators
species, soil and ground water table, carbon emissions avoided and carbon sequestered)	30. Breeding success 31. Number of secure nesting sites 32. Action plan on conservation of 13 invertebrates and 5 molluscs with EN and VU status based on scientific knowledge of size and distribution (including <i>Dolomedes plantarius</i> , <i>Dytiscus latissimus</i> , <i>Graphoderus bilineatus</i> , <i>Cerambyx cerdo</i> , <i>Lycaena helle</i> , <i>Lopinga achine</i> , <i>Euphydryas maturna</i> , <i>Phyllodesma ilicifolia</i> , <i>Unio crassus</i> , <i>Pseudanodonta complanata</i>)

Source: project document

56. The project strategy or “*logic model*” was confirmed during the inception phase of the project, including at the inception workshop held in Minsk on February 27, 2018. No changes were made to the set of expected results presented in the *Project Results Framework* during the inception phase. The Evaluation Team confirms that a good review of the project strategy was conducted during the inception phase, including the context of the project.

57. The “*logic model*” presented above provides a good response to national needs/priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for community livelihood; particularly addressing the three drivers of degradation of peatland ecosystems. The detailed review of the project “*chain of results*” – activities, expected outputs, expected outcomes, and objective (see Annex 2) - is logical. It includes about 35 distinct indicative activities under 12 expected outputs seeking to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect.

58. The project document is well structured and has been used as a “*blue-print*” by the project management team for the implementation of project activities. When considering the implementation timeframe of 5 years and a GEF financing of about \$4.3M, the project is progressing well so far. Several changes have been already introduced, including the procurement of equipment to pilot new techniques for managing the biomass (see Section 3.2.1). Currently, the project is almost at the mid-term point and, based on the assessment conducted for this terminal evaluation of the progress made so far, the key challenge for the remaining period of implementation is becoming the development of a “*financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands.*” This is the area where most project activities should focus on during the remaining period of implementation.

59. Regarding the set of indicators and their respective targets to measure the performance of the project, a total of 32 indicators were identified to measure the progress made in achieving its expected outcomes and objective: 5 indicators were identified to measure how well the project is progressing toward its objective; 11 indicators to monitor the progress under outcome 1; 4 indicators to monitor the progress under outcome 2; and 12 indicators to measure the progress made under outcome 3 (see table 4 above). For a project of this size, it is a relatively high number of indicators; making the monitoring function somewhat more complicated, yet with limited focus on measuring capacities developed with the support of the project (see also Section 3.3.5).




60. In conclusion, the review of the project strategy and the national context for this project indicates that this strategy is a direct response to national needs and priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for community livelihood; particularly addressing the three drivers of degradation of peatland ecosystems. Its aim is to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The project focuses on three areas: (i) Improve the financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity; (ii) Adopt a sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas; and (iii) Increase the experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations. The project is well documented in the project document, which has provided a very useful “*blueprint*” for the project team to guide the implementation of the project.

3.2. Progress Towards Results

61. This section discusses the assessment of project results; how effective the project has been to deliver its expected results and what are the remaining barriers limiting the effectiveness of the project.

3.2.1. Progress Towards Outcomes Analysis

62. As presented in Sections 3.1, the project has been implemented through three (3) expected outcomes. The implementation progress is measured through a set of 32 indicators with their respective targets. On the next page is a table listing key deliverables achieved so far by the project against each outcome and their corresponding targets. A color “traffic light system” code was used to represent the level of progress achieved so far by the project. Finally, a discussion of results achieved so far is presented at the end of this section.

 Target achieved  On target to be achieved  Not on target to be achieved

5 The analysis presented in this Section have been conducted with the assumption that the project will terminate in November 2022.
Mid-term Review of the UNDP-GEF-Government of Belarus Project “Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits”
Belarus (PIMS 5495)

Table 5: List of Delivered Results

Expected Results	Project Indicators	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
Project Objective: To introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity	1. Biodiversity: Funding gap for management of targeted globally significant PAs -- Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, and Olmany Mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project pilot reserves gained approximately USD 106,440. As a result, the annual financing gap for optimal management scenario has been reduced to USD 29,066; a reduction of the funding gap of 79% (data from annual reserve's reports to the National Statistic Committee). 	
	2. Protected area management effectiveness score -- METT applied at Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, Olmany Mires, Dikoe and Servech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nalibokski 75; Zvanets 75; Sporovsky 79; Olmany 66; Servech 47; Turov 66 	
	3. Sustainable Forest Management: Area of high conservation value forest identified and maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A total of 109,514 ha of rare biotopes have been identified on the territory of 28 forestries. Passports for the protection of 21,703 ha of rare biotopes outside protected areas were prepared, and proposals were made for the protection of rare biotopes within the boundaries of specially protected natural areas on an area of 27,303 ha 	
	4. Land Degradation: Application of INRM practices in wider landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,726 ha (4 forested peatland pilots). Engineering projects on re-watering of 4 project forested peatlands were developed and implemented (Berezovik, Verechskoye, Ostrovo, Dokudovskoye) with a total area of 6,726 hectares. Work on restoration of disturbed hydrological regime in the last territory of the Zhada (area about 4,600 ha) continues and will be completed in 2020. 	
	5. Climate Change Mitigation: Area under low GHG management practices with monitoring of low GHG impact undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 308,212 ha: 49,005 hectares of sustainable management of forest resources; 257,000 hectares - changing the direction of use of forest reclamation systems; 2,207 hectares of biomass reproduction in swamps to replace fossil fuels. 	
Outcome 1 – Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Output 1.1: Improvement of nature conservation legislation aimed at 	6. Number of business organizations involved in sustainable habitat management at target PAs (Zvanets, Sporovsky, Mid-Pripyat, Turov Meadows) that is profitable for them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 business organization involved at 2 target PAs: Agricultural JSC "Turovschina" was involved in implementing project activities in the "Srednaya Pripyat" reserve (grazing in the meadows and mowing), and the corresponding memorandum was signed. A second private enterprise "Arzhanitsa" organizes cranberry harvesting at the project area "Zhada" and "Servech". 	
	7. Representation of women in sustainable use activities associated with business plans developed under Outcome 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project carried out 5 thematic master classes for local communities on using local resources for handicrafts and berries gathering. These events were attended by 226 people, of which 92 were women (40%). The three press tours conducted by the project in 2019 were attended by 28 media representatives, 68% (19 persons) of whom were women. 	

Expected Results	Project Indicators	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
<p>conservation of globally threatened species and their habitats, as well as of the system of registration of nature protection areas</p> <p>• Output 1.2: Improved habitat conditions for the European bison micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve through creation of mosaic meadow grounds among dense forests</p> <p>• Output 1.3: Profitable use of cranberry reserves as an effective way of mire ecosystem conservation</p> <p>• Output 1.4: Financially self-sustaining wetland biomass harvesting and processing program launched at two PAs (Sporovsky and Zvanets) in partnership with private sector</p> <p>• Output 1.5: Improved financial sustainability of measures for conservation of floodplain meadows (key habitats of</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the total number of experts hired by the project in 2019-2020, 53% were women (12 from 23). 	
	8. Area of natural, highly productive foraging grounds within the living territory of the European bison's micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve (50,000 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 296 ha of forage meadows in the Nalibokski Reserve were restored, including hay meadows and perennial grasses. 	
	9. Spatial distribution of bison throughout the micro population's living area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the recovery of forage meadows (hydro-regime restored, shrubs removed, grass sown), 50% of the Bison population forage in this area (mosaic meadows) during the late autumn and winter. In the early spring, the bison are still visiting the agricultural fields. 	
	10. Area of open sedge mires where sustainable resource use and vegetation management is practiced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sporovsky 1,600 ha (mowing) are sustainably managed through the removal of shrubs and regular mowing. Zvanets 4,500 ha (fire management, mowing) used mulcher to keep the fens open and limited shrub removal (about 400 ha) to control winter burning 	
	11. Dynamics of water level throughout the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sporovsky: Water level of 5-20 cm above ground level was maintained during May-July 2019, but it was 10-30 cm below ground in 2020. Water mineralization is from 150 to 300 mg/l Zvanets: Optimal water level, 5-20 cm above ground level during May-July, provided with an optimal water level through the regulation of locks, and water salinity which remains high at 300-450 mg/l. In 2020, due to absence of snow in winter and a shortage of rainfall in spring, the whole Polesie region suffers from low water level, spring flooding was completely absent. As a result, the Sporovskoye water level in the floodplain swamp is below normal. In Zvanets swamp, thanks to a number of measures to optimize the hydrological regime, water level has been maintained close to the optimal level. 	
	12. Population size of indicator species in Zvanets and Sporovsky Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sporovsky Reserve: Aquatic warbler: absolute accounting is planned for 2021; Greater spotted eagle: 2 Zvanets Reserve: Aquatic warbler: conducted accounting on routes only. A full census of bird numbers in the pilot areas will be conducted in July 2020: Greater spotted eagle: 3; Curlew: 2 Aquatic warbler and Greater Spotted Eagle populations remain stable with annual fluctuations due to changes in water levels. 	
	13. Area of open, sustainably used meadows at Turov and Pogost Meadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turov Meadow 180 ha and Pogost 50 ha 	

Expected Results	Project Indicators	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
<p>globally threatened species) through introduction of technology of sustainable use of meadows for mowing and grazing and through development of ecological tourism</p> <p>● Output 1.6: Ecological tourism developed at key protected areas, resulting in improved financial sustainability of protected areas and raised awareness about importance of globally biodiversity conservation.</p>	14. Population size of species during spring migration (Widgeon, Ruff, Black-tailed godwit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turov Meadow 2019-2020: Widgeon: 500 – 47,000; Ruff: 52,000-10,000; Black-tailed godwit: 300 – 5,000 Pogost Meadow: Widgeon : 0 - 1,000; Ruff: 0 -1,000; Black-tailed godwit: 0 - 50 In 2020, due to lack of snow cover and severe drought throughout the Polesie region, there was no spring flood in the floodplain of the Pripyat River, which resulted in a strong decline in the number of migrating and nesting birds in floodplain meadows on the both project territories. 	
	15. Population size of nesting indicator bird species (Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit, Terek sandpiper, Redshank)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turov Meadow: Great snipe: 50-60; Black-tailed godwit: 17-63; Terek sandpiper: 2; Redshank: 98-187 Pogost Meadow: Great snipe: 0; Black-tailed godwit: 0-2; Terek sandpiper: 0; Redshank: 2-10 In 2020, due to lack of snow cover and severe drought throughout the Polesie region, there was no spring flood in the floodplain of the Pripyat River, which resulted in a strong decline in the number of migrating and nesting birds in floodplain meadows on the both project territories. 	
	16. Numbers of organized tourists in the PAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the Reserve's reports to the National Statistic Committee for 2019, the number of organized tourists amounted to: Nalibokski – 9,300; Sporovsky – 4,800; Turov Meadow – 1,850 Infrastructure was built in the Nalibokski Reserve: 3 wildlife observation sites, 3 towers, an eco-trail and a wood grouse nursery. 	
<p>Outcome 2 – Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas.</p> <p>● Output 2.1: Forest biotopes, subject to special protection, are identified, approved and sustainably managed at an area of 150,000 ha.</p> <p>● Output 2.2: Avoided degradation of inefficiently drained forest peatlands</p>	17. Area of forest biotopes transferred to the protection category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A total of 122,866 ha of rare biotopes have been identified on the territory of 33 forestries 	
	18. Number of Forestries that envisage forestry management plans in line with sustainable use of protected biotopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Dyatlovskoe and Ivievskoe forestries (2) changes on sustainable management of forest habitats were introduced into their forest management plan In 8 forestries: recommendations on changes were prepared . In Stolinskoe, Vileyskoe, Kletskoe, Puhovichskoe, Smolevichskoe, Starobinskoe, Uzdenskoe, Minskoe Zhlobinskoe forestriesv (8) recommendations for changes on sustainable management of forest habitats were prepared to be introduced into their respective forest management plan. 	
	19. Number of employees of the Ministry of Forestry trained in the sustainable use of protected biotopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 50 employees of the Ministry of Forestry were trained 	
	20. Official policy and document on future use of forest hydro amelioration systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A comprehensive inventory of hydroforestry systems was carried out and the directions of their use were determined on the area of 65,911 ha in 2 oblasts: Grodno (11 forestry enterprises, 78 	

Expected Results	Project Indicators	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
(260,000 ha) as a result of development and implementation of the Scheme of Sustainable Use of Drained Forest Peatlands, defining ways of use of each peatland, and ecological rehabilitation of inefficiently drained peatlands demonstrated at an area of about 12,456 ha.		<p>objects; total area 36,721 ha) and Mogilev (13 forestry enterprises; 102 objects; total area 29,190 ha).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided to drafting the Law on the protection and sustainable use of peatlands, which was adopted by the government in December 2019. • Developed proposals to use forest hydro ameliorative systems on a total area of 257,000 ha, which were accepted by the respective forestries (more than 30 forestries in 5 regions of the country). • In 2021, the inventory materials will be submitted to the Ministry of Forestry to develop a sectoral program for sustainable use of hydroforestry reclamation systems. 	
<p>Outcome 3 – Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.1: Restored habitats (about 1,820 ha) of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) within the most important protected areas (Servech, Dikoe) through control of vegetation succession (control of the spread of shrubs and reeds) 	21. Area of territory with associations of sedge mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dikoe 250 ha: Belovezhskay Puscha National Park decided to optimize the hydro-regime on the pilot territory Dikoe instead of removing excess biomass • Servech 290 ha: works on optimization of the hydrological regime are planned at the Servech fen, which will prevent overgrowth of the swamp with alder and birch on the area of 600 ha. 	
	22. Population size of globally threatened species: Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Curlew, Great snipe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dikoe 2019-2020: Aquatic warbler: 150 – 20; Greater spotted eagle: 4-5. Aquatic warbler population in Dikoe is decreasing (long term trend) due to overgrowth of open marshes with bushes. In the short term it strongly fluctuates depending on precipitation. • Servech: Aquatic warbler - 22-57; Curlew – 2; Great snipe – 10. The number fluctuates by year depending on the water level: in 2019 the water level was low, in 2020 it has been close to optimum. 	
	23. Area of restored sedge fen mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 800 ha. An agreement with the peat extracting factory for the remaining 400 ha was found to re-water - at the factory's expense - after the production is completed in 2021-22. 	
	24. Area of vegetation associations on restored mire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation and planting of sedge seeds in the restored Dokudovskoye bog on an area of about 70 ha is planned for August 2020. 	
	25. Greenhouse gas emissions at following pilot sites: 12,456 ha of forest peatland; 1,025 ha of open peatlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-20 tons per ha per year. Carbon dioxide emissions are estimated prior to rewetting. The reduction in emissions will be assessed in 2021, after the completion of the rewetting activities on approximately 12,000 ha 	
	26. Number of genetically valuable bison transferred from different	No change from the baseline (0). After studying the genetics of the Nalibokski bison micropopulation, a recommendation has been made by the National Academy of Sciences of	

Expected Results	Project Indicators	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
<p>and optimization of hydrological regime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.2: Program on exchange of individuals across micro-populations to improve the genetic status of the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison developed and realized • Output 3.3: Targeted measures to stabilize populations of insufficiently studied globally threatened species • Output 3.4: Assessing the efficiency of implementation of project measures (monitoring of globally threatened species, soil and ground water table, carbon emissions avoided and carbon sequestered) 	micro populations in Belarus and Poland to Nalibokski to increase diversity	Belarus on advisability of transferring new animals to enrich the genetic diversity of the local micropopulation. An exchange of 2 females from Nalibokskaya Pushcha for 2 males from Moldova is planned in 2020-2021.	
	27. Number of genetic passports issued for the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 genetic passports prepared for the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison 	
	28. Population dynamics of the Aquatic warbler in the Zuvintas Reserve (Lithuania)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population size increases from 2 males in 2017 to 30 males in 2020 (through translocation). The International Study Group on Aquatic warbler recognized that a breakthrough in Aquatic warbler conservation had been achieved through the developed translocation methodology. 	
	29. Number of breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle in Olmany Mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 pairs: There is a possibility in decreasing of breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle in the future due to a sharp decrease in the number of water vole (due to diseases), their main forage supply. 	
	30. Breeding success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change from the baseline (30%). 27 nests were arranged for the Greater Spotted Eagle and other large birds of prey (2019). Research in this area is planned for 2021-2022, together with another international technical assistance project, "Polesie", where this issue is one of the priorities. 	
	31. Number of secure nesting sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 38 artificial nests have been established for rare bird species (big eagle, owl, bearded eagle). Artificial nests of the similar type can be used by different bird species. 	
	32. Action plan on conservation of 13 invertebrates and 5 molluscs with EN and VU status based on scientific knowledge of size and distribution (including Dolomedes plantarius, Dytiscus latissimus, Graphoderus bilineatus, Cerambyx cerdo, Lycaena helle, Lopinga achine, Euphydryas maturna, Phyllodesma ilicifolia, Unio crassus, Pseudanodonta complanata)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National status of 13 invertebrate species and 5 mollusk species was assessed in Brest, Minsk, Grodno and Vitebsk regions, similar works in Gomel and Mogilev regions are underway. Data on distribution, population status, ecology and threats to the above-mentioned species were obtained. • Dolomedes plantarius and Unio crassus were settled in the habitats where these species have disappeared and newly created populations are being monitored. • New Cerambyx cerdo habitats (2 new populations) have been restored and preparatory works have been carried out to relocate them to the new Unio crassus habitats (2 new populations). 	

Source: Adapted from project progress reports, mostly from PIR 2019 and draft PIR 2020.

63. Overall, the project is progressing well towards its outcome targets and it has almost two and a half more years of implementation to go. As discussed in more details in section 3.3.1, the implementation of project activities is well coordinated among the project's key Partners - whom are all represented on the Project Board (PB) – and contributes to an effective project delivering what it is expected to deliver. The review conducted by the Evaluation Team of achievements versus targets of the project, indicates that the project should meet most if not all its targets by October 2022.

64. The project implementation team and its Partners have been able to implement activities and deliver intermediate results under each component as planned in the project strategy; it is on track to be a satisfactory project by October 2022 and should contribute to “*introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity*”. Below is a summary of key deliverables under each component:

65. Under **Outcome 1** (GEF budget USD 2,287,456 – Used USD 1,597,408⁶ or 70%), the project's focus under this outcome is three-fold: (1) it supported the development/drafting of the Law on the protection and sustainable use of peatlands, which was approved by the government in December 2019, and also the formulation of secondary legislation to improve the legal framework for the conservation of globally threatened species; (2) it has been piloting new financially self-sustaining approaches for managing forest and mire protected areas, aiming at the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity and the improvement of the sustainable management of floodplain meadows. Measures include the sustainable use of natural resources in these areas (gathering, processing and selling vegetation mire biomass and harvesting, processing and selling cranberries), and the development of ecotourism.



66. As a result of activities implemented so far, biodiversity indicators show that the conservation of key threatened species has been improving. Results include the improvement of the European bison habitat conditions decreasing their negative impacts on surrounding agricultural land, and on increasing the population of several bird species such as the Aquatic Warbler, Wigeon, Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit.

67. Under **Outcome 2** (GEF budget USD 1,027,039 – Used USD 642,943 or 63%), the project has been focusing on biodiversity-important forests outside protected areas. A total of 122,866 ha of rare biotopes have been identified on the territory of 33 forestries. Recommendations for the sustainable use of these protected biotopes have been identified and are being incorporated in forest management plans in several forestries. A comprehensive inventory of hydro-forestry systems was carried out, including guidelines on how to use them, on an area of 65,911ha located in 2 Oblasts. Finally, proposals to use forest hydro ameliorative systems on a total area of 257,000 ha were developed and accepted by the respective forestries (over 30 forestries in 5 regions of the country).

68. Under **Outcome 3** (GEF budget USD 746,039 – Used USD 451,294 or 61%), the project has been focusing on implementing innovative biotechnological measures seeking to eliminate the most significant threats to globally important species in selected areas. It includes measures to restore habitats of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) through control of the spread of shrubs and reeds and optimization of the hydrological regime; measures to improve the genetic status of the European bison through exchange of individuals across micro-populations of European bison; measures to stabilize populations of globally threatened species such as the installation of artificial nests for rare bird species (big eagle, owl, bearded eagle).



⁶ Actual disbursement figures are as of end of May 2020.

69. Under this outcome, the project has also been focusing on improving the monitoring of key elements affecting biodiversity conservation as indicators of project successes. It includes the monitoring of the dynamic state of globally threatened species (such as population dynamics of the Aquatic Warbler and breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle); the monitoring of vegetation dynamics and of ground water levels before and after the project supported measures to optimize and restore ecosystems; and, finally, the monitoring of carbon benefits from a greater carbon dioxide absorption by wetlands and forest ecosystems due to project supported activities.

70. So far, the project has been successful in delivering its planned activities. The implementation of the project adheres to its strategy designed at the outset and detailed in the project document. This document is used as a “blue-print” by the project implementation team. The existing partnerships with key stakeholders also contribute to the effectiveness of the implementation and the sustainability of project achievements over the long-term. Based on the review of progress made by the project, the Evaluation Team found that the key challenge of the project over its remaining implementation period is the financial self-sufficiency of the management approaches and measures implemented in and out of key biodiversity areas (reserves and surrounding landscapes). These measures have already demonstrated positive impacts on the conservation of globally threatened species, they now need to be self-sustained after the end of the project.

Review of Tracking Tools

71. The Evaluation Team also reviewed the GEF tracking tools for this project, which include the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) and the Financial Sustainability Scorecard (FSC). The project did not use the Biodiversity (BD) Tracking Tool, the land degradation Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool (PMAT), and the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Tracking Tool. Tracking tools are instruments supported by the GEF Secretariat to measure progress in achieving impacts and outcomes established at the portfolio (global) level. The information contained in these tracking tools is collated together at the global level to provide a global summary on the progress made in each GEF focal area.

72. The Evaluation Team noted that the METT and the FSC tracking tools were completed at the inception of the project and have been updated at the time of the MTR. The METT score is also a performance indicator to measure the effectiveness of the project against its objective (*see Table 4 – indicator #2*). The table below shows the METT scores for each protected area at the time of the inception phase, at the MTR time, and at project end (targets).

Table 6: METT Scores

Protected Area	METT Scores		
	at Inception	at MTR	Target at end of project
Nalibokski	50	75	85
Zvanets	49	75	87
Sporovsky	53	79	87
Olmany	43	66	79
Servech	24	47	73
Turov	37	66	84

Sources: Project document, PIR 2019 and information collected from the Project Team.

73. The review of these scores indicates a major improvement in the management effectiveness of the selected protected areas⁷. From an average score of 43 at the time this project was formulated, the assessment conducted at the time of the MTR concluded that this average score is now 68; an increase of 58%. The average target by the end of the project is about 83, which should be achieved when considering that 29 months of implementation remain.

⁷ Nalibokski, Zvanets, Sporovsky, Olmany, Servech, and Turov.

74. The Financial Sustainable Scorecard (FSC) is to assess the financial sustainability of the PA system. The scorecard is compartmentalized into three fundamental components for a fully functioning financial system: (i) legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks; (ii) business planning and tools for cost-effective management (e.g. accounting practices); and (iii) tools for revenue generation. It was completed at inception and then at mid-term point. The scores are presented in the table below.

Table 7: FSC Scores

FSC Components	FSC Scores		
	Maximum Score	at Inception	at MTR
(i) Legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks	95	40	51
(ii) Business planning and tools for cost-effective management	59	24	31
(iii) Tools for revenue generation	71	14	16
Total Score for PA system	225	78	98
Actual score as a percentage of the total possible score	-	35%	44%

Sources: Project document, PIR 2019 and information collected from the Project Team.

75. These scores reveal a slight improvement over the first phase of implementation of the project with a 25% increase of the total score between the status of the financial sustainability of the PA system at inception and at the time of the MTR. However, overall, these scores also reveal that for the time being, the FSC total score is low. It is only 44% of the total maximum score for a PA system that is financially sustainable. As discussed in section 3.1.2, the project is about to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of KBAs with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and a more efficient management with respect to the conservation effect. After a good first phase during which the project piloted a series of management changes, these FSC scores confirm the need for the second phase of the project to focus on the financial sustainability aspects. It is one main critical success factor.

3.2.2. Remaining Barriers to Achieve the Project Objective

76. The project started in November 2017 and will be completed by the end of October 2022. At the time of this review (May 2020), the project has completed 31 months of implementation and has 29 more months to go before it ends. At this point, there is no critical barriers limiting its implementation over the remaining implementation period. As discussed in the previous section, the project overall effectiveness will depend much on the development of a “*financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands.*” So far, good progress has been made in most planned intervention areas. After this first phase of implementation focusing more on improving the conservation of KBAs in and outside protected areas, the remaining period of implementation should now focus more on developing the financial self-sufficiency for the management of these forests and wetlands. It is a challenging area but also a critical success factor for the project to achieve its objective.

77. The rationale of the project for improving the conservation of forests and wetlands, through a more efficient management approach and sustainable financing, was to address three drivers of degradation: (a) effectiveness and sustainability of management of forest and wetland ecosystems in globally important protected areas is inadequate with respect to protection of species; (b) forest management in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs does not fully meet the requirements of these ecosystems' conservation; and (c) inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species.

78. The project – through its activities - has been addressing these three barriers, which ultimately will gauge the overall effectiveness of the project at the end. Removing these barriers is critical for improving the conservation of forests and wetlands. Strategically, the project seeks to: (i) Improve the financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity; (ii) Adopt a sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas; and (iii) Increase the experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and

monitoring of their populations.

79. As discussed in previous sections, this project is timely and responds to national priorities. It is making progress in improving the management effectiveness of forests and wetlands to increase biodiversity conservation of the selected peatlands. The review of the progress made so far indicates that the project will contribute to the removal of the drivers of degradation identified during the formulation of the project. However, following the demonstrations of new forest and wetland management approaches to improve biodiversity conservation during the first phase of the project, the challenge to render these approaches financially sustainable remains. Considering the time left to implement the second part of this project, it is recommended to focus on the development of a “*financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands.*”

3.3. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

80. This section discusses the assessment of how the project has been implemented. It assessed how efficient the management of the project has been and how conducive it is to contribute to a successful project implementation.

3.3.1. Management Arrangements

81. The management arrangements of this project are as follows:

- The *GEF Agency* for this project is UNDP; assuring the role of Project Assurance. It will monitor the implementation and expenditure of the project funds. It is also responsible for monitoring the progress of the project, timely reporting on the progress of the project to the UNDP-GEF Regional Office, and organizing the preparation of mandatory and possible additional reviews and assessments, as required. Upon request of the Executing Entity - MNREP, the UNDP Country Office provides *Direct Project Services (DPS)*, including procurement of goods and services, contracting, human resources management, and facilitation of training activities (*This latter function is funded by the GEF grant*).
- The *Executing Entity* of the project is the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP). It is responsible for the overall implementation of the project and closely cooperates with UNDP to ensure the successful implementation of all project activities. (*This function is funded by the government*).
- The project is guided by a *Project Board (PB)* as the executive decision-making body of the project. It is composed of representatives from the main stakeholders including the MNREP, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, National Academy of Science, administrations of state environmental enterprises “Reserve Sporovskii”, “Reserve Zvanets”, Reserve “Nalibokskii”, JSC “Turovsnina”, NGO “Akhova Ptushak Batskauschyny” and UNDP Belarus. Other members can be invited at the decision of the PB on an as-needed basis, but taking into account that the PB should remain sufficiently lean to be operationally effective. The PB provides strategic oversight and guidance based upon project progress assessments and related recommendations from the Project Manager (PM) who is non-voting member. The PSC ensures that the project remains on course to deliver the desired outcomes of the required quality. The PSC met six times since the inception of the project in November 2017 (January 30, 2018, May 30, 2018, June 12, 2018, December 5, 2018, June 28, 2019, December 11, 2019).
- A *National Project Director (NPD)* was appointed by MNREP and is chairing the PB. The NPD provides the general coordination and support to the project on behalf of the MNREP (*This function is funded by the government*).
- A full time *Project Manager (PM)* was selected by the PSC and hired by UNDP. The PM participates as a non-voting member to PB meetings and is responsible for compiling summary reports of discussions and conclusions of each meeting. The PM is tasked with the day-to-day management of project activities, as well as with financial and administrative reporting. He is guided by Annual Work Plans, following UNDP Results Based Management (RBM) standards. The PM prepares Annual Work Plans (AWPs) in advance of each successive year and submit them to the PB for approval (*This function is funded by the GEF grant*).

- A *Project Management Unit (PMU)* was established at the beginning of the project; it is located on the premises of MNREP in Minsk. It is headed by the PM and provides project administration, management and technical support as required by the needs of day-to-day operations of the project. The unit is composed of the following staff:
 - i. Project Manager (PM) – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
 - ii. Project Administrative/Financial Assistant – *Full time funded by the GEF grant*
 - iii. Project Scientific Coordinator – *Full time funded by the GEF grant*
 - iv. Project Driver – *Full time funded by the GEF grant*
 - v. Project Procurement and Communication Specialist – *Part time funded by the GEF grant*
- The PMU is technically supported by international and national experts. The recruitment of specialists and the procurement of any equipment and materials for the project is done by the PMU, in consultation with the NPD and in accordance with relevant recruitment and procurement rules and procedures of UNDP and of the government of Belarus.

82. The project is implemented under the “*UNDP Support Services to National Implementation Modality (NIM)*” in line with the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) between the government of Belarus and UNDP signed on September 24, 1992. In this modality, UNDP may be requested to provide support services to nationally implemented projects, which must be done following UNDP rules and regulations.

83. In addition, to facilitate the mobilization of project resources and coordinate project supported activities, the project developed agreements between UNDP and 7 Implementing Partners⁸. Each agreement (7) was developed to scope the cooperation between the project and the respective entities. In addition to regular clauses of an agreement, each one included a copy of the project document; a description of activities to be implemented by the signatory entity, including their respective costs; an annual work plan; a UNDP expenditure report template; and the financial responsibility and requirements for each entity (7). Through these agreements, the implementation of project activities have been truly nationally implemented; which is conducive to a better national ownership of project achievements. The Evaluation Team found that the implementation process conducted by the respective entities, has resulted in a good institutionalization of project achievements, which should contribute to the long-term sustainability of these achievements.

84. The review indicates that the management arrangements as planned at the outset of the project are good and conducive for a day-to-day implementation of project activities. The project is implemented by a good technical team of professionals supported by short-term experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in conservation of forests and wetlands and peatland management. Additionally, the fact that the PMU is based at MNREP is also an incentive for developing a good national ownership of the project and its achievements. One particular positive characteristic of these management arrangements is the functioning of the PB. Through the PB membership, the project enjoys strong partnership with key government entities, particularly MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, National Academy of Sciences, and the Administration of Reserves, whom are all members of the PB. They meet regularly, review the progress made by the project, and endorse annual work plans. Key decisions for the implementation of the project are made collaboratively among the members of the PB. The result of this collaboration is a well-coordinated project enjoying a good ownership by national Partners, which should contribute to the long-term sustainability of its achievements.

3.3.2. Stakeholder Engagement

85. As per the project document, a number of consultation meetings with stakeholders took place during the formulation of the project (PPG phase); including two large workshops (Minsk May 12, 2016 with 25 participants and Stolin in the Brest region July 7-8, 2016 with 32 participants) and 16 stakeholders meetings held mostly in the regions. These consultations included meetings with staff from the selected reserves and other regional/local government officials in regions. These consultations were held to discuss and gain consensus on various project activities. On this basis, a list of key Stakeholders to be involved in the implementation of the project was developed with their respective expected roles and responsibilities. This list is presented in the table below:

⁸ Scientific-Practical center on Bioresources; Institute of Experimental Botany; Scientific-Practical center on Cattle Breeding; State Reserve “Nalibokski”; State Reserve “Sporovski”; State Reserve “Zvanets”; and BelNIITS “Ecologia”

Table 8: List of Stakeholders and their Roles and Responsibilities Anticipated in the Project

Stakeholders		Roles and Responsibilities in the Project	
National Government Organizations / Counterparts			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP) of Belarus, BelNIC Ecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National implementing agency for the project• Heads the cross-ministerial Project Board for the project• Ensures regular monitoring of project progress and, with UNDP, takes measures to address problems in implementation• Oversees the implementation of the conservation activities related to conservation and sustainable management of European bison populations• Takes the lead on project activities aimed at ensuring the financial sustainability of protected areas		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Academy of Sciences: Scientific and Practical Center – NPC – on Bioresources; Institute of Botany; Scientific and Practical Centre of Livestock Farming; Forest Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides its substantial technical expertise and resources for the scientific assessments needed to implement project activities under all three components• Provides in-kind co-financing in the form of laboratory, equipment, and research facilities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Ministry of Forestry (Belgosles, Forestries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes the lead in the identification and designation of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF)• Takes the lead on conducting the inventory of peatland forests• Ensures sustainability and replication of peatland forest restoration and sustainable management activities		
Local Government Organizations / Counterparts			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PA administrations of selected PAs: Nalibokski, Zvanets, Sporovsky, Olmany mires, Mid Pripyat, Turov meadow, Servech, and Belovezhskaya Puscha	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key partners for implementation of financial mechanisms in Component I• Ensure coordination with private sector and local communities• Participate in the habitat and species management activities for aquatic warbler, European bison and greater spotted eagle under Component III		
Private Sector			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OAO «Turovshchina», «Valeotrans», «Arzhanitsa»	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Actively engaged in the development of income-generation activities at protected areas that are a focus of the project, as well as at the forested peatland pilot sites that are to be restored, withdrawn from logging, and designated for sustainable use		
Civil Society			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representatives of Local Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biomass processing and pellet production industries, as well as tourism operators will be important partners in implementing the financial mechanisms under Component I		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NGO “BirdLife Belarus”• NGO “Bagna”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating a positive public attitude toward the project. Participation in bird counts in project areas.		

86. Despite all these consultations which took place during the formulation of the project, no Stakeholder involvement plan was identified and be part of the project document. The results of these consultations consisted mostly of the table above. No clear mechanisms to facilitate and engage stakeholders were included in the initial implementation mechanisms of the project beside the need to set up a Project Board composed of all key Implementing Partners.

87. Nevertheless, key Implementing Partners at both national and regional/local level are well engaged in implementing project activities. As discussed in section 3.3.1, good management arrangements have been put in place; including the signature of agreements with seven Implementing Partners. The PMU is based at MNREP; a good incentive to stimulate ownership of project achievements by key stakeholders. Finally, the

Project Board is composed of all key Implementing Partners. They have met over twice a year so far and it has certainly contributed to a good coordination and collaboration among project partners.

88. However, despite that key Partners are well engaged in project activities facilitating the institutionalization of project achievements, the assessment of stakeholder engagement in the project conducted by the Evaluation Team reveals that the civil society - and to some extent the private sector - are not much involved in the implementation of the project. Most of their participation is restrained to the civil society (mostly women as cranberry gatherers) being the targeted group/beneficiaries of the collection and processing of cranberries (output 1.3) as an effective mechanism for conserving mire ecosystems; and to the private sector being the key player to harvest and process biomass (as chips) to be sold as fuel (output 1.4) and to develop a sustainable meadow management model (output 1.5).

89. Yet, civil society and the private sector are definite tangential stakeholders; particularly the surrounding communities to the pilot reserves. They could play a larger role in the management and conservation of peatlands; particularly in areas outside protected areas/KBAs. A greater participation in project activities would contribute to raising awareness about peatlands (their values and the need to conserve and restore them), innovate/identify potential alternatives for the conservation of peatlands, and overall, to be part of the solution of restoring/conserving their surrounding ecosystems. It is recommended that the project put more focus on involving the civil society and the private sector in the implementation of the second phase of the project.

3.3.3. Work Planning

90. Project Annual Work Plans (AWPs) were produced every year from 2017. These plans were developed following UNDP project management guidelines, including the calendar year cycle (January to December for each year). Once finalized, these AWP were reviewed and endorsed by the PB and approved by MNREP and UNDP. These AWP, presented in a tabular form, details the list of activities to be conducted during the coming year following the structure of the log frame of the project (components 1, 2 & 3, and respective outputs). They also include for each activity, a tentative schedule (per quarter) when it will be implemented, a corresponding budget, who is responsible, the type of resources to be used (local consultants, equipment, etc.) and the target for the year for each activity.

91. Based on the information collected, the Evaluation Team compared the budgeted annual work plans with the actual annual disbursements (GEF grant only), the results are presented in the table below:

Table 9: Annual Work Plans versus Actual Expenditures (GEF grant)

Years	AWP Budgets	Actual Expenditures	% Spent
2017	10,235	4,149	41%
2018	796,674	725,086	91%
2019	1,364,099	1,757,788	129%
2020	765,585	310,387 ⁹	41%

Sources: Project AWP and UNDP-Atlas CDR Reports

92. Numbers presented in the table above reveal that the annual work planning function since the start of the project in 2017 have been more of a “reactive” budgeting process rather than a “proactive” budgeting process. The implementation team has been guided by activities to be implemented to reach the expected results. Each AWP included a list of activities and a tentative budget. Through the implementation of activities, the use of adaptive management and flexibility of the project team resulted from time to time in some changes, which overall did not change the progress of the project toward its expected results. However, the expenditures, particularly the big-ticket items such as procurement of equipment, may have shifted in time, resulting in annual expenditures under or over budget.

93. The difference between the AWP and the actual disbursements for 2017 is negligible in term of dollars

⁹ Actual expenditures for 2020 are from January to end of May 2020.

(underspent by USD 6,086). Regarding the following year (2018), the actual annual expenditures represented 91% of the original annual budget for the year. However, this percentage was reduced to 65% when the initial budget was revised later in the year to USD 1,107,624. This is mostly explained by the relatively high amount budgeted for 2018 for the procurement of equipment allocated to the six reserves such as tractors, mulchers, mowers, trailers, etc.), as well as conducting the inventory of rare and typical biotopes in several forestries. Due to some minor delays, some of these high cost items were then expended in the following year (2019). Regarding the last full year of implementation (2019), as a result of the delays in the previous year, the actual expenditures for the year were 129% of the original budget. Similar to 2018, the AWP budget was revised later in the year but it still resulted in the expenditures being over this revised budget by 23%. Finally, the current expenditures for 2020 as of end of May are on budget. They represent 41% of the AWP budget for the year versus 42% of the time elapsed.

94. In reviewing the annual work plans, the Evaluation Team found that the management and administration of the project is not a simple affair! There are a lot of “*moving parts*” for a smooth implementation. As detailed in section 3.3.1, the project team has to administer and manage agreements with seven partners. When needed, the project implementation team has been using adaptive management to support activities through the best available “*channels*” to deliver activities and reach the intended results.

3.3.4. Finance and Co-finance

95. The project is implemented in line with the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) between the government of Belarus and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), signed by the parties on September 24, 1992. As discuss in Section 3.3.1, the implementation modality of the project to allocate, administer and report on project resources is the *UNDP Support Services to National Implementation Modality (NIM)*. In this modality, UNDP is requested to provide support services to the nationally implemented project, which must be done following UNDP rules and regulations. The UNDP Resident Representative is accountable for the provision of services, including their quality and timeliness. The implementing partner has full programmatic control, however, and so full accountability for and ownership of project activities. Project activities are carried out by the Project Team in partnership with MNREP and reports to UNDP as per the guidelines.

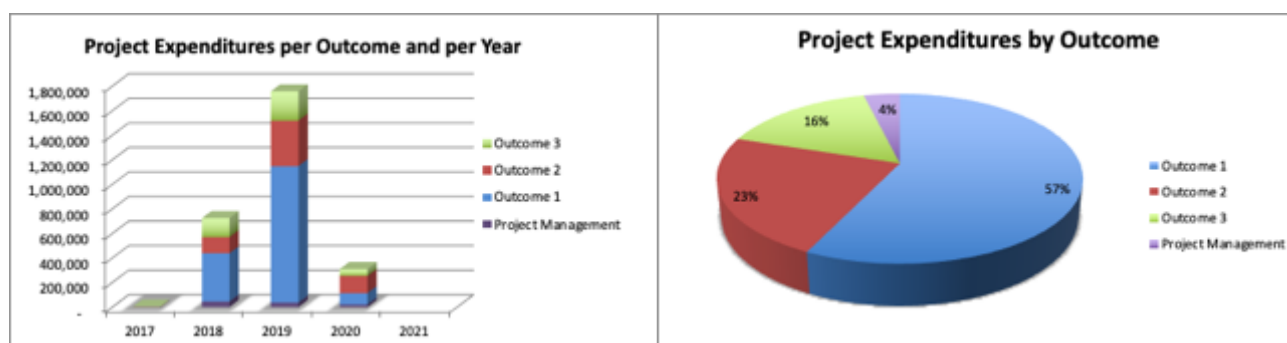
96. At the time of this evaluation, the review of financial records as recorded in the UNDP Atlas system indicates that the actual expenditures allocated against the GEF project grant for the years 2017 to May 2020 (31 months) represent about 66% (USD 2,797,410) of the approved budget of USD 4,263,561 versus an elapsed time of 52% (31 months out of 60). The breakdown of project expenditures by outcome and by year is presented in the table below.

Table 10: UNDP-GEF Project Funds Disbursement Status (GEF Grant in USD)

Component / Outcome	Budget (USD)	2017	2018	2019	2020 ¹⁰	Total (USD)	Total/ Budget
Component 1	2,287,456	802	393,369	1,112,101	91,137	1,597,408	69.8%
Component 2	1,027,039	802	131,518	370,685	139,939	642,943	62.6%
Component 3	746,039	826	154,646	238,754	57,067	451,294	60.5%
Project Management	203,027	1,720	45,552	36,248	22,245	105,766	52.1%
TOTAL	4,263,561	4,149	725,086	1,757,788	310,387	2,797,410	65.6%

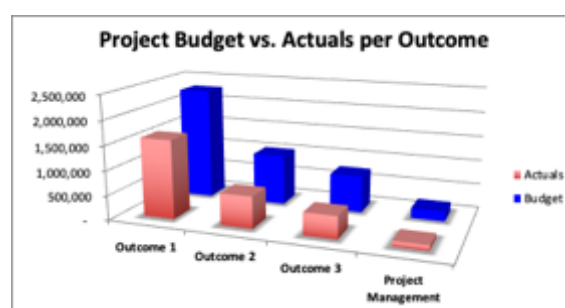
Sources: UNDP Atlas Financial Reports (CDRs) and information collected from the Project Team.

¹⁰ Figures for 2020 are from January to May 2020.



97. With a project starting date of November 2017, the project expended USD 2,797,410 to the end of May 2020 that is 66% of the GEF grant versus 52% of the project timeline (31 months out of 60 months). As of June 1, 2020, the remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 1,466,151 (34%). When considering the timeline left for implementing the project (29 months), the entire budget should be expended by October 2022. The average monthly disbursement for the remaining period of 29 months needs to be about USD 50,557 to totally expend the GEF grant. This is a much lower expenditures level than the average monthly disbursement of the first 31 months of USD 90,239. This higher level of expenditures during the first half of the project is mostly explained by the fact that most of the planned procurement of equipment was completed during this phase; the next phase will focus more on consolidation of initial achievements, strengthening capacities and developing the sustainable financing of the conservation measures being implemented with the support of the project.

98. The review of project expenditures against budgets per outcome indicates an equal level of disbursements. The table above and the diagram indicate that almost 70% of the budget for outcome 1 (*Improve financial sustainability and management of PAs*) has been expended to May 2020; 63% was noted for outcome 2 (*SFM outside of PAs*); and about 61%, for outcome 3 (*Increase experience and knowledge*). This disbursement profile is in line with the analysis of project achievements so far conducted in section 3.2.1.



99. In the meantime, about 52% of the project management budget has been spent as of end of May 2020, which represents a ratio of about 3.8% of the total expenditures to May 2020. This ratio compares well against the planned ratio of 4.8% allocated to project management at the formulation stage. The remaining budget for project management is USD 97,261 or almost 7% of the remaining GEF grant. Based on these figures, it is anticipated that, by the end of the project, the project management expenditures should be well within the budgeted amount of USD 203,027.

100. Finally, the Evaluation Team reviewed the financial audit conducted by independent auditors for the year 2019. Auditors reviewed the expenditures reported by the Implementing Partners (7) for the year and totaling USD 573,450. The opinions of the auditors are that “*the statements of expenses present fairly, in all material respects, the expense incurred by the project, for the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 in accordance with agreed upon accounting policies and the notes to the statement and were: (i) in conformity with the approved project budgets; (ii) for the approved purposes of the project; (iii) in compliance with the relevant UNDP regulations and rules, policies and procedures; and (iv) supported by properly approved vouchers and other supporting documents*”. In addition, the Auditors reviewed the Statement of Assets and Equipment. They also concluded that it “*presents fairly, in all material respects, the assets and equipment status of the project as at December 31, 2019, in accordance with UNDP accounting policies and the notes related to the statement*”.

Co-financing / Parallel Financing

101. Co-financing commitments at the outset of the project totaled the amount of USD 14,230,000 (*see table below*), which represented about 77% of the total financial resources required in the project document of USD 18,493,561 (GEF grant + co-financing) for the implementation of the project. All pledged amounts listed in

the table below were supported by co-financing letters and are part of the project document.

Table 11: Co-financing Status

Partner	Type	Commitments (USD)	Reported at mid-term
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection	In-kind	2,900,000	3,053,040
Ministry of Forestry	In-kind	8,000,000	12,400,000
UNDP TRAC	Cash	35,000	22,795
UNDP Parallel	In-kind	1,465,000	?
JSC Turauschyna	In-kind	1,050,000	?
Institute of Experimental Botany - NAS	In-kind	60,000	289,427
NPC – NAS on Bioresources	In-kind	690,000	248,182
Nalibiksky Reserve	In-kind	30,000	8,388
Total (USD)		14,230,000	

Source: Project Document

102. The table indicates that 77% of this co-financing was pledged by two ministries of the government of Belarus. A further 7% was from the private sector and 5% from the National Academy of Science and from the reserve of Nalibiksky. The rest (10%) was pledged by UNDP as parallel financing through the project “*Involvement of civil society organizations in environmental monitoring and improvement of environmental governance at local level*” and USD 35k of cash.

103. At the time of the MTR, the available reported co-financing contributions indicates an amount of USD 16,013,444 or 113% of the original co-financing amount committed at the formulation stage of the project. These contributions confirmed by letters from the Implementing Partners, are also confirmed by the review conducted for this MTR. The site visits and interviews conducted for this MTR by the Evaluation Team confirmed that Implementing Partners were engaged in implementing activities with their own resources in addition to the resources provided by the project. Under the NIM modality, and as discussed in section 3.3.1, the project has 7 agreements in place to support the implementation of activities; which defined the respective responsibilities and resources. Implementing Partners have contributed critical resources to the implementation of project activities, particularly MNREP and the Ministry of Forestry as the two key Implementing Partners of the project; reflecting a good national ownership of the project by these key stakeholders.

3.3.5. Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

104. A good M&E plan was developed during the formulation of the project in accordance with standard UNDP and GEF procedures. A budget of USD 65,000 was allocated to M&E, representing about 1.5% of the GEF grant. The Evaluation Team noted that this budget was revised to USD 63,000 at the completion of the inception phase, due to a lower cost of the activity “*Inception workshop and report*”. These changes were documented in the inception report.

105. A summary of the M&E plan operating modalities are as follows:

- *Performance indicators:* A set of 32 indicators with their respective baselines and targets at the end of the project were identified and documented in the *Project Results Framework*.
- *Inception workshop:* It was conducted on February 27, 2018 in Minsk. The project design was reviewed in detail, including the *Project Results Framework* and the available resources for implementing the project. Discussions were facilitated on roles and responsibilities of the *Implementing Agency (UNDP)*, the *Implementing Partner (MNREP)*, other partners/stakeholders and the *Project Implementation Team*. The implementation plan covering the entire life of the project was reviewed. Finally, a set of recommendations to the Project Implementation Team were identified and documented in the *inception report*.
- *Quarterly Progress Reports:* Quarterly progress reports were planned to monitor the progress and record it in the UNDP Enhanced Results Based Management Platform. Risks have also been

reviewed quarterly and updated in the Atlas system when needed.

- *Annual Project Review/Project Implementation Review (APR/PIR)*: These annual progress reports, combining both UNDP and GEF annual reporting requirements, are submitted by the Project Manager to the PB, using a UNDP/GEF template for project progress reporting. These APRs/PIRs includes a summary of results achieved against the overall targets identified in the project document (Development Objective (DO)); and a summary of deliverables implemented during the reporting period (Implementation Progress (IP)). They follow the GEF annual cycle of July 1st to June 30th for each year.
- *Periodic Monitoring through Site Visits*: UNDP Country Office has been conducting visits to project sites to assess firsthand project progress. Field Visit Reports were prepared and circulated to the project implementation team.
- *External mid-term and final evaluations*: The mid-term evaluation (MTR) is underway (this report); a final evaluation will take place three months prior to the final PB meeting and will follow UNDP and GEF evaluation guidelines. The GEF's tracking tools were completed for the MTR and will be updated before the final evaluation.
- *Project Terminal Report*: This comprehensive report will summarize the results achieved (objectives, outcomes, outputs), lessons learned, problems met and areas where results may not have been achieved. It will also lay out recommendations for any further steps that may need to be taken to ensure sustainability and replicability of project's results.
- *Learning and Knowledge Sharing*: Results from the project are to be disseminated within and beyond the project intervention zone through existing information sharing networks and forums. The project is due to identify and participate, as relevant and appropriate, in scientific, policy-based and/or any other networks, which may be of benefit to project implementation though lessons learned. The project is to identify, analyze, and share lessons learned that might be beneficial in the design and implementation of similar future projects. A two-way flow of information between this project and other projects with a similar focus is also encouraged.
- *Communications and visibility requirements*: Full compliance is required with UNDP's Branding Guidelines and the GEF's Communication and Visibility Guidelines, including the use of the UNDP and GEF logos. For other agencies and project partners that provide support through co-financing, their branding policies and requirements should be similarly applied.
- *Audits*: Audits are conducted in accordance with UNDP Financial Regulations and Rules and applicable audit policies on UNDP projects. An audit of this project has been conducted in early 2020 for the year 2019.

106. The revised set of indicators presented in the *Project Results Framework* was reviewed during this review. It includes a set of 32 indicators – each one with a baseline and a target by the end of the project - to monitor the performance of the project at the objective and outcome levels. The list of indicators and targets is presented in the table below.

Table 12: List of Performance Indicators

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
Project Objective: To introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity	1. Biodiversity: Funding gap for management of targeted globally significant PAs -- Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, and Olmany Mires	● Financing gap reduced by half
	2. Protected area management effectiveness score -- METT applied at Nalibokski, Sporovsky, Zvanets, Mid-Pripyat (Pogost meadow), Turov Lug, Olmany Mires, Dikoe and Servech	● METT PA Target ○ Nalibokski 85 ○ Zvanets 87 ○ Sporovsky 87 ○ Olmany 79 ○ Servech 73 ○ Turov 84
	3. Sustainable Forest Management: Area of high conservation value forest identified and maintained	● 200,000 ha

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
	4. Land Degradation: Application of INRM practices in wider landscapes	● 12,456 ha (5 forested peatland pilots)
	5. Climate Change Mitigation: Area under low GHG management practices with monitoring of low GHG impact undertaken	● 415,385 ha
Outcome 1 – Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 1.1: Improvement of nature conservation legislation aimed at conservation of globally threatened species and their habitats, as well as of the system of registration of nature protection areas ● Output 1.2: Improved habitat conditions for the European bison micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve through creation of mosaic meadow grounds among dense forests ● Output 1.3: Profitable use of cranberry reserves as an effective way of mire ecosystem conservation ● Output 1.4: Financially self-sustaining wetland biomass harvesting and processing program launched at two PAs (Sporovsky and Zvanets) in partnership with private sector ● Output 1.5: Improved financial sustainability of measures for conservation of floodplain meadows (key habitats of globally threatened species) through introduction of technology of sustainable use of meadows for mowing and grazing and through development of ecological tourism ● Output 1.6: Ecological tourism developed at key protected areas, resulting in improved financial sustainability of protected areas and 	6. Number of business organizations involved in sustainable habitat management at target PAs (Zvanets, Sporovsky, Mid-Pripyat, Turov Meadows) that is profitable for them	● At least one business organization profitably involved at each target PA
	7. Representation of women in sustainable use activities associated with business plans developed under Outcome 1	● 50%
	8. Area of natural, highly productive foraging grounds within the living territory of the European bison's micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve (50,000 ha)	● More than 300 ha
	9. Spatial distribution of bison throughout the micro population's living area	● Bison forage in this area (mosaic meadows) during the most important period of the year (late autumn, early spring)
	10. Area of open sedge mires where sustainable resource use and vegetation management is practiced	● Sporovsky 3,000 ha ● Zvanets 4,500 ha
	11. Dynamics of water level throughout the year	● Optimal water level – 5-20 cm above ground level during May-July ● Water mineralization is from 150 to 300 mg/l
	12. Population size of indicator species in Zvanets and Sporovsky Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sporovsky Reserve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aquatic warbler: 900 ○ Greater spotted eagle: 4 ● Zvanets Reserve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aquatic warbler: 5,000 ○ Greater spotted eagle: 4 ○ Curlew: 15
	13. Area of open, sustainably used meadows at Turov and Pogost Meadows	● Turov Meadow 380 ha ● Pogost 150 ha
	14. Population size of species during spring migration (Widgeon, Ruff, Black-tailed godwit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turov Meadow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Widgeon : 50,000 ○ Ruff: 40,000 ○ Black-tailed godwit: 10,000 ● Pogost Meadow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Widgeon: 10,000 ○ Ruff: 10,000 ○ Black-tailed godwit: 500
	15. Population size of nesting indicator bird species (Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit, Terek sandpiper, Redshank)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turov Meadow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Great snipe: 150 ○ Black-tailed godwit: 80 ○ Terek sandpiper: 20 ○ Redshank 200 ● Pogost Meadow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Great snipe: 20

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
<p>raised awareness about importance of globally biodiversity conservation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Black-tailed godwit: 5 ○ Terek sandpiper: 2 ○ Redshank: 10
	16. Numbers of organized tourists in the PAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nalibokski: 2,500 ● Sporovsky: 5,500 ● Turov Meadow: 2,500
<p>Outcome 2 – Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 2.1: Forest biotopes, subject to special protection, are identified, approved and sustainably managed at an area of 150,000 ha. ● Output 2.2: Avoided degradation of inefficiently drained forest peatlands (260,000 ha) as a result of development and implementation of the Scheme of Sustainable Use of Drained Forest Peatlands, defining ways of use of each peatland, and ecological rehabilitation of inefficiently drained peatlands demonstrated at an area of about 12,456 ha. 	17. Area of forest biotopes transferred to the protection category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 150,000 ha of forest lands with rare biotopes are transferred into protection
	18. Number of Forestries that envisage forestry management plans in line with sustainable use of protected biotopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 forestry enterprises
	19. Number of employees of the Ministry of Forestry trained in the sustainable use of protected biotopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At least 50 employees of the Ministry of Forestry trained
	20. Official policy and document on future use of forest hydro amelioration systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proposals on ways of further use of forest hydro ameliorative systems (260,000 ha) are developed and encapsulated in a Sectoral document of the Ministry of Forestry
<p>Outcome 3 – Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 3.1: Restored habitats (about 1,820 ha) of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) within the most important protected areas (Servech, Dikoe) through control of vegetation succession (control of the spread of shrubs and reeds) and optimization of hydrological regime ● Output 3.2: Program on exchange of individuals 	21. Area of territory with associations of sedge mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dikoe 1,250 ha ● Servech 570 ha
	22. Population size of globally threatened species: Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Curlew, Great snipe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dikoe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aquatic warbler: 250 ○ Greater spotted eagle: 4-5 ● Servech <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aquatic warbler: 90 ○ Curlew: 3-4 ○ Great snipe: 30-40
	23. Area of restored sedge fen mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sedge fen mire Dokudovskoe with an area of 1,200 ha is restored (located in northwest Belarus); offers potential key habitats for globally threatened aquatic warbler, greater spotted eagle
	24. Area of vegetation associations on restored mire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sedge communities on peatland Dokudovskoe occupy at least 700 ha
	25. Greenhouse gas emissions at following pilot sites: 12,456 ha of forest peatland; 1,025 ha of open peatlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carbon dioxide emissions are about 0 tons per ha per year

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
<p>across micro-populations to improve the genetic status of the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison developed and realized</p> <p>● Output 3.3: Targeted measures to stabilize populations of insufficiently studied globally threatened species</p> <p>● Output 3.4: Assessing the efficiency of implementation of project measures (monitoring of globally threatened species, soil and ground water table, carbon emissions avoided and carbon sequestered)</p>	26. Number of genetically valuable bison transferred from different micro populations in Belarus and Poland to Nalibokski to increase diversity	● 5
	27. Number of genetic passports issued for the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison	● 8
	28. Population dynamics of the Aquatic warbler in the Zuvintas Reserve (Lithuania)	● Population size increases to at least 30 males (through translocation) and further population growth is registered
	29. Number of breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle in Olmany Mires	● Stabilized at 20-25 pairs
	30. Breeding success	● 40-50
	31. Number of secure nesting sites	● At least 20 artificial nests are established on plots where greater spotted eagles nest
	32. Action plan on conservation of 13 invertebrates and 5 molluscs with EN and VU status based on scientific knowledge of size and distribution (including Dolomedes plantarius, Dytiscus latissimus, Graphoderus bilineatus, Cerambyx cerdo, Lycaena helle, Lopinga achine, Euphydryas maturna, Phyllodesma ilicifolia, Unio crassus, Pseudanodonta complanata)	● Collected data on the state of populations of these species leads to the development of an Action Plan on conservation of these poorly known species

Source: Project Document and PIRs

107. This set of 32 indicators and their respective targets have been used yearly to report progress made in the APRs/PIRs. There are SMART¹¹ indicators; most of them are specific enough, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound. The review of these indicators and their respective targets reveals that it is an adequate monitoring framework to measure the performance of the project with a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative indicators give a clear measure of things and are numerically comparable. They also provide an easy comparison of a project progress over time and are easy to monitor and do not require too much resources to collect data. Qualitative indicators measure the degree of capacity developed such as skills developed for relevant stakeholders, procedures and mechanisms developed within relevant institutions and measure the relevance of the enabling environment in place (laws, policies and programmes). They depict the status of a situation in more qualitative terms.

108. The monitoring framework in place is workable and the project implementation team has been able to use this framework to annually report progress made by the project. As it stands at the time of this MTR, it is expected that the project will meet most of its targets by October 2022.

109. However, the Evaluation Team also found that among these 32 indicators only one indicator focuses on the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach: “*Funding gap for the management of targeted globally significant PAs.*” This indicator is to monitor the progress toward the objective of the project and its target is “*Financing gap reduced by half*” by the end of the project. The baseline was an annual financing gap for optimal management scenario (operations) estimated at USD 135,506. Therefore, the target would be to have an annual gap of USD 67,753 by the end of the project. However, no methodology is provided in the project document on how this funding gap was calculated and it is not clear as to how this indicator should be calculated and reported over time.

110. As discussed in various sections of this report, the financial sustainability of the new measures piloted is one critical success factor of the project. Without financial sustainability these new measures may not be sustained after the project end. As the project is entering its second phase, it is critical that more attention is

¹¹ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

being given to this aspect. It is recommended that the project management team works with Partners to review this indicator and its baseline and establish a meaningful target.

3.3.6. Reporting

111. Management reports have been produced according to UNDP project management guidelines. They include AWP and annual APRs/PIRs (Annual Progress Reports/Project Implementation Reviews), both are reviewed and endorsed by the PB. The Evaluation Team was able to collect the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 AWP, and the APR/PIRs for 2019 and 2020 (draft). Overall, progress made by the project is being satisfactorily reported, following UNDP project progress reporting guidelines. The APRs/PIRs document the progress made against the project objective and outcomes on a yearly basis using indicators and targets set at the outset of the project (see Section 3.3.5). These annual reports include also a review and update of risks identified at the outset of the project and the steps taken to mitigate these risks when rated as critical; no risks have been reported as critical since the inception of the project.

112. The ratings given in APRs/PIRs were also reviewed. The progress made toward the Development Objective (DO) has been rated as *Satisfactory (S)* in both the 2019 and 2020 APR/PIRs. Regarding the implementation progress it is also rated as *Satisfactory (S)* in the 2019 APR/PIR and this rating is consistent among Reviewers. Based on the review conducted for this MTR, the Evaluation Team found that these ratings are well justified. When considering the status of implementation at the mid-point, the project has certainly the potential to be a successful project by its end.

3.3.7. Communications / Knowledge Management

113. Communication and knowledge management functions are not “embedded” in the project strategy (*Project Results Framework*); i.e. they are not part of the expected results/deliverables. As a result, they are not part of the performance monitoring of the project; no indicators are tracking communication and knowledge management activities. However, they are part of the M&E plan whereby under learning and knowledge sharing “*results from the project are to be disseminated within and beyond the project intervention zone through existing information sharing networks and forums*”. The project is also due to identify and participate, as relevant and appropriate, in scientific, policy-based and/or any other networks, which may be of benefit to project implementation through lessons learned. As per the M&E plan, the project also needs to identify, analyze, and share lessons learned that might be beneficial in the design and implementation of similar future projects. A two-way flow of information between this project and other projects with a similar focus is also encouraged. Unfortunately, the Evaluation Team noted that no budget was planned for this activity in the M&E plan.

114. Nevertheless, despite that communication and knowledge management is not part of the strategy of the project, the project implementation team – in accordance with its M&E plan - has been well communicating the progress of the project and disseminating knowledge through numerous events. It includes regular “*media trips*” focusing on key milestones/achievements of the project such as translocation of Aquatic Warbler from a reserve in Belarus to a reserve in Lithuania; acquisition of new equipment for one of the pilot reserves; improving habitat conditions for European bison in Nalibokski; ecological restoration of drained peatland forests; etc. These media trips include generally Belarussian media outlets but also, from time to time, international journalists. It also includes press-conferences such as one prior to the World Wetlands Day 2020 done in partnership with MNREP, one on Earth Day 2020 and the UN press-conference on Climate Change.

115. Overall, the project has been well covered by the Belarussian media and also by foreign outlets. As reported in the 2019 and 2020 APR/PIRs, a total of 369 communications were released through Belarussian and foreign media (140 in 2018, 67 in 2019 and 162 in 2020). It includes communications in major national and local media outlets (news agencies, online, print, TV, radio), including the publications in Tier 1 media (BELTA, BELAPAN, TUT.BY, SB.BY, “Belarus” magazine, wildlife.by, greenbelarus.info, BT and MIR TV channels), and in international outlets such as Reuters Pictures, Radio France Internationale, Russian Service, Polskie Radio, and PAP Polska Agencja Prasowa agency. The project also produced a short video presenting the objectives of the project that is available online¹². Finally, the project has also communicating

¹² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xDsQuGbDi1YQq70xBTGbAYY0eCpkyrXL/view>

its results on social media including on UNDP Belarus Facebook Twitter and Instagram accounts.

116. From a branding perspective, the Evaluation Team noted the good visibility of the project. Wherever possible, UNDP and GEF logos have been applied in compliance with the UNDP's branding guidelines as well as the GEF's communication and visibility guidelines¹³ such as *"In order to accord proper acknowledgement to GEF for providing funding, a GEF logo would appear on all relevant GEF project publications, including among others, project hardware and vehicles purchased with GEF funds. Any citation on publications regarding projects funded by GEF would also accord proper acknowledgment to GEF."* A few information display boards with logos are still missing but are being produced and will be installed soon. Through these communication activities, the project has certainly been excellent in producing and disseminating information on the project and ensure its visibility. All Partners and key stakeholders are aware about UNDP and GEF visibility requirements.

3.4. Sustainability

117. This section discusses how sustainable project achievements should be over the long-term. It includes a review of the management of risks and specific risks such as financial risk, socio-economic risks, institutional framework and governance risks, and environmental risks.

118. Project risks were identified at the formulation stage and documented in the project document; including the level of risk and mitigation measures for each identified risk. These risks were reviewed during the inception phase and no changes were made. It included a list of 5 risks, which are presented in the table below.

Table 13: List of Risks Identified at the outset of the project

Project Risks	Level ¹⁴	Risk Assessment
1. The project is too ambitious for the amount of resources available	M	During PIF preparation the project activities were designed based on a careful analysis of their cost-effectiveness. The ambition of the proposed framework is considered to be just right for the amount of resources available from the GEF and co-financing. Based on further analysis carried out during the PPG, as well as following discussions with stakeholders, the feasibility of implementing the project framework outlined in the PIF is confirmed. At the implementation stage, the management unit will carefully monitor implementation on a regular basis vis-à-vis the available resources. If there is a mismatch, the Project Steering Committee, in agreement with implementing agencies and GEF Secretariat (where relevant) might be called in to consider a corresponding change to project outputs or strategy. At the same time, it is equally likely (as has been the evidence with all previous and present GEF projects) that new co-financing is going to be identified in addition to those confirmed at the CEO Endorsement stage.
2. Climate change leads to catastrophic impacts on high conservation value forests and peatlands	L	More frequent drought, warmer summers and changed winters are some of the climate change symptoms in Belarus. During the preparation of its National Communication to UNFCCC and implementation of the peatland project, Belarus has developed good knowledge on climate change impacts on the vegetation and fauna structure of the country. The expert teams that will be working on forestry and PA plans will use that knowledge to make sure that proposed solutions incorporate climate change risks.
3. Use of machinery during restoration and management of habitat might damage flora and fauna of wetlands (soil compaction, ditches formation, etc.)	M	All works will be conducted taking into account the standing ground water table and soil condition. The main bulk of work will be carried out during the winter season when minimal to no damage would be expected. The project will take stock of the lessons learnt from wetland ecosystems management in Poland and Lithuania. The project experts have an understanding of what kind of machinery (light weight) is necessary to work on wetland soils without damaging them. Nevertheless, this precaution will be specially highlighted in the work plan and procurement practices related to these restoration works.
4. Demand and price dynamics in wetland	M	Presence of private sector agents who already work on biomass production shows that the demand and prices for biomass products have remained stable

¹³ GEF, April 26, 2011, *Proposal for Enhancing the Visibility of the GEF*

¹⁴ H (high), M (medium), L (low)

Project Risks	Level ¹⁴	Risk Assessment
biomass (pellets) might influence project activities		over the course of the past 10 years. The experience of similar GEF projects implemented elsewhere, as well as non-GEF projects in Belarus (e.g. projects funded by EU in Belarus) confirms that the viability of conservation approaches and technologies and their marketability depends on (1) quality of feasibility study, (2) experience during implementation, (3) careful monitoring and adjustment of proposed approaches after their piloting. All three elements above will be paid careful attention to, given that UNDP has rich experience in engaging best national and international specialists in biomass production. In addition, the project will learn from wetland biomass projects in Lithuania and Poland and will develop its business plan with knowledge of the most cost-effective and biodiversity-friendly approaches.
5. Innovative biotechnical measures (e.g., “steppingstones” of threatened species habitats, translocation, artificial nests) cannot be easily applied in Belarus because of the possibility of events such as droughts and floods	M	Catastrophic floods and droughts may affect the success of measures to restore the marshes. To reduce the risk, for the majority of the pilot areas the project plans to provide optimal hydrological regime. This will reduce the negative impact on the success of the pilot areas and activities, even if there is a lack or excess of water.

Source: Project Document, Inception Report and UNDP-Atlas Risk Log.

119. Since the outset of the project, the project implementation team has been monitoring these risks. Project risks have been logged and monitored/updated regularly in the UNDP-Atlas system. As per the reporting guidelines for annual progress reports (APRs/PIRs), risks are to be reported as critical when the impact and probability are high under section *E - Critical Risk Management*. No critical risks were reported in both the 2019 and 2020 APRs/PIRs. The review of these risks and their respective risk assessments reveal that there are covering key aspects of the project where issues can arise, and the level of risk significance is appropriate.

120. However, when considering the objective of the project, one additional risk should be added and monitored; that is the risk of a lack of financial resources to sustain project achievements after the project end. The project has been piloting new measures to manage and restore peatlands. It required the investment in equipment to conduct these management and restoration activities. After the end of the project, this equipment will require financial resources to run and be maintained (recurrent costs) and over the medium to long term to be replaced. If no additional financial resources are found after this project (from the government, private sector or other sources), this risk may hamper the sustainability of project achievements. It is recommended to add this risk to the risk log of the project and to monitor/report as part of the regular reviews of risks (*see also Section 3.4.1 below*).

121. Nevertheless, within the context of these risks, the Evaluation Team found that the project is progressing well and that through adaptive management, these risks are constantly mitigated; hence decreasing the chance that these risks would materialize. It was noted that as of June 25, 2019, the status of the fourth risk was changed from stable to reduced and the same happened to the third and fifth risks when they were reviewed on December 4, 2019. The project enjoys a good national ownership with Partners, which also contributes to mitigating most of these risks.

3.4.1. Financial risk to Sustainability

122. When reviewing the sustainability of project achievements, financial risk is an area where some questions related to the long-term sustainability of project achievements need some attention. Section 3.1.1 discussed the three key drivers of degradation preventing the implementation of the long-term solution to improve the management of forests and wetlands in and out of KBAs and the financial self-sufficiency of these new measures. The assessment conducted at the formulation stage of this project also revealed that the financial sustainability of the PA system in Belarus is underfunded (*see Section 3.2.1*).

123. Within this context, the project has been supporting the procurement of equipment to several pilot sites

to pilot new management approaches. It includes the procurement of tractors, mulchers, mowers, trailers, etc. to be used for applying these new management measures in the 7 pilot reserves. This support has been much appreciated. It has allowed project activities to be carried out with the required resources. However, once the project will end, financial resources will still be needed to run and maintain this equipment (recurrent costs) and over the medium to long term to replace it. Additional financial resources will also be needed to expand these measures to other reserves in Belarus.

124. Improving the financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity is one key expected outcome of this project. As it stands currently, there is a risk of a lack of financial resources to support these new measures for the management of peatlands after the project end. So far, the government is committed to the project objective and has the “*instruments*” (institutional and legal frameworks) to carry out its programme to restore peatlands in Belarus. The project will also focus more on this aspect of developing the financial sustainability of the management of these KBAs during its second phase. It is expected that the government will continue to support the project achievements with the necessary financial resources from the national budget and possibly from other funding sources. In the meantime, considering the expected outcomes of the project, the Evaluation Team is recommending that the project focuses on the financial sustainability of managing these reserves. As discussed in previous sections of this report, it is a critical success factor of this project.

3.4.2. Socio-economic risk to Sustainability

125. The review indicates that there is no socio-economic risk to sustainability. In the worst-case scenario, if the project has very limited impact, it should not affect negatively the project beneficiaries and the “business as usual” scenario would continue. Nevertheless, as discussed in section 3.2.1, the project is progressing well. New approaches to manage forest and wetlands in and out of KBA have been piloted with the aim of developing sustainable financing for the management of these KBAs. It includes the sustainable development of cranberry production as an effective way of mire ecosystem conservation but also the commercialization of available biomass in these reserves. It was anticipated that these activities will have a positive socio-economic impact on the livelihood of local communities in project areas. Over the medium and long-term, the development of these activities should contribute to increasing incomes for local populations and small businesses, while ensuring sustainable ways to manage peatlands; hence to have positive socio-economic impacts on local livelihoods. It is too early to assess the success of this approach, but, based on activities implemented so far, the potential exists for sustainable positive socio-economic impacts over the long-term.

3.4.3. Institutional framework and governance risk to Sustainability

126. The review did not find any institutional and governance risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. As discussed previously in this report, the project is a direct response to the government agenda to restore peatlands as a key resource for community livelihood. Its aim is to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The project is “rooted” in national priorities. It is particularly aligned with the *Strategy for the Conservation and Wise (Sustainable) Use of Peatlands (2015)*, the “*Law on the Protection and Use of Peat Bogs*”, the “*State Programme for the Development of Specially Protected Natural Areas (SPNAs) for 2015-2019*” as well as the “*Strategic plan for the development of the forestry economic sector (2015- 2030)*.” Additionally, in its initial phase of implementation, the project supported the development of the “*Law on the Protection and the Sustainable Use of Peatlands*” which was adopted by the government in December 2019. Belarus has now a good institutional and governance framework for the sustainable management of KBAs; it is better equipped for the sustainable management and conservation of peatlands.

3.4.4. Environmental risk to Sustainability

127. The review did not find any environmental risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. The project supports the implementation of measures to improve the management of forest and wetlands in and out of KBA. Ultimately, the achievements of the project that is “*to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity,*” should have a medium and long-term positive

environmental impact over the natural resources in the project areas. The implementation of new management approaches for biodiversity conservation of peatlands that are financially sustainable should render the management of these ecosystems more sustainable over the long-term.

4. Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

4.1. Conclusions

Project Strategy

a) The project is fully relevant; it is part of a much larger approach to improve the conservation and management of peatlands in Belarus.

128. The project supports the government to address three drivers of degradation by changing the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The project is well aligned with several key national strategies, programmes and priorities. It is also part of a series of projects supporting the government to improve the conservation and management of peatlands in Belarus. Together, these projects have been instrumental in steadily developing local and national capacities for conservation of peatlands and enhancing awareness of key issues among government staff, technical experts, and policy makers. They have contributed to the development of a body of knowledge and experience in Belarus that has enabled national stakeholders to continue to push the boundary when it comes to conserving the multiple global benefits generated by peatlands.

b) The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for biodiversity conservation and community livelihood.

129. The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities to restore peatlands as a key resource for biodiversity conservation and community livelihood; particularly addressing three drivers of degradation of peatland ecosystems, including the hydrology of peatlands and the management of biomass. The project “*chain of results*” – activities, expected outputs, expected outcomes, and objective - is logical; seeking to introduce changes to the management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The project document is well structured and has been used as a “*blue-print*” by the project management team for the implementation of project activities.

Progress Towards Results

c) The progress made by the project so far is satisfactory.

130. The implementation adheres to the project strategy. It has made good progress so far under its three outcomes and it has almost two and a half more years of implementation. It should contribute to “*introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity*” and should meet most if not all its targets by October 2022. Progress highlights under each outcome include:

- **Under Outcome 1** the project supported the development of the *Law on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Peatlands*, which was approved by the government in December 2019, and the formulation of secondary legislation to improve the legal framework for the conservation of globally threatened species. It has piloted new financially self-sustaining approaches for managing forest and mire protected areas, aiming at the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity and the improvement of the sustainable management of floodplain meadows. As a result, biodiversity indicators show that the conservation of key threatened species has been improving, including the improvement of the European bison habitat conditions decreasing their negative impacts on surrounding agricultural land, and on increasing the population of several bird species such as the Aquatic Warbler, Wigeon, Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit.
- **Under Outcome 2** the project has identified a total of 122,866 ha of rare biotopes on the territory of 33 forestries on biodiversity-important forests outside protected areas. Recommendations for the

sustainable use of these protected biotopes are being incorporated in forest management plans in several forestries. A comprehensive inventory of hydro-forestry systems was carried out on an area of 65,911ha located in 2 Oblasts, including guidelines on how to use them. Then, proposals to use forest hydro ameliorative systems on a total area of 257,000 ha were developed and accepted by the respective forestries (over 30 forestries in 5 regions of the country).

- **Under Outcome 3** the project has implemented innovative biotechnological measures seeking to eliminate the most significant threats to globally important species in selected areas. It includes measures to restore habitats of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) through control of the spread of shrubs and reeds and optimization of the hydrological regime; measures to improve the genetic status of the European bison through exchange of individuals across micro-populations of European bison; measures to stabilize populations of globally threatened species such as the installation of artificial nests for rare bird species (big eagle, owl, bearded eagle). The project has also been supporting the monitoring of key elements affecting biodiversity conservation, including the monitoring of the dynamic state of globally threatened species (such as population dynamics of the Aquatic Warbler and breeding pairs of greater spotted eagle); the monitoring of vegetation dynamics and of ground water levels before and after the project supported measures to optimize and restore ecosystems; and, finally, the monitoring of carbon benefits from a greater carbon dioxide absorption by wetlands and forest ecosystems due to project supported activities.

d) The project is addressing the three drivers of degradation but the challenge to render these new approaches financial sustainable remains.

131. The three-fold strategy of the project has been effective in addressing three drivers of degradation: (a) inadequacy of the management of forest and wetland ecosystems to protect biodiversity in globally important protected areas; (b) management of forests in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs are not effective enough for conservation of ecosystems; and (c) inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species. However, following demonstrations of new forest and wetland management approaches to improve biodiversity conservation, the challenge to render these approaches financially sustainable remains; it is confirmed by the FSC scorecard. It is a key critical success factor for the implementation of a sustainable conservation-centered approach to the management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity.

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

e) The management arrangements are conducive for a good implementation of the project.

132. The project is implemented by a good technical team of professionals supported by short-term experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in conservation of forests and wetlands and peatland management. The PMU, based at MNREP, developed agreements detailing activities and budgets to be implemented between UNDP and 7 Implementing Partners to facilitate the mobilization of project resources and coordinate project supported activities. Through these agreements, the implementation of project activities have been truly nationally implemented; they have provided a framework for good collaboration among Partners and the project. Overall, the project enjoys strong partnership with key government entities, particularly MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, National Academy of Sciences, and the Administration of Reserves, whom are all members of the Project Board. They meet regularly, review the progress made by the project, and endorse annual work plans. Key decisions for the implementation of the project are made collaboratively among members of the Project Board. The outcome of this collaboration is a well-coordinated project enjoying a good ownership by national Partners, contributing to an effective delivery of project activities and resulting in a good institutionalization of project achievements. All these arrangements should be conducive to the long-term sustainability of project achievements.

f) The disbursement of the GEF grant is well on track and the entire GEF grant should be expended by the end of the project.

133. As of end of May 2020, the project expended USD 2,797,410, representing 66% of the GEF grant versus

an elapsed time of 52% (31 months out of 60 months). So far almost 70% of the budget for outcome 1 (Improve financial sustainability and management of PAs) has been expended; 63% for outcome 2 (SFM outside of PAs); and about 61% for outcome 3 (Increase experience and knowledge). About 52% of the project management budget has been spent, which represents a ratio of about 3.8% of total expenditures to May 2020. So far, project expenditures are somewhat ahead of the timeline but this is mostly explained by the fact that most of the planned procurement of equipment was completed during this first phase. The remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 1,466,151 (34%) and, when considering the timeline and plan for the second phase of 29 months of implementation, the entire budget should be expended by October 2022.

g) The monitoring framework in place is workable but only one indicator focuses on the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach.

134. The project implementation team has been able to use the monitoring framework to report progress made by the project annually. It is composed of a set of 32 indicators with their respective baseline and targets. There are SMART indicators used to measure the progress made by the project with a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. However, only one indicator “*Funding gap for the management of targeted globally significant PAs*” – with its target “*Financing gap reduced by half*” by the end of the project - measures the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach. The baseline was an annual financing gap for optimal management scenario (operations) estimated at USD 135,506. Therefore, the target would be to have an annual gap of USD 67,753 by the end of the project. However, no methodology is provided in the project document on how this funding gap was calculated and it is not clear as to how this indicator should be calculated and reported over time. Yet, the financial sustainability of the new measures piloted by the project is one critical success factor of the project.

h) Communication activities and knowledge management are excellent and provide a good visibility of project achievements.

135. Overall, the project has been well covered by the Belarusian media and also by foreign outlets. So far, a total of 369 communications were released through Belarusian and foreign media. It includes communications in major national and local media outlets (news agencies, online, print, TV, radio), including the publications in Tier 1 media (BELTA, BELAPAN, TUT.BY, SB.BY, “Belarus” magazine, wildlife.by, greenbelarus.info, BT and MIR TV channels), and in international outlets such as Reuters Pictures, Radio France Internationale, Russian Service, Polskie Radio, and PAP Polska Agencja Prasowa agency. Project results are also communicated through social media and the project produced a short video presenting the objectives of the project that is available online. Following these communications and a good branding of UNDP and GEF support, the project and its achievements enjoy a good visibility.

Sustainability

i) Project achievements should be sustained over the long-term, though the challenge of management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes to be financially sustainable remains.

136. When assessing the risks to sustainability, no socio-economic, nor environmental risks were found to hamper the sustainability of project achievements. The same is true for institutional and governance risk, following the support of the project to strengthen the legislation of peatland conservation (new Law on Peatlands). However, financial risk is an area where there are questions related to the long-term sustainability of project achievements. Within the context of an underfunded protected area system, the project has been supporting the procurement of equipment to several pilot sites to pilot new management approaches. It has allowed project activities to be carried out with the required resources. However, once the project will end, financial resources will still be needed to run and maintain this equipment (recurrent costs) and over the medium to long term to replace it. Additional financial resources will also be needed to expand these measures to other areas in Belarus. As it stands currently, there is a risk of a lack of financial resources to support these new measures for the management of peatlands after the project end. So far, the government is committed to the project objective and has the “*instruments*” (institutional and legal frameworks) to carry out its programme to restore peatlands in Belarus. Nevertheless, additional financial resources will need to be found to sustain the achievements of the project.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this mid-term review, the following recommendations are suggested.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended to focus on the development of a “financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands” during the remaining period of implementation.

Issue to Address

137. After a good first phase of implementation, whereby the project has made good progress in improving the management effectiveness of forests and wetlands to increase biodiversity conservation of selected peatlands, the key challenge for the remaining period of implementation is the second part of the project objective that is the development of a “financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands.” The progress made so far should contribute to the removal of the drivers of degradation identified during the formulation of the project. Following the demonstrations of new forest and wetland management approaches to improve biodiversity conservation, the challenge now is to ensure that these piloted approaches are financially sustainable. Moreover, the success of the project depends much on improving the financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity; it is a critical success factor of the project. However, as it stands currently, there are limited financial resources to sustain these new measures for the management of peatlands after the project end. It is recommended that the project focuses on the financial aspects of these piloted measures during its second phase of implementation, to ensure the sustainability of these new measures/approaches over the medium and long term.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended to develop a plan for increasing the engagement of civil society and private sector; particularly for the conservation of biodiversity outside KBAs.

Issue to Address

138. Civil society and the private sector could be defined as “tangential” stakeholders; living in surrounding communities to the protected areas and having interests in the management and conservation of areas around their communities. They could play a larger role in the management and conservation of peatlands; particularly in areas outside protected areas. The plan should target a greater participation of civil society and private sector in project activities, which would contribute to raising their awareness about peatlands (their values and the need to conserve and restore them), innovate/identify potential alternatives for the conservation of peatlands, and overall, to be part of the solution of restoring/conserving their surrounding ecosystems.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended to undertake a socio-economic valuation study of peatlands.

Issue to Address

139. Knowing the socio-economic value of peatlands would provide critical information on gauging the importance of these ecosystems in the economy of Belarus and particularly on the socio-economic impacts of these ecosystems on livelihoods of surrounding communities. It would also demonstrate the socio-economic value of these ecosystems to the government and provide a basis to explore the potential for additional investments in the protection and conservation of these ecosystems, including increasing the relevant government budget allocations. It is recommended to conduct a socio-economic valuation of peatlands in Belarus during the remaining period of implementation.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended to organize annual technical reviews with “field day(s)” to exchange knowledge and observe piloted measures bringing together stakeholders including national decision-makers, local administrations, civil society and private sector.

Issue to Address

140. Since its start, the project has accumulated a good body of knowledge in piloting new measures to improve the management and conservation of biodiversity in and out of protected areas. This knowledge is already shared with key partners involved in the implementation of project activities. However, it is recommended to disseminate this knowledge further through the organization of annual technical reviews bringing together decision-makers, researchers, academicians and practitioners, including representatives from

civil society and private sector. These events should focus on what has been accomplished, how to replicate/scale-up these achievements, and how to engage/involve civil society and private sector in the management of these types of ecosystems. These events should also be followed by “*field day(s)*” with the participation of national decision-makers, research institutes, academicians, civil society and private sector to exchange and share knowledge, observe ongoing demonstrations and seek a greater involvement of civil society and private sector in the management of these ecosystems.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended to conduct comprehensive capacity assessments of park and reserve administrations and allocate project resources to consolidate key capacities.

Issue to Address

141. The project has been supporting the implementation of new measures to better manage and improve biodiversity in and out of protected areas in strong collaboration with the selected reserve administrations. These administrations are entities supported by the government to manage and administer protected areas, including the protection and conservation of biodiversity. These new measures supported by the project represent a change of approach in managing these biodiversity important areas. Any change comes with additional capacity requirements such as skills, knowledge, human and financial resources, procedures, mechanisms, etc. In order to ensure the sustainability of project achievements, it is recommended to conduct capacity assessments of these local entities to identify capacity gaps and needs and allocate project resources to consolidate key capacities during the remaining period of implementation of the project.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended to strengthen the gender mainstreaming approach of the project.

Issue to Address

142. Despite that gender was considered in the project document, the consideration of gender throughout the implementation of project activities is limited. It is mostly limited to reporting gender-disaggregated indicators (number of women and men) in progress reports on the participation of women and men to some activities supported by the project. The main consideration of gender in the project, was to be in the sustainable harvest of cranberries where women represents over 80% of the cranberry gatherers. A gender analysis on income generating activities was planned during the formulation of the project but, so far, nothing has been done in this area. As part of local communities surrounding these KBAs, women should be plainly part of the solution to restore and conserve peatlands and their biodiversity. They could play key roles in monitoring biodiversity in protected areas. It is recommended that the project strengthen its gender mainstreaming approach in its activities.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to review the indicator measuring the funding gap and establish a more meaningful target for the financial sustainability of the pilot reserves.

Issue to Address

143. Among the 32 indicators to measure the performance of the project, only one indicator focuses on the financially self-sufficiency of the piloted management approach. This indicator is to monitor the progress toward the objective of the project and its target by the end of the project is “*Financing gap reduced by half*”. The baseline was an annual financing gap for optimal management scenario (operations) estimated at USD 135,506. Therefore, the target would be to have an annual gap of USD 67,753 by the end of the project. However, no methodology is provided in the project document on how this funding gap was calculated and it is not clear as to how this indicator should be calculated and reported over time and more importantly how this indicator would render a reserve self-sufficient financially. It is recommended that the project management team works with Partners to review this indicator, its baseline and establish a meaningful target.

Recommendation 8: It is recommended to add the risk of a lack of financial resources to sustain project achievements after the project end.

Issue to Address

144. The project has been piloting new measures to manage and restore peatlands. It required the investment in equipment to conduct these management and restoration activities. After the end of the project, this

equipment will require financial resources to run and be maintained (recurrent costs) and over the medium to long term to be replaced. Additional financial resources will also be needed to expand these measures to other areas in Belarus. If no additional financial resources are found after this project (from the government, private sector or other sources), this risk may hamper the sustainability of project achievements. It is recommended to add this risk to the risk log of the project and to monitor/report as part of the regular reviews of risks.

Recommendation 9: It is recommended to develop a project exit strategy (in early 2022).
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Issue to Address

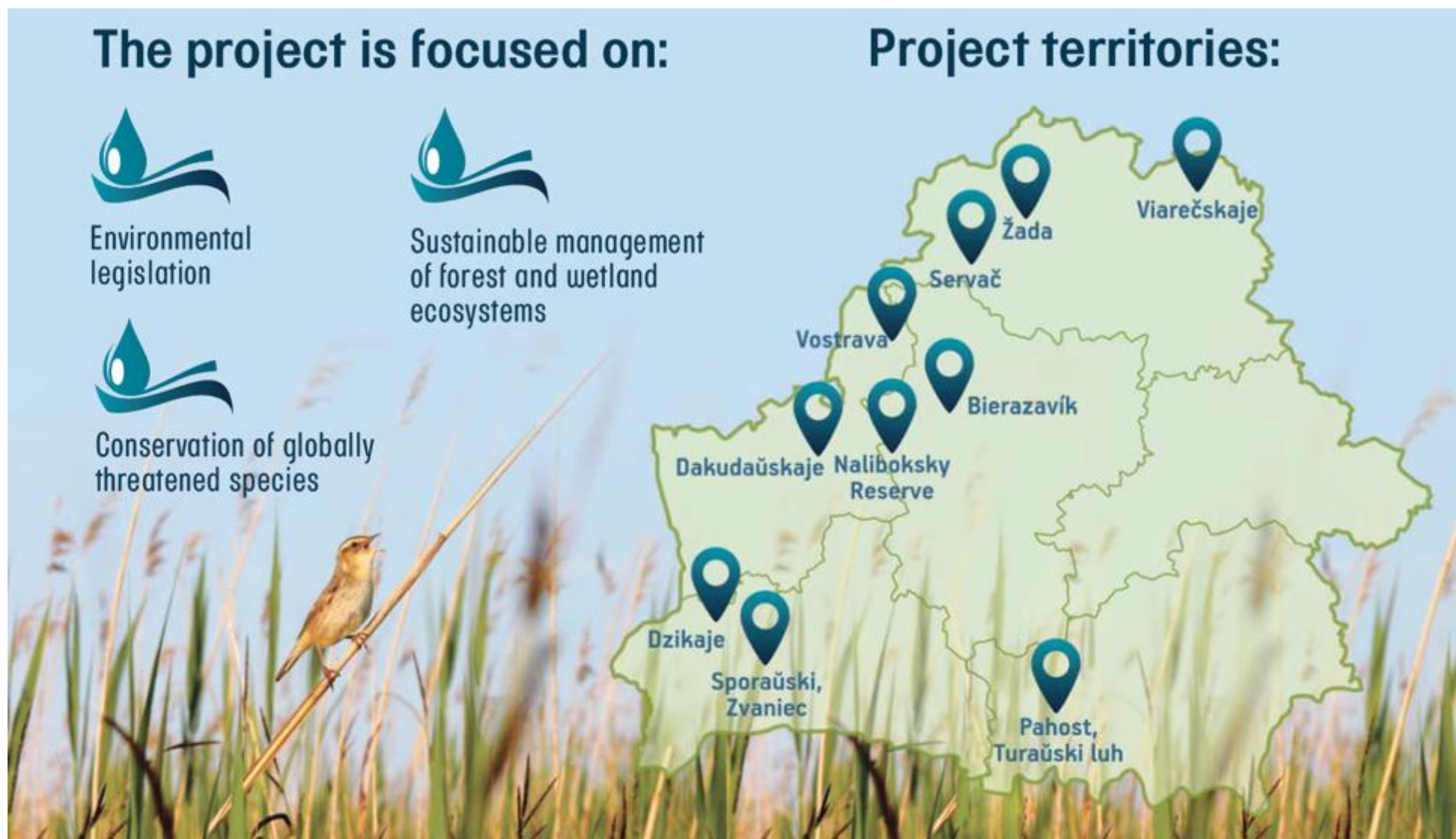
145. Considering that the project is to be completed by the end of October 2022, it is recommended to develop a project exit strategy by early 2022 to set key milestones to reach before the end of the project, identify handover procedures for some activities/products, identify priorities to sustain project achievements and identify the way forward (roadmap laying out what, when, where and how much some activities need to be continued) after the end of the project, including a dialogue with other international development partners.

4.3. Lessons Learnt

146. Several lessons learned are presented below. There are based on the review of project documents, interviews with key informants and analysis of the information collected for this evaluation:

- In order to ensure a good participation of civil society in the implementation of a project, it is critical to engage Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) early in the formulation process of this type of projects and to co-share the ownership of the project strategy.
- A project that is a response to clear national needs and priorities is often highly relevant for stakeholders and its chance of being implemented effectively are maximized.
- A good design leads to a good implementation, which in turn leads to good project results. There is more chance for a project well designed to be a success. Every steps of the way count in the success of a project; it is a lot easier to succeed when all these steps are relevant and clear to be implemented.
- Implementation through government entities as custodians of project achievements is conducive to good long-term sustainability of project achievements.
- When a project is part of a long-term strategy to address national needs and priorities in one area, it has a stronger baseline to start with; it benefits from past experiences and lessons learned and it is more effective in producing the desired changes.
- When gender considerations are limited in the project strategy/project document, there is a high risk that gender mainstreaming will be limited throughout the implementation of the project; particularly if it is not part of measuring the performance of the project.
- A strong participation of stakeholders in the implementation of a project including its decision-making process enables conflict minimization and improve development of innovative solutions.
- Project management driven by consensus among stakeholders provides a good platform for an effective project.

Annex 1: Map of Project Sites



Annex 2: Project Expected Results and Planned Activities

The table below was compiled from the list of expected results and planned activities as anticipated in the project document and project inception report. The Evaluation Team used it as a succinct summary of what is expected from this project.

Project Objective: To introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity.

Intended Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Budget per Outcome	Indicative Activities
Outcome 1 – Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity	Output 1.1: Improvement of nature conservation legislation aimed at conservation of globally threatened species and their habitats, as well as of the system of registration of nature protection areas	GEF: \$2,287,456	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Elaborate the concept and draft of the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On the Protection and Use of Peatlands" (ii) Preparation of proposals on improvement of normative legal acts, regulating issues of registration and management of protected areas. (iii) Updating of data on number and area of protected areas, optimization of corresponding informational resources
	Output 1.2: Improved habitat conditions for the European bison micro population in the Nalibokski Reserve through creation of mosaic meadow grounds among dense forests		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Restore natural foraging grounds (meadows) of European bison in river floodplains and on abandoned amelioration systems (ii) Maintain restored foraging meadows in a highly productive state
	Output 1.3: Profitable use of cranberry reserves as an effective way of mire ecosystem conservation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Develop local business aimed at collection and processing of cranberries that grow in natural mire ecosystems (ii) Sustainable use of cranberry reserves in Olmany Mires
	Output 1.4: Financially self-sustaining wetland biomass harvesting and processing program launched at two PAs (Sporovsky and Zvanets) in partnership with private sector		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Procure necessary equipment for sustainable and profitable mowing of reeds, shrubs and grass (ii) Mow and cut reeds and shrubs in Sporovsky Reserve and Zvanets Reserve on a regular basis (iii) Develop business plans for Sporovsky and Zvanets Reserves
	Output 1.5: Improved financial sustainability of measures for conservation of floodplain meadows (key habitats of globally threatened species) through introduction of technology of sustainable use of meadows for mowing and grazing and through development of ecological tourism		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Test methods of sustainable use of floodplain meadows (Turov Meadow, Pogost Meadow) for the conservation of unique biodiversity habitats (ii) Develop technology of ecologically effective and economically profitable use of meadows for raising cattle for beef
	Output 1.6: Ecological tourism developed at key protected areas, resulting in		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Improve and create touristic infrastructure, develop touristic routes, prepare promotional products (maps, booklets, etc.), and develop and test mechanisms of

Intended Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Budget per Outcome	Indicative Activities
	improved financial sustainability of protected areas and raised awareness about importance of globally biodiversity conservation.		sustainable management of nature conservation objects taking into account touristic activities
Outcome 2 – Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas	Output 2.1: Forest biotopes, subject to special protection, are identified, approved and sustainably managed at an area of 150,000 ha.	GEF: \$1,027,039	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Harmonize forest and nature conservation legislation (ii) Identify forest biotopes subject to special protection and nature monuments (outside PAs) (iii) Revise forest management plans so that they take into account sustainable use of the biotopes now subject to protection (iv) Train Foresters
	Output 2.2: Avoided degradation of inefficiently drained forest peatlands (260,000 ha) as a result of development and implementation of the Scheme of Sustainable Use of Drained Forest Peatlands, defining ways of use of each peatland, and ecological rehabilitation of inefficiently drained peatlands demonstrated at an area of about 12,456 ha.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Implement a complex inventory of forest hydro ameliorative systems with evaluation of their economic and ecological value based on specially developed and approved criteria (ii) Develop and approve proposals for future use of forest hydro ameliorative systems (iii) Develop and implement engineering projects on repeated waterlogging of forest hydro ameliorative systems (iv) Disseminate the project's experience
Outcome 3 - Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations.	Output 3.1: Restored habitats (about 1,820 ha) of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, Greater spotted eagle, Great snipe, Black-tailed godwit) within the most important protected areas (Servech, Dikoe) through control of vegetation succession (control of the spread of shrubs and reeds) and optimization of hydrological regime	GEF: \$746,039	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Restore key aquatic warbler habitats at Dikoe fen mire (bordering Poland) and Servech fen mire (bordering Lithuania) (ii) Rehabilitate extracted peatland at Dokudovskoe fen mire (bordering Lithuania) by accelerated technology through assisted revegetation (using native sedge species) (iii) Develop and test method of creation of new aquatic warbler populations through relocation of young birds from Zvanets Reserve to restored habitats in Zuvintas Reserve (Lithuania).
	Output 3.2: Program on exchange of individuals across micro-populations to improve the genetic status of the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison developed and realized		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Implement individual identification of European bison (passportization) on the basis of molecular-genetic research to assess their genetic potential (ii) Conduct genetic recovery of the Nalibokski micro population of the European bison and assess effectiveness of implemented activities
	Output 3.3: Targeted measures to stabilize populations of insufficiently studied globally threatened species.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Undertake an inventory of key habitats of the globally threatened species (ii) Change land use status of such habitats to the protection category (iii) Develop and implement priority measures to address targeted threats to the most important populations of globally threatened species

Intended Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Budget per Outcome	Indicative Activities
	Output 3.4: Assessing the efficiency of implementation of project measures (monitoring of globally threatened species, soil and ground water table, carbon emissions avoided and carbon sequestered).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Monitor breeding populations of globally threatened species (European bison, Greater spotted eagle, Aquatic warbler - VU) and other rare bird species (Great snipe, Curlew, Black-tailed godwit, Lapwing, Meadow pipit and other - NT) at all the pilot sites of the project (ii) Monitor vegetation dynamics on the project areas before and after implementation of the project measures on optimization and restoration of ecosystems (iii) Monitor ground water levels. Water levels will be monitored before and after realization of the project measures to assess efficiency of habitat optimization activities (Zvanets, Dikoe, Servech), ecological rehabilitation of degraded peatlands (five drained forest peatlands), and rewetting of extracted peatland (Dokudovskoe) (iv) Assess efficiency of measures on improvement of foraging conditions for European bison (v) Apply the Monitoring and Evaluation Tracking tool (METT) and UNDP-GEF financial scorecard to monitor management effectiveness and financial sustainability at target PAs (vi) Monitor carbon benefits
Project Management		GEF: \$203,027	
Total Financing		GEF: \$4,263,561 + Co-financing: \$14,230,000 = Total Financing: \$18,493,561	

Source: Project Document

Annex 3: MTR Terms of Reference

UNDP-GEF Midterm Review: Team Leader Terms of Reference

1 INTRODUCTION

This is the Team Leader Terms of Reference (ToR) for the UNDP-GEF Midterm Review (MTR) of the full-sized project titled “Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits” (PIMS 5495) implemented through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, which is to be undertaken in 2020. The project started on November 2017 and is in its third year of implementation. In line with the UNDP-GEF Guidance on MTRs, this MTR process was initiated before the submission of the second Project Implementation Report (PIR). This ToR sets out the expectations for this MTR. The MTR process must follow the guidance outlined in the document *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects* ([insert hyperlink](#)).

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Belarus’ forest and wetland ecosystems are of global significance for the unique biodiversity they harbor and the conservation of these ecosystems is important to realize a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels. Belarus has 16 Ramsar Sites, three Biosphere Reserves and 51 Important Bird Areas. The forests and wetlands of Belarus are home to 25 species that are classified by IUCN as vulnerable and critically endangered. They are also of global significance for their role in maintaining climate and land integrity. The project scenario introduces changes to management of forests and wetlands in and outside of key biodiversity areas with the objective of making it financially more sustainable and more efficient with respect to the conservation effect. The focus on both Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and surrounding landscape is justified from the Aichi Target and ecosystem approach perspectives, recognizing that protection of natural capital only within PAs is not going to improve its status.

The objective of the project is to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity.

Outcome I: Improved institutional, financial and management sustainability of forest and mire protected areas, which are key areas for conservation of globally threatened species

Outcome II: Sustainable management of biodiversity-important forest and wetland ecosystems outside protected areas

Outcome III: Increased experience and knowledge of innovative measures for habitat restoration and elimination of the most significant threats to globally threatened species; monitoring of efficiency of the project's measures

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE MTR

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

4 MTR APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The MTR must provide evidence based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The MTR team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF,

UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Environmental & Social Safeguard Policy, the Project Document, project reports including Annual Project Review/PIRs, project budget revisions, lesson learned reports, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the team considers useful for this evidence-based review). The MTR team will review the baseline GEF focal area Tracking Tool submitted to the GEF at CEO endorsement, and the midterm GEF focal area Tracking Tool that must be completed before the MTR field mission begins.

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

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful MTR.² Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection; Ministry of Forestry, Scientific-Production Center on Bioresources, Institute of Experimental Botany, Scientific-Production Center on Livestock, Belarussian Scientific Research Center “Ecologia”, Nalibokski, Sporovski and Zvanets reserves, NGO “Akhova ptushak Batskauschyny”, Project Board, other project stakeholders.

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

5 DETAILED SCOPE OF THE MTR

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

i Project Strategy

Project design:

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

Results Framework/Logframe:

- Undertake a critical analysis of the project’s logframe indicators and targets, assess how “SMART” the midterm and end-of-project targets are (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound), and suggest specific amendments/revisions to the targets and indicators as necessary.
- Are the project’s objectives and outcomes or components clear, practical, and feasible within its time frame?
- Examine if progress so far has led to, or could in the future catalyse beneficial development effects (i.e. income generation, gender equality and women’s empowerment, improved governance etc...) that should be included in the project results framework and monitored on an annual basis.
- Ensure broader development and gender aspects of the project are being monitored effectively. Develop and recommend SMART ‘development’ indicators, including sex-disaggregated indicators and indicators that capture development benefits.

¹ For ideas on innovative and participatory Monitoring and Evaluation strategies and techniques, see [UNDP Discussion Paper: Innovations in Monitoring & Evaluating Results](#), 05 Nov 2013.

² For more stakeholder engagement in the M&E process, see the [UNDP Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results](#), Chapter 3, pg. 93.

ii Progress Towards Results

Progress Towards Outcomes Analysis:

- Review the logframe indicators against progress made towards the end-of-project targets using the Progress Towards Results Matrix and following the Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects; colour code progress in a “traffic light system” based on the level of progress achieved; assign a rating on progress for each outcome; make recommendations from the areas marked as “Not on target to be achieved” (red).

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

Project Strategy	Indicator ³	Baseline Level ⁴	Level in 1 st PIR (self-reported)	Midterm Target ⁵	End-of-project Target	Midterm Level & Assessment ⁶	Achievement Rating ⁷	Justification for Rating
Objective:	Indicator (if applicable):							
Outcome 1:	Indicator 1:							
	Indicator 2:							
Outcome 2:	Indicator 3:							
	Indicator 4:							
	Etc.							
Etc.								

Indicator Assessment Key

Green= Achieved	Yellow= On target to be achieved	Red=Not on target to be achieved
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- ³ Populate with data from the Logframe and scorecards
- ⁴ Populate with data from the Project Document
- ⁵ If available
- ⁶ Colour code this column only
- ⁷ Use the 6 point Progress Towards Results Rating Scale: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU

In addition to the progress towards outcomes analysis:

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

iii Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

Management Arrangements:

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

Work Planning:

- Review any delays in project start-up and implementation, identify the causes and examine if they have been resolved.

- Are work-planning processes results-based? If not, suggest ways to re-orientate work planning to focus on results?
- Examine the use of the project's results framework/ logframe as a management tool and review any changes made to it since project start.

Finance and co-finance:

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

Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:

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

Stakeholder Engagement:

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

Reporting:

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

Communications:

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

iv Sustainability

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

Financial risks to sustainability:

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

Socio-economic risks to sustainability:

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

Institutional Framework and Governance risks to sustainability:

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

Environmental risks to sustainability:

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

Conclusions & Recommendations

The MTR team will include a section of the report setting out the MTR's evidence-based conclusions, in light of the findings.⁸

⁸ Alternatively, MTR conclusions may be integrated into the body of the report.

Recommendations should be succinct suggestions for critical intervention that are specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant. A recommendation table should be put in the report's executive summary. See the *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF- Financed Projects* for guidance on a recommendation table.

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

Ratings

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

Table. MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary

Table for Landscape approach to management of peatlands aiming at multiple ecological benefits project

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Project Strategy	N/A	
Progress Towards Results	Objective Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
	Outcome 1 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 2 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 3 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Etc.	
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	(rate 6 pt. scale)	
Sustainability	(rate 4 pt. scale)	

6 TIMEFRAME

The total duration of the MTR will be approximately *25 days* over a time period of *9 weeks* starting April 30, 2020 and shall not exceed five months from when the consultant(s) are hired (contract closing date will not extend over August 10, 2020). The tentative MTR timeframe is as follows:

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY
<i>April 25, 2020</i>	Application closes
<i>April 30, 2020</i>	Select MTR Team
<i>May 15 2020 1 day</i>	Prep the MTR Team (handover of Project Documents)
<i>May 20 2020 3 days</i>	Document review and preparing MTR Inception Report
<i>May 30 2020</i>	Finalization and Validation of MTR Inception Report - latest start of MTR mission
<i>June 5 2020 – June 30 2020 16 days</i>	In collaboration with the local evaluator (additionally hired by the project) using telecommunicating modality prepare a draft report
<i>July 20, 2020 2 days</i>	Incorporating audit trail from feedback on draft report/Finalization of MTR report
<i>July 30, 2020</i>	Preparation & Issue of Management Response
<i>August 10, 2020</i>	Expected date of full MTR completion

7 MIDTERM REVIEW DELIVERABLES

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Responsibilities
1.	MTR Inception Report	MTR team clarifies objectives and methods of Midterm Review	No later than 3 weeks after compiling of the MTR team: (May 20, 2020)	MTR team submit to the Belarus UNDP Country Office and project management
2.	Draft Final Report	Full report (using guidelines on content outlined in Annex B) with annexes	Within 6 weeks upon presenting of the MTR inception report: (June 30, 2020)	Sent to the Belarus UNDP Country Office, reviewed by RTA, Project Coordinating Unit, GEF OFP

3.	Final Report*	Revised report with audit trail detailing how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final MTR report	Within 1 week of receiving UNDP comments on draft: (July 30 2020)	Sent to the Belarus UNDP Country Office
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*The final MTR report must be in English. If applicable, the Belarus UNDP Country Office may choose to arrange for a translation of the report into a language more widely shared by national stakeholders.

8 MTR ARRANGEMENTS

The principal responsibility for managing this MTR resides with the Belarus UNDP Country Office.

The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the MTR team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits for local expert.

CONDITIONS OF WORK: Remotely using telecommunications.

9 TEAM COMPOSITION

A team of two independent consultants will conduct the MTR - one team leader (with experience and exposure to projects and evaluations in other regions globally) and one team expert, usually from the country of the project. The consultants cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation, and/or implementation (including the writing of the Project Document) and should not have a conflict of interest with project's related activities.

Team leader key qualifications

- Experience with result-based management monitoring and evaluation methodologies demonstrated by an example of evaluation of at least one other UNDP project funded by GEF (within last 5 years), what is confirmed by inclusion into UNDP Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) roster;
- working Experience with the GEF or GEF-evaluations, confirmed by previous working experience;
- Relevant regional or country specific knowledge (at least 1 country in the CIS region);
- A Master's degree in biology, ecology, or other closely related areas
- Written and spoken English is a must confirmed by diploma, certificates, studies abroad or other relevant documents (If the Consultant is a native speaker it is not necessary to confirm);

10 PAYMENT MODALITIES AND SPECIFICATIONS

Lump sum.

Payment is made upon satisfactory completion of the deliverables described below with written confirmation from (Project Manager and UNDP Belarus CO Programme Officer (Certificate of Payment) according to the following schedule:

- 10% of payment upon finalization of Deliverable 1
- 30% upon submission of the draft MTR report – upon finalization of Deliverable 2
- 60% upon finalization of the MTR report – upon finalization of Deliverable 3

11 APPLICATION PROCESS

Process of identification and selection of the MTE Team leader will be realized using UNDP corporate GPN/ExpRes consolidated roster platform (<https://undp.sharepoint.com/teams/gpn/digital-initiatives/dli-ch/SitePages/Consolidation-of-Rosters.aspx>) and respective mechanisms.

Recommended Presentation of Proposal:

- a) **Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability** using the [template](#)¹⁰ provided by UNDP;
- b) **CV and a Personal History Form (P11 form)**¹¹;
- c) **Financial Proposal** that indicates the all-inclusive fixed total contract price, supported by a breakdown of costs, as per template attached to the Letter of Confirmation of Interest template. If an applicant is employed by an organization/company/institution, and he/she expects his/her employer to charge a management fee in the process of releasing him/her to UNDP under Reimbursable Loan Agreement (RLA), the applicant must indicate at this point, and ensure that all such costs are duly incorporated in the financial proposal submitted to UNDP.

All application materials should be submitted to the e-mail aliaksei.artsiusheuski@undp.org.

TOR ANNEXES

Annex A: List of Documents to be reviewed by the MTR Team

Annex B: Guidelines on Contents for the Midterm Review Report

Annex C: Midterm Review Evaluative Matrix Template

Annex D: UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators/Midterm Review Consultants¹³

Annex E: MTR Ratings

Annex F: MTR Report Clearance Form

⁹ Engagement of the consultants should be done in line with guidelines for hiring consultants in the POPP:

<https://info.undp.org/global/popp/Pages/default.aspx>

¹⁰

<https://intranet.undp.org/unit/bom/pso/Support%20documents%20on%20IC%20Guidelines/Template%20for%20Confirmation%20of%20Interest%20and%20Submission%20of%20Financial%20Proposal.docx>

¹¹ http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Careers/P11_Personal_history_form.doc

Annex 4: UNEG Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Agreement Form

Reviewers / Consultants:

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

Mid-Term Review Consultant Agreement Form

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

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

Signed in Ottawa on May 13, 2020

Signed in Minsk on May 15, 2020

Signature: _____



Signature: _____



Names: Jean-Joseph Bellamy

Sergei Gotin

Annex 5: Mid-Term Review Matrix

The evaluation matrix below served as a general guide for the review. It provided directions for the review; particularly for the collection of relevant data. It was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing project documents. It also provided a basis for structuring the review report as a whole.

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Review criteria: Relevance - How does the project relate to the main objectives of the GEF, UNDP and of Belarus to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands?				
<i>How is the Project relevant to the GEF objectives?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the Project support the related strategic priorities of the GEF? What regional & international commitments/agreements did the project contribute to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between project objectives and those of the GEF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents GEF policies and strategies GEF web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>How is the Project relevant to UNDP objectives?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the objectives of UNDP in this sector? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of a clear relationship between project objectives and country programme objectives of UNDP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents UNDP strategies and programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>How is the Project relevant to Belarus in introducing a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project follow the government's stated priorities? How does the Project support the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands? Does the project address the identified problem? How country-driven is the Project? Does the Project adequately take into account national realities, both in terms of institutional framework and programming, in its design and its implementation? To what extent were national partners involved in the design of the Project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which the project supports the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus Degree of coherence between the project and national priorities, policies and strategies; particularly related to the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus Appreciation from national stakeholders with respect to adequacy of project design and implementation to national realities and existing capacities? Level of involvement of Government officials and other partners into the project Coherence between needs expressed by national stakeholders and UNDP criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents National policies, strategies and programmes Key government officials and other partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>Does the Project address the needs of target beneficiaries?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the needs of target beneficiaries? Is the implementation of the project being inclusive of all relevant Stakeholders? Are local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately involved in project formulation and implementation? Were gender issues incorporated in the project design? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of the link between project expected results and the needs of target beneficiaries Degree of involvement and inclusiveness of beneficiaries and stakeholders in project design and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiaries and stakeholders Needs assessment studies Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and Partners' priorities and areas of focus? How could the project better target and address priorities and development challenges of targeted beneficiaries? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Review criteria: Coherence – <i>How well does the project fit with other interventions to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands?</i>				
<i>How is the coherence between the project and other interventions carried out by the same project's Partners?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there contradictions between the different projects' objectives of Partners? Are there duplications between their activities? Are there any interlinkages and synergies between the project and other projects implemented by the Partners? To what extent is the project coherent with international norms and standards as well as international obligations that Belarus signed up to? Is there convergence between the objective of the project and those of the project's Partners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between the project objective and those of the project's Partners Level of coherence between the project and international norms and standards as well as international obligations committed by Belarus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Partners policies and strategies Partners' web sites Documents from other projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with government officials and other Partners/projects Field visits
<i>Is the Project internally coherent in its design?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were GEF criteria for project identification adequate in view of actual needs? Was the project sourced through a demand-driven approach? Is there a direct and strong link between project expected results (<i>Project Results Framework</i>) and the project design (in terms of project components, choice of partners, structure, delivery mechanism, scope, budget, use of resources etc.)? Are the assumptions made at the outset still valid? Is the length of the project conducive to achieve project outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between project expected results and internal project design logic Level of coherence between project design and project implementation approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program and project documents Key project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Key Interviews
<i>How is the coherence between the project and other relevant interventions?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project coherent in terms of areas of focus and targeting of key activities within the context of other donors' strategies? How does GEF help to fill gaps (or give additional stimulus) that are crucial but are not covered by other donors? To what extent interventions undertaken by different donor's support (or undermine) the objective of the project? Is there any overlap (or not) between the project and other similar interventions in Belarus which are implemented by other donors? If any, to what extent efforts are being made to minimize/eliminate them? Are the design and implementation of similar interventions implemented by other donors harmonized and coordinated to avoid duplication of effort? In what ways? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which the project was coherent and complementary to other donors programming List of programs and funds in which future developments, ideas and partnerships of the project are eligible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Donors' policies and programming documents Other Donor representatives Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with other Donors

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment, its coherence and complementarity between the project and other relevant interventions? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Review criteria: Effectiveness – To what extent have the components and objective of the project been achieved?				
<i>How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is the project being effective in achieving its expected outcomes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations Is the project strategy feasible within the timeframe of the project? Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation? Does (or will) the project catalyzes unintended beneficial development effects? Are environmental and social safeguards appropriately addressed in the project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New methodologies, skills and knowledge Change in capacity for the conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands in Belarus Change in capacity for awareness raising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder involvement and government awareness Change in local stakeholder behavior Change in capacity in policy making and planning to introduce conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands in Belarus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy reform Legislation/regulation change Development of national and local strategies and plans Change in capacity in implementation and enforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and implementation of risk assessments Implementation of national and local strategies and action plans through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance Monitoring, evaluation and promotion of pilots Change in capacity in mobilizing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage of resources Human resources Appropriate practices Mobilization of advisory services Gender disaggregated data in project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Key stakeholders including UNDP, Project Team, Representatives of Gov. and other Partners Research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analysis Meetings with main Project Partners Interviews with project beneficiaries
<i>How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well are risks and assumptions being managed? What is the quality of risk mitigation strategies developed? Are they sufficient? Are there clear strategies for risk mitigation related with long-term sustainability of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completeness of risk identification and assumptions during project planning Quality of existing information systems in place to identify emerging risks and other issues? Quality of risk mitigations strategies developed and followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atlas risk log Project documents and evaluations UNDP, Project Staff and Project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What lessons have been learnt for the project to achieve its outcomes? What changes could have been made (if any) to the formulation of the project in order to improve the achievement of project's expected results? How could the project be more effective in achieving its results? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Review criteria: Efficiency – Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively and in-line with international and national norms and standards?				
<i>Is Project support channeled in an efficient way?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use? Is the implementation in line with the timeline of the project? Does the <i>Project Results Framework</i> and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation? Are the accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and producing accurate and timely financial information? How adequate is the M&E framework? Does it measure well the performance of the project? How SMART are indicators & targets? Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and responded to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes? Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual) Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently? Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happened as planned? How is RBM used during project implementation? Is the project decision-making effective? Does the government provide continuous strategic directions to the project's formulation and implementation? Have these directions provided by the government guided activities and outcomes of the project? Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback or dissemination mechanisms to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project formulation and implementation effectiveness were shared among project stakeholders, UNDP staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment and improvement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and quality of financial and progress reports Timeliness and adequacy of reporting provided Level of discrepancy between planned and utilized financial expenditures Planned vs. actual funds leveraged Cost in view of results achieved compared to costs of similar projects from other organizations Adequacy of project choices in view of existing context, infrastructure and cost Quality of RBM reporting (progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation) Occurrence of change in project formulation/ implementation approach (i.e. restructuring) when needed to improve project efficiency Existence, quality and use of M&E, feedback and dissemination mechanism to share findings, lessons learned and recommendation on effectiveness of project design. Cost associated with delivery mechanism and management structure compare to alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, Representatives of Gov. and Project Staff Beneficiaries and Project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Key Interviews
<i>How efficient are partnership arrangements for the Project?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the government engaged? How does the government demonstrate its ownership of the project? Did the government provide a counterpart to the project? To what extent partnerships/linkages between institutions/ organizations are encouraged and supported? Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable? What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, UNDP and relevant government entities) Which methods were successful or not and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific activities conducted to support the development of cooperative arrangements between partners, Examples of supported partnerships Evidence that particular partnerships/linkages will be sustained Types/quality of partnership cooperation methods utilized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations Project Partners UNDP, Representatives of Gov. and Project Staff Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Does the Project efficiently utilize local capacity in implementation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity? Does the project support mutual benefits through sharing of knowledge and experiences, training, technology transfer among developing countries? Did the Project take into account local capacity in formulation and implementation of the project? Was there an effective collaboration with scientific institutions with competence in conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of total expertise utilized taken from Belarus Number/quality of analyses done to assess local capacity potential and absorptive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, Project Team and Project partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency? How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements etc.)? What changes could have been made (if any) to the project in order to improve its efficiency? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Review criteria: Impacts - Are there indications that the project has contributed to the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity?				
<i>How is the Project effective in achieving its long-term objective?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the project achieve its objective that is “to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity”? Are there any qualitative and quantitative evidence on environmental stress reduction and environmental status change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pool/mobilize resources To provide an enabling environment, For implementation of related strategies and programmes through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance, Changes in use and implementation of conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands Changes to key drivers of degradation of forest and wetland ecosystems (barriers): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness and sustainability of management of forest and wetland ecosystems in globally important protected areas is inadequate with respect to protection of species Forest management in biodiversity important areas outside of PAs does not fully meet the requirements of these ecosystems’ conservation Inadequate state of research and monitoring of globally important biodiversity, and lack of demonstration of the potential of species and habitat management and restoration work on survival of threatened species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Key Stakeholders Research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analysis Meetings with UNDP, Project Team and project Partners Interviews with project beneficiaries and other stakeholders
<i>How is the Project</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project on? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local environment; Poverty; and, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide specific examples of impacts at those three levels, as relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Key Stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>impacting the local environment?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other socio-economic issues. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with key stakeholders
Future directions for the Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How could the project build on its successes and learn from its weaknesses in order to enhance the potential for impact of ongoing and future initiatives? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Review criteria: Sustainability - To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?				
<i>Are sustainability issues adequately integrated in Project design?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were sustainability issues integrated into the formulation and implementation of the project? Does the project employ government implementing and/or monitoring systems? Is the government involved in the sustainability strategy for project components? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence/Quality of sustainability strategy Evidence/Quality of steps taken to address sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Did the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues? Are the recurrent costs (if any) after project completion sustainable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level and source of future financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities after project end? Evidence of commitments from international partners, governments or other stakeholders to financially support relevant sectors of activities after project end Level of recurrent costs after completion of project and funding sources for those recurrent costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Organizations arrangements and continuation of activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are results of efforts made during the project implementation period well assimilated by organizations and their internal systems and procedures? Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support? Has there been a buy-in process, or was there no need to sell the project and buy support? What degree is there of local ownership of initiatives and results? Are appropriate 'champions' being identified and/or supported? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which project activities and results have been taken over by local counterparts or institutions/organizations Level of financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities by in-country actors after project end Number/quality of champions identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Enabling Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are laws, policies and frameworks addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms? Are the necessary related capacities for lawmaking and enforcement built? What is the level of political commitment to build on results of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts to support the development of relevant laws and policies State of enforcement and law-making capacity Evidence of commitment by the political class through speeches, enactment of laws and resource allocation to priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Institutional and individual capacity development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the capacity in place at the national and sub-national levels adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elements in place in those different management functions, at appropriate levels (national and sub-national levels) in terms of adequate structures, strategies, systems, skills, incentives and interrelationships with other key actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, Project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries Capacity assessments available, if any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Documentation review
<i>Social and political sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability? Did the project contribute to local Stakeholders' acceptance of new practices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example of contributions to sustainable political and social change with regard to the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Documentation review
<i>Replication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were project activities and results replicated elsewhere or scaled up? What was the project contribution to replication or scaling up of innovative practices or mechanisms for a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus? Does the project have a catalytic role? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number/quality of replicated initiatives Number/quality of replicated innovative initiatives Volume of additional investment leveraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other donor programming documents Beneficiaries UNDP, project staff and project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Challenges to sustainability of the Project</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts? Have any of these been addressed through project management? What could be the possible measures to further contribute to the sustainability of efforts achieved with the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges in view of building blocks of sustainability as presented above Recent changes which may present new challenges to the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations Beneficiaries UNDP, project staff and project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Future directions for the Project</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed? How can the experience and good project practices influence the strategies to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus? Are national decision-making institutions (Parliament, Government etc.) ready to improve their measures to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands in Belarus? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis

Annex 6: List of Documents Reviewed

A. Kozulin1, N. Tanovitskaya and N. Minchenko, Developing a national strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of peatlands in the Republic of Belarus

BDO, Audit Report 2019

Council of Ministers, 2014, National Strategy for Development of the System of Specially Protected Natural Areas until January 1, 2030

Council of Ministers, 2018, Resolution: About the Development of the Draft National Strategy Sustainable Development of Belarus for the Period until 2035

Council of Ministers of Belarus, November 11, 2010, NBSAP for 2011-2020

Council of Ministers of Belarus, September 3, 2015, NBSAP for 2016-2020

FAO, 2014, Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015 – Country Report Belarus

FAO, Towards Climate-Responsible Peatlands Management

FAO, Wetlands International, MICCA, Universitat Greifswald, Peatlands – guidance for Climate change mitigation through conservation, rehabilitation and sustainable use

GEF, Brand Guidelines & Graphic Standards

GEF, May 22, 2014, GEF-6 Programming Directions

GEF, Wetlands Project: GEF-6 Request for Project Endorsement/Approval

GEF, Wetlands Project: GEF Secretariat Review for F/MSP

GEF, Wetlands Project: PIF

Government of Belarus, 2014, Forestry Strategic Plan for the Period 2015-2030

Government of Belarus, 2014, State Programme for the Development of Specially Protected Natural Areas for 2015-2019

Government of Belarus, December 18, 2019, Law on the Protection and Use of Peat Bogs

Government of Belarus, UNDP, 1992, Agreement between the Government of Belarus and UNDP (1992)

Ministry of Economy, 2012, Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus Based on “Green” Economy Principles – National Report

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - Belarus, 2002, National planning tool for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - Belarus, 2010, The State of Environment in the Republic of Belarus – National Report

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection – Belarus, 2018, Seventh National Communication of Belarus in Accordance with Obligations under the UNFCCC

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - Belarus, Clima-East: Conservation and sustainable management of peatlands in Belarus to minimise carbon emissions and help ecosystems to adapt to climate change – Project Implementation Report (2013-2017)

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - Belarus, Final Report on “Preparation and implementation of an action program for training wild berry pickers on methods and principles for the sustainable use of natural resources of wetland ecosystems”

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection – Belarus, National Academy of Sciences, 2010, The State of Environment in the Republic of Belarus – National Report

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - Belarus, Report on the Work Completed on the Wetlands Project

National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, October 2016, Report on Monitoring the Conditions of Vegetation Communities and the Ground Water Level of Spruce Bog as a Result of the Cycle of Activities (for the period 2007-2015) to Restore the Hydrological Regime.

OECD, UN/ECE, 1997, Environmental Performance Belarus

Olga Meerovskaya, Belarus National Strategy of Sustainable Social and Economic Development – 2030 at a glance

Public Institution Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania, National Academy of Sciences, Partnership Contract concerning the LIFE Project

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, May 8, 2015, Wetlands Project: STAP Screening of the PIR

Sergei Gotin, Photos and Videos of Sites Visited

UNDP, 2010, Country Programme Document for Belarus (2011-2015)

UNDP, GEF, Government of Belarus, UNDP-GEF Project “Landscape Approach to Management of Peatlands Aiming at Multiple Ecological Benefits (“Peatlands-2”)”

UNDP, GEF, Government of Belarus, Wetlands Project Brief (brochure)

UNDP, GEF, Government of Belarus, Wetlands Project: Project Document

UNDP, GEF, March 2018, Wetlands Project Inception Report

UNDP, GEF, UNDP/GEF “Renaturalization and Sustainable Management of Peatlands in Belarus to Combat Land Degradation, Ensure Conservation of Globally Valuable Biodiversity and, Mitigate Climate Change”

UNDP, June 27, 2015, Country Programme Document for Belarus (2016-2020)

UNECE, 2005, Environmental Performance Reviews – Belarus – Second Review

UNECE, 2016, Environmental Performance Reviews – Belarus – Third Review Synopsis

UN, Government of Belarus, UNDAF for Belarus (2011-2015)

UN, Government of Belarus, UNDAF for Belarus (2016-2020)

Wetlands Project, Agreements

Wetlands Project, AWP, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

Wetlands Project, CDR (Atlas Financial Reports) 2017, 2018, 2019 and to May 2020

Wetlands Project, Consumer Marketing and rebranding Strategy

Wetlands Project, Co-financing Letters

Wetlands Project, Project Board Meetings Minutes (January 30, 2018, May 30, 2018, June 12, 2018, December 5, 2018, June 28, 2019, December 11, 2019)

Wetlands Project, Progress Reports: APR 2018, PIR 2019, 2020

Wetlands Project, Risk Logs 2018, 2019, 2020

Wetlands Project, Tracking Tools: METT at Inception and at Mid-Term

World Bank, December 17, 1993, Belarus – Environmental Strategy Study – Volume III

_____, 2004, National Strategy for Sustainable Development for the Period to 2020 of Belarus – Key Provisions

_____, 2015, National Report on the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

_____, 2015, Strategy for Conservation and Wise (Sustainable) Use of Peatlands

_____, 2017, Starting Positions of Belarus to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

_____, Information about Forest Fires in the Republic of Belarus since 2000

_____, June 2012, National Report on the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

_____, Overview of economic efficiency of the use of peatland vegetation biomass for energy, agricultural and other purposes

_____, Ramsar National Report to COP13

_____, Social Sustainable National Strategy of Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for the Period Until 2030

_____, State Program “Environmental Protection and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources” for 2021-2025

Website Consulted

CBD website – Belarus page

GEF website

Mires and Peat website

MNREP website

Ministry of Forestry website

UNDP-Belarus website

UNDP-Belarus Facebook Page

Annex 7: Interview Guide

Note: This is a guide for the Review Team (a simplified version of the review matrix). Not all questions will be asked to each interviewee; it is a reminder for interviewers about the type of information required to complete the review exercise and a guide to prepare the semi-structured interviews. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees and the findings, once “triangulated”, were incorporated in the report.

I. RELEVANCE - *How does the project relate to the main objectives of the GEF, UNDP and of Belarus to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands?*

- I.1. Is the Project relevant to the GEF objectives?
- I.2. Is the Project relevant to UNDP objectives?
- I.3. Is the Project relevant to Belarus in introducing a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands?
- I.4. Does the Project address the needs of target beneficiaries?

Future directions for similar projects

- I.5. What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and the Partners' priorities and areas of focus?
- I.6. How could the project better target and address priorities and development challenges of targeted beneficiaries?

II. COHERENCE - *How well does the project fit with interventions to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to the management of forests and wetlands??*

- II.1. How is the coherence between the project and other interventions carried out by the same project's Partners?
- II.2. Is the Project internally coherent in its design?
- II.3. How is the coherence between the project and other relevant interventions?

Future directions for similar projects

- II.4. What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment, its coherence and complementarity between the project and other relevant interventions?

III. EFFECTIVENESS – *To what extent have the components and objective of the project been achieved?*

- II.1. How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes/components?
 - Improved financial sustainability and management effectiveness of protected forest and wetland biotopes harboring globally important biodiversity
 - Sustainable forest and wetland ecosystem management in buffer zones and economic landscapes adjacent to protected areas
 - Increased experience and knowledge of innovative biotechnological measures for eliminating the most significant threats to globally important species, and monitoring of their populations
- II.2. Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation?
- II.3. How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?

Future directions for similar projects

- II.4. What lessons have been learnt for the project to achieve its outcomes/components?
- II.5. What changes could have been made (if any) to the formulation of the project in order to improve the achievement of project's expected results?
- II.6. How could the project be more effective in achieving its results?

IV. EFFICIENCY - *Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively and in-line with international and national norms and standards?*

- IV.1. Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use?
- IV.2. Do the *Project Results Framework* and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation?
- IV.3. Are accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and producing accurate and timely financial information?
- IV.4. How adequate is the M&E framework (indicators & targets)?

- IV.5. Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and respond to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes?
- IV.6. Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)
- IV.7. Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happening as planned?
- IV.8. Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently?
- IV.9. How is RBM used during project implementation?
- IV.10. Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback or dissemination mechanism to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project formulation and implementation effectiveness were shared among project stakeholders, UNDP Staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment and improvement?
- IV.11. Is the government engaged?
- IV.12. To what extent are partnerships/ linkages between institutions/ organizations encouraged and supported?
- IV.13. Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable?
- IV.14. What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, UNDP, and relevant government entities)
- IV.15. Is an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity?
- IV.16. Did the project take into account local capacity in design and implementation of the project?

Future directions for the project

- IV.17. What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency?
- IV.18. How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements, etc.)?

V. IMPACTS - *Are there indications that the project has contributed to the introduction of a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity?*

- IV.1. Will the project achieve its objective that is “to introduce a conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approach to management of forests and wetlands that harbor internationally important biodiversity and are important for climate and land integrity”?
- IV.2. What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project on the local environment; poverty; and, other socio-economic issues?

Future directions for the project

- IV.3. How could the project build on its successes and learn from its weaknesses in order to enhance the potential for impact of ongoing and future initiatives?

VI. SUSTAINABILITY - *To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?*

- V.1. Were sustainability issues adequately integrated in project formulation?
- V.2. Does the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues?
- V.3. Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support?
- V.4. Are laws, policies and frameworks being addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms?
- V.5. Is the capacity in place at the national and local levels adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date?
- V.6. Are there any environmental risks linked to the implementation of the project?
- V.7. Does the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability?
- V.8. Are project activities and results being replicated elsewhere and/or scaled up?
- V.9. What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts?

Future directions for the project

- V.10. Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results?
- V.11. What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed?

Annex 8: List of People Interviewed and Sites Visited

Below is a list/agenda of stakeholders and site visits conducted for this MTR. Interviews took place in person (National Evaluator) and online (Team Leader) through phone, skype or any other appropriate communication platforms. The National Evaluator was the primary contact point for setting up these interviews. Using the interview guide (*see Annex 7*), the Evaluation Team conducted these semi-structure interviews and confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees.

Date/Time	Participants	Position
Monday May 18		
16.00–17.00	Alexey Artushevsky	Project Manager
Tuesday May 19		
15.30 – 16.30	Igar Tchoulba	UNDP CO Programme Officer, Energy & Environment
17.00–18.00	Alexey Artushevsky	Project Manager
Wednesday May 20		
15.30–16.30	Alexander Kozulin	Project Scientific Coordinator
Thursday May 21		
15.30-16.30	Nikolay Korbut	NPD, Deputy Minister MNREP
17.00-18.00	Valentin Shatravko	First Deputy Minister of Forestry
Tuesday May 26		
15.30 – 16.30	Vitaliy Skapich	Director, Zvanets Reserve
Wednesday May 27		
15.30 – 17.10	Vadim Protasevich	Director, Sporovski Reserve
Thursday May 28		
15.30 – 16.45	Vasiliy Gurkov	Director, Nalibokski Reserve
Tuesday June 2		
15.30 – 16.45	Alexander Pugachevski Maxim Ermochin	Director, Institute of Experimental Botany
17.00 – 18.00	Alexander Chaikovski Vasily Shakun Michail Maksimenkov	Director, Centre on Bioresources of the National Academy of Science (NAS)
18.00 – 19.00	Alexander Vinchevsky	Executive director, <i>APB (NGO partner)</i>
Wednesday June 3		
15:00 – 16:00	Andrey Kuzminich,	Deputy Head of Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources
Thursday June 4		
16:00 – 17:00	Michail Maksimenkov	Centre on Bioresources of the National Academy of Science (NAS) (discussion on Dokudovo and Ostrovo sites (peatlands re-watering testing))

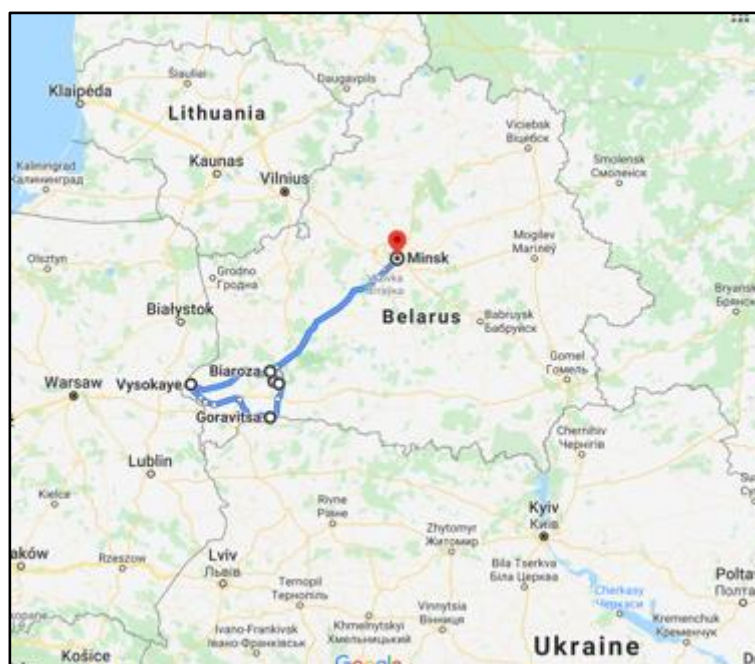
Date/Time	Participants	Position
17:15 – 18:00	Dmitry Mizhihurskii	Project Administration/Financial Assistant
Friday June 5		
15:00 – 16:00	Alexey Artushevsky & Alexander Kozulin	Project Manager & Project Scientific Coordinator
Monday June 15		
16:00 – 17:00	Igar Tchoulba	Debriefing with UNDP Belarus
Friday June 19		
09:00 – 10:00	Maxim Vergeichik	Debriefing with UNDP RTA

The Evaluation Team visited the following sites during field mission (the National Evaluator conducted these visits in person and linked with the Team Leader through videos, pictures and drone flights):

Site Visit 1:

Itinerary

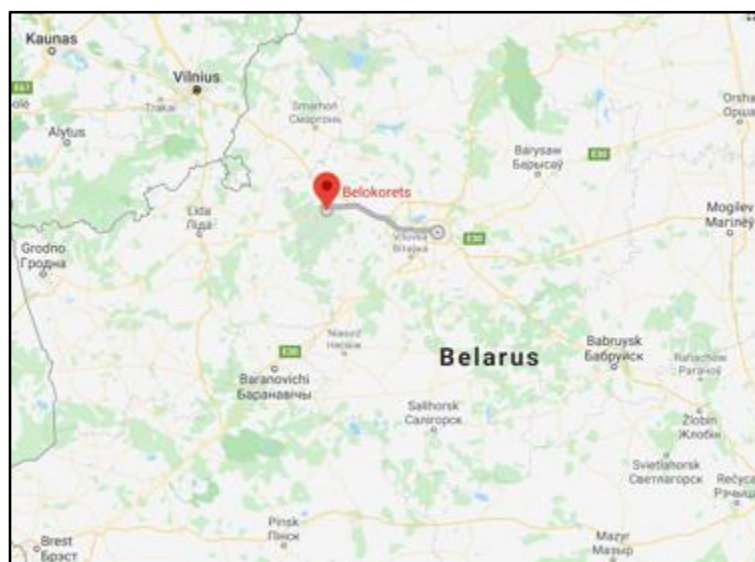
Minsk - Zvanets Reserve (Goravitca (Горавица) Village) - Sporovski Reserve (Visokoye (Высокое) Village, Kostiuki (Костюки) village, Mostyki (Мостыки) Village, Bereza (Бере́за) city) – Minsk



Site Visit 2:

Itinerary

Minsk - Nalibokski Reserve (Around Belokoretc (Белокорец) Village, Tiakovo (Тяково) village) – Minsk



Annex 9: MTR Rating Scales

As per UNDP-GEF guidance, the MTR Reviewing Team used the following scales to rate the project:

- A 6-point scale to rate the project's progress towards the objective and each project outcome as well as the Project Implementation and Adaptive Management: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), or Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).
- A 4-point scale to rate the sustainability of project achievements: Likely (L), Moderately Likely (ML), Moderately Unlikely (MU), and Unlikely (U).

Ratings for Progress Towards Results: (one rating for each outcome and for the objective)		
6	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve or exceed all its end-of-project targets, without major shortcomings. The progress towards the objective/outcome can be presented as "good practice".
5	Satisfactory (S)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
4	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets but with significant shortcomings.
3	Moderately Unsatisfactory (HU)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve its end-of-project targets with major shortcomings.
2	Unsatisfactory (U)	The objective/outcome is expected not to achieve most of its end-of-project targets.
1	Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	The objective/outcome has failed to achieve its midterm targets, and is not expected to achieve any of its end-of-project targets.

Ratings for Project Implementation & Adaptive Management: (one overall rating)		
6	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Implementation of all seven components – management arrangements, work planning, finance and co-finance, project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, stakeholder engagement, reporting, and communications – is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management. The project can be presented as "good practice".
5	Satisfactory (S)	Implementation of most of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management except for only few that are subject to remedial action.
4	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	Implementation of some of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management, with some components requiring remedial action.
3	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	Implementation of some of the seven components is not leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive, with most components requiring remedial action.
2	Unsatisfactory (U)	Implementation of most of the seven components is not leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management.
1	Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	Implementation of none of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management.

Ratings for Sustainability: (one overall rating)		
4	Likely (L)	Negligible risks to sustainability, with key outcomes on track to be achieved by the project's closure and expected to continue into the foreseeable future
3	Moderately Likely (ML)	Moderate risks, but expectations that at least some outcomes will be sustained due to the progress towards results on outcomes at the Midterm Review
2	Moderately Unlikely (MU)	Significant risk that key outcomes will not carry on after project closure, although some outputs and activities should carry on
1	Unlikely (U)	Severe risks that project outcomes as well as key outputs will not be sustained

Annex 10: Audit Trail

The audit trail is presented in a separate file.

Annex 11: Evaluation Report Clearance Form

EVALUATION REPORT CLEARANCE FORM

for the Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the UNDP-GEF-Government of Belarus Project:
“Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits”
Belarus
(PIMS 5495)

Evaluation Report Reviewed and Cleared by

UNDP Country Office

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

UNDP RTA

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____