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Mid-term review of the project Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro (PIMS#6461)

MID-TERM REVIEW REPORT

November 2024

Table of contents

E	xecut	tive summary	7
lr	trod	uction	10
1	Co	ontext and background	10
	1.1	Biodiversity in Montenegro- overview, threats and responses	10
	1.2 Prot	The Project Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened tection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro- Overview and Theory of Change	11
	1.3	Implementation arrangements	15
2	E١	valuation Purpose, Scope and Objectives	15
	2.1	Purpose of the mid-term review	15
	2.2	The scope and specific objectives	15
	2.3	Target Groups and Beneficiaries	15
3	E١	valuation Criteria	16
	3.1	Key evaluation criteria	16
	3.2	Cross-cutting issues	16
	3.3	Specific approach to this mid-term review	17
	3.	3.1 Analysis of Project records and secondary literature	18
	3.	3.2 Primary data collection	19
	3.4	Data Analysis	19
	3.5	Risks, limitations and mitigation measures	19
	3.6	Review and validation	20
	3.7	Ethical Considerations	20
4	Fi	indings	21
	4.1	Findings concerning the Project Strategy	21
	4.2	Findings concerning Progress Towards Results	26
	4.3	Findings concerning Project Implementation and Adaptive Management	44
	4.4	Findings concerning Sustainability	48
5	Co	onclusions and recommendations	52
	5.1	Conclusions	52
	5.	1.1 Conclusions on strategy	52
	5.	1.2 Conclusions on progress towards results	52
	5.	1.3 Conclusions on implementation and adaptive management	53
	5.	1.4 Conclusions on sustainability	53
	5.	1.5 Lessons learned	53
	5.2	Recommendations	55
6	A	nnexes	58
	Ann	ex 1: MTR Terms of Reference	58
	Ann	ex 2: Evaluation matrix	68

Annex 3: Interview guides	74
Biodiversity Project Team	74
National partners	77
Annex 4 Rating scale	79
Annex 5 Interviewed institutions and stakeholders	81
Annex 6: List of reviewed documents	83
Annex 7 Evaluability checklist	85
Annex 8: Co-financing table	88
Annex 9: Proposal for revision of the Project indicators	91
Annex 10: Signed Code of Conduct Agreement Form	96
Annex 11: MTR Report Clearance Form	97

	Project information							
Project/outcome title	"Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Se							
	Strengthened Protection of Biodive	rsity Hot-Spots in Montenegro"						
Atlas Project ID: 00117706	Atlas Output ID: 00114485							
UNDP/GEF PIMS ID number:	6461							
Implementing partner	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and North Region Development (at the time of the Project initiation, it was the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism and then Ministry of Toursim, Ecology, Sustainable Development and North Region Development)							
Management Arrangements:	National Implementation Modality							
UNDCS Outcome and CPD	UNSDCF 2023-2027							
Output	Outcome 1: By 2027, all people, espe improved management and state or innovative, competitive, gender- res development that is climate resilien	f natural resources and increasingly sponsive and inclusive economic						
	UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025							
	Outcome: Structural transformatior inclusive and digital transitions	n is accelerated, particularly green,						
	UNDP CPD 2023-2027							
	Output 1.1: Policy and regulatory en mechanisms developed to enable m support of green and inclusive trans	nitigation and adaptation actions in						
	Output 1.2: Policies and financial r value and sustainably manage natur	nechanisms developed to protect, ral resources						
Country	Montenegro							
Project Dates	Start	Planned End Date						
	28 February 2022	28 February 2027						
Total Budget	\$ 3,278,995							
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	28 February 2022	31 July 2024						
Evaluators	Mr. Tomislav Novović, Team Leader	- Senior Evaluation Expert						
	Ms. Ana Simonovic, Senior Evaluatio	on Expert						
Evaluator e-mail address	tomislav.novovic@gmail.com							
	ana.simonovic@gmail.com							
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List of abbreviations

CA	Contribution Analysis
Biodiversity	Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened
Project	Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
EQ	Evaluation Question
ER	Evaluation Report
ETS	EU's Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GoM	Government of Montenegro
GRES	UNDP Gender Results Effectiveness Framework
INDC	Intended Nationally Determined Contribution
IR	Inception report
JC	Judgement Criteria
KII	Key Informants Interviews
LCDS	Low-Carbon Development Strategy
LNOB	Leave no-one behind
MESPU	Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Urbanism
MESDNRD	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and North Region Development
MMR	Monitoring Mechanism Regulation
MPGs	Transparency Methodologies, Procedures, and Guidelines
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
MTR	Mid-term Review
ET	Evaluation Team
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEAS	National Strategy with Action Plan for Transposition, Implementation, and
	Enforcement of the EU ACQUIS on Environment and Climate Change 2016-2020
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NPD	National Project Director
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
ProDoc	Project document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PT	Project Team
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Accepted, Realistic and Timely
SoV	Sources of Verification
ТОС	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared as part of the mid-term evaluation of the project "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro." The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report are those of the evaluation team and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Government of Montenegro, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

While the evaluation team has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information and data presented, it cannot guarantee that the report is completely free from errors or omissions. The content is based on data available and provided by stakeholders during the evaluation period, and the accuracy of this data is subject to its availability and reliability.

The recommendations and conclusions contained herein are meant to assist project stakeholders and decisionmakers in improving project outcomes and ensuring sustainability. The evaluation team disclaims responsibility for any decisions or actions made as a result of the information or recommendations provided in this report.

Acknowledgment

The Evaluation Team would like to extend its sincere gratitude to Ms. Marija Tripunović, Project Manager, Ms. Tamara Brajović, National Project Director, Mr. Bojan Tenjović, Data, Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst of UNDP, and the entire UNDP team for their invaluable support and cooperation during the evaluation process. Their insights and assistance greatly contributed to the successful completion of this evaluation.

Executive summary

The "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro" project aims to integrate biodiversity considerations into key sectors like tourism, agriculture, and forestry while enhancing the protection of biodiversity hotspots. By addressing key threats to biodiversity and incorporating biodiversity protection into the national policy framework, the project strives to create a comprehensive system for biodiversity conservation.

Mid-Term Review Purpose, Scope, and Objectives

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) aimed to assess the project's progress toward its objectives and provide recommendations for mid-course corrections. Key objectives included evaluating the project's efficiency in delivering results, identifying emerging needs, and offering strategic guidance for future activities.

The MTR evaluated the project's relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness, focusing on its alignment with national priorities, gender equality integration, and stakeholder engagement. The project's implementation and management were assessed, highlighting progress and areas for improvement, particularly regarding sustainability prospects. The review emphasized gender equality and human rights, assessing how these principles were integrated into the project's design and execution. The project was evaluated on its contribution to promoting gender equality, addressing the needs of marginalized groups, and ensuring inclusive participation in biodiversity conservation efforts. The MTR employed a theory-based evaluation approach, using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Key informant interviews and document reviews provided in-depth insights into the project's progress, challenges, and achievements.

Project progress summary

The Biodiversity Project has achieved progress in various key areas, although it has also encountered challenges. In terms of strategy, the project is aligned with Montenegro's national development strategies and international environmental commitments. It focuses on strengthening the management capacities of protected areas, fostering biodiversity-friendly practices in sectors like agriculture, forestry, and tourism, and ensuring the inclusion of gender considerations throughout its design and implementation. Protected area staff, local communities, and farmers have benefited from capacity-building initiatives and grant schemes, helping to align financial incentives with conservation goals.

The project has made significant progress towards achieving its outcomes. Under Outcome 1, the management of over 315,000 hectares of protected land has been improved, surpassing the initial target. The integration of biodiversity conservation into national spatial planning under Outcome 2 has also progressed, with 96 conservation areas included in the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040. In Outcome 3, foundational work has been done to promote biodiversity-sensitive tourism, although tangible results, such as increased visitor numbers, are still pending. Under Outcome 4, progress in biodiversity-positive forest management has been made, with consultations and management plans developed for over 600 hectares of private land. Outcome 5 has seen the development of an agro-environmental incentive scheme, though political changes have delayed its implementation. Progress in knowledge management under Outcome 6 is satisfactory.

However, challenges such as political instability, administrative delays, and limited national expertise have slowed implementation. Resistance from local communities to biodiversity conservation measures in protected areas has further complicated engagement efforts. The project's integration of gender equality and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle is evident in its initiatives, but it could adopt a more transformative approach to addressing systemic barriers for women and marginalized groups.

Regarding adaptive management, the Project Team demonstrated resilience and adaptability in overcoming delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and political changes. The National Implementation Modality (NIM) fostered national ownership but also led to delays due to the complexity of aligning ministry processes with project requirements. Enhanced coordination through quarterly Project Board meetings and strong stakeholder engagement were critical to maintaining progress, although procurement challenges and institutional restructuring continued to impact activities.

Looking forward, the sustainability of the project's results will depend on securing long-term financial and institutional support. The agro-environmental incentive scheme is a promising mechanism, but it will require continued financial backing to succeed. The project's contributions to policy frameworks, particularly the integration of biodiversity into the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040, provide a strong foundation for sustained biodiversity conservation. However, addressing the ongoing risks of political instability and operational delays will be essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project's achievements.

Measure	MTR rating	Achievement description
Project Strategy	N/A	The Biodiversity Project strengthens Montenegro's biodiversity conservation by enhancing management capacities, revising protected area plans, and integrating biodiversity into national policies. It actively involves key national stakeholders, including government ministries and local communities, ensuring broad support and collaboration. The Project also aligns with international commitments of the country. It's intervention logic is well-established; still, finetuning of indicators will contribute to more effective tracking of progress and measure its achievements. While the project's gender-sensitive approach is commendable, further embedding gender and social inclusion in decision-making will enhance its relevance.
Progress Towards Results	Objective: Satisfactory	Progress towards the project objective is considered satisfactory as the Project has already made significant advancements in strengthening capacities for biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming objectives into land use planning around Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). The Project has successfully initiated key activities, and while some risks remain, particularly due to the belated transfer of the project team, these issues are expected to be managed as implementation continues.
	Outcome 1: Satisfacory	Progress towards Outcome 1 is satisfactory as METT scores across several key national parks have improved, meeting or exceeding midterm and end- of-project targets. The project has strengthened the management capacities of protected areas, such as Durmitor and Skadar Lake, through revised protection studies incorporating international best practices and guidelines.
	Outcome 2: Satisfactory	Progress towards Outcome 2 has been satisfactory, with significant advancements in integrating biodiversity conservation into Montenegro's national spatial planning framework. The inclusion of 96 areas of conservation interest in the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040 ensures that key biodiversity hotspots, especially those outside of formally protected areas, are recognized and prioritized in national land-use decisions. Additionally, the project has made progress in developing specific management mechanisms for sites like Long Beach and Ada Bojana, contributing to the long-term conservation of these critical areas.
	Outcome 3: Satisfactory/ Mod. Satis.	The project has laid the groundwork for small-scale tourism operators to adopt biodiversity-sensitive practices by engaging stakeholders and developing eco-certification schemes, although concrete results have yet to materialize. Furthermore, baseline data for visitor numbers in protected areas (PAs) have been established, but progress in achieving the targeted 10% increase in visitation remains incomplete, with updated data pending.
	Outcome 4: Satisfactory/ Moderately Satisfactory	Progress under Outcome 4 is between satisfactory and moderately satisfactory. The project is on track with Indicator 11, aiming to promote comprehensive biodiversity-positive forest management tools across 600 hectares of privately owned forests. Consultations with forest owners and the development of forest management plans are progressing. However, political support and restored delivery capacities will be crucial for timely achievement. The project is advancing with the development of a Forest Management Plan for Zabljak Municipality.
	Outcome 5: Satisfactory	The efforts for developing a sustainable agro-environmental incentive mechanism, is on track, with a pilot scheme ready for implementation, involving 10 small-scale farms. Progress towards targeting 20 small-scale farming enterprises to benefit from "green" payments, progress has been slower, with political changes affecting the implementation of these grants.
	Outcome 6: Satisfactory	The project has successfully developed and disseminated key knowledge products related to biodiversity conservation, including guidelines on protected area management, a capacity-building program, and a biodiversity database, all aligned with national and international standards. However, the project could enhance its impact by establishing clearer milestones for knowledge dissemination and incorporating feedback mechanisms.
Project Implementation &	Moderately satisfactory	The Project demonstrated resilience and adaptability by managing delays and seizing opportunities arising from political changes and government restructuring. However, more intensive efforts are needed to build capacity within protected area administrations and improve integration at demonstration sites and implement on-the ground activities. Procurement- including selection and contracting and implementation of local-level

Adaptive Management		grants would require additional boost. Increased frequency of Board meetings and enhanced communication are crucial for maintaining momentum. Still, the external challenges, including political changes, have to be carefully observed as the formal transfer of the project and assigning working offices to the project team affected implementation.
Sustainability	Moderately likely	The project demonstrates moderate progress towards sustainability- it's focus on building long-term capacities, supporting policy frameworks, and assisting with inclusion of biodiversity conservation into national strategies have been some of the critical dimensions. However, risks related to securing financial resources and political support remain. The project is working on strengthening institutional capacities and ensure stakeholder engagement, contributing to progress within the sector. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these efforts will depend on continued government commitment, financial mechanisms, and integrating biodiversity conservation into broader climate and development policies.

Recommendations

Recommendation	For	Details
1: Request	MESDNRD,	Extend the Project by 12 months through a no-cost extension to compensate for delays caused by political instability, COVID-19,
Project	Government of	and procurement challenges. This will allow the Project to meet all targets, recover lost momentum, and solidify institutional
Extension	Montenegro	capacities for sustainability.
2: Improve NIM	MESDNRD,	Clarify the roles of the Ministry and departments under NIM to improve ownership. Streamline procurement and administrative
Implementation	Government of	processes by developing clear guidelines and providing training for key staff. These measures will help reduce delays and
Capacity	Montenegro	improve the efficiency of implementation.
3: Strengthen	MESDNRD,	Strengthen decision-making by formalizing onboarding and training for new Project Board members. Institutionalize
Advisory	Government of	governance structures like the Coordination Body for Protected Area Managers within legal frameworks to ensure stability and
Structures	Montenegro	continuity through political changes.
4: Ensure Long-	MESDNRD,	Develop long-term financial mechanisms such as expanding agro-environmental incentive schemes and engaging private sector
term	Government of	partnerships. Institutionalize capacity-building initiatives within national institutions and integrate post-project monitoring into
Sustainability	Montenegro	government systems to ensure biodiversity efforts continue after the project ends.
5: Revise Work	MESDNRD,	Revise work plans with realistic targets and milestones that reflect the extended timeline. Update indicators to include
Plans and	Government of	qualitative and sustainability-focused measures to track progress more effectively, ensuring ongoing alignment with the
Indicators	Montenegro, UNDP	Project's objectives.
6: Enhance Local	MESDNRD,	Strengthen outreach and communication efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of biodiversity conservation among
Capacity and	Government of	local communities. Expand capacity-building efforts using both online and in-person training, targeting new and existing
Awareness	Montenegro	professionals to enhance technical skills in biodiversity management.
7: Strengthen	MESDNRD,	Hold regular coordination meetings between the Project Team, UNDP, and Ministry leadership to review progress and address
Coordination	Government of	challenges. High-level meetings between UNDP leadership and the Ministry should ensure political support and alignment on
and Monitoring	Montenegro, UNDP	Project priorities. Reconsider UNDP Country Office involvement to improve operational efficiency.

Introduction

Montenegro is recognized as a critical biodiversity hotspot in the Mediterranean region, distinguished by its exceptional ecological diversity and the presence of a wide array of species, many of which are endemic. Despite this rich natural heritage, Montenegro faces numerous challenges related to the conservation and sustainable management of its biodiversity. These include habitat loss due to urbanization, unsustainable tourism, overexploitation of natural resources, and the emerging impacts of climate change.

In response to these challenges, the Government of Montenegro, in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched the project **"Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro"**. This five-year initiative (2022–2027) aims to integrate biodiversity considerations into national policies and practices, strengthen the protection of critical biodiversity areas, and enhance Montenegro's capacity to manage its unique ecosystems.

The mid-term review (MTR) of this project is intended to assess progress made towards the achievement of its objectives, evaluate the effectiveness of the project's design and implementation, and provide recommendations for improving performance during the remaining period. The MTR focuses on four key areas of inquiry:

- The relevance of the project's design and its alignment with national biodiversity priorities.
- Progress made in achieving the expected results and outcomes.
- The effectiveness of project management and adaptive responses to external challenges.
- The sustainability of the project's results, particularly in securing long-term financial and institutional support for biodiversity conservation.

This report presents the findings of the MTR, detailing achievements made thus far, challenges encountered, and lessons learned. The review also offers actionable recommendations to ensure the project achieves its intended outcomes by its conclusion in 2027. The MTR aims to guide stakeholders in making strategic decisions that will bolster the sustainability of the project's results and ensure that Montenegro's biodiversity continues to be protected and conserved for future generations

1 Context and background

1.1 Biodiversity in Montenegro- overview, threats and responses

Montenegro is a critical biodiversity hotspot within the Mediterranean region, distinguished by its exceptional ecological diversity across a compact geographical area. This rich biodiversity stems from Montenegro's unique position straddling both the Mediterranean and Alpine biogeographical regions, which has led to the formation of a wide variety of habitats, from coastal zones and wetlands to dense forests and high mountain ranges.

Plant Diversity: Montenegro's flora is particularly notable, with approximately 3,250 plant species recorded, placing it among the most botanically rich areas in the Balkans. The country's vascular flora species-to-area ratio is the highest in Europe, underscoring the extraordinary concentration of plant diversity relative to its size. This diversity includes many endemic species, which are plants found nowhere else in the world, reflecting the unique ecological conditions in Montenegro.

Avian Diversity: The avian diversity in Montenegro is equally impressive. Of the 526 bird species found across Europe, 297 species are regularly observed in Montenegro. This includes a variety of species that rely on the country's diverse habitats for nesting and migration. The nesting bird density in Montenegro is higher than the average for the Balkan region, highlighting the country's importance as a sanctuary for birdlife. Notable bird habitats include the wetland areas around Lake Skadar and the forests of Biogradska Gora, which are critical for both resident and migratory bird species.

Habitat Diversity: Montenegro's range of habitats supports plants and birds and a variety of other wildlife, including large mammals like brown bears and Balkan lynxes, which are considered key species for conservation efforts. The country's coastal zones, wetlands, river systems, and mountain ecosystems each provide distinct environments that contribute to the overall biodiversity.

Montenegro's diverse ecosystems are important on a regional and global scale. The country is part of the Mediterranean Basin biodiversity hotspot, one of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots. Collectively, these hotspots harbor a high number of endemic species while being significantly threatened by human activities.

Threats to Biodiversity

- Despite its rich natural heritage, Montenegro's biodiversity faces several significant threats. Urbanization
 and Infrastructure Development: Rapid urbanization and infrastructure development, particularly in coastal
 areas, have led to habitat fragmentation and loss. The construction of roads, tourist facilities, and other
 infrastructure has degraded natural habitats, particularly in areas like the Adriatic coast.
- Unsustainable Tourism: While economically beneficial, Montenegro's booming tourism industry has placed considerable pressure on its natural resources. High tourist traffic, especially in protected areas, leads to habitat disturbance, pollution, and overexploitation of resources. For instance, wetlands and water systems are threatened by pollution and eutrophication, exacerbated by increased human activities in these areas.
- Illegal Logging and Overexploitation: Forest ecosystems in Montenegro are also threatened by illegal logging and the overexploitation of non-timber forest products. These activities reduce forest cover and disrupt many species' habitats, leading to a decline in biodiversity.
- **Climate Change**: The impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures, more frequent wildfires, and changing precipitation patterns, also affect Montenegro's ecosystems. For example, droughts have become more common, reducing water availability in rivers and wetlands, threatening aquatic species and the ecosystems that depend on them.

Conservation Efforts

Montenegro has initiated several conservation efforts to mitigate these threats. Establishing protected areas, such as national parks and nature reserves, has been a primary strategy for conserving biodiversity. However, the effectiveness of these protected areas is often limited by insufficient funding, lack of management plans, and inadequate enforcement of conservation laws. In collaboration with international organisations like the WWF, the government has also focused on specific conservation projects, such as protecting large mammals like the brown bear and the Balkan lynx and promoting sustainable practices in agriculture and forestry.

Despite these efforts, challenges still need to be addressed, particularly in integrating biodiversity conservation into broader economic and development policies. The ongoing development of Montenegro's spatial planning framework presents an opportunity to better protect its biodiversity by incorporating ecological considerations into land-use planning.

1.2 The Project Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro-Overview and Theory of Change

The project "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro" focuses on integrating biodiversity considerations into various sectors and enhancing the protection of biodiversity hotspots. The primary focus areas include ecosystem protection within Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in Montenegro and sectoral integration into tourism, agriculture, and forestry.

The Project aims to create a comprehensive framework for biodiversity conservation in Montenegro by integrating biodiversity considerations into key sectors and enhancing the protection of critical biodiversity hotspots. This Project's preconditions include addressing threats to biodiversity from economic activities such as tourism, construction, and forestry. Management and governance weaknesses affecting biodiversity conservation must be tackled, including the need for enhanced protection of species and habitats, particularly in marine ecosystems. There is an inadequate integration of KBA protection objectives into national PA management, and specific threats such as land-use changes, infrastructure development, unsustainable resource use, and climate threats must be addressed. Barriers in PA management, including deficiencies in planning, insufficient patrolling, and lack of public engagement, must also be overcome. Additionally, the inadequate enforcement of biodiversity-related regulations, weak spatial planning frameworks for biodiversity conservation outside PAs, and a lack of practical experience and incentives for biodiversity-sensitive practices in critical sectors need to be resolved.

The key assumptions for the Project include stakeholder commitment to better management of biodiversity hotspots, MESDNRD's incorporation of biodiversity conservation into the Spatial Planning Framework, the continued prioritization of eco-certification, adaptability of post-COVID recovery plans for key sectors to expert contributions, sufficient recovery of tourism businesses to partner with the Project, ongoing government support for private forest owners and agro-environmental policies, national and regional efforts complementing the Project's efforts to reduce forest fire threat, project stakeholders' commitment and provision of declared co-financing, the persistence of sustainable development and nature conservation drivers, a stable project implementation environment, and KBA values remaining unaffected by extreme climatic events. The risks include institutional risks related to governmental reforms and changes in priorities, potential lack of capacity and vision among national partners, conflicting stakeholder interests impacting project performance, fragmented efforts if resources are spread too thin, possible shifts in project focus due to stakeholder conflicts, and the necessity for adaptive management to align with declared objectives and avoid arbitrary deviations.

If these assumptions hold true, and if the risks are monitored and activities are implemented promptly, the Project will achieve several key results. These include strengthened capacity of existing and newly established national protected areas to address key threats to globally significant biodiversity, established biodiversity conservation arrangements for hotspots outside protected areas, mainstreamed biodiversity conservation considerations for sustainable tourism development, mainstreamed biodiversity conservation considerations into forestry policies and practices around KBAs, mainstreamed biodiversity conservation considerations into agricultural policies and practices around KBAs, ensured knowledge management through project implementation, and properly monitored and evaluated project results.

Achieving these results will ensure several outcomes. Enhanced management and protection of globally significant biodiversity within and outside protected areas will be realized, leading to improved biodiversity conservation in key economic sectors such as tourism, forestry, and agriculture. Additionally, increased knowledge and capacity for biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming will be developed, along with effective monitoring and evaluation of project results to ensure adaptive management and continuous improvement. Ultimately, these outcomes will contribute to the Project's goal of creating a comprehensive framework for biodiversity conservation in Montenegro. This will lead to transformational changes in the management of protected areas and land use practices, ensuring long-term conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development in the region.

The Project is structured around four main components, each designed to address specific aspects of biodiversity conservation in Montenegro:

Component 1: Protection of Valuable and Vulnerable Biodiversity within KBAs and Biodiversity Corridors: This component focuses on strengthening the capacity of existing and newly established national protected areas to address key threats to globally significant biodiversity better. By improving management practices, enhancing patrolling and monitoring capacities, and promoting public engagement, the Project aims to protect valuable and vulnerable biodiversity within KBAs and biodiversity corridors.

Component 2: Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices: This component aims to integrate biodiversity conservation considerations into sectoral policies and practices in tourism, forestry, and agriculture. By developing and promoting best-practice standards for sustainable and nature-based tourism, forestry management, and agricultural practices, the Project seeks to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity and encourage sustainable development in these sectors.

Component 3: Knowledge Management: Effective knowledge management is crucial for the success of biodiversity conservation efforts. This component ensures that knowledge is gathered, shared, and utilized to improve project outcomes and facilitate the replication of successful practices. The Project aims to support informed decision-making and adaptive management by building a robust knowledge management system.

Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation are essential for tracking progress, assessing impacts, and making necessary adjustments to achieve project objectives. This component focuses on establishing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure Project results are properly tracked and evaluated, enabling continuous improvement and accountability.

The specific outcomes of the Project include:

- Strengthened capacity of national protected areas to address threats to biodiversity.
- Established conservation arrangements for biodiversity hotspots outside protected areas.

- Mainstreamed biodiversity conservation considerations into tourism, forestry, and agricultural policies and practices.
- Enhanced knowledge management systems to support biodiversity conservation.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure adaptive management and accountability.

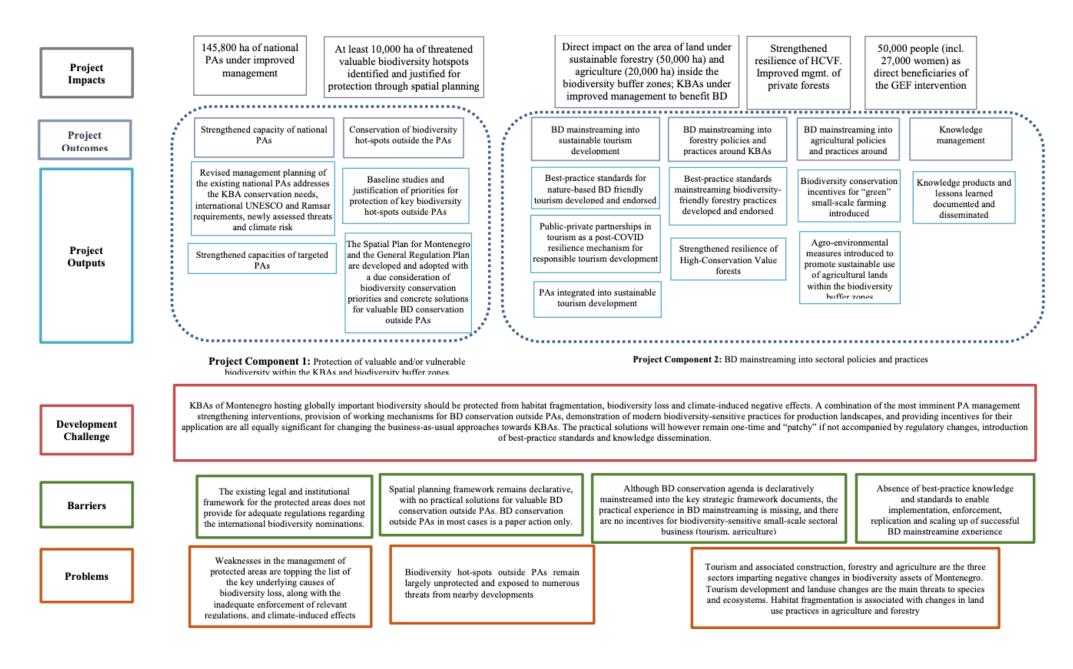
By achieving these outcomes, the Project will contribute to the long-term conservation of biodiversity in Montenegro, ensuring sustainable development and the protection of critical ecosystems for future generations.

The project was initially planned to start on 28 February 2022- however, it started in April 2023 with a planned end date of 28 February 2027. The total project budget amounts to \$3,278,995.

During the data collection phase, the ET addressed two key questions:

- The ET assessed the validity and credibility of the ToC at the mid-term point by analysing the intervention logic, including the hierarchy of objectives, identifying potential gaps in the logic, and evaluating whether preconditions were sufficient to achieve outputs and progress towards outcomes and overall objectives.
- The ET analysed whether the ToC was realistic and achievable, considering if the Biodiversity Project had progressed in delivering its outputs and progressing towards established targets. Additionally, the ET assessed key partners' commitment, capacity and resources to implement planned activities and maintain established results or required additional support. Furthermore, the ET reviewed whether adjustments to the scope, expectations, or timeline of the ToC were necessary.

Figure 1: Theory of Change-Biodiversity Project



1.3 Implementation arrangements

The project is implemented under the National Implementation Modality (NIM) with the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Northern Region Development as the Implementing Partner (IP). The IP manages the project, including monitoring and evaluation, achieving project outcomes, and effectively using resources. A high-level official, nominated as the National Project Director (NPD), chairs the Project Board and oversees project implementation, providing government oversight and guidance. UNDP is accountable to GEF for the project's implementation, ensuring adherence to agreed standards and provisions. UNDP provides project cycle management services, including project approval, supervision, oversight, completion, and evaluation. UNDP also has a project assurance role on the project board.

The project operates out of the Ministry's Directorate of Nature Protection and Climate Change, working closely with institutions like the Eco Fund, Environment Protection Agency, and Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro, as well as other managers of protected areas and a number of NGOs. The Working Group facilitates coordination with other projects and initiatives for Sustainable Finance of the National Council for Sustainable Development.

2 Evaluation Purpose, Scope and Objectives

2.1 **Purpose of the mid-term review**

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) aimed to assess progress toward achieving the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document. The intention was to determine early signs of project achievements or underachievement and identify the necessary changes to set the Project on track to achieve its intended results.

2.2 The scope and specific objectives

The central aspect of this MTR was to provide critical input for mid-course correction and offer strategic guidance on the future trajectory of the Biodiversity Project. Additionally, the MTR identified lessons learned and formulated recommendations to adjust the Project's intervention for the remaining implementation period.

The objectives of this review were:

- To assess progress towards achieving the objectives and planned results detailed in the project documents. The ET provided credible evidence of whether the Project delivered results and utilized resources efficiently.
- To identify emerging demands of partners and adjust project activities in response to evolving requirements.
- To generate evidence-based knowledge by identifying best practices and lessons learned from the Project. These insights were expected to benefit other development interventions and contribute to the sustainability of the Biodiversity Project or some of its components.
- Recommendations for improvement were provided for mid-course adjustments, strategically informing stakeholders about the possible future direction for the remaining period of the Project.

The Project was initially planned to start on 09 March 2022; however, it began one year later, in March 2023. It was planned to continue until February 2027, with a total budget of USD 3,278,995 administered by UNDP. The scope of the mid-term review covered the period from its start until 31 July 2024, analyzing its various components.

2.3 Target Groups and Beneficiaries

The Evaluation Team (ET) ensured inclusive participation from a diverse range of stakeholders, ensuring gender-balanced representation of both men and women. This evaluation will be of significant benefit to the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning, and Urbanism (MESDNRD), as the Implementing Partner, and the UNDP, by providing a detailed analysis of the project's progress at its mid-point. The Government of Montenegro and relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management, will also gain valuable insights to inform future policy and strategic direction, particularly regarding

mainstreaming biodiversity into sectoral practices. Moreover, institutions such as the Nature and Environmental Protection Agency and the Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro will benefit by identifying opportunities for enhancing biodiversity management and protection.

Lastly, the evaluation will support the broader community of local authorities, private forest owners, smallscale farmers, tourism operators, and NGOs by highlighting avenues for further engagement and sustainable development in line with biodiversity conservation goals.

3 Evaluation Criteria

3.1 Key evaluation criteria

The Evaluation Team (ET) focused on the ToR's relevance (and coherence), efficiency, and effectiveness criteria while also analyzing sustainability prospects. Additionally, the MTR considered cross-cutting criteria such as gender mainstreaming and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle. The ET utilized the **Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects** to inform their comprehensive assessment, ensuring a thorough evaluation of the Project's progress. The focus was on the following key categories:

In the **Project Strategy** category (corresponding to relevance, coherence, and flexibility criteria), the ET reviewed the problem, the needs the project addressed, and the underlying assumptions. This process included assessing the effect of any incorrect assumptions or contextual changes on achieving the project results. The ET assessed the Project's strategy relevance to determine if it provided the most effective route towards the expected results. Additionally, the team determined how well the Project aligned with country priorities and whether decision-making processes had adequately considered the perspectives of affected stakeholders. The ET also analyzed if and how the Project integrated gender issues into its design and followed these during implementation, suggesting areas for improvement.

Concerning **internal coherence**, the ET analyzed the Results Framework/Log frame, critically examined its indicators and targets, and evaluated their 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timebound) attributes, suggesting specific amendments as necessary. These efforts included reviewing whether the Project Team effectively monitored broader development and gender aspects.

In assessing **Progress Towards Results** (effectiveness), the team reviewed the log-frame indicators against the progress made towards the mid-point targets using the Progress Towards Results Matrix, applying a "traffic light system" to colour-code progress. The ET assessed progress under each component and outcome/outputs and identified areas not on target. The team also compared and analyzed the GEF Tracking Tool at the Baseline with the one completed before the Midterm Review. Identifying remaining barriers to achieving the project objective and expanding successful elements of the Project were also key focuses.

Under **Project Implementation and Adaptive Management** (efficiency), the ET considered management arrangements, work planning, finance and co-finance, project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, stakeholder engagement, reporting, and communications. This assessment utilized the **Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects**.

Finally, to review **Sustainability Prospects**, the ET validated whether the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs, and the Quantum Risk Management Module were the most significant and whether the risk ratings applied were appropriate and current. The team also examined opportunities to ensure the sustainability of results, reflecting on financial, socio-economic, institutional framework and governance, and environmental risks.

3.2 Cross-cutting issues

The ET undertook a thorough and nuanced approach to ensure the evaluation comprehensively addressed cross-cutting issues, focusing strongly on gender equality and human rights. The methodology integrated gender considerations at every stage of the evaluation, ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives were incorporated and that the analysis reflected the project's impact on various disadvantaged groups, including women and those experiencing poverty.

The evaluation specifically assessed how the Biodiversity Project in Montenegro had embedded human rights and gender equality into its activities. The ET examined the benefits delivered to marginalized groups

and how the project addressed gender issues throughout its lifecycle. This assessment also explored the transformative changes brought about by the project in promoting gender equality and its overall contribution to human rights and human development.

Adherence to a gender-responsive evaluation framework that critically examined the influence of interventions on gender equality and power dynamics was central to this approach. The ET applied the **UNDP Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES)** to categorize and interpret the gender-sensitive aspects of the Biodiversity Project.

3.3 Specific approach to this mid-term review

The framework for this review has been set in the ToR, and following its provisions, the ET has developed a tailor-made methodology. The primary references were the Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed Projects¹, the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines² and the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria³. The ET adhered to UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards⁴ and UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation⁵. Expanding this basis, the ET applied a theory-based evaluation approach⁶ using the Theory of Change and combined it with contribution analysis and gender-sensitive and human rights-based approaches.

The **theory-based evaluation** was grounded in the analysed and confirmed ToC for the Biodiversity Project, providing a comprehensive and dynamic evaluation approach that emphasized accountability and continuous learning. This method offered a structured framework, viewing the ToC as a roadmap outlining the intended sequence of events and causal pathways leading to the desired outcome. This clear articulation of assumptions and expected outcomes allowed the EC to systematically assess whether and how the Biodiversity Project activities led to the planned outputs and desired outcomes. This approach was particularly instrumental in the Biodiversity Project due to the multiple, interrelated factors contributing to the outcomes.

The ET promoted the theory-based evaluation for adaptability and learning. The EC compared the actual achievement of outputs and outcomes with those presented in the (reconstructed) ToC. This comparison revealed discrepancies, uncovering aspects of the Project that did not work as expected. From experience, this iterative process of testing the ToC fostered a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors influencing the delivery of outputs and progress towards outcomes.

Contribution analysis, a robust evaluation tool, complemented the methodology for complex interventions like the Biodiversity Project. It focused on disentangling the plausible connections between the Project's activities and results and the changes observed at the outcome level. The analysis involved meticulous evidence gathering to validate each step of the causal chain. Additionally, contribution analysis acknowledged the critical role of context, particularly relevant for the Biodiversity Project in Montenegro, where the political, economic, and social landscape and the EU accession process significantly shaped environmental sector policies and practices. The mid-term review was adaptive, continuously refining the causal chain based on emerging evidence to maintain the relevance and accuracy of the Project's impact assessment.

The ET also benefited from a **human-rights-based approach and a gender-sensitive evaluation**, which emphasized understanding issues related to human rights and gender equality. The evaluation analyzed how and to what extent the Project addressed these issues during its design and implementation, ensuring that the evaluation remained agile and responsive to emerging findings and changing circumstances.

¹ https://erc.undp.org/pdf/Guidance_Midterm%20Review%20_EN_2014.pdf

 $^{^{2}} http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/PDF/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf$

³ https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf

⁴ http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/2787

⁵ <u>http://www.uneval.org/document/download/1294</u>

⁶ Centre of Excellence for Evaluation (2012). Theory-Based Approaches to Evaluation: Concepts and Practices. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

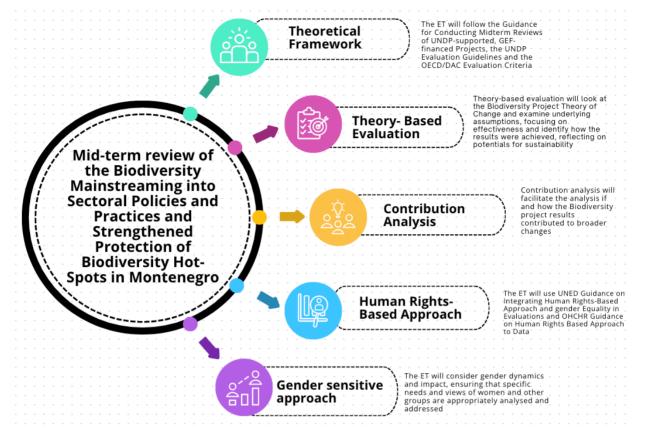


Figure 2: Overview of the mid-term review methodology

The Biodiversity Project planned a mid-term review encompassing both summative and formative methodologies. The summative component aimed to encapsulate and critically evaluate the lessons learned, pinpointing the realization of discernible results at both output and outcome levels during the first years of implementation. The formative facet looked ahead, considering the adaptability of these results for future phases and possible expansions of the Biodiversity Project. In this context, the evaluation used several information sources and benefited from different data-gathering tools, enabling exhaustive comprehension of the Project's roll-out and influence in Montenegro. The ET's proposed methodology for this evaluation reflected the theory-based model, employing a mixed-methods paradigm that synergised qualitative and quantitative data collection and interpretative techniques.

While qualitative data methods dominated the landscape—featuring tools such as key informant interviews, group discussions, and reflective sessions—quantitative data, derived from entities such as the Biodiversity Team and UNDP Montenegro, the Directorate of Nature Protection and Climate Change in the MESDNRD, and other vital directorates and institutions, complemented the findings. Participatory data-gathering methods were the cornerstone, validating the authority and expertise of program affiliates, particularly those from diverse sectors of society in Montenegro. The ET, fully aware of the inherent biases in research, committed to complete immersion and ongoing self-reflection on potential power disparities concerning the evaluation subjects. Therefore, the ET ensured data triangulation and harvested insights from various sources, authenticating findings and highlighting consensus and variance points.

This evaluation methodology, coupled with its well-elaborated approach based on the ET's experience in similar settings, enabled the Biodiversity Project evaluation to remain robust in its relevance, applicability, and integrity within the context of Montenegro's environmental sector and its reform.

3.3.1 Analysis of Project records and secondary literature

The evaluative process commenced with an in-depth examination of the Biodiversity Project, its inputs, and deliverables while revising national and sector-specific strategic documents and project-level inputs. It encompassed national regulations, environment-related sectoral and EU Progress Reports, and overarching strategic directives aligned with the Project's intent. These sources provided insight into Montenegro's environmental, socio-economic, institutional, and developmental landscape during the implementation of

this initiative. Beyond this core repository, the ET explored a broader context, highlighting external variables influencing the environmental sector and its reforms. This approach also allowed the ET to situate the context in which the Biodiversity Project was implemented and to identify various operational details that emerged. The ET's desk audit also incorporated insights from various national reports, enabling the fine-tuning of evaluation questions and ensuring their alignment with the evaluation mission's objectives. This meticulous methodology crafted a seamless narrative, intertwining the Project's aspirations, evaluative questions, and data methodologies, as envisioned in the report. In the following stages of the evaluation process, the ET further enriched findings, revisited documents, and strengthened alliances with key and participating institutions. The ET deployed a standardised analytical tool aligned with the evaluative matrix to systematise findings from various primary and secondary sources, allowing for a cohesive and holistic understanding.

3.3.2 Primary data collection

This mid-term review followed gender-sensitive and feminist approaches that ensured stakeholders' participation in interviews, including men and women from the national institutions (e.g., the Biodiversity and MESDNRD, governmental entities and the regulatory bodies, CSOs, etc).

For a mid-term review of the Project, the ET employed a purposive sampling technique- focusing on the key informants' selection influenced by their level and nature of engagement ("purpose"), encompassing formulation, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and benefiting. The ET organised in-person and online semi-structured interviews (Annex 2 Interview Guides) with them to extract in-depth insights from stakeholders integrally involved in varying stages of the Biodiversity Project, ensuring a multi-faceted perspective on its accomplishments and challenges.

3.4 Data Analysis

The ET applied a **cross-validation approach**⁷ for information from various sources and collection methods to ensure the accuracy of findings. In parallel, the ET examined multiple sources to confirm the internal validity of the findings. This **triangulation**, involving various sources, ensured the confirmation and cross-checking of major trends while establishing a pattern through the convergence of data from different sources⁸.

The report included a consolidated analysis of key results, challenges, and lessons learned from the analytical phase.

Progress and achievement probability have been qualitatively assessed on outcome and output levels, accompanied by an assessment of outcome indicators, related risk assessment, and formulation of lessons learned. Forward-looking recommendations have been formulated to address the potential gaps and opportunities identified, along with concrete solutions proposed for the remaining project period.

3.5 Risks, limitations and mitigation measures

Risks

The evaluation faced significant risks due to the political changes that occurred in Montenegro just before the evaluation began. This was the fourth government reconstruction since the project started, creating instability and uncertainty. The project team had not been formally transferred to the new Ministry, raising concerns about the continuity of the project's implementation.

These political changes made it difficult for the evaluation team (ET) to assess perceptions about the future of the project and how delayed processes would be addressed. Furthermore, there was a risk that new government priorities might not align with the project's objectives, which could potentially lead to a loss of support or delays in critical project components.

Limitations

The timing of the evaluation also posed limitations. Several interviews were conducted shortly after the new government's election, which prevented the ET from meeting with some critical interlocutors. This absence

⁷ Morras-Imas and Rist define triangulation of methods as "Collection of the same information using different methods in order to increase the accuracy of data", p. 300. Morra **Imas**, L. G., & **Rist**, R. C. (2009). The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations. Washington, D.C., World Bank.

⁸Morras- Imas and Rist, p. 376.

limited the ET's ability to fully grasp the perspectives of key stakeholders and gather insights into the project's challenges.

Additionally, the newly appointed management within the relevant ministries had not yet fully understood the project's scope, achievements, and existing challenges. This made it difficult for them to provide in-depth feedback or convey their perceptions about the project's future trajectory.

Mitigation Measures

To address these risks and limitations, the ET employed several mitigation measures. The ET worked closely with long-serving civil servants and project officers who had been involved in the project from its inception, ensuring that institutional memory was preserved despite political changes. The ET also relied on input from local stakeholders and NGO partners, who were able to offer valuable insights into project implementation, even as government priorities shifted.

Additionally, the ET engaged proactively with the new government, conducting structured dialogues to ensure that the newly appointed officials were briefed on the project's importance and objectives. In cases where key informants were unavailable, the ET used secondary data sources such as project records and reports to support their findings and maintain the integrity of the evaluation. These measures helped the ET mitigate the effects of the political transition and ensure a comprehensive evaluation.

3.6 Review and validation

The Mid-Term Review Report has been shared with UNDP, the Ministry, and other stakeholders as appropriate, who have reviewed and validated the outcomes of the evaluation exercise. This phase included i) preparation of the first draft of the Evaluation Report as per the proposed structure, ii) review of the draft report by UNDP, Government and other key partners, iii) appropriate incorporation of the received feedback, correction of factual inaccuracies and professional editing, all this leading to iv) submission of the Final Report.

The MTR Report included key findings, actionable recommendations, lessons learned, and good practices to inform the next phase of the Project implementation. It also reflected on the country's context changes and priorities and potentially suggested changes in the monitoring and reporting framework and oversight and implementation structures to support high performance and achievement rates in the cycle.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The ET was fully aware of the **OECD DAC ethical considerations** for development evaluations and the **United Nations Ethical Guidelines**⁹. The evaluation team followed ethical considerations when selecting interviewees, interacting with them, and respecting their personal and institutional rights. The ET requested informed consent from stakeholders before asking questions about the Biodiversity Project evaluation, briefly explaining the evaluation's reasons, objectives, and the scope of the questions. Stakeholders had the right to refuse or withdraw at any time. The EC also ensured respondent privacy and confidentiality, recognising that disclosing confidential information could have seriously jeopardised the efficiency and credibility of the evaluation process. The EC remained fully independent and confirmed no conflicts of interest for this work. Throughout the evaluation process, the EC adhered to impartiality, credibility, and accountability principles.

⁹ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation- UNEGFN/CoC , 2020. Ref to http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866

4 Findings

4.1 Findings concerning the Project Strategy

The ET assessed the **Project Strategy** by analysing its alignment with the needs of intended beneficiaries and stakeholders, its consistency with national environmental priorities, and the coherence between objectives, activities, and expected outcomes. The team evaluated whether the Project design addressed key national partners' perspectives, mainly through consultations during the conceptualization phase. Additionally, the ET examined whether relevant gender issues were integrated into the Project's design and implementation, ensuring inclusivity. The assessment also focused on aligning the Project with Montenegro's national strategies, international environmental agreements, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ET assessed the Project's adaptability during implementation, focusing on whether the changing environmental and political contexts required adjustments in strategy while maintaining relevance. Finally, the ET reviewed the logical connection between the Project's objectives and the adequacy of indicators to measure progress.

SQ 1.1. To what extent was the design of the intervention, including the formulation of its planned results, relevant to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders?

• The intervention's design and ongoing formulation of planned results reflect its relevance (and strong alignment) to the beneficiaries' immediate needs and key stakeholders' strategic priorities, ensuring the Project remains relevant throughout its lifecycle. Despite the initial delay and considerable time gap between its conceptualisation and the actual start, the Project's approach has evolved to maintain this relevance, particularly in response to the dynamic challenges and stakeholder inputs encountered during implementation.

From the outset, the Project identified its primary beneficiaries through a detailed and substantive analysis, further supported by an effective dialogue with the national partners. The Project selected beneficiaries based on their involvement in biodiversity, such as Protected Area (PA) staff, local communities, farmers, and sectors like tourism and forestry. For PA staff, the Project has been instrumental in enhancing capacity to address the critical threats to biodiversity. This process has included developing and revising management plans for protected areas and strengthening the legal and operational frameworks for biodiversity conservation. In parallel, its capacity-building initiatives, such as developing management toolboxes and hands-on training programs, address immediate gaps and foster long-term sustainability in biodiversity protection efforts. Additional stakeholder comments on the relevance noted that the Project continued to adapt its interventions to meet their evolving needs.

The Project also considered local communities and farmers as key beneficiaries, mainly by introducing sustainable agricultural practices and grant schemes to integrate biodiversity-friendly methods into local economies. The interviewed representatives of these beneficiaries recognised the Project's assistance as critical for communities living in or around biodiversity hotspots, where economic activities often intersect with environmental conservation. Thus, the Project's ability to align financial incentives with conservation goals is setting the ground for the local population to see tangible benefits from their participation; these efforts are expected to secure broader buy-in for the Project's objectives. In addition, the Project is relevant in emphasizing gender inclusivity, particularly by prioritising women in grant schemes and capacity-building initiatives. This demonstrates a commitment to addressing systemic inequalities within these communities¹⁰.

According to the interviewed partners, the Project's continued engagement with key stakeholders, including government ministries, NGOs, and local authorities, ensured its interventions remaines relevant and responsive to the needs. Despite being designed several years ago, the Project remains aligned with Montenegro's national priorities for biodiversity conservation and land-use planning. The involvement of national authorities, such as the Ministry in charge of Environmental Protection/Ecology¹¹ and municipal governments, has ensured that the Project's objectives and activities are incorporated into the country's broader environmental and developmental strategies¹². The interviewed partners stated that the Project

¹⁰ This approach aligns with broader UNDP and GEF priorities on gender equity and addresses local needs by empowering a traditionally underrepresented group within the agricultural and environmental sectors.

[&]quot; During the lifetime of this initiative, there were changes in the name, mandate and leadership of the ministry

¹² This alignment has been critical in addressing governance-related challenges, such as the frequent changes in government, which posed potential risks to project continuity.

institutionalised critical coordination mechanisms, such as establishing a Partnership Board and coordination bodies, thus strengthening resilience in its design, enabling it to adapt to political changes while maintaining its strategic direction.

Civil society organisations¹³ have emerged as more emphasised partners than initially anticipated. Their role in mobilising local communities, institutional capacity building and contributing to implementing biodiversity-friendly practices has increased the Project's results, and these efforts will likely continue. This (unplanned) strengthening of CSOs participation has been a positive development, reinforcing the Project's adaptability and capacity to integrate stakeholder feedback, while also creating strong synergy between CSOs' and public initiatives in the area of biodiversity conservation. Moreover, the formal partnerships established with the CSO representatives, often through memoranda of understanding (MoUs), have ensured that their contributions are institutionalised within the project framework, further enhancing the relevance while contributing to the sustainability prospects of the Project's results.

The tourism and forestry sectors also benefit from the Project's interventions, mainly by introducing biodiversity considerations into sectoral policies and practices. The Project is working on biodiversity-friendly tourism certification schemes and promoting sustainable forestry practices, demonstrating its strategic alignment with Montenegro's economic development priorities. The ET finds that its efforts to foster partnerships between private tourism operators, forestry policymakers, and local communities contribute to creating sustainable value chains (with possibilities to ensure benefits for biodiversity conservation and economic growth).

The Project strived to adapt to emerging risks and challenges. It included a detailed risk management plan, which accounted for potential challenges such as government instability and economic fluctuations. As the Project progressed, several risks, particularly related to political changes and administrative delays, became more significant than originally anticipated. The Project has demonstrated some flexibility in applying mitigation measures in the given context- the efforts such as establishing the Coordination Body of Protected Areas Managers, have facilitated communication on the local level and decision-making, helping to reduce delays and ensure smoother implementation. Still, the situation remains challenging as the Project Team has not been assigned the space nor formally transferred to the newly established ministry.

The Project's knowledge management and learning components are highly relevant and designed to enhance and systematise capacities in this area. Its work to document lessons learned and incorporate stakeholder feedback on capacity development efforts enables the refinement of interventions and the response to emerging needs.

SQ1.2. To what extent were key national partners perspectives, views and priorities reflected during the design and addressed by the Project?

• The ET finds that the Project successfully integrated the perspectives and priorities of key national partners in its design. Interview examples show that governmental and non-governmental stakeholders provided direct and critical inputs, particularly in aligning the Project with national conservation and spatial planning priorities. Moreover, the Project demonstrated flexibility in adapting to the evolving roles of partners, particularly in responding to the stronger-than-expected participation of NGOs, which further solidified its relevance and delivery of results.

National partners, including representatives of local governments and CSOs, were involved in the Project's conceptualisation. The process included online and in-person consultations, and the partners stated that their views and comments were reflected in the Project's priorities. The ET finds that representatives of the national authorities (the GoM and related agencies) provided "critical inputs to ensure that the Project aligned with Montenegro's environmental and biodiversity goals". They emphasised that their involvement ensured that the Project included "critical national concerns and priorities, particularly in areas like spatial planning and biodiversity conservation".

The then Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism (at the time of the Project design and during the first years of its implementation- currently Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management and Ministry of Tourism) were also involved in guiding aspects of the Project related to land use and the integration of biodiversity in economic sectors like agriculture and tourism.

¹³ Under CSOs, the ET considered non-governmental organisations, formal and informal groups

In addition, the partners stated that the Project responded to the identified need for institutional support, highlighting the establishment of a Coordination Body for Protected Areas Managers. This body was formed in response to the challenges of engaging local authorities and protected area managers. This body facilitated better communication and decision-making, a priority expressed by local government partners during the design phase.

The Project also considered the perspectives and feedback from the CSOs, considering their experience, ongoing initiatives in this area, as well as deep connections with local communities. Some of the interviewed CSOs' representatives stated that their growing expertise and views were integrated into the Project's evolving implementation strategy, helping the Project reflect on the ground realities.

SQ1.3. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies, priorities and commitments on environmental protection and climate change?

• The Project has successfully anchored its interventions within the national and international environmental and climate frameworks that guide Montenegro's policy landscape. Its alignment with the NSSD, NCCS, the Paris Agreement, and the EU accession agenda ensures that the Project addresses Montenegro's immediate environmental protection needs and contributes to its long-term climate resilience and sustainable development objectives.

The ET finds that the Project is well-aligned with Montenegro's national development strategies, priorities, and international environmental protection and climate change commitments. Its focus on biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming environmental considerations into sectoral policies is highly consistent with Montenegro's long-term objectives of achieving sustainability and enhancing climate resilience¹⁴.

The Project is closely aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) until 2030, which aims to transition Montenegro to a resource-efficient, low-carbon, and circular economy. The Project's efforts to promote sustainable practices in key sectors and improve the management of biodiversity-rich areas directly support the goals of the NSSD. The interviewed stakeholders stated that the Project's work in ensuring the integration of biodiversity into Montenegro's national policies is crucial for advancing the country's sustainable development priorities, emphasising the priorities for ensuring that natural resources are managed in a manner that is both economically viable and ecologically sustainable. In addition, the Project aligns with Montenegro's national climate change strategy, mainly through its adherence to the National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS). The NCCS underscores the importance of biodiversity conservation as part of the national climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The Project's work in strengthening biodiversity protection within and outside protected areas contributes to building ecosystem resilience, which is critical for reducing climate change vulnerabilities. This Project's intention is particularly relevant in a country like Montenegro, where ecosystems are sensitive to climate variations, and biodiversity conservation is essential for maintaining ecosystem services that support local communities and the broader economy. The ET also finds that the Project aligns with the broader commitments Montenegro has made under international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). By improving the management of biodiversity and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems to climate impacts, the Project supports the implementation of Montenegro's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These NDCs focus on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increasing climate resilience, and the Project contributes by ensuring that biodiversity and ecosystem services are protected in the face of climate change.

Moreover, the Project is well-aligned with Montenegro's EU accession agenda, particularly concerning the environmental and climate acquis. The EU's environmental regulations require stringent biodiversity protection and integration of climate considerations into sectoral policies, and the Project has played a key role in advancing these objectives in Montenegro. By incorporating EU environmental standards into its biodiversity protection framework, the Project helps Montenegro move closer to its EU accession goals. This alignment is critical as the country continues harmonising its national policies with EU environmental requirements, such as the Emissions Trading System (ETS) and other climate-related directives.

¹⁴ The ET finds that the Project contributes directly to the country's strategic goals through its efforts to safeguard KBAs and strengthen the management of protected zones. These include its ambitions to meet EU environmental standards as part of its accession process.

• The Project is strategically aligned with several key international biodiversity and environmental frameworks, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 14 and 15, IUCN standards, the Ramsar Convention, and UNESCO guidelines.

The Project's core objectives of mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into sectoral policies and improving the management of protected areas align with the *CBD*, which emphasizes the integration of biodiversity into national policies and the sustainable use of ecosystems. The Project supports this by enhancing biodiversity protection within and outside protected areas, promoting sustainable land use, and strengthening ecosystem resilience. Additionally, the Project's focus on ecosystem-based adaptation strategies helps Montenegro meet its commitments under the CBD, particularly in the protection of ecosystems vital for biodiversity and their ecosystem services.

The Project also aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which sets ambitious targets to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and ensure the sustainable use of ecosystems. The Project contributes to several key targets of the GBF, including:

- **Target 1**: Protecting biodiversity and restoring ecosystems. The Project focuses on managing Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and integrating biodiversity conservation into spatial planning, thereby supporting the restoration and protection of critical ecosystems.
- **Target 3:** Expanding protected areas and ensuring their effective management. The Project enhances the management effectiveness of Montenegro's protected areas, improving conservation outcomes in biodiversity-rich landscapes and contributing to the GBF's goal of conserving 30% of the planet by 2030.

The Project directly supports **SDG 14** (Life Below Water) and **SDG 15** (Life on Land), which aim to conserve marine and terrestrial ecosystems. By focusing on the sustainable use and protection of coastal and marine areas like *Skadar Lake* and *Ulcinj Salina*, the Project aligns with international designations under *Ramsar* and *UNESCO*. Simultaneously, the Project's efforts to manage forests, agricultural landscapes, and protected areas contribute to halting biodiversity loss and preserving terrestrial ecosystems by promoting biodiversity-friendly practices in agriculture and forestry.

The Project adheres to *IUCN* guidelines by promoting best practices in protected area management and biodiversity conservation. Through capacity building, technical support, and the development of management plans for Montenegro's national parks and nature reserves, the Project helps to improve the conservation status of critical ecosystems in line with IUCN categories and standards for protected areas.

Aligned with the *Ramsar Convention*, the Project focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, particularly in *Skadar Lake* and *Ulcinj Salina*, which are Ramsar-designated sites. It supports wetland management by restoring ecological integrity, improving water management, and enhancing biodiversity conservation, contributing to the Ramsar goals of maintaining the ecological character of wetlands.

The Project's work with UNESCO-designated sites, such as Durmitor National Park, reinforces international commitments to conserving globally significant biodiversity areas. By enhancing the management of these sites, the Project aligns with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, which promotes sustainable natural resource management and the conservation of cultural landscapes. This alignment ensures that Montenegro's biodiversity conservation efforts contribute to UNESCO's global objectives in safeguarding natural heritage.

EQ1.4. To what extent have relevant gender issues been considered during the Project design and implementation?

• The Biodiversity Project successfully integrated gender considerations throughout both its design and implementation phases, ensuring that gender equality became a central aspect of its approach. From the outset, the Project embedded gender mainstreaming into its core strategies, making critical strides toward equal participation and benefits for both men and women. By designing a Gender Action Plan (GAP), gender equity was a practical component of the day-to-day activities The Project aligned with Montenegro's National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality, ensuring that gender considerations were included in all aspects of its design. It emphasised the importance of equal participation, especially in sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as biodiversity management and sustainable agriculture. The Prodoc detailed how to collect gender-disaggregated data to monitor progress and described mechanisms to achieve gender equity objectives. In practice, this laid the groundwork for systematically addressing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women, ensuring they had equal access to the Project's benefits.

The ET finds that the Project prepared the Gender Action Plan (GAP), which was incorporated into the project's work plan, outlining specific targets for gender equality, particularly regarding participation and capacity-building. The Project recognised that women have historically been underrepresented in biodiversity management and conservation, especially in decision-making roles. As a result, the project set a clear goal to ensure that women are actively involved in decision-making processes, governance, and leadership positions in biodiversity-related activities. Special provisions ensured that vulnerable women and grips- such as those living in rural areas (particularly those involved in small-scale agriculture and ecotourism), had access to the project's resources, training, and financial support¹⁵.

SQ 1.5. Are the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project logically connected and consistent with each other?

 The ET finds that the objectives, activities, and outcomes of the Biodiversity Project are logically aligned, with a clear connection between its goals and its actions. However, some activities could benefit from a more detailed explanation of how they will lead to long-term policy and behavioural change. Similarly, while the Project's indicators are generally appropriate, they could be refined to include more qualitative measures that capture the depth of effects, particularly concerning the results of biodiversity mainstreaming and the sustainability of interventions. These adjustments would provide a more precise and comprehensive analysis and assessment of the Project's success in achieving its biodiversity conservation and governance goals.

The ET finds that the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project are generally well-connected and logically consistent. Still, the ET finds areas where stronger articulation and refinement could improve the Project's effectiveness in achieving long-term sustainable results. The Project's design is grounded in two key components: protecting Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and mainstreaming biodiversity into sectoral policies and practices. These components are supported by a series of targeted activities that aim to strengthen biodiversity conservation efforts in Montenegro while integrating biodiversity considerations into national and sectoral planning frameworks.

Overall, the logical flow between objectives and activities is clear; however, there are instances where the pathways to achieving broader, systemic changes in policy and governance could be more explicitly defined.

The Project's overarching objective—to strengthen capacities for protecting internationally recognized biodiversity hot spots in Montenegro—is well supported by activities that focus on enhancing management effectiveness in protected areas, implementing modern monitoring tools like drone surveillance, and improving governance frameworks for biodiversity management. These activities align closely with the expected outcome of improving biodiversity conservation by ensuring more effective management of critical ecosystems. For example, efforts to strengthen governance in National Parks Durmitor and Skadar Lake directly contribute to protecting vulnerable species and ecosystems, fulfilling the Project's aim of safeguarding biodiversity in critical areas.

In biodiversity mainstreaming, the Project engages in essential activities aimed at integrating biodiversity considerations into national and local strategies planning, land-use planning, agriculture, forestry, and tourism policies. These activities align with the Project's objective of embedding biodiversity conservation into sectoral frameworks, ensuring that these sectors adopt sustainable practices that protect biodiversity in the long term. For example, promoting biodiversity-friendly farming practices and developing ecocertification schemes for the tourism sector are directly relevant to this objective. However, while these activities are appropriate and well-targeted, the pathways through which they will lead to systemic changes in policy and governance are only sometimes clearly articulated. Specifically, the Project could benefit from

¹⁵ The design identified specific barriers faced by these groups, such as limited access to funding and training, and aimed to address them through targeted interventions like agro-environmental incentive schemes and grants for biodiversity-friendly enterprise

a more detailed explanation of how these short-term interventions—such as incentives for sustainable farming or certifications in tourism—will become institutionalised within national policies and practices. This gap suggests that while the activities are logical and aligned with the Project's goals, more work is needed to ensure these practices are sustained and scaled up over time. In particular, the Project's approach to mainstreaming biodiversity into sectors like agriculture and forestry is promising, but the mechanisms for ensuring long-term behavioral change and policy adoption remain somewhat ambiguous. For instance, promoting biodiversity-sensitive agricultural practices is a positive step. Still, the success of this activity ultimately depends on how well national agricultural policies integrate these practices and how consistently local farmers adopt them. Without clearer pathways to policy integration, the risk is that these activities could remain isolated efforts- rather than becoming part of a broader, sustainable shift toward biodiversity-friendly agriculture. This finding highlights the need for the Project to more explicitly link its activities with broader, systemic policy changes that ensure lasting impacts on biodiversity conservation.

The Project's use of indicators reflects an attempt to measure progress. Still, there are areas where these indicators could be more refined to capture better both quantitative and qualitative changes, particularly about long-term outcomes and systemic impact.

One of the core indicators measures the area of protected land under improved management. While this indicator tracks the size of protected areas, it focuses primarily on surface area (145,767 hectares as a midterm target) rather than the quality of management improvements in these areas. The Project uses the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) to assess progress. Still, a deeper assessment of the actual ecological improvements and the effectiveness of governance within these protected areas would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Project's impact. For example, monitoring biodiversity health, species recovery rates, and resilience of ecosystems to climate impacts could provide a more nuanced evaluation of the Project's success in enhancing biodiversity protection.

Another critical indicator tracks the number of small-scale farming enterprises benefiting from agroenvironmental incentives. This indicator helps measure engagement and uptake of biodiversity-friendly practices but does not fully capture whether these practices are being sustained or scaled up. An additional indicator assessing the long-term adoption of these biodiversity-friendly practices by the agriculture sector and their integration into national policies would better reflect the Project's broader goal of systemic change.

The Project also tracks gender-disaggregated data, with a focus on the number of women participating in project activities. While the high level of women's participation (48.6% of beneficiaries) is a positive indicator of gender inclusivity, the current metrics primarily assess the number of women involved rather than the quality of their involvement. Expanding these indicators to measure the extent to which women are involved in decision-making processes and their roles in leadership within the Project would provide a more meaningful measure of gender equity. For example, indicators could track how women's participation in decision-making forums has influenced policy changes or improved governance within protected areas.

Moreover, more qualitative measures could benefit the indicator tracking biodiversity mainstreaming into sectoral policies. While the Project aims to integrate biodiversity into various national policies, the existing indicators focus more on outputs (e.g., the number of policy changes or meetings held) than outcomes. Measuring the effectiveness of biodiversity mainstreaming, such as how well biodiversity considerations are being implemented in real-world policy decisions and the level of commitment from sectoral stakeholders, would provide a better sense of the Project's long-term impact on governance structures.

4.2 Findings concerning Progress Towards Results

The ET assessed the progress of the Biodiversity Project towards its results by analysing the extent to which mid-term targets and outputs had been achieved, using the Theory of Change (ToC) as a guiding framework. The ET identified critical areas of success, particularly in strengthening institutional capacities, but also noted areas requiring improvement.

The ET evaluated gender equality and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle through the lens of Project activities and national partners' capacity to integrate these issues into their practices.

EQ 2.1. To what degree has the Project achieved its mid-term targets and progressed towards outputs (as per ToC)?

• The Biodiversity Project has progressed across its key intervention areas- its achievements include initial steps for enhanced management of national parks through updated protection studies, integration of biodiversity into national spatial planning, the development of biodiversity-sensitive tourism and forestry practices, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. However, various challenges- political instability, administrative delays, and gaps in capacity- have hindered certain aspects of project implementation, and these issues are still evident.

The ET provided an overview of progress on outcomes and respective outputs at the midpoint of its planned implementation timeframe.

Table 1 Results Matrix and the status of indicators

Indicator Assessment Key

Croon-	Achieved	
u een=	Achieved	

Yellow= On target to be achieved

Red= Not on target to be achieved

Ratings are assigned using the 6 point Progress Towards Results Rating Scale: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU

Project Objective: To ensure strengthened capacities for protection of the internationally recognized biodiversity hot-spots of Montenegro and mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use objectives into the land use planning framework and sectoral practices around the KBAs

Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification
Mandatory GEF Core indicator Indicator 1: # direct project beneficiaries disaggregated by ri (individual people) (GEF Core Indicator 11)	0	20,000 (incl. 10,000 women)	50,000 (incl. 27,000 women)	 Progress under Indicator 1 The indicator tracking the number of direct project beneficiaries, disaggregated by gender, is on track. The target aims to reach 50,000 beneficiaries by the end of the project, including 27,000 women, with an interim target of 20,000 beneficiaries by the midterm. Since the project's implementation phase effectively began in April 2023 after a one-year delay, significant progress has already been made. Cooperation was established with over 20 institutions and more than 100 direct beneficiaries were engaged within the first few months, with women representing 48.6% of participants. Key activities like the Inception Workshop, Steering Committee meeting, working group sessions, and training for protected area staff have contributed to this early success, involving a wide range of stakeholders from various sectors including environment, tourism, agriculture, and forestry. Likelihood of Achievement: While the project is well-positioned to achieve its midterm and end-of-project targets based on the strong early progress and the broad engagement of stakeholders, there is a risk of delays due to the belated transfer of the project team 	S	Progress has been made toward engaging over 100 beneficiaries, with 48.6% women, though the belated transfer of the project team poses a risk to achieving the target of 50,000 beneficiaries by the end of the project.

				following recent political changes. The transfer of the project to the new Ministry has not yet been formalized, which could affect continuity and further implementation. Additionally, the one-year delay in launching the project adds pressure to achieve the ambitious targets within the remaining timeframe. Despite these risks, if the project team can quickly solidify its transfer and maintain the current momentum, the target of 50,000 beneficiaries by the end of the project is achievable. However, the project must continue to prioritize active engagement and mitigation strategies to avoid delays caused by political and institutional transitions.	
Mandatory GEF Core Indicators: Indicator 2: Terrestrial protected areas under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (Hectares) (GEF Core Indicator 1)	0	145,767 ha	145,767 ha	Progress Under Indicator 2: The Project has met the target under indicator 2. The Project aims to enhance management effectiveness over a total area of 145,767 hectares- and the total area under improved management now stands at 315,442 hectares, exceeding the original project target. The Project made significant progress in two pilot protected areas: National Park Durmitor (32,519 hectares) and National Park Skadar Lake (40,000 hectares). These results covered 72,519 hectares, around 50% of the target. In partnership with the Environment Protection Agency, developing protection studies for other regions are also being implemented. In addition, the Project achieved further improvements during its implementation. Key interventions included management planning improvements through updated studies and management plans for the two national parks. The Project advanced capacity building for national park management by developing a Management Effectiveness Toolbox and training programs. The Project implemented conservation activities, such as using pheromone traps in National Parks Durmitor and Prokletije, covering 50,034 hectares. Technical capacity enhancements, among others, included the acquisition of drones and tree tags for monitoring illegal activities, which span 131,076 hectares. Altogether, the total area under	The Project has exceeded the target by improving the management of 315,442 hectares, surpassing the initial goal of 145,767 hectares through interventions like updated management plans and capacity building for protected areas.

				 improved management now stands at 315,442 hectares, exceeding the original project target of 145,767 hectares. Likelihood of Achievement: Given the substantial progress, particularly with the coverage of 315,442 hectares through various interventions, it is highly likely that the Project will not only meet but exceed its end-of-project target. Ongoing activities such as the completion of protection studies, capacity-building efforts, and technical upgrades in monitoring and enforcement strengthen the likelihood of success. The structured approach, which combines human capacity-building with technical improvements across multiple protected areas, points to a strong probability of achieving long-term conservation goals. However, it remains crucial to complete the planned studies and maintain stakeholder engagement to sustain the Project's momentum. 	
Indicator 3: Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (GEF Core Indicator 4.1)	0	0	80,000 ha	Progress Under Indicator 3:Indicator 3 tracks the area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity, with a target of 80,000 hectares by the end of the Project. This includes 50,000 hectares of land under sustainable forestry, 20,000 hectares of agricultural land, and 10,000 hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) under improved management.Several activities during the implementation have contributed to progress towards this indicator. A Model Forest Development Plan is being developed for three pilot areas, including the Municipality of Žabljak. The plan covers 44,500 hectares and integrates biodiversity, ecosystem services, and climate change resilience into forest management. The Project also supports the development of management plans for 600 hectares of private forests within and around National Park Durmitor, aligning them with the conservation and management objectives of the municipal forest plan.In addition, the Project analyzed the non-timber forest product (NTFP) sector, identifying unsustainable practices and economic	The Project is progressing well, with substantial steps like the development of a forest management plan covering 44,500 hectares and private forest plans for 600 hectares, showing promise to meet the 80,000-hectare target by the end of the project.

Indicator 4: At least 10% increase in METT score for the targeted national Pas	Durmitor National park - 64 Biogradska Gora National park - 66	n/a	Durmitor National park - 70 Biogradska Gora National park - 72	Progress under Indicator 4 Indicator is on trak. Protection studies and updated management plans for Durmitor and Skadar Lake have incorporated best practices and international guidelines to strengthen the capacity for biodiversity conservation.	S	The revised protection study for Durmitor National Park (32,519 hectares) included UNESCO guidelines, strengthening the
Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification
Project Outcome 1: Cana	-ity of the existing nat	ional protected ar	ass strengthened to	pressures on natural resources. Based on these findings, a bylaw has been drafted to regulate and incentivize sustainable NTFP production, mitigating the negative impacts of unsustainable harvesting. On the agriculture front, the Project has identified biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices and is developing a subsidy scheme to encourage adoption. This scheme will be open to agricultural lands across Montenegro, with a focus on areas near protected areas and KBAs. Likelihood of Achievement: Given the current progress, the Project is likely to meet its 80,000-hectare target by the end of the Project. The development of the Model Forest Development Plan for Žabljak, covering a substantial portion of the target area, and the implementation of management plans for private forests demonstrate strong initial steps towards improving land management. The Project's comprehensive approach—integrating forestry, agriculture, and NTFP practices—shows promise for achieving sustainable biodiversity management across landscapes. However, continued efforts to engage stakeholders and ensure effective implementation of these plans will be critical to maintaining momentum and ensuring that the Project will reach its full target.		

	Skadar Lake National Park - 57 Orjen Nature Park - 43 Dragisnica- Komarnica Nature Park - 37 Piva Nature Park - 60 Komovi Nature Park - 21 Ulcinjska Solana Nature Park - 38		Skadar Lake National Park - 62 Orjen Nature Park - 46 Dragisnica- Komarnica Nature Park - 42 Piva Nature Park - 65 Komovi Nature Park: 22 Ulcinjska Solana Nature Park - 40	Areas for imporvements: The indicator is relevant, but its effectiveness could be enhanced. It could benefit from explicitly linking capacity-building efforts to the mitigation of specific biodiversity threats, such as poaching, illegal logging, or habitat loss. Currently, the focus is on general capacity, but not all improvements in capacity will necessarily lead to measurable biodiversity benefits. The indicator could track intermediate results, such as specific changes in management practices or reductions in illegal activities, to demonstrate a clearer link between enhanced capacity and biodiversity protection.	conservation framework for this globally important site. The study outlines updated conservation objectives and strategies, which will be implemented in future management plans. Among other priorities, the main focus is improving enforcement against illegal activities and promoting sustainable tourism.
Indicator 5: International nominations (UNESCO, Ramsar) under improved management at 280,000 ha	0	0	287,707 ha	 Progress under Indicator 5: Progressing. The project is addressing management challenges in UNESCO and Ramsar sites through enhanced protection mechanisms. The Project has made initial strides in improving the management of national protected areas, mainly focusing on Durmitor National Park and Skadar Lake National Park. These parks are internationally recognized biodiversity hot spots, with Durmitor being a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Skadar Lake designated under the Ramsar Convention. The Project has revised protection studies for these areas, incorporating guidelines from UNESCO and Ramsar to ensure that the new management plans are based on international best practices and contemporary conservation approaches. The revised protection studies serve as the foundation for creating updated management plans; these efforts are expected to enhance the long-term protection of these critical ecosystems. Areas for Improvement: 	The protection study for Skadar Lake National Park (40,000 hectares) integrated Ramsar guidelines, prioritising the preservation of its unique wetland ecosystem. Based on the revised protection study, the ET finds that the Project efforts will focus on developing a new management plan for Skadar Lake.

Outcome 2: Biodiversity		ments in place for t	the biodiversity bot.	While the indicator is on track, it could be improved by providing a clearer definition of what constitutes "improved management." The criteria for measuring success should be more explicit, tying improvements to tangible biodiversity outcomes, such as enhanced species protection or reduced habitat degradation. Additionally, the indicator would benefit from the inclusion of intermediate milestones to track progress before the Terminal Evaluation. This would provide more real-time insight into the effectiveness of interventions. Finally, linking these management improvements to the specific threats faced by these areas—such as tourism pressure or habitat loss—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the project is addressing key conservation challenges		Additionally, the Project provided support for introducing innovative monitoring tools, such as tree tagging using NFC technology and drone surveillance to monitor illegal logging and poaching. These measures have already improved monitoring and enforcement capabilities in the national parks.
	0	•				
Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification

Regulations Plan of Montenegro)		of biodiversity conservation priorities and concrete solutions for valuable BD conservation outside PAs	conservation priorities and concrete solutions for valuable BD conservation outside PAs	For example, the indicator could track the proportion of biodiversity hotspots or critical habitats outside PAs that are effectively included in spatial plans and protected from adverse land-use decisions. Additionally, ensuring regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of these conservation measures in real- world land-use changes would enhance the indicator's ability to measure long-term biodiversity outcomes. Finally, considering the new legal changes related to planning, the indicator may need to adapt to assess the extent to which these reforms influence biodiversity conservation in practice.	
Indicator 7: KBAs covered by specific management/protectio n mechanisms developed with the project assistance and set for implementation	0	tbc	Long beach/Velika plaža, Ada Bojana and Šasko jezero with its surrounding (Briska gora) – spatial coverage for Output 2.3; The exact coverage in ha tbc pending the parallel research and conservation effort	Progress under Indicator 7 The Project is on track target and plans under this output. Detailed protection mechanisms for these areas are being developed and the stakeholders expect these proposals/ mechanisms to be integrated into municipal spatial plans. The Project has made progress in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into national spatial planning frameworks. One critical accomplishment is the integration of biodiversity considerations into the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040, which now includes 96 areas of conservation interest across the country. This ensures that biodiversity is systematically considered in national land-use planning, preventing the degradation of ecologically important habitats. Areas for Improvement: More specificity in the target area coverage (in hectares) could be provided earlier in the project timeline, even if preliminary estimates are used. Having these figures sooner would allow for better tracking of progress and ensure that activities remain aligned with the goal of covering significant portions of these KBAs. Additionally, the indicator could benefit from including measurable interim outcomes tied to the development of the specific management mechanisms. Lastly, integrating biodiversity monitoring systems to measure the impact of these mechanisms once implemented would strengthen	Biodiversity considerations were incorporated into municipal spatial plans for regions like Ulcinj and Velika Plaža- Long beach. The ET highlights that the Long Beach/ Velika plaza was protected in 1968, but due to lack of the data (zonation, detailed information on biodiversity etc.) it is under the revision process. The first Draft of the revision study has been prepared. The Project contributed to the Strategic Impact Assessment of the Spatial Plan,

			the ability to link management improvements to actual conservation outcomes.	identifying potential conflicts between biodiversity protection and planned infrastructure projects, helping to mitigate negative environmental impacts
Indicator 8: Unprotected KBAs and valuable BD hotspots justified for enhanced protection status and included as priorities into the spatial development framework	o 130,000 ha	130,000 ha	Progress under Indicator 8: The project is on track to progress under Indicator 8, which measures the justification and inclusion of unprotected Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and valuable biodiversity (BD) hotspots into the spatial development framework for enhanced protection. As of the reporting period, significant steps have been made with 44,580.62 hectares mapped across Rumija, Mrtvica Canyon, and the Zeta River Valley, accounting for 34.92% of the midterm target of 130,000 hectares. Consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have led to the prioritization and selection of additional areas for mapping, covering approximately 115,000 hectares in Orjen, Sinjajevina, Đalovića Cave, and Nikšić Municipality. With ongoing fieldwork and strong coordination with national authorities, the project anticipates exceeding both midterm and final targets, reaching an estimated 159,580 hectares by the project's end.	Project is progressing with the indicator 8
			Areas for Improvement:	
			One area for improvement would be to strengthen the connection between mapping efforts and actual protection measures. While the indicator measures spatial coverage and the inclusion of areas into planning frameworks, the partners could introduce additional metrics to track the formal designation and enforcement of protection status. For example, an intermediate indicator could assess the legal and regulatory steps taken to officially designate these areas as protected, ensuring that the mapped areas move from	

				identification to actual conservation enforcement. Furthermore, tracking the biodiversity impacts of these interventions—such as reductions in habitat loss or improvements in species populations— would provide a more comprehensive assessment of the conservation outcomes. Finally, ensuring that the ambitious spatial coverage targets are aligned with capacity and resources for implementation is crucial, particularly in ensuring that protected status leads to effective management and enforcement.		
Outcome 3: BD conserva Indicator	tion considerations ma Baseline Level	ainstreamed for su Midterm target level	stainable tourism d End of project target level	evelopment Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification
Indicator 9: at least 5 small-scale tourism operators introduce biodiversity-sensitive nature-based tourism products as BAU alternative (gender- disaggregated)	0	0	5	 Progress under Indicator 9: is still in the early stages. Although no concrete results have been reported yet, the project is on track with foundational efforts already underway. These include consultations with the Ministry of Economic Development, National Tourism Organisation, and other relevant stakeholders. A biodiversity-sensitive certification system for tourism operators is in development, and eco-certification schemes have been analyzed. The project has also received approval from the Steering Committee to introduce a new biodiversity-focused certification scheme, with ongoing efforts to formalize this through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and an action plan. Additionally, the project plans to provide guidance and assess the viability of tourism products for small-scale businesses, contributing to biodiversity-sensitive nature-based tourism. Areas for Improvement: While the indicator is relevant, there are some areas for improvement. Firstly, it could benefit from more specific milestones that allow for tracking incremental progress, such as the number of operators engaged or certifications granted during the midterm phase. This would provide a clearer picture of how effectively the project is advancing toward its end target. Additionally, while the 	S/MS	The Project is on track to have five small-scale tourism operators adopt biodiversity-sensitive practices, including eco-certification, as part of efforts to align tourism development with environmental conservation. Consultations with the National Tourism Organisation and other stakeholders have been held, laying the groundwork for implementing biodiversity-sensitive

			focus on small-scale tourism operators is appropriate, the indicator could also include metrics for measuring the actual biodiversity impact of the introduced tourism products—such as reductions in habitat degradation or improvements in species conservation— thereby ensuring that the benefits of these products extend beyond just business outcomes. Lastly, the indicator could be enhanced by ensuring gender-disaggregated reporting is incorporated early, tracking how both women and men participate and benefit from these biodiversity-sensitive tourism initiatives.	certification schemes in the next reporting period. These certification systems will help ensure that tourism operations contribute to biodiversity conservation while
Indicator 10: At least 10% increase in the annual number of visitors in targeted PAs	Baseline visitation data for the pilot Pas (National Parks): Durmitor NP: 270315 Biogradska Gora NP: 72209 Skadar Lake NP: 145.237 Orjen NP: 14 Dragisnica- Komarnica NP: 2785 Piva NP: 33000 Komovi NP: No data Ulcinjska Solana NP: 2983	3% 10%	 Progress under Indicator 10 Indicator 10, which aims for at least a 10% increase in the annual number of visitors to targeted protected areas (PAs), remains work in progress. Baseline visitation data have been established for several pilot PAs, including Durmitor, Biogradska Gora, and Skadar Lake National Parks, along with several Nature Parks such as Orjen and Piva. However, the data for these PAs are expected to be updated and the ET could not verify the mid-term target Areas for Improvement: While the indicator is appropriate for measuring tourism growth, several areas could be improved. Firstly, the quality of visitation data is critical; regular data collection and analysis should be ensured across all PAs, particularly for those lacking baseline data (e.g., Komovi Nature Park). Secondly, the indicator could be strengthened by assessing the environmental impact of increased visitation, such as the effect on biodiversity and ecosystems in these areas. Monitoring environmental impacts alongside visitor numbers would provide a more balanced view of how increased tourism aligns with conservation goals. Additionally, the project could benefit from establishing interim visitation targets for more dynamic tracking between baseline, midterm, and end-of-project stages. Finally, visitor experience and satisfaction could be tracked to ensure that tourism growth enhances the overall value of these PAs without compromising their conservation integrity 	promoting sustainable tourism models that benefit local communities economically.

Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification
Indicator 11: Comprehensive management tools in place and incentives for biodiversity-positive forest owners promoted for at least 600 ha of privately owned forests	0	600 ha	600 ha	Progress under Indicator 11 Progress under Indicator 11, which aims to promote comprehensive management tools and incentives for biodiversity-positive forest management over at least 600 hectares of privately owned forests, is on track. The project has progressed through consultations with private forest owners and the development of forest management plans. The project team conducted consultations to plan for the development of Forest Management Plans for three pilot areas, including the Municipality of Žabljak, covering around 600 hectares. A contract signed (in April 2024) has set a timeline for finalizing these plans by December 15, 2024; however, this achievement will depend on the commitment from the Ministry and restored delivery capacities for the project. The ET finds that comprehensive management tools and methods piloted here are intended to be applied to other municipalities in the future.	S/ MS	The progress will depend on the political support
				Areas for Improvement:		
				While the indicator is on track, there are opportunities for improvement. Firstly, the indicator could include more specific biodiversity outcomes, such as monitoring how forest management changes impact species conservation or habitat preservation. Additionally, incentive mechanisms for private forest owners should be better defined and tracked—ensuring that financial or other incentives are sufficient to encourage long-term adherence to biodiversity-positive practices. Lastly, it would be helpful to establish interim targets before the midterm review to ensure steady progress and allow for course corrections if needed. Expanding the methodology piloted in the Municipality of Žabljak to other areas		

				sooner would also ensure that lessons learned can be integrated early into broader forest management strategies.		
Indicator 12: Targeted adaptation and resilience measures developed and implemented for at least 1000 ha of HCVF	0	1,000 ha	1,000 ha	Progress under Indicator 12: Indicator 12, which aims to develop and implement targeted adaptation and resilience measures for at least 1,000 hectares of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), is currently on track. The Project has focused on integrating biodiversity conservation into forestry management. It is developing a Forest Management Plan for Zabljak Municipality, which covers 44,500 hectares of high-value conservation forests (HCVFs). This plan aims to enhance the resilience of forests to climate change and promote the sustainable use of forest resources, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Areas for Improvement: The indicator would benefit from intermediate targets. For example, tracking the development and submission of expert inputs for the law amendments or the completion of pilot activities in Žabljak would provide a clearer sense of progress. Additionally, the indicator could include metrics for measuring the actual effect of the adaptation and resilience measures on biodiversity. Finally, more clarity around the specific types of resilience measures being implemented would help ensure that the activities are clearly aligned with biodiversity conservation goals and are tailored to the unique needs of HCVFs.		The Forest Management Plan outlines strategies for sustainable forest use, focusing on minimizing habitat degradation and enhancing biodiversity conservation. Regulations for promoting non- timber forest products (NTFPs) have been developed, incentivising local communities to adopt sustainable forest management practices.
Outcome 5: BD conservation considerations mainstreamed into agricultural policies and practices around KBAs						
Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	Justification
Indicator 13: A sustainable mechanism	0	Agro- environmental	Agro- environmental	Progress under Indicator 13:	MS	The agro- environmental

for agro-environmental incentives is in place to encourage uptake of sustainable BD-friendly agricultural practices		incentive scheme (top-up of green direct payments to farmers) developed	incentive scheme (top-up of green direct payments to farmers) institutionalized and tested	The project is on track to meet the midterm target for Indicator 13, which focuses on developing a sustainable mechanism for agro- environmental incentives to encourage the adoption of biodiversity- friendly agricultural practices. The project has designed an agro- environmental incentive scheme that is ready for implementation, with a pilot phase involving 10 small-scale farms . Areas for Improvement: While the indicator is on track, there are potential areas for improvement. The success of the incentive scheme should include clear metrics for biodiversity impact, such as improved soil health, increased species diversity, or reduced land degradation. This would ensure that the scheme is financially viable and environmentally effective.	incentive scheme has been developed and is ready for implementation. A pilot involving 10 small-scale farms will demonstrate how these incentives can promote sustainable agricultural practices that benefit biodiversity
Indicator 14: at least 20 small-scale farming enterprises benefit from top-up "green" payments (gender- disaggregated)	0	10	20	Progress under indicator 14: The Project is making progress in promoting biodiversity-sensitive agricultural practices by developing an agro-environmental incentive scheme. This scheme is designed to encourage small-scale farmers to adopt biodiversity-friendly practices, particularly in areas surrounding KBAs. A comprehensive analysis of existing subsidies has been completed, and a pilot phase of the incentive scheme is expected to be implemented shortly.	The political changes affected progress under this component- the small scale grants under "green payment" has not been initiated
				Areas for Improvement:	
				While the focus on small-scale enterprises is crucial, the project could benefit from diversifying its outreach to ensure a wide range of agricultural actors participate. More emphasis could be placed on measuring the biodiversity outcomes of these green payments, such as improvements in soil health or habitat protection, to ensure the financial incentives are delivering tangible environmental benefits.	
Outcome 6: Knowledge m	nanagement ensured	through project in	nplementation		

Indicator	Baseline Level	Midterm target level	End of project target level	Status of indicators and comments (relevance and areas for improvements)	Rank	
Indicator 15: At least 3 knowledge products related to BD conservation considerations mainstreaming into sectoral policies and practices developed and disseminated. Project knowledge products include an analysis or showcasing of the interplay of gender equity and empowerment with the specific knowledge topic	0	1	3	 Progress under indicator 15 Development and dissemination of knowledge products related to biodiversity conservation and its mainstreaming into sectoral policies, is on track. The project has already delivered some knowledge products: Guidelines on Establishment and Revision of Protected Areas, aligned with both national legal frameworks and international standards like UNESCO and Ramsar. A Capacity Building Program for national stakeholders responsible for the establishment and management of protected areas, including an online version for future institutional use. A Biodiversity Database, containing spatial distribution data of key biodiversity elements and protected areas, to assist with planning and management. Areas for Improvement: One potential improvement would be establishing intermediate milestones for developing knowledge products, ensuring steady progress throughout the project timeline. Additionally, to maximize the impact, the project could focus on wider dissemination strategies, ensuring that knowledge products reach national stakeholders and regional and international platforms. Finally, feedback mechanisms could be incorporated to assess the practical application and effectiveness of these knowledge products, ensuring they meet the needs of their target audiences 	S	5 : The development and dissemination of knowledge products related to biodiversity conservation is progressing well, with three key products already completed. These products are aligned with national and international standards and include gender equity considerations
Indicator 16: Number of women and men getting access to the best available	tbd	tbd	tbd	The project is currently on track, having already provided access to knowledge products and capacity-building activities for 246 people, with women making up 57% of participants. The project aims to ensure that knowledge products related to biodiversity conservation		Provided access to knowledge products and training to 246

knowledge and practice, through project-supported knowledge products	and sectoral mainstreaming are accessible both within and beyond the project intervention zones. The project is working to design and deliver a digital, online training program for the establishment and revision of protected areas.	people, 57% of whom are women.
and training	Areas for Improvement:	
	To strengthen this indicator, the project could provide more specific targets and milestones for the number of people expected to be trained or given access to knowledge products at the midterm and final stages. Additionally, the project should include metrics to assess the quality and impact of the knowledge products and training programs—such as how the acquired knowledge is being applied by participants. Expanding outreach beyond the initial participants through broader networking and dissemination strategies would also enhance the impact of this indicator, ensuring that a larger and more diverse group of stakeholders gains access to these resources.	

EQ2.2. In which areas has the project had the greatest achievements? What barriers remain in achieving the project objective, and how can the Biodiversity Project improve effectiveness?

• The Project has faced several internal and external barriers that have affected its overall effectiveness.

All interviewed stakeholders (and partners) stated that political instability has been a major challenge, with frequent changes in the government and restructurings in the ministry responsible for biodiversity, which has led to administrative delays and disruptions in the decision-making process. These political changes have resulted in delays in tendering and procurement processes, slowing down the pace of implementation. The frequent political changes have also affected the continuity- including the functioning of the Project's steering mechanism, with new Government officials needing time to understand and actively engage in supporting its objectives.

Another significant barrier is reflected in the lack of **national expertise** in certain technical areas, particularly innovative technologies for biodiversity monitoring and forest management. The key informants- including Project Team representatives- stated the **shortage of qualified national experts**, leading to delays in procurement procedures, as tenders had to be re-advertised multiple times to attract the necessary talent. The stakeholders stated that this issue is further compounded by the fact that many innovative solutions the Project is introducing, such as drones and tree-tagging systems, require specialised skills that show limited availability in Montenegro. Additionally, due to the country's small size and limited labor market, most national and local experts are already employed in public administration, making them unavailable to provide external support for the Project. Furthermore, according to interviewees, many potential experts may have been reluctant to apply for positions advertised by the Ministry due to concerns about the transparency of the selection process in public institutions. This challenge has, for now, been addressed with the support of UNDP, which has taken over the responsibility of posting open positions for local and national experts.

Additionally, there have been challenges in **engaging local communities**, particularly in protected areas where resistance to biodiversity conservation measures still exists. The interviewed stakeholders stated that the local populations often see protected areas as a barrier to their economic activities, leading to difficulties in gaining full cooperation. The Project has attempted to address this through outreach and communication efforts. Still, more work is needed to effectively convey biodiversity conservation's long-term economic and ecological benefits to local stakeholders.

EQ2.3. To what extent has gender and LNOB been addressed during the implementation and monitoring of the Biodiversity Project?

The Project has integrated gender equality and the LNOB principle during its implementation¹⁶, with clear strategies to promote the participation of women and vulnerable groups. The Project is working to include women in capacity-building activities, decision-making, and economic empowerment initiatives, particularly in the agricultural and eco-tourism sectors. However, to fully achieve its gender and LNOB goals, the Project could strengthen its focus on gender-transformative approaches, address structural barriers, and enhance its monitoring system to track better the long-term impacts of its interventions on women and marginalised communities.

During the implementation phase, the Project actively ensured women were included in its capacity-building and economic empowerment activities. For example, the ET finds that nearly half (48.6%) of the Project's direct beneficiaries were women, demonstrating its commitment to promoting gender-balanced participation. Women are becoming more involved in workshops, governance structures, and decisionmaking processes related to protected area management, sustainable tourism, and biodiversity-sensitive agriculture.

The ET already highlighted that gender equality was prioritised under the agro-environmental incentive scheme, which provides financial and technical support to small-scale farmers. The scheme focuses on women-led farms, encouraging biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices and promoting economic empowerment for women in rural areas. However, the external challenges and delays affected the planned activities including the design and implementation of the scheme. The Project could have done more to

¹⁶ The gender mainstreaming and LNOB have been integrated in the Project's design, as elaborated under the previous part of this report

deliver grants, mentoring, and training opportunities and help women develop skills in managing sustainable enterprises, particularly in sectors (like eco-tourism and green agriculture). Still, despite these delays, the stakeholders expect that these activities will be implemented.

Additionally, the Project established mechanisms to monitor gender-disaggregated data, which will track the participation and impact of project activities on both men and women. This will allow the Project to assess how effectively gender equality is achieved and make adjustments where necessary to ensure that women and vulnerable groups benefit equally from the Project's interventions. The Project is also working to ensure that the LNOB principle is respected by targeting support to marginalised groups, ensuring they have access to various benefits (as elaborated in the previous part on results and achievements) and new opportunities.

Still, the ET has identified some challenges. For example, the political changes have been well-noted and elaborated upon in the context of the Project's main efforts. However, this situation is even more challenging in the context of gender equality, whereby a generally limited (political) commitment to equality is present, and traditionally, only symbolic resource allocation is ensured for gender-related initiatives. Additionally, entrenched societal norms and gender stereotypes, particularly in rural areas, create barriers to women's full participation and leadership in biodiversity conservation.

While the Project ensured that women were involved in governance and decision-making processes, more could be done to adopt a gender-transformative approach within the project. This would involve ensuring participation and addressing the underlying structural barriers preventing women from fully benefiting from biodiversity initiatives. For example, the stakeholders proposed that the Project implement targeted efforts to improve access to funding and training for women-led enterprises and promote greater representation of women in leadership roles within biodiversity governance structures.

Another area for improvement is the monitoring and evaluation system. While the Project collected genderdisaggregated data, there is potential to enhance the system by tracking the specific impacts of biodiversity conservation activities on women and vulnerable groups, beyond participation. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of how gender equality and LNOB are being achieved and help identify areas where additional support or adjustments are needed.

4.3 Findings concerning Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

The ET assessed the Project Implementation and Adaptive Management by analysing the timeliness and sequencing of activities, the effectiveness of the National Implementation Modality (NIM), and the project's adaptability to external challenges. This assessment focused on how well the Project adhered to planned timelines, the effectiveness of its leadership and management in driving results, and how well the Project adapted to external factors such as political changes, administrative delays, and other unforeseen challenges.

The ET examined how monitoring mechanisms were utilised to ensure efficient project delivery and how the leadership facilitated stakeholder coordination and mitigated delays. In addition, the ET considered the Project's responsiveness to external pressures and its capacity to adjust its strategies and management systems to maintain progress towards results despite various challenges.

SQ3.1. Have the Biodiversity Project's activities been implemented on time and delivered results?

The Biodiversity Project has established steering and management practices to maximise results, although the ET finds various challenges that influence the efficiency of implementation.

The Biodiversity Project faced significant delays in its initial stages, as it was scheduled to begin in February 2022 but actually commenced in March 2023. These delays were primarily caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, political changes, and a cyberattack that affected governmental systems. Despite these setbacks¹⁷, theProject Team conducted a thorough revision of the Project after the first three months of implementation, resulting in the submission of the first PIR to the donors, who concluded that the Project had commenced on schedule. The Work Plan for 2023 and 2024 was subsequently adjusted and accelerated to compensate for the lost time, with the expectation that most delays will be recovered by the end of the year.

¹⁷ As already elaborated, the objectives and priorities- justification for the Project's intervention in the original project document remain highly relevant, suggesting that the Project's design was robust enough to withstand external disruptions.

The Project Team, including the Project Manager, Procurement Specialist, and Technical Advisor, and led by the National Project Director, was well-established with skilled members who played critical roles in managing day-to-day activities. The undisputed competence of the National Project Director alongside the technical expertise of the Project Manager and Technical Advisor, were pivotal in ensuring the Project remained aligned with its objectives and deadlines, while the Procurement Specialist was instrumental in supporting large-scale and intensive procurement processes. It is particularly noteworthy that the Project Team, with the leadership of the National Project Director, has demonstrated proactiveness, flexibility, and creativity in addressing the challenges that have arisen during the project's implementation thus far. Nearly all interviewees agree that, despite significant external challenges, the successful outcomes are a direct result of the Project Team's efforts.

Stakeholders commended the Project's design for targeting key national sectors and obligations, and despite the delays, the Project remained highly relevant. Moreover, the engagement of various stakeholders—ranging from CSOs to sectors such as forestry, agriculture, and tourism—demonstrated that the Project successfully achieved broad institutionalization and collaboration across multiple sectors.

However, the effects of political changes and institutional restructuring created several challenges in the steering processes, resulting in delays in approvals and extended administrative processes. The Government restructuring also required the physical relocation of the Project Office,, further affecting delays in project activities and creating an environment of uncertainty. Despite these difficulties, as highlighted above, the PT and the NPD provided steady leadership in the face of external pressures, and ensuring that the stakeholder communication remained a key strength of the Project's management systems.

Quarterly Project Board meetings were held instead of the originally planned biannual meetings, improving the frequency of coordination and oversight. Despite these positive aspects, political changes caused disruptions, affecting the Project Board and delaying decision-making. Nonetheless, the institutional sustainability of the Project, bolstered by its connection to the National Sustainable Development Council (through the NAP project), mitigated the impact of political changes on implementation. The Partnership Board, functioning as an advisory body, provided additional support in maintaining continuity despite institutional shifts. This Working Group ensured that most activities were not adversely affected by the frequent government changes, and it fostered collaboration with sectors like academia and civil society, formalised through MoUs.

SQ3.2. Has the Biodiversity Project established effective leadership and management practices to maximize results?

• The Project's management system was designed to ensure the smooth execution of activities, but delays caused by administrative hurdles and political changes affected its ability to deliver results efficiently. The Project Team demonstrated resilience in adapting to these challenges, particularly by enhancing stakeholder communication and introducing firm monitoring. Moving forward, the Project will need to address some operational issues, especially procurement bottlenecks and enhance higher-level political and operational commitment and understanding of the importance of biodiversity for Montenegro.

Management systems and monitoring mechanisms: The Project employed monitoring mechanisms to track progress in parallel; regular Project Board meetings contributed to coordination and oversight, helping the Project remain aligned with its objectives. The first level pertains to the Project itself and its indicators from the results matrix that were consistently monitored during the implementation. Despite firm monitoring the procurement and approval processes affected nearly 25% of project activities, contributing to delays in delivery. Although the Project Team implemented various measures, these efforts were not always sufficient to resolve the bottlenecks¹⁸.

On a broader scale, the Project worked on introducing innovative approaches to monitor biodiversity management. The Project procured equipment such as drones and tree tags to monitor forest health, providing protected area managers with advanced tools to track the status of ecosystems. Developing a

¹⁸ For example, the Project adapted to procurement challenges by promoting positions and tenders on UNDP platforms and making greater use of online platforms to attract applicants, these efforts were not always sufficient to resolve the bottlenecks. The report also highlighted that these institutional changes caused frequent errors in payment processing, further slowing the Project's financial management. Payments were often delayed or processed incorrectly due to changes in the Ministry of Finance and other institutional entities involved in the Project. These administrative inefficiencies added further delays to project timelines.

biodiversity map in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency was another major achievement, enhancing land-use planning by integrating biodiversity considerations into spatial data.

Stakeholder engagement and coordination: One of the strengths of the Project's management systems was its stakeholder engagement. The Project built strong partnerships with CSOs, which played a more significant role than originally anticipated. MoUs were signed, allowing for greater coordination and collaboration in biodiversity-related activities. This cooperation helped ensure that the Project's efforts complemented ongoing initiatives and avoided duplication of work.

However, some communication challenges persisted at the local level, particularly with protected area managers and municipalities. Local governments often needed more capacity or resources to manage protected areas effectively, and communication between local managers and the Project Team was sometimes strained. To address these challenges, the Project established a Coordination Body for Protected Area Managers, which is already showing positive results, as well as improved communication and coordination with local stakeholders.

Key informants provided valuable insights into how the Project could improve moving forward:

- Strengthening decision-maker involvement: Several stakeholders, emphasised the need for decisionmakers to be more engaged and aware of biodiversity issues. They recommended enhancing communication strategies to raise awareness among decision-makers at national and local levels.
- Improving public outreach: While the Project had strong stakeholder engagement, public communication was identified as an area that needed improvement. More resources were recommended to raise public awareness about the Project's goals and the broader importance of biodiversity conservation.
- Addressing procurement challenges: The partners stressed the need for better procurement templates and guidance to streamline processes under NIM. The Project Team also needed better access to Quantum to improve transparency and efficiency in managing procurement and financial reporting.

SQ3.3. How the project addressed social and environmental standards, including reflections on mitigation measures?

UNDP screens projects based on its Social and Environmental Standards (SES) as part of its quality assurance process. The Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) guides this screening by categorizing projects into risk levels—Low, Moderate, Substantial, or High. These risk levels determine the required level of review, assessment, and resources to address and manage potential social and environmental risks and impacts. For this project, the SESP has been revised to include newly identified risks and updated mitigation measures. Furthermore, an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) will be developed to screen and assess the social and environmental risks and impacts of upcoming but currently undefined activities. The ESMF will ensure that appropriate management measures are in place before implementing activities with potential risks.

Concerning social standards, the Project addressed social inclusion and gender equality by embedding these considerations into all interventions. A key strategy elaborated under the Gender Action Plan has been to ensure gender-disaggregated data collection and equal access to project benefits for men and women. For example, the ET finds that in sectors like agriculture and tourism with women under-representation, the Project targets small-scale farmers and tourism operators with agro-environmental incentive schemes and biodiversity-sensitive tourism programs, providing women with equitable opportunities to participate and benefit. These efforts will help mitigate the risk of unequal access to resources and promote broader socioeconomic inclusion.

On the environmental side, the Project maintains biodiversity conservation in critical sectors like forestry, spatial planning, and agriculture. One example is the integration of biodiversity considerations into the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040, covering over 3,500 hectares in key biodiversity areas; this approach will ensure that biodiversity protection becomes an integral part of national land-use policies. The Project is working on biodiversity-sensitive certification schemes in tourism, incentivizing sustainable practices and reducing the environmental footprint of tourism operators. The Project also supports adaptation and resilience measures for High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) in the forestry sector, covering 1,000

hectares. These measures, backed by amendments to the Law on Forests, will institutionalize biodiversity protection within forestry practices, ensuring long-term environmental resilience.

In addition, the Project planned mitigation measures that will include training local stakeholders on biodiversity-friendly practices; this approach will build institutional capacity for long-term management of biodiversity hotspots. Additionally, stakeholder engagement remains a crucial mitigation strategy, ensuring that interventions are aligned with local priorities. For example, consultations with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management and local municipalities will ensure that the Project's activities are locally relevant and supported. Part of mitigation effort includes creating a data-sharing protocol to improve accessibility to biodiversity data and facilitate informed decision-making for conservation efforts.

Despite the Project's strong integration of social and environmental standards, some challenges remain. Political instability in Montenegro, with frequent government changes, posed a risk to institutional continuity, delaying decision-making processes and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, gaps in real-time biodiversity monitoring and long-term financial sustainability could hinder the Project's lasting impact. Ensuring biodiversity-friendly practices, such as agro-environmental schemes and sustainable tourism certifications, are scaled up and institutionalized will be critical for maintaining momentum. Addressing these challenges through enhanced monitoring, more robust post-project engagement strategies, and securing ongoing financial support will help ensure long-term success.

EQ3.4. What external factors affected the project, and to what extent was the project able to adapt and mitigate the effects of such factors?

• The Biodiversity Project encountered various external factors that affected its implementation, including political instability, operational hurdles, technical capacity limitations, and financial management constraints. The Project had to adapt to these external influences and mitigate their impacts through various strategies, some of which were more successful than others.

The ET highlighted in several parts of this Report that frequent *political changes* were one of the most significant external factors affecting the Project. The Project commenced during protracted governmental instability, marked by changes in ministries and critical personnel. The Project was planned during the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning, and Urbanism mandate, which was formed in 2020, replacing the previous Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism. In 2023, the Government was restructured, which resulted in the creation of the Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development, and North Region Development. This shift reflects an increased focus on both sustainable development and regional initiatives. In a further reorganisation, in 2024, the Government established the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Development of the North, reflecting the continued prioritisation of environmental issues (including biodiversity). However, this instability had a strong impact on the Project Team, who were left without allocated offices¹⁹. This was compounded by the fact that the formal transfer and acceptance of the Project by the newly established Ministry had not been completed. As a result, the Project Team was unable to carry out activities, process payments, or proceed with contracting²⁰. The replacement of key ministerial and government officials further delayed approvals for Project activities, leading to a slowdown and disruption in the Project's overall momentum.

The ET presented various examples of the Project's response to these challenges. The Project Team maintained strong relationships with stakeholders and established structures to "buffer the impact of political changes"—for example, through the Coordination Body for Protected Area Managers. The NPD and PM also played crucial roles in mitigating these risks by ensuring steady leadership and continuity, even in the face of shifting political landscapes. Despite mitigation measures, these external factors caused implementation delays.

While intended to foster national ownership, **the National Implementation Modality (NIM) posed challenges in adapting to the Project's complex operational requirements**. The Ministry faced difficulties aligning its regular operational processes with the Project's management structures, leading to delayed administrative procedures and slow approval processes. These challenges were compounded by institutional restructuring, which disrupted the administrative workflows. In response, the Project introduced measures such as

¹⁹ This was the case during the time of this evaluation- July to October 2024

²⁰ Furthermore, the team had not received any payments from the time the new government was established in July 2024 until the evaluation in October 2024

enhancing capacity-building initiatives for ministry staff, focusing on aligning national expertise with international best practices. Additionally, adaptive management strategies were implemented, such as revising work plans and intensifying Project oversight through more frequent Project Board meetings, which were held quarterly instead of biannually.

The Project also faced challenges recruiting technical support and national experts for specialised tasks. Montenegro had a limited pool of professionals with the required expertise in biodiversity management and innovative technologies, leading to repeated procurement calls and extended delays in filling critical positions. This shortage of expertise slowed down the implementation of key activities, as the Project had to rely on external expertise to bridge the capacity gap. Despite these efforts, the technical capacity limitations continued to be a major barrier to timely project implementation.

The Project faced *financial management constraints* due to the understaffing of the Operations Unit within the Ministry and frequent personnel changes in the Ministry of Finance. These issues led to payment delays, with funds sometimes being misallocated to incorrect accounts. Additionally, the Project encountered bottlenecks in the financial approval process. The ET finds that the response included strengthening financial oversight mechanisms, introducing templates and guidelines for procurement and payment processes, and ensuring greater coordination with the Ministry of Finance. Despite these mitigation strategies, the delays continued to burden the Project, especially as the Project depends on the national budget (including co-financing components).

While these factors caused delays and operational difficulties, the **Project Team demonstrated flexibility and resilience by adapting its management strategies and increasing engagement with key stakeholders**. Although the Project was able to mitigate many of the effects of these external challenges, ongoing issues with procurement and financial management continued to pose risks to timely implementation.

4.4 Findings concerning Sustainability

The ET assessed the sustainability by examining its efforts to secure long-term financial and human capacities, establish policy and regulatory frameworks, and build institutional capacities to ensure the continuation of benefits beyond the Project's lifespan.

The ET analysed the Project's risk management, particularly in identifying and addressing critical risks outlined in the Project Document, PIRs, and Quantum Risk Management Module, to gauge their impact on long-term sustainability. Furthermore, ET explored opportunities for building climate change resilience and enhancing biodiversity conservation through policy integration and financial mechanisms to ensure that the Project's achievements will likely be maintained and further improved.

SQ4.1. What is the likelihood that the Project will ensure the sustainability of its results?

• The Project shows positive signs for sustainability of its results but challenges remain, particularly in securing long-term financial and institutional support. The ET finds that despite its efforts to establish a strong foundation for future biodiversity conservation, the continued commitment from government institutions and stakeholders will be essential to maintaining and building on these achievements.

The Project is progressing in strengthening the management capacity of national and local institutions involved in biodiversity conservation. By improving the management effectiveness of protected areas and mainstreaming biodiversity into key sectors like agriculture, forestry, and tourism, the ET expects the Project to build a strong foundation for sustained results.

The Project is working to secure **long-term financial support** through mechanisms such as the agroenvironmental incentive scheme to promote sustainable practices among small-scale farmers. However, the Project's reliance on external funding poses a potential challenge to long-term sustainability. Without a clear strategy for securing continued financial resources post-project, the sustainability of these incentives and other financial support mechanisms may be at risk.

The ET finds that **capacity development** is one of the core components, and the Project has been effective thus far in strengthening the capacities of local stakeholders, including national park staff, forest managers, and small-scale farmers. This process will continue and include training in the priority topics (for example,

using new monitoring tools and education on sustainable land-use practices). However, maintaining these capacities over time will require ongoing support and institutionalisation within government agencies.

The ET finds evidence that the Project is working to ensure **that policy and regulatory frameworks** are in place to support the continuation of benefits. It has made important contributions to the policy and regulatory frameworks that can support the continuation of its benefits. The ET mentioned that the main achievement has been integrating biodiversity considerations into the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040, ensuring that biodiversity protection will be considered in future land-use and development planning. Additionally, the revision of protection studies incorporatesd international conservation standards, providing a robust regulatory framework for continued biodiversity management. An important aspect is that the Project's policies and frameworks include gender considerations, ensuring that both men and women can benefit equally from biodiversity-related activities. The agro-environmental incentive scheme, for example, provides targeted support to women-led enterprises in the agricultural sector, helping to ensure that women are not left behind in efforts to promote biodiversity-friendly practices. In addition, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Government, the Project worked to incorporate biodiversity protection as a cross-cutting activity in all future national strategic documents, which not only ensures financial support but also guarantees a certain level of institutional sustainability. While the Project has laid the groundwork for effective policy frameworks, the long-term effects and sustainability will depend on government institutions' political will and commitment to uphold and enforce these policies. Continued monitoring and assessment of progress remain critical.

The ET finds that the Project contributes to and generates several opportunities for sustaining and improving its results. To further enhance the sustainability of its results, the Project could explore additional opportunities for linking biodiversity conservation with broader climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. This could include expanding the scope of the agro-environmental incentive scheme to cover more regions and incorporating climate-related indicators into future monitoring frameworks.

SQ4.2. To what extent are the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs and the Quantum Risk Management Module the most important?

 The analysis of the risks identified in the Project Document (ProDoc) and PIRs, as well as the Quantum Risk Management Module, reveals that while certain critical risks have been highlighted, the assessment of their impact and probability could have been more thorough, particularly in the face of evolving challenges throughout project implementation.

The risks identified in the relevant documents were largely appropriate, but some key risks, particularly political instability and administrative inefficiencies, were underestimated. For example, these sources did not fully anticipate the operational challenges linked with the NIM, the associated complex implementation processes, and the effects of political changes, leading to delays and challenges. A more sound risk management strategy, realistic risk assessments, and proactive updates to the risk logs could mitigate some of these risks.

The risk analysis focused on climate change resilience and biodiversity conservation was well-founded. However, ensuring the long-term sustainability of financial mechanisms and private sector engagement remains a critical concern.

Political and institutional risks: The risk logs from the Project documentation initially recognised political risks, suggesting a sufficient political commitment to biodiversity conservation, not envisaging major disruptions from changes in Government. However, this risk assessment proved to be overly optimistic. In practice, the Project experienced significant delays due to frequent political changes and administrative restructuring. Several ministers and Government officials were replaced during the Project's implementation, disrupting decision-making processes and affecting key approvals. The Project Board and other governance structures had to repeatedly adjust to these changes, delaying the Project's timelines and affecting delivery.

This misjudgment highlights a disconnect between the initial risk rating and the actual political volatility experienced, underscoring the need for a more realistic assessment of political risks. This finding also points to the need for the risk log in the PIRs to be updated regularly, reflecting the increasing risks posed by political instability, which was insufficiently captured in these reports.

Operational and management risks: The risk analysis (from the initial Project's stage) correctly identified the National Implementation Modality (NIM) as a moderate risk, particularly because the Project was one of the first in Montenegro to be implemented under this modality. The NIM was seen as an opportunity to enhance national ownership but also posed operational challenges, as the ministry had limited experience in directly implementing large-scale projects. The PIRs noted operational delays associated with complex administrative processes, particularly in procurement and recruitment. These delays were compounded by the government's procedural bottlenecks, which were not fully anticipated during the initial risk assessment.

While the Risk Assessment outlined the need for targeted capacity-building as a mitigation measure, the risk of delayed procedures and inefficiencies persisted throughout the Project's implementation. The capacity of the Ministry in charge (with all changes that have occurred) to manage operational aspects (procurement processes and financial administration) proved to be more limited than expected, causing significant setbacks in delivering key outputs.

Strategic Risks: Another key risk identified in the risk logs concerned the proclamation of protection regimes for areas with multiple land use and stakeholder interests. The risk of under-delivery of spatial indicators, particularly in Durmitor and Skadar Lake, was noted as moderate due to the lengthy and iterative processes involved in conservation planning. This risk was well-identified, and while the Project took measures to align its objectives with Montenegro's spatial development framework and EU integration milestones, delays in decision-making and approvals have slowed the formalisation of protection regimes. The risk analysis outlined the Spatial Plan of Montenegro as a key framework to support these processes. However, achieving the planned spatial outcomes within the Project's five-year timeframe remains challenging, especially without extensions.

Environmental risks: The environmental risks, particularly those related to climate change, were welladdressed in the risks logs. The risk of climate-induced habitat conversion and biodiversity loss was highlighted, and the Project incorporated climate change resilience measures, including forest management and agro-environmental practices, into its key outputs. The protection studies for Durmitor and Skadar Lake were designed to integrate climate change assessments, and activities aimed at enhancing the resilience of high-conservation-value forests to climate threats were embedded within the Project's framework. This risk was correctly identified and effectively mitigated by including climate change considerations from the start of the Project.

Financial and Strategic Sustainability Risks: The risk log also noted a risk related to the financial viability of the biodiversity-friendly finance mechanisms introduced by the Project, particularly concerning their ability to scale in the long term. This risk remains valid, as the success of these mechanisms depends on securing ongoing financial resources and ensuring that the incentives provided to the private sector, particularly in tourism and agriculture, are sustainable. The ProDoc recommended cost-benefit analyses of these mechanisms as a risk mitigation measure. Still, implementing these financial mechanisms has encountered challenges, especially in the context of post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

SQ4.3. To what extent is the intervention building individual and institutional capacities to ensure the sustainability of benefits?

The Project is progressing in building individual and institutional capacities by creating a strong sense of ownership among national partners and strengthening individual and institutional capacities to continue mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into policy frameworks.

The stakeholders stated that the Project is focusing on building individual and institutional capacities, stating that these activities will continue, essential for ensuring sustainability. The ET finds that involving national partners to align project activities with Montenegro's biodiversity conservation priorities and creating a foundation for continued engagement and support could enhance sustainability beyond the Project's implementation period.

Despite some implementation delays, the Project has established and maintained functional partnerships with key national and local institutions involved in biodiversity management. This approach has helped to strengthen the coherence between the Project's activities and Montenegro's national strategies related to sustainable land use, forest management, and biodiversity-sensitive tourism. For instance, the Project organised broad consultative processes and assessments involving various stakeholders, which identified key biodiversity conservation needs and actions. Importantly, these processes will likely contribute to

institutional capacities to understand policy and decision-making processes, increasing the likelihood that biodiversity conservation will remain a priority in national and local policies.

National partners view the Project's deliverables to this mid-term point as critical resources for long-term biodiversity management. For example, the mentioned new protection studies provide updated frameworks for managing these critical ecosystems and incorporate international best practices, ensuring Montenegro's conservation efforts align with global standards. The Project has also invested in capacity development, including training for national and local institutions in biodiversity management, financial resource management, and policy implementation. The Project is expected to have a significant impact on the managers of protected areas, as it focuses its capacity-building efforts and provides technical support specifically aimed at enhancing their management capabilities and operational effectiveness.

The Project's advocacy and awareness-building activities have further created an enabling environment for sustainable biodiversity management. Through workshops, campaigns, and public engagement initiatives, the Project has raised awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation among various segments of society, from policymakers to local communities. These efforts ensure that biodiversity remains a national priority, even after the Project's direct support ends.

In addition to individual capacity building, the Project will strengthen institutional capacities by working closely with national partners, such as the Ministry in charge of environmental protection, spatial planning and urbanism, as well as CSO sector that demonstrated the ability to compensate for the lack of institutional capacities, to ensure institutional ownership over the Project's outcomes. The focus remains on integrating biodiversity considerations into national operational frameworks and securing their commitment to continue supporting conservation efforts.

The Project Board has played a crucial role in providing strategic guidance and ensuring Project activities align with institutional mandates and long-term strategic directions. This role will be critical in future activities. This comprehensive sense of ownership over decision-making processes is creating a strong foundation for integrating the Project's outcomes into national policies and frameworks, ensuring that the project's achievements are sustained well into the future.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The ET has thoroughly reviewed the project's progress and challenges, drawing several key conclusions. Despite significant delays and external challenges, the Project has made notable advances in strengthening biodiversity management, institutional capacities, and policy integration. The involvement of strong leadership, particularly from the National Project Director, has proven critical to overcoming obstacles and aligning the project with national priorities. However, sustained political and financial commitment will be necessary to ensure that the project's results are maintained and built upon in the future.

The following main conclusions have been generated:

5.1.1 Conclusions on strategy

C1. The **Biodiversity Project** effectively addresses Montenegro's critical needs in biodiversity conservation by establishing stronger frameworks and improving capacities for managing protected areas and mainstreaming biodiversity into national policies. It included critical tools- such as implementing capacity development initiatives, revising management plans for protected areas, and introducing innovative monitoring tools. These efforts align with Montenegro's commitment to safeguarding its biodiversity and enhancing environmental governance, thereby contributing to long-term biodiversity protection and management sustainability. Furthermore, the project's relevance is strengthened by the active involvement of national partners in its design and implementation. Including key stakeholders such as the Government of Montenegro and its ministries, Protected Area managers, local communities, and NGOs in decision-making processes reflects a broad, collaborative effort that has enhanced the project's impact on biodiversity conservation across Montenegro.

However, for sustained long-term relevance, these tools and capacities must be institutionalized into national and local governance structures, ensuring their continued use and impact post-project. Additionally, ensuring the full integration of local communities and marginalized stakeholders in decision-making processes will further enhance the project's relevance and sustainability.

C2. The project remained highly relevant throughout its implementation by focusing on building institutional capacities and enhancing technical skills crucial for biodiversity conservation. Its gender-sensitive approach and engagement with local communities are commendable, ensuring that underrepresented groups, especially women, actively participate in and benefit from conservation efforts. However, to fully leverage the potential of these strategies, the project must further embed gender and social inclusion into leadership roles and decision-making processes. This transformative approach will strengthen the project's impact on both ecological and social sustainability in the long term.

C3. The Project demonstrated strong internal coherence, with well-aligned activities, outputs, and outcomes that its Theory of Change effectively guides. This coherence has strengthened efforts to mainstream biodiversity into key sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and forestry. The project's alignment with national and international strategies, including the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) and the National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS), positions it well within Montenegro's broader environmental and economic policies. Furthermore, its strategic linkages with several key international biodiversity and environmental frameworks, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 14 and 15, IUCN standards, the Ramsar Convention, and UNESCO guidelines, reinforce the project's contribution to biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. To maintain this alignment, the project should focus on embedding these frameworks into long-term national and local governance systems to ensure ongoing policy harmonisation and sustainability.

5.1.2 Conclusions on progress towards results

C4. The Biodiversity Project made significant strides in advancing biodiversity conservation in Montenegro by enhancing the management of protected areas and integrating biodiversity into national policies. Delivering protection studies for Durmitor National Park and Skadar Lake are key achievements that underscore the project's impact. However, ongoing political instability and staff turnover have delayed full implementation, revealing a need for more adaptive management strategies. Establishing the Coordination Body for Protected Area Managers has improved stakeholder collaboration, which is crucial for long-term

sustainability. Moving forward, the project must institutionalise crisis management strategies to address political and operational disruptions while ensuring leadership continuity and setting clear short- and mid-term milestones for achieving project goals.

C5. The Project has made commendable progress in integrating gender equality and the LNOB (Leave No One Behind) principle by implementing the Gender Action Plan, focusing on women and vulnerable groups in biodiversity activities. However, entrenched structural barriers and deep-seated gender norms continue to hinder the full realization of these goals. To make meaningful progress, the project must adopt a more transformative approach, addressing these systemic issues through targeted interventions. Furthermore, strengthening the project's monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the long-term impacts of gender-related interventions will be essential in ensuring sustained progress toward gender equality in biodiversity governance

5.1.3 Conclusions on implementation and adaptive management

C6. Despite the Biodiversity Project's proactive leadership and adaptability, external factors significantly delayed timely implementation. The Project Team's skilled members, especially the NPD, were crucial in navigating these challenges and maintaining progress.

However, the weak operational support from the Ministry, coupled with persistent procurement delays due to institutional changes and a lack of national expertise, further hampered progress. Administrative issues in the Ministry of Finance, particularly payment processing errors, slowed financial management, creating additional obstacles. As the project nears its completion deadline, accelerated action is required from both the Project Team and the Ministry to ensure all planned activities are implemented within the remaining period.

5.1.4 Conclusions on sustainability

C7. The sustainability outlook for the Biodiversity Project is promising, backed by Montenegro's strong commitment to international conservation standards and national biodiversity priorities. The project's integration of biodiversity considerations into national frameworks, such as the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040, and its investment in capacity-building efforts at the national and local levels provide a robust foundation for long-term biodiversity management. However, securing long-term financial resources and consistent institutional support remains a significant challenge. The reliance on external funding and delays in policy execution present risks to the sustained impact of these initiatives. Addressing these financial and institutional gaps is critical to ensure the Project's continued success.

C8. The Project's efforts to build institutional capacity and establish robust legal frameworks, particularly by revising protection studies for Durmitor and Skadar Lake, are pivotal for sustaining its results. The strengthened sense of institutional ownership—evidenced by the active involvement of government stakeholders, NGOs, and local communities—provides a solid foundation for maintaining biodiversity conservation efforts. However, the project's sustainability remains highly dependent on continued political commitment and integration of these legal frameworks into national governance. Without political backing and effective policy integration, the long-term impact of these achievements could be compromised.

C9. The Project has successfully fostered strong partnerships and promoted biodiversity-friendly practices. However, the sustainability of these efforts is contingent upon addressing high staff turnover and ensuring the continuation of professional development. For capacity-building initiatives to have a lasting impact, they must be integrated into formal institutional systems that ensure trained personnel remain engaged and that their skills are continuously updated. Mitigating staff turnover and embedding professional development programs within institutional frameworks will be crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

5.1.5 Lessons learned

Based on the project's implementation analysis, the ET has identified several key lessons learned that can inform future initiatives. These lessons focus on the importance of strong leadership, national ownership, adaptive management, and the need for effective financial and policy integration. By addressing these areas, future projects can achieve greater sustainability and resilience in the face of challenges.

The following critical lessons have been identified:

Institutional commitment and leadership drive project success: The involvement of national stakeholders, particularly the National Project Director (NPD), was pivotal to the project's progress. The NPD's technical capacity and personal involvement in biodiversity conservation were critical in navigating challenges, maintaining steady leadership, and ensuring alignment with national priorities. Strong institutional leadership, coupled with dedicated oversight, helps mitigate external disruptions like political changes and administrative delays. This was especially important in ensuring that project objectives remained relevant despite shifting political landscapes.

Critical Lessons:

- The commitment and ownership of national stakeholders, from planning to implementation, are essential for project success.
- The Project Director's leadership was key in driving the results and maintaining strategic alignment, highlighting the importance of capable technical leadership at the national level.

Capacity building and ownership are essential for long-term sustainability: While the project effectively built technical capacity across key sectors, ensuring sustainability requires embedding these skills within national institutions. Capacity-building efforts must be paired with a clear sense of ownership among national stakeholders to prevent the dissolution of knowledge and practices post-project. The temporary nature of Project Implementation Units (PIUs) highlights the need to transfer capacities into permanent national structures, securing long-term impact. In this case, the shift from DIM to NIM posed several challenges, underlining the importance of structured transitions and establishing a dedicated Project Implementation Unit that adheres to NIM guidelines.

Critical points:

- The shift from DIM to NIM requires a well-defined strategy and phased approach, considering financial, institutional, and administrative challenges.
- Establishing clear ownership and commitment from national partners early in the project is critical for long-term sustainability.

Adaptive management is key to overcoming external challenges: The Biodiversity Project's ability to adapt to external challenges, including political instability, cyber-attacks, and operational delays, **underscores** the importance of flexible management strategies. Projects must integrate adaptive management from the outset to accommodate evolving risks and maintain progress. Real-time adjustments to work plans, including phased approaches to implementation, help ensure continuity in the face of external disruptions. Furthermore, addressing procurement and operational bottlenecks quickly was vital in ensuring progress despite delays.

Critical points:

- The project's capacity to adjust to unforeseen challenges, such as political changes and operational hurdles, highlights the need for adaptive, flexible management strategies.
- Continuous engagement with stakeholders and building functional partnerships help mitigate external risks and facilitate progress even when faced with delays or disruptions.

Integrated financial and policy planning is crucial for sustainability: Long-term financial sustainability remains a key challenge, particularly in ensuring that mechanisms like agro-environmental incentives can continue beyond the project's lifecycle. Embedding such mechanisms within national financial frameworks and securing government commitment to biodiversity conservation in policy and budget planning is crucial. The Project's integration into national spatial plans and regulatory frameworks is promising, but sustained political and financial support is needed to maintain momentum. Additionally, compliance with national and international regulatory frameworks is essential for ensuring the long-term success of these initiatives.

Critical points:

- Successful NIM projects require establishing well-defined procedures and compliance with regulatory frameworks to ensure smooth implementation and alignment with national priorities.
- Long-term success depends on technical results and embedding financial mechanisms within national planning frameworks to secure sustainable funding.

5.2 Recommendations

E

The primary and secondary data analysis served to define findings and form conclusions. Considering these inputs, the ET recommendations have been defined as a framework for further analysis and follow-up actions.

The evaluation consultant has formulated the following main recommendations:

Recommendation 1:	Consider, elaborate and request the extension of the Project
For: MESDNRD (Implementing partner) Government of Montenegro	The ET recommends extending the Project for at least 12 months through a no- cost extension to address delays caused by political instability, COVID-19, and procurement challenges. This extension will provide adequate time to recover lost momentum, ensure all targets are met, and establish long-term institutional capacities essential for sustainability. The delayed start and financial savings make this extension feasible.
	Furthermore, the extra time will help the Project solidify its achievements and ensure its long-term impact, particularly in building national capacities and securing biodiversity outcomes.
	(Linked to Conclusions: C1, C2, C4)
Recommendation 2:	Advance and improve project implementation capacities under the NIM framework- (including procurement, financial and administrative processes):
For: MESDNRD (Implementing partner) Government of Montenegro	The ET recommends that the partners- UNDP and the Ministry- to discuss and clearly define the role of the IP and its departments in the NIM. All the issues should be clarified, and the importance of the project in the broader context should be discussed and clarified- there is a need to enhance ownership of the project and understanding of the decision-making process.
	The ET recommends that the Project implement streamlined procurement procedures to address the bottlenecks that have delayed progress. Comprehensive procurement guidelines should be developed, ensuring compliance with both national and UNDP procurement policies. Key staff members in the Ministry should receive focused training in procurement to improve their understanding and execution of these processes. The decision to engage procurement specialist from the beginning has reduced administrative delays and contributed to improved processes- this process should continue and it is expected to contribute to timely delivery of essential activities.
	This will facilitate smoother implementation and improve overall efficiency, especially in the context of governance and operational coherence.
	(Linked to Conclusions: C3, C6)
Recommendation 3:	Strenghten advisory structures to ensure informed decision-making processes:
For: MESDNRD (Implementing partner) Government of Montenegro	The ET recommends strengthening the advisory structures to ensure more informed and continuous decision-making throughout the Project's lifespan. Frequent political changes and subsequent turnover within the Project Board have hindered consistent decision-making. To mitigate this, the ET suggests formalized training and onboarding programs for new board members to ensure they are well-versed in the Project's goals, strategy, and key milestones.
	Additionally, the Project should work toward institutionalizing key governance mechanisms, such as the Coordination Body for Protected Area Managers, by embedding them into national legal frameworks. This institutionalization will

	help maintain the function and authority of these bodies, regardless of political instability or personnel changes, ensuring continuity and stability in decision- making and project implementation even during government transitions. (Linked to Conclusions: C4, C6)
Recommendation 4:	Strengthen national commitment and enhance sustainability prospects:
For: MTESDNRD (Implementing partner) Government of Montenegro	Build long-term financial mechanisms: To ensure sustainability, the Project should explore opportunities to develop long-term financial models, such as biodiversity-friendly finance mechanisms. The ET suggests considering and expanding the agro-environmental incentive schemes, encouraging sustainable farming practices, or fostering partnerships with the private sector to create revenue-generating conservation initiatives. Engaging with local businesses and tourism sectors to co-finance biodiversity efforts could be an effective model for securing continuous funding. Furthermore, exploring opportunities within Montenegro's national budget and international funding programs like the EU's Green Deal could provide more sustainable financial backing.
	Institutionalize capacity-building efforts: A key pillar of the Project's sustainability should be to embed capacity-building initiatives within national institutions and professional development systems. The ET suggests to consider how the national capacity development institutions/ educational institutions could accept and introduce biodiversity conservation into curricula, ensuring that technical skills such as biodiversity monitoring and sustainable land-use planning are retained and expanded after the Project ends. Ongoing professional development programs for government staff, national park managers, and other relevant sectors should be institutionalized to maintain the knowledge gained through the Project.
	Establish clear post-project monitoring and evaluation systems: Proposing robust monitoring and evaluation systems for the Government of Montenegro and the Ministry in charge of biodiversity- currently the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Development of the North- to continue beyond the Project's lifetime. These systems should be integrated into national biodiversity management frameworks to continuously assess and report on the state of biodiversity in protected areas and the effectiveness of conservation efforts. Incorporating climate resilience indicators and biodiversity health metrics would further strengthen the capacity of local institutions to track outcomes and inform future decision-making. (Linked to Conclusions: C6, C7, C8)
Recommendation 5:	Revision of Work Plans and Indicators:
For: MTESDNRD (Implementing partner) UNDP (Oversight role)	The ET recommends that the Project Team (PT), in close coordination with the National Project Director (NPD) and Project Board (PB), prepare revised work plans to include realistic, phased targets and periodic milestones. This will align the Project's objectives with its extended timeline and updated scope. The ET also suggests that the PT revise its indicators—particularly outcome and output indicators—to ensure they accurately measure progress. This should include incorporating more qualitative and sustainability-focused measures, especially regarding biodiversity conservation outcomes.
	The ET recommends establishing semi-annual targets to allow for more frequent monitoring and adjustments as necessary. Improved results reporting should clearly document the Project's progress in relation to its indicators and

	identify areas that require additional focus or adjustments, contributing to a systematic evaluation of its effectiveness. (Linked to Conclusions: C5, C6)				
Recommendation 6:	Enhance awareness and capacities concerning the biodiversity priorities and challenges and support (broader) capacity development efforts				
MTESDNRD (Implementing partner)	The ET recommends that the Project enhance its communication and outreach strategies to increase local community involvement in biodiversity conservation efforts. By focusing on the economic and social benefits of biodiversity protection, such as eco-tourism, agro-environmental incentives, and sustainable agriculture, the Project can foster greater cooperation and ownership among local stakeholders. Strengthening participatory decision- making processes will improve local buy-in and ensure more sustainable outcomes.				
	In addition, the ET recommends that the Project expand its capacity-building programs, targeting both existing professionals and new entrants in the biodiversity sector. This can be achieved by hosting more intensive workshops and technical training sessions, possibly in partnership with other initiatives and institutions. The ET recommends using hybrid approach that combines the flexibility and accessibility of online learning with the engagement and interactivity of in-person training. The goal is to leverage the strengths of both modalities to create a more effective and holistic learning experience. (Linked to Conclusions: C2, C5)				
Recommendation 7:	Strengthen coordination practices and establish firm monitoring to ensure that the Project is back on implementation path				
Recommendation 7: For: MTESDNRD (Implementing partner) UNDP (Oversight role)					
For: MTESDNRD (Implementing partner)	that the Project is back on implementation path The ET recommends that the Project establish more regular coordination meetings between the National Project Director (NPD), the Director of the respective directorate, and UNDP representatives to review progress, address emerging challenges, and align on priorities. Regular monthly meetings will facilitate continuous oversight and ensure that any challenges are identified				
For: MTESDNRD (Implementing partner)	 that the Project is back on implementation path The ET recommends that the Project establish more regular coordination meetings between the National Project Director (NPD), the Director of the respective directorate, and UNDP representatives to review progress, address emerging challenges, and align on priorities. Regular monthly meetings will facilitate continuous oversight and ensure that any challenges are identified and addressed in a timely manner. In addition, the ET suggests to continue with high level advocacy and high-level quarterly meetings between UNDP senior leadership and the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Development of the North (MESDNRD) to foster political support and ensure a cohesive approach to 				

6 Annexes

Annex 1: MTR Terms of Reference

Midterm Review - Terms of Reference

BASIC CONTRACT INFORMATION

Location: Home-based, with the mission to Podgorica, Montenegro Category: Biodiversity Type of Contract: Individual Contract Assignment Type: International Consultant Languages Required: English Starting Date: 30 April 2024 Duration of Initial Contract: 30 working days Expected Duration of the Assignment: April to September 2024

BACKGROUND

A. Project Title

Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro (PIMS#6461)

B. Project Description

This is the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the UNDP-GEF Midterm Review (MTR) of the full-sized project titled *Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro* (PIMS#6461) implemented through the Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development as an Implementing Partner, which is to be undertaken in the period between April and September 2024. The project started on 9 March 2022, and is now in its second 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

The project is geographically focused on the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) of Montenegro and includes various types of intervention and involves both ecosystem protection and work with production sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, and forestry. The Component 1 of the proposed project deals with the management constraints associated with the Protected Area estate, and unprotected biodiversity hotspots. The project will provide for the improved management of the pilot protected areas in order to ensure compliance with the international requirements for protection of valuable biodiversity within KBAs and other international biodiversity hot-spots. Through spatial planning instruments, the project will promote concrete solutions for valuable and threatened BD conservation outside PAs. The Component 2 targets the productive landscapes outside PAs and in the vicinity of KBAs, where the project will address the sectoral threats to biodiversity via mainstreaming of BD-friendly practices and adjust the sectoral development scenarios for tourism, forestry and agriculture to take into account the potential impact on biodiversity. The project will aid Government in biodiversity-friendly planning for the post-COVID planning for recovery of the tourism sector, will help developing best-practice standards for sustainable tourism and naturebased biodiversity friendly tourism, and support the small-scale tourism business development towards the more offerings of biodiversity-sensitive nature-based tourism products. For the forestry sector, the project will offer bestpractice standards for mainstreaming biodiversity-friendly forestry practices, will assist the Government with support and services to private forest owners, and help promote biodiversity-positive entrepreneurship in forestry. For BD mainstreaming in agriculture, the project will support the Government with the introduction of agroenvironmental incentives and piloting of agro-environmental measures.

This Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro project is structured as a set of outputs and activities organized in four complementary components, with seven expected outcomes:

Component 1: Protection of valuable and/or vulnerable biodiversity within the KBAs and biodiversity corridors

Outcome 1: Capacity of the existing and newly established national protected areas strengthened to better address the key threats to globally significant biodiversity

Outcome 2: Biodiversity conservation arrangements in place for the hot-spots outside the PAs

Component 2: BD mainstreaming into sectoral policies and practices Outcome 3: BD conservation considerations mainstreamed for sustainable tourism development

Outcome 4: BD conservation considerations mainstreamed into forestry policies and practices around KBAs Outcome 5: BD conservation considerations mainstreamed into agricultural policies and practices around

KBAs

Component 3: Knowledge management

Outcome 6: Knowledge management ensured through project implementation

Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Outcome 7: Project results properly monitored and evaluated

3.2 Stakeholder engagement, partnerships and coordination

3.3 Gender equality and women's empowerment

3.4 Risks to project success, cross-cutting issues and social/environmental safeguards

3.5 Innovativeness, sustainability and potential for scaling up

3.6 Knowledge management

3.7 South-south and triangular cooperation

The project is implemented under National Implementation Modality (NIM), with the Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development as the Implementing Partner (IP).

The Implementing Partner is responsible and accountable for managing the project, including the monitoring and evaluation of project interventions, achieving project outcomes, and the effective use of the resources. The IP nominated a high-level official who served as the National Project Director (NPD) for the project implementation. The NPD chairs the Project Board and other relevant stakeholder, sectoral, and working groups under the project and is responsible for providing government oversight and guidance to the project implementation.

UNDP is accountable to GEF for the implementation of this project. This includes oversight of project execution to ensure that the project is carried out in accordance with agreed standards and provisions. UNDP is responsible for delivering GEF project cycle management services, comprising project approval and start-up, project supervision and oversight, and project completion and evaluation. UNDP has the Project Assurance role within the Project Board/Steering Committee.

The project operates out of Podgorica, specifically, the Directorate of Environment protection and Climate Change in the Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development, working with other key directorates/institutions such as the Eco Fund for environment protection and Environment Protection Agency. As a NIM project, the office for the project is located at the IP premises.

The project duration continues until February 2027, with a total budget administered by UNDP USD 3,278,995.

Coordination with other projects and initiatives has been ensured by the Working Group on Mitigation and Adaptation and Working Group for sustainable finance of the National Council for Sustainable Development, which was established specifically to ensure inter-institutional coordination. Operationally, this coordination works through the Project Boards of project, whose members are by and large the same focal points in the various government bodies.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

C. Scope of Work and Key Tasks

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) will assess progress toward the achievement of the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document and will 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 and its risks to sustainability.

The MTR must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable, and useful. The MTR team, consisting of one international and one national expert, will review all relevant sources of information, including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e., UNDP Initiation Plan, Project Document, SESP, Project Inception Report, PIRs, finalized GEF Tracking Tools, Project Appraisal Committee meeting minutes, Financial and Administration guidelines used by Project Team, project operational guidelines, manuals and systems, PIF, project budget revisions, etc) provided by the Project Team and Commissioning Unit. Then, they will participate in an

MTR inception workshop to clarify their understanding of the objectives and methods of the MTR, producing the MTR inception report thereafter. The MTR mission will then consist of interviews and site visits to Podgorica. The MTR team will review the baseline GEF focal area Tracking Tool, which was 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, the UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Adviser, and other key stakeholders. The specific design and methodology for the MTR should emerge from consultations between the MTR team and the above-mentioned parties regarding what is appropriate and feasible for meeting the MTR purpose and objectives and answering the evaluation questions, given limitations of budget, time and data. The MTR team must use gender-responsive methodologies and tools and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other crosscutting issues and SDGs are incorporated into the MTR report. The MTR methodology should employ both, standard and innovative evaluation approaches, relevant quantitative, qualitative or combined methods, and data triangulation based on diverse ecosystem of evidence. For example, qualitative insights will be generated through conversations with all relevant stakeholders, to generate insights, feedback and recommendations around the key questions suggested to drive the MTR. The MTR methodology is expected to employ feedback loops and insights into signals of transformational change generated by the Project. The MTR recommendations will be forward looking and focused on adaptation of the Project in the complex changing system. The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the MTR must be clearly outlined in the Inception Report and be fully discussed and agreed between UNDP, stakeholders and the MTR team. The final MTR report should describe the entire MTR approach used and the rationale for the approach, making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of the methods and approach of the review.

The MTR will also adhere to the United Nations Guidelines on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations. The MTR team will assess the following <u>four categories</u> of project progress and produce a draft and final MTR report. See the *Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects* for rating requirements. No overall rating is required.

i. Project Strategy

Project design:

- Review the problem addressed by the project and the underlying assumptions. Review the effect of any
 incorrect assumptions or changes to the context to achieving the project results as outlined in the Project
 Document.
- Review the relevance of the project strategy and assess whether it provides the most effective route towards expected/intended results.
- Review how the project addresses country priorities.
- Review decision-making processes: were perspectives of those 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.
- If there are significant 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.
- 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.

ii. Progress Towards Results

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

Indicator Assessment Key Green= Achieved

hieved Yellow= On target to be achieved Red= Not on target to be achieved

In addition to the progress towards outcomes analysis:

 \cdot 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

Using the *Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects* assess the following categories of project progress:

· 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.
- Do the Executing Agency/Implementing Partner and/or UNDP and other partners have the capacity to deliver benefits to or involve women? If yes, how?
- What is the gender balance of project staff? What steps have been taken to ensure gender balance in project staff?
- What is the gender balance of the Project Board? What steps have been taken to ensure gender balance in the Project Board?

· Work Planning

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

¹ Populate with data from the Logframe and scorecards

² Populate with data from the Project Document

³ If available

⁴ Colour code this column only

⁵ Use the 6 point Progress Towards Results Rating Scale: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU

- 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 by the Commissioning Unit and project team, 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?

Sources of Co- financing	Name of Co- financer	Type of Co- financing	Co-financing amount confirmed at CEO Endorsement (US\$)	Actual Amount Contributed at stage of Midterm Review (US\$)	Actual % of Expected Amount
		TOTAL			

Include the separate GEF Co-Financing template (filled out by the Commissioning Unit and project team) which
categorizes each co-financing amount as 'investment mobilized' or 'recurrent expenditures'. (This template
will be annexed as a separate file.)

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?
 Review the extent to which relevant gender issues were incorporated in monitoring systems. See Annex 9 of
- Review the extent to which relevant gender issues were incorporated in monitoring systems. See Annex 9 of <u>Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects</u> for further guidelines.

· 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?
- How does the project engage women and girls? Is the project likely to have the same positive and/or
 negative effects on women and men, girls and boys? Identify, if possible, legal, cultural, or religious
 constraints on women's participation in the project. What can the project do to enhance its gender benefits?

Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)

- Validate the risks identified in the project's most current SESP, and those risks' ratings; are any revisions needed?
- Summarize and assess the revisions made since CEO Endorsement/Approval (if any) to:
 - The project's overall safeguards risk categorization.
 - The identified types of risks⁶ (in the SESP).
 - The individual risk ratings (in the SESP).
- Describe and assess progress made in the implementation of the project's social and environmental
 management measures as outlined in the SESP submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval (and prepared
 during implementation, if any), including any revisions to those measures. Such management measures might
 include Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) or other management plans, though can also
 include aspects of a project's design; refer to Question 6 in the SESP template for a summary of the identified
 management measures.

A given project should be assessed against the version of UNDP's safeguards policy that was in effect at the time of the project's approval.

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 & Knowledge Management:

- 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.
- List knowledge activities/products developed (based on knowledge management approach approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval).

iv. Sustainability

Validate whether the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs and the Quantum Risk Management Module are the most important and whether the risk ratings applied are appropriate and up to date. If not, explain why.

Assess overall risks to sustainability factors of the project in terms of the following four criteria:

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

⁶ Risks are to be labeled with both the UNDP SES Principles and Standards, and the GEF's "types of risks and potential impacts": Climate Change and Disaster; Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups; Disability Inclusion; Adverse Gender-Related impact, including Gender-based Violence and Sexual Exploitation; Biodiversity Conservation and the Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources; Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement; Indigenous Peoples; Cultural Heritage; Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention; Labor and Working Conditions; Community Health, Safety and Security.

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.

Additionally, the MTR team is expected to make **recommendations** to the Project Team. 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 8 recommendations in total.

D. Expected Outputs and Deliverables

The MTR consultant shall prepare and submit:

- MTR Inception Report: MTR team clarifies the objectives and methods of the Midterm Review no later than 2 weeks before the MTR mission. To be sent to the Commissioning Unit and project management.
- Presentation: Initial Findings presented to project management and Commissioning Unit at the end of the MTR mission.
- Draft Final Report: Full report with annexes within three weeks of the MTR mission.
- Final Report: Revised report with annexed audit trail detailing how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final MTR report. To be sent to the Commissioning Unit within one week of receiving UNDP comments on the draft.

Note: The final MTR report must be in English.

E. Institutional Arrangement

The principal responsibility for managing the evaluation resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for this Project's TE is UNDP Montenegro Country Office (CO). The Commissioning Unit will contract the consultants and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country. The Team Lead will report to the Evaluation Manager appointed by UNDP, who will oversee and support the overall evaluation process. Senior management will be accountable for the quality and approval of the final TOR and the evaluation report. The evaluation manager is responsible for leading the development of the evaluation terms of reference, including gender equality and cross-cutting issues, facilitating communication between evaluators, the program unit, senior management, and key stakeholders for an inclusive and transparent evaluation process. Also the evaluation manager will be in charge for reviewing and approving inception reports and ensuring gender equality, LNOB and other relevant cross-cutting issues are considered in inception and draft evaluation reports. The evaluation manager also collects and consolidates feedback on draft reports to provide an audit trail for the evaluation team to finalize the evaluation report.

The evaluation partners, including donor, stakeholders and government partners, will participate in the review of key evaluation deliverables, including the TOR, inception report, and successive versions of the draft evaluation report. Additionally, evaluation partners will ensure that data and documentation in general, and particularly related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and other relevant cross-cutting issues, are made available to the evaluation manager. The engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful MTR. Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to the Directorate for Environment protection and Climate Change, the Secretariat of the National Council for Sustainable Development, Environment Protection Agency, State Statistical Office etc., as well as component leaders, key experts, and consultants in the subject area, Project Board, project stakeholders, academia, CSOs, etc. Additionally, the MTR team is expected to conduct field missions to Podgorica. A complete list of documents and a list of key stakeholders and other individuals who should be consulted will be shared once the consultant is on board.

F. Duration of the Work

The MTR consultancy will be for 30 working days over a time period of approximately 15 weeks, starting April 30 2024, and shall not exceed six months from when the consultant is hired. The tentative MTR timeframe is as follows:

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY
22 April	Application closes
30 April	Select MTR Team
30 April, 1 day	Prep the MTR Team (handover of Project Documents)
15 May, 6 days	Document review and preparing MTR Inception Report (IR submitted to the Commissioning Unit)
24 May, 2 days	Finalization and Validation of MTR Inception Report
10-21 June, 8 days	MTR mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits
21 June, 1 day	Mission wrap-up meeting & presentation of initial findings- earliest end of MTR mission
15 July, 10 days	Preparing draft report (submitted to the Commissioning Unit)
12 August, 2 days	Incorporating audit trail from feedback on draft report/Finalization of MTR report
15 July – 5 August	Preparation of Management Response (within 3 weeks of receiving final draft of the report)
9 September	Expected date of full MTR completion

The date start of contract is 30 April 2024.

G. Duty Station

The location of the assignment is home-based with mission to Podgorica, Montenegro.

- International travel is required to Montenegro during the MTR mission.
- The Basic Security in the Field II and Advanced Security in the Field courses must be successfully completed prior to commencement of travel.
- Consultants are required to comply with the UN security directives set forth under https://dss.un.org/dssweb/
- All related travel expenses will be covered and will be reimbursed as per UNDP rules and regulations
 upon submission of an F-10 claim form and supporting documents.

EVALUATION TEAM COMPOSITION AND REQUIRED SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

The MTR will be conducted by the MTR team composed of an International Evaluation Consultant (MTR Team Leader) and National Evaluation Consultant. The MTR Team Leader will lead the MTR process and decide on planning and distribution of the MTR workload and tasks. She/he will closely collaborate with the National Evaluation Consultant who will provide support throughout the MTR process. The Evaluation Team Leader will bear responsibility for conducting the Evaluation process. This entails designing the evaluation process according to this Terms of Reference; preparing the Evaluation Inception Report; undertaking a rigorous desk review; gathering data from different sources of information; analysing, organizing and triangulating the collected

information; responding to comments and factual corrections from stakeholders and incorporating them, as appropriate, in subsequent versions; and making briefs and presentations ensuring the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations are communicated in a coherent, clear and understandable manner. The MTR team will assess emerging trends with respect to regulatory frameworks, budget allocations, capacity in developing the MTR detailed plan and itinerary and implementing the evaluation process in line with these Terms of References.

The Evaluation Team Leader will lead the evaluation process and decide on planning and distribution of the evaluation workload and tasks. She/he will design and implement the evaluation process and will closely collaborate with the National Evaluation Consultant who will provide support throughout the evaluation process.

Specifically, the Evaluator Team Leader will be responsible for the following tasks:

- · Plan the evaluation mission; collect data and information and prepare relevant sections in the report;
- Design the detailed evaluation scope and methodology (including the methods for data collection and analysis);
- Conduct an analysis of the outcome, outputs and partnership strategy (as per the scope of the evaluation described above);
- Draft the evaluation report;
- Address comments on the report, using Audit Trial Form;
- Finalize the evaluation report.

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.

H. Qualifications of the Successful Applicants

The selection of consultants will be aimed at maximizing the overall "team" qualities in the following areas:

Education

• A Master's degree in environment, climate change, ecology, engineering or other closely related field.

Experience

- Relevant experience with result-based management evaluation methodologies;
- Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Competence in adaptive management, as applied to Biodiversity GEF focal area;
- Experience working with the GEF or GEF-evaluations
- Experience working in RBEC region;
- Experience in relevant technical areas for at least 10 years;
- Demonstrated understanding of issues related to gender and Biodiversity; experience in gender sensitive evaluation and analysis.
- Excellent communication skills;
- System thinking capability and strategic advice in development context;
- Demonstrable analytical skills.
- A Master's degree in environment, climate change, ecology, engineering or other closely related field.

Language

· Fluency in written and spoken English.



Consultant Independence: 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.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- I. Scope of Price Proposal and Schedule of Payments Financial Proposal:
- Financial proposals must be "all inclusive" and expressed in a lump-sum for the total duration of the contract. The term "all inclusive" implies all cost (professional fees, travel costs, Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) etc.);
- The lump sum is fixed regardless of changes in the cost components.

Schedule of Payments:

10% of payment upon approval of the MTR Inception Report 30% upon submission of the draft MTR Report 60% upon finalization of the MTR Report

Criteria for issuing the final payment of 40%:

The final MTR report includes all requirements outlined in the MTR TOR and is in accordance with the MTR guidance.

The final MTR report is clearly written, logically organized, and is specific for this project (i.e. text has not been cut & pasted from other MTR reports).

The Audit Trail includes responses to and justification for each comment listed.

J. Recommended Presentation of Offer

- a. Completed Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability using the template provided by UNDP;
- Personal CV or a P11 Personal History form, indicating all past experience from similar projects, as well as the contact details (email and telephone number) of the Candidate and at least three (3) professional references;
- c. Brief description of approach to work/technical proposal of why the individual considers him/herself as the most suitable for the assignment, and a proposed methodology on how they will approach and complete the assignment; (max 1 page)
- d. Financial Proposal that indicates the all-inclusive fixed total contract price, supported by a breakdown of costs, as per template provided. 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.

Incomplete applications will be excluded from further consideration.

K. Criteria for Selection of the Best Offer

The award of the contract will be made to the Individual Consultant who has obtained the highest Combined Score and has accepted UNDP's General Terms and Conditions. Only those applications which are responsive and compliant will be evaluated.

The offers will be evaluated using the "Combined Scoring method" where:

a) The educational background and experience on similar assignments will be weighted a max. of 70%; b) The price proposal will weigh as 30% of the total scoring.

Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

The EC has improved the understanding of the Project's structure and available data sources through an initial document review and the creation of an evaluation matrix. The ET will focus on assessing four crucial categories of project progress- i. Project Strategy (equivalent to "relevance and coherence" criteria), ii. Progress Towards Results (equal to "effectiveness" criterion); iii. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management (equivalent to efficiency criterion) and iv. Sustainability.

This comprehensive assessment will produce a draft and a final MTR report. The evaluation process will adhere to the guidelines provided for conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects, which detail the specific requirements for rating. The list of core evaluation questions has been prepared and other questions and sub-questions have been defined to make them more focused. In contrast, a few others have been rephrased and linked to appropriate evaluation categories.

Relevant sub-question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Data analysis	Data Sources and collection tools
Relevant evaluation category: P	ROJECT STRATEGY			
SQ 1.1. To what extent was the design of the intervention, including the formulation of its planned results, relevant to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders?	JC 1.1.1. The extent to which the Project considered and addressed the needs and situation of the beneficiaries and priorities of stakeholders JC1.1.2. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project is relevant to the specific environmental and developmental reality in Montenegro	 Evidence that the Project analyzed the situation of beneficiaries and addressed their needs and the stakeholders' priorities Opinions of the stakeholders about the Biodiversity's relevance to the specific environmental sector and developmental reality in Montenegro 	Desk based research Assessment of the strength of the ToC designed for the Project (explicit or implicit). Analysis of national and sector-specific priorities that the Biodiversity Project addressed Analysis of Montenegro's International benchmarks- and the EU accession framework Interviews with key informants, including development partners	Programming documents: Project documents, Annual Progress Reports Stakeholders from the implementing partners, public institutions, policy-making bodies, other government institutions, and development partners in the respective fields
SQ1.2. To what extent were key national partners perspectives, views and priorities reflected during the design and addressed by the Project?	JC1.1.2. The extent to which the partners were involved in the Project conceptualization JC1.2.2. The extent to which perspectives of those affected by project decisions, those who could affect the outcomes, and those who could contribute information or other resources have been taken into account during design	 Evidence that the partners were involved in the Project conceptualization and prioritization and opinions if their views and comments have been considered and reflected Evidence that the inputs from partners and stakeholders have been incorporated into the Project design 		
EQ1.3. To what extent has the Biodiversity Project relevance been considered and examined during its implementation?	JC1.3.1. The degree of lasting relevance of the Biodiversity Project and its activities (Existence of changes in the Biodiversity Project's environment that required changes and adjustments of the intervention) JC1.3.2. The extent to which the underlying assumptions are held (in the context of achieving the project results as outlined in the Project Document).	 Evidence (including opinions) about the changes in the Biodiversity Project environment and the need to adjust activities and implementation approach Justification for modifying and adjusting the Biodiversity Project's implementation approach and evidence of the Project's flexibility Evidence (including opinions and desk examples) that the Project's underlying assumptions held during the implementation 		
EQ1.4. To what extent have relevant gender issues been considered during the Project design and implementation?	JC 1.4. Evidence that gender issues were considered during the Project's design and reflected during its implementation	 Evidence that the gender issues have been considered and incorporated in Project document and during the implementation in various plans 		

SQ1.5. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies, priorities and commitments on environmental protection and climate change? SQ 1.6. Are the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project logically connected and consistent with each other? Relevant evaluation category: P	JC1.5.1. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project aligns with national priorities of Montenegro, international agreements and conventions on environment and climate change JC1.5.2. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project considered the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, UNDP strategic plan, and relevant SDGs JC1.6.1. The extent to which the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project are logically connected and consistent JC1.6.2. The extent to which the indicators are appropriate and adequate to measure the Project's progress	 Evidence and examples that the Biodiversity Project contributed to international agreements/ conventions on biodiversity, climate change and environmental protection Evidence that the Biodiversity Project addressed SDGs and contributed to its targets Evidence- opinions and examples- that the Biodiversity Project aligns with national strategies and priorities Evidence and the analysis that the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project are logically connected and consistent with each other Evidence that the indicators included benchmarks (baselines and targets) and evidence of their SMART dimension 		
EQ 2.1. To what degree has the Project achieved its mid-term targets and progressed towards outputs (as per ToC)?	JC2.1.1. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project met its mid-term targets and achieved progress under its outputs JC2.1.2. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project's management and staff, national institutions and and beneficiaries have been satisfied with the Project implementation and achieved results thus far	 Evidence and examples of strengthened capacity of the existing national protected areas to better address the key threats to globally significant biodiversity % increase in METT score for the targeted national PAs International nominations (UNESCO, Ramsar) under improved management (measured in ha) Evidence that the progress is achieved with putting in place biodiversity conservation arrangements for the biodiversity hot-spots outside the PAs Evidence that biodiversity conservation considerations mainstreamed at the local level through spatial planning framework (Spatial Plan) Progress in KBAs covered by specific protection mechanisms developed with the project assistance and set for implementation Progress concerning justification for enhanced protection status for unprotected KBAs and valuable BD hotspots justified Evidence of progress in mainstreaming BD conservation considerations for sustainable tourism development 	Desk-based research including national and sectoral statistics. Third parties' reports on environmental sector in Montenegro National statistics and international performance indicators on the priority areas Interviews and group interviews with identified stakeholders from the Biodiversity Project and the Ministry. Review the log frame 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-	Programming documents: The Project, Annual Progress Reports. Other project deliverables Stakeholders from the Biodiversity, public institutions, policy- making bodies and other government institutions, and development partners in the respective fields

		 Examples of small-scale tourism operators introduce biodiversity-sensitive nature-based tourism products as BAU alternative (gender-disaggregated) Increase in in the annual number of visitors in targeted PAs Evidence that the BD conservation considerations are mainstreamed into forestry policies and practices around KBAs Progress in putting in place comprehensive management tools and incentives for biodiversity-positive forest owners Progress in developing targeted adaptation and resilience measures Evidence that BD conservation considerations are mainstreamed into agricultural policies and practices around KBAs Progress in establishing a sustainable mechanism for agro-environmental incentives to encourage uptake of sustainable BD-friendly agricultural practices Progress in ensuring benefits for small-scale farming enterprises from top-up "green" payments (gender- disaggregated) Evidence that knowledge management is progressing through project implementation Examples of knowledge products related to BD conservation considerations mainstreaming into sectoral policies and practices developed and disseminated 	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). The intention is to validate or refuting lines of inquiry - collecting perceptions about results (outputs) achieved with the reference to outputs and progress towards outcomes.	
EQ2.2. In which areas does the	JC2.2.1. The existence of areas that the	- Analysis of external situations that have affected the		
project have the greatest achievements? What barriers remain in achieving the project objective, and how can the Biodiversity Project improve effectiveness?	Biodiversity Project has shown the greatest achievement (or underperformed). JC2.2.2. The extent to which external and internal factors to the Biodiversity Project affected (supported or constrained) the effectiveness	 implémentation of the Project Opinions of stakeholders if the Project has achieved more progress and examples 		
		 Examples of adverse and unplanned internal and external developments that have affected the achievement of the outputs of the Project 		
	constrained) the effectiveness	 Proposals for strategies to expand the Biodiversity Project's results 		

EQ2.3. To what extent has gender and LNOB been addressed during the implementation and monitoring of the Biodiversity Project?	JC2.3.1. The extent to which gender mainstreaming was considered and implemented under the Biodiversity Project JC2.3.2. The extent to which national partners are capacitated to mainstream gender and LNOB in its activities JC2.3.3. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project promoted gender equality LNOB and positive changes for all groups	 Evidence and opinions that gender was considered and mainstreamed during the Biodiversity Project implementation Evidence and examples- including opinions that national partners understand and implement gender mainstreaming and LNOB practices in their performance Evidence that partners and the Project enhanced capacities for LNOB and implemented it during the implementation 		
SQ3.1. Have the Biodiversity Project's activities been implemented on time and delivered results? SQ3.2. Has the Biodiversity Project established effective leadership and management	JC3.1.1. The degree of timely implementation of the Biodiversity Project in a logical sequence and availability of inputs in a timely fashion JC3.1.2. The extent to which the implementation modality- NIM- has been favourable to efficiency and effectiveness JC3.2.1. The extent to which implementation modality, leadership and management of the Biodiversity Project	 Evidence of timely implementation of activities (without delays)- analysis of planned vs implemented activities and delivery of outputs or delays and changes in the implementation of plans Opinions and evidence that the NIM implementation contributed to or prevented the efficient delivery – e.g., procurement processes, HR, payments signed and done on time; other examples of timely implementation of this project Evidence that the Project's management structure has been optimized to ensure efficient delivery 	including national and organizational statistics and third parties reports Analysis of the Biodiversity Project budget and management/ organizational structure Analysis of the steering mechanisms and minutes from the meetings- to verify decision-making approaches Interviews with key informants – focus groups	Programming documents: The Project Document and annual Progress Reports. Steering Committee meeting minutes Contractual arrangements, including analysis of the approved budget Stakeholders from the implementing partners-
practices to maximize results? EQ3.3. What external factors affected the project, and to what extent was the project	contributed to the delivery of results JC3.2.2. The extent to which management systems, including monitoring mechanisms, facilitated efficient implementation JC3.3.1. Existence of external factors and the extent to which they affected the Project implementation	 Evidence that the steering structure was timely established and provided strategic guidance during the implementation Evidence that management processes- HR, procurement, financial management, risk management, and communication have been suitable for effective and efficient implementation Evidence that the monitoring data were objectively used for the management of risks, actions and decision-making Examples of external factors and forms that affected the implementation of the Project 		Biodiversity Project, other ministries and governmental structures,

able to adapt and mitigate the effects of such factors?	JC3.3.2. The extent to which the Project responded to these challenges	 Examples of the Project adjusted and responded to these challenges 		
Relevant evaluation criteria: <u>Sus</u>	TAINABILITY			
SQ4.1. What is the likelihood that the Project will ensure the sustainability of its results? SQ4.2. To what extent are the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs and the Quantum Risk Management Module the most important? SQ4.3. To what extent is the intervention building individual and institutional capacities to ensure the sustainability of benefits?	JV4.1.1. The extent to which the Biodiversity Project is working to ensure the achievement of results (and the extent to which financial and human capacities are in place) JC4.1.2. The extent to which policy and regulatory frameworks are in place that will support the continuation of benefits for men and women in the future JC4.1.3. Opportunities for continuation and improvements in the achievement of the Biodiversity Project results and activities in the area of climate change SQ4.2. To what extent are the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs, and the Quantum Risk Management Module the most important?	 Type of national mechanisms/ structures to maintain the results achieved Evidence that financial resources are assigned to the Biodiversity Project for the delivery of services that are being developed The extent to which partners are committed to providing continuing support Evidence that policy and regulatory frameworks are in place to support the continuation of benefits for men and women in the future Proof of the opportunities for continuation and improvements in the delivery of results The analysis of the project's overall risks to sustainability factors in terms of the following four criteria: i) Financial risks to sustainability; iii) Institutional Framework and Governance risks to sustainability; and Environmental risks to sustainability. Evidence that institutional systems (legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes) and individual capacities are in place for sustaining benefits 	Desk-based research, including national and organizational statistics and third-party reports Analysis of the project budget and management/ organizational structure Interviews with key informants - Group interviews, if possible (to discuss achievements and validate findings)	Programming documents: The Project Document and annual Progress Reports. Contractual arrangements Stakeholders from the implementing partners- Biodiversity Project, MESDNRD, other ministries and governmental structures,

Annex 3: Interview guides

Biodiversity Project Team

Project Strategy

SQ 1.1: To what extent was the design of the intervention, including the formulation of its planned results, relevant to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders?

- Has the Project considered and addressed the needs and situation of the beneficiaries? Has it addressed the priorities of stakeholders?
- Is the Biodiversity Project relevant to the specific environmental and developmental reality of Montenegro?

SQ 1.2: To what extent were key national partners' perspectives, views, and priorities reflected during the design and addressed by the Project?

- Were partners involved in the Project conceptualization?
- Were perspectives of those affected by project decisions, those who could affect the outcomes, and those who could contribute information or other resources taken into account during design?

SQ 1.3: To what extent has the Biodiversity Project relevance been considered and examined during its implementation?

- How relevant has the Biodiversity Project and its activities been over time?
- To what extent did the underlying assumptions hold during the implementation?

SQ 1.4: To what extent have relevant gender issues been considered during the Project design and implementation?

• Were gender issues considered during the Project's design and reflected during its implementation?

SQ 1.5: To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies, priorities, and commitments on environmental protection and climate change?

- Is the Biodiversity Project aligned with national priorities, international agreements, and conventions on environment and climate change?
- Did the Biodiversity Project consider the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, UNDP strategic plan, and relevant SDGs?

SQ 1.6: Are the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project logically connected and consistent with each other?

- Are the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of the Biodiversity Project logically connected and consistent?
- Are the indicators appropriate and adequate to measure the Project's progress?

Progress Towards Results

SQ 2.1: To what degree has the Project achieved its mid-term targets and progressed towards outputs (as per ToC)?

- What evidence exists of strengthened capacity in existing national protected areas to better address key threats to globally significant biodiversity?
- Can you provide examples demonstrating how the capacity of national protected areas has been improved?
- What evidence is there that progress has been made in establishing biodiversity conservation arrangements for biodiversity hot-spots outside the protected areas?
- What specific measures or arrangements have been put in place for biodiversity conservation outside the PAs?
- What evidence indicates progress in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation considerations for sustainable tourism development?

- What examples can be provided of sustainable tourism practices that have incorporated biodiversity conservation considerations?
- What evidence is there that biodiversity conservation considerations have been mainstreamed into forestry policies and practices around Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)?
- Can you provide specific examples of forestry policies or practices that have integrated biodiversity conservation considerations?
- What evidence shows that biodiversity conservation considerations have been mainstreamed into agricultural policies and practices around KBAs?
- What examples can be provided of agricultural practices that have adopted biodiversity conservation considerations?
- What evidence supports the progress of knowledge management through the implementation of the project?
- Can you provide examples of knowledge management activities or products that have been developed and disseminated during the project?
- •
- How satisfied are the Biodiversity Project's management and staff, national institutions, and beneficiaries with the Project implementation and achieved results thus far?

SQ 2.2: In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? What barriers remain in achieving the project objective, and how can the Biodiversity Project improve effectiveness?

- In which areas has the Biodiversity Project shown the greatest achievement?
- What barriers remain in achieving the project objective, and how can the Biodiversity Project improve effectiveness?

SQ 2.3: To what extent has gender and LNOB been addressed during the implementation and monitoring of the Biodiversity Project?

- Has gender mainstreaming been considered and implemented under the Biodiversity Project?
- Are national partners capacitated to mainstream gender and LNOB in its activities?
- Has the Biodiversity Project promoted gender equality, LNOB, and positive changes for all groups?

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

SQ 4.1: Have the Biodiversity Project's activities been implemented on time and delivered results?

- Has the Biodiversity Project been implemented in a timely manner, following a logical sequence, with necessary inputs available when needed?
- Has the NIM implementation modality contributed to the efficient and effective delivery of the Biodiversity Project?

SQ 4.2: Has the Biodiversity Project established effective leadership and management practices to maximize results?

- To what extent has the implementation modality, leadership, and management of the Biodiversity Project contributed to the delivery of results?
- Have the management systems, including monitoring mechanisms, facilitated efficient implementation?

SQ 4.3: What external factors affected the project, and to what extent was the project able to adapt and mitigate the effects of such factors?

- What external factors have affected the Project implementation, and how have they influenced it?
- How did the Project respond to these challenges, and what adaptations were made?

Sustainability

SQ 5.1: What is the likelihood that the Project will ensure the sustainability of its results?

• To what extent is the Biodiversity Project working to ensure the achievement of results, and are the necessary financial and human capacities in place?

- Are policy and regulatory frameworks in place to support the continuation of benefits for men and women in the future?
- What are the opportunities for continuation and improvements in the achievement of the Biodiversity Project results and activities in the area of climate change?

SQ 5.2: To what extent are the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs, and the Quantum Risk Management Module the most important?

 How important are the risks identified in the Project Document, PIRs, and the Quantum Risk Management Module?

SQ 5.3: To what extent is the intervention building individual and institutional capacities to ensure the sustainability of benefits?

• Are stakeholders' capacities (individual and institutional) being supported to enhance sustainability prospects?

National partners

The project "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro" aims to create a comprehensive framework for biodiversity conservation by integrating biodiversity considerations into key sectors and enhancing the protection of critical biodiversity hotspots. The project is geographically focused on the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) of Montenegro and involves various types of interventions, including ecosystem protection and work with production sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and forestry.

The Project addresses the management constraints associated with the Protected Area estate and unprotected biodiversity hotspots. The project aims to improve the management of pilot protected areas to ensure compliance with international requirements for the protection of valuable biodiversity within KBAs and other international biodiversity hotspots. Through spatial planning instruments, the project will promote concrete solutions for valuable and threatened biodiversity conservation outside protected areas.

In addition, the Project targets productive landscapes outside protected areas and in the vicinity of KBAs, addressing sectoral threats to biodiversity by mainstreaming biodiversity-friendly practices and adjusting sectoral development scenarios for tourism, forestry, and agriculture to consider their potential impact on biodiversity.

The Project will support the development of best-practice standards for sustainable and nature-based tourism, promote biodiversity-positive entrepreneurship in forestry, and introduce agro-environmental incentives and measures to support biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices.

Project Strategy

Relevance

EQ 1.1.1. To what extent did the Biodiversity Project consider and address your needs? Has it reflected the situation of the beneficiaries and priorities of Montenegro?

EQ1.1.2. To what extent has the Biodiversity Project been relevant to the specific environmental and developmental reality in Montenegro?

EQ1.2.1. How was the Project formulated- to what extent has it reflected the in-depth situation assessment?

EQ1.3.1. Is this intervention still relevant to the country's needs? Have there been changes in the Biodiversity's environment that required changes and adjustments of the intervention?

Coherence

SQ2.2. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies and priorities? and commitments on environmental protection and climate change?

Progress Towards Results

Effectiveness

What are the main results of the Project, from what you know?

EQ 3.1.2. To what degree have you been satisfied with the Project implementation and achieved results thus far?

SQ3.3. In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? What barriers remain in achieving the project objective, and how can the Biodiversity Project improve effectiveness?

Gender and leave no-one behind

EQ 4.2.2. To what extent have you been capacitated to mainstream gender and LNOB in its activities?

EQ 4.2.3. To what extent has the Biodiversity Project promoted gender equality, LNOB and positive changes for all groups, and how?

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

SQ5.2. Has the Biodiversity Project established effective leadership and management practices to maximise results?

EQ5.2.1. To what extent has this implementation modality, leadership and management of the Biodiversity Project contributed to the delivery of results?

EQ5.2.2. To what extent have the management systems, including monitoring mechanisms, facilitated efficient implementation?

SQ 5.3. What external factors affected the project, and to what extent was the project able to adapt and/or mitigate the effects of such factors?

Sustainability

SQ6.1. What is the likelihood that the Project will ensure the sustainability of its results?

SQ6.3. To what extent is the intervention building individual and institutional capacities to ensure the sustainability of benefits?

Annex 4 Rating scale

Measure	MTR rating	Achievement description
Project Strategy	N/A	The Biodiversity Project strengthens Montenegro's biodiversity conservation by enhancing management capacities, revising protected area plans, and integrating biodiversity into national policies. It actively involves key national stakeholders, including government ministries and local communities, ensuring broad support and collaboration. The Project also aligns with international commitments of the country. It's intervention logic is well-established; still, finetuning of indicators will contribute to more effective tracking of progress and measure its achievements. While the project's gender-sensitive approach is commendable, further embedding gender and social inclusion in decision-making will enhance its relevance.
Progress Towards Results	Objective: Satisfactory	Progress towards the project objective is considered satisfactory as the Project has already made significant advancements in strengthening capacities for biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming objectives into land use planning around Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). The Project has successfully initiated key activities, and while some risks remain, particularly due to the belated transfer of the project team, these issues are expected to be managed as implementation continues.
	Outcome 1: Satisfacory	Progress towards Outcome 1 is satisfactory as METT scores across several key national parks have improved, meeting or exceeding midterm and end-of-project targets. The project has strengthened the management capacities of protected areas, such as Durmitor and Skadar Lake, through revised protection studies incorporating international best practices and guidelines.
	Outcome 2: Satisfactory	Progress towards Outcome 2 has been satisfactory, with significant advancements in integrating biodiversity conservation into Montenegro's national spatial planning framework. The inclusion of 96 areas of conservation interest in the Spatial Plan of Montenegro 2040 ensures that key biodiversity hotspots, especially those outside of formally protected areas, are recognized and prioritized in national land-use decisions. Additionally, the project has made progress in developing specific management mechanisms for sites like Long Beach and Ada Bojana, contributing to the long-term conservation of these critical areas.
	Outcome 3: Satisfactory// Moderately Satisfactory	The project has laid the groundwork for small-scale tourism operators to adopt biodiversity-sensitive practices by engaging stakeholders and developing eco-certification schemes, although concrete results have yet to materialize. Furthermore, baseline data for visitor numbers in protected areas (PAs) have been established, but progress in achieving the targeted 10% increase in visitation remains incomplete, with updated data pending.
	Outcome 4: Satisfactory/	Progress under Outcome 4 is between satisfactory and moderately satisfactory. The project is on track with Indicator 11, aiming to promote comprehensive biodiversity-positive forest management tools across 600 hectares of privately owned forests. Consultations with forest owners and the development of forest management plans are progressing. However,

	Moderately Satisfactory	political support and restored delivery capacities will be crucial for timely achievement. The project is advancing with the development of a Forest Management Plan for Zabljak Municipality.
	Outcome 5: Satisfactory	The efforts for developing a sustainable agro-environmental incentive mechanism, is on track, with a pilot scheme ready for implementation, involving 10 small-scale farms. Progress towards targeting 20 small-scale farming enterprises to benefit from "green" payments, progress has been slower, with political changes affecting the implementation of these grants.
	Outcome 6: Satisfactory	The project has successfully developed and disseminated key knowledge products related to biodiversity conservation, including guidelines on protected area management, a capacity-building program, and a biodiversity database, all aligned with national and international standards. However, the project could enhance its impact by establishing clearer milestones for knowledge dissemination and incorporating feedback mechanisms.
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	Moderately satisfactory	The Project demonstrated resilience and adaptability by managing delays and seizing opportunities arising from political changes and government restructuring. However, more intensive efforts are needed to build capacity within protected area administrations and improve integration at demonstration sites and implement on-the ground activities. Procurement-including selection and contracting and implementation of local-level grants would require additional boost. Increased frequency of Board meetings and enhanced communication are crucial for maintaining momentum. Still, the external challenges, including political changes, have to be carefully observed as the formal transfer of the project and assigning working offices to the project teamaffected implementation.
Sustainability	Moderately likely	The project demonstrates moderate progress towards sustainability- it's focus on building long-term capacities, supporting policy frameworks, and assisting with inclusion of biodiversity conservation into national strategies have been some of the critical dimensions. However, risks related to securing financial resources and political support remain. The project is working on strengthening institutional capacities and ensure stakeholder engagement, contributing to progress within the sector. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these efforts will depend on continued government commitment, financial mechanisms, and integrating biodiversity conservation into broader climate and development policies.

Name	Role	E-mail
Marija Tripunović	Project Manager	marija.m.tripunovic@gmail.com
Tamara Brajović,	National Project Director	tamara.brajovic@mert.gov.me
Marija Vugdelić	Project Technical Specialist	m.vugdelic@t-com.me
Nebojša Banićević	Procurement Associate	nbanicevic@gmail.com
Aneta Kankaraš	Secretary of the National Council for Sustainable Development	aneta.kankaras@gsv.gov.me
Jovana Drobnjak	Project Manager of CBIT, member of the RfP Commission	drobnjakjovana@ymail.com
Arina Maraš	Head of the Directorate for Protected Areas in the Ministry	arina.maras@mert.gov.me
Ksenija Medenica,	NGO CZIP	ksenija.medenica@czip.me
Ana Katnić,	NGO ENVPRO	ana.katnic@envpro.me
Nemanja Peković,	Eco Fund	nemanja.pekovic@eko-fond.co.me
Hajdana Ilić Božović,	PE National Parks	hajdanailicbozovic@nparkovi.me
Milan Gazdić,	Agency for Environmental Protection	milan.gazdic@epa.org.me gazdic.milan@gmail.com
Jelena Marojević Galić	NGO Parks of the Dinarides	jelena.marojevic@parksdinarides.org,

Annex 5 Interviewed institutions and stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the project titled "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro" are as follows:

Implementing Partner:

• **The Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Development of the North** is the principal executing agency responsible for the project's overall implementation.

Project Partners:

- **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management:** Engaged in the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations into agricultural and forestry policies and practices.
- Nature and Environmental Protection Agency: Involved in protecting biodiversity and managing protected areas (PAs).
- **Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro:** Key partner responsible for managing the national parks (where biodiversity hotspots are located).
- **Investment for Development Fund:** This fund provides financial support for the project's goals of fostering sustainable economic activities in sectors like tourism and agriculture.
- Local Municipal Authorities: Participate in the integration of biodiversity considerations into local land use and spatial planning processes.

Primary Beneficiaries:

- **Pilot Protected Area (PA) Staff and Management Authorities:** These include those involved in the management of national parks such as Durmitor and Skadar Lake.
- **Private Forest Owners and HCVF Managers** are the beneficiaries of the project's interventions aimed at promoting biodiversity-positive practices in private forests.
- Small-scale Farmers and Tourism Operators: Farmers and tourism operators adopting biodiversityfriendly practices as part of the project's initiatives (e.g., agro-environmental incentives, green tourism).

Secondary Beneficiaries:

- Local Communities Around KBAs (Key Biodiversity Areas): Communities benefiting from sustainable tourism development, biodiversity conservation, and improved ecosystem services.
- **Tourism and Agriculture Sector Stakeholders:** Business operators in tourism and agriculture will be engaged in implementing biodiversity-sensitive practices.
- Scientific and Policy-based Networks: Beneficiaries of knowledge management products and best practices shared through the project.

Other Key Stakeholders:

- NGOs: Various NGOs are engaged in capacity-building and outreach activities to improve management practices in biodiversity conservation. These include organizations like **Parkovi** Dinarida and NVO Green Home.
- **National Tourist Organization:** Supports the promotion of biodiversity-sensitive nature-based tourism.

This comprehensive stakeholder structure ensures that the project targets a wide range of partners, primary beneficiaries, and secondary beneficiaries across various sectors like forestry, tourism, agriculture, and biodiversity management.

Annex 6: List of reviewed documents

Project documents and reports

- "Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices and Strengthened Protection of
- Biodiversity Hot-Spots in Montenegro" Project document-
- Project budget
- Project budget with Actual expenses

PIR

- 2024 GEF-PIR-PIMS6461-GEFID10343
- 2023-GEF-PIR-PIMS6461-GEFID10343

2023 Reports

<u>Component 1</u>

- Prirucnik za studije zastite i revizije- Studija revizije Durmitor Revidiran Nacrt
- Povrsine prema zonama zastite
- Final Izvještaj o šemama_turizam

Component 2

- NDSP publikacija (draft 2)
- REPORT_V4
- 5 2 24 Izvjestaj za 2023 MMT.docx

2024 Reports

<u>Component 1</u>

- Rjesenje o formiranju Koordinacionog tijela_broj 39-72 (1.07.2024)
- Radionica_Uspostavljanje i revizija zaštićenih područja (23.11.2023) zaključci

<u>Component 2</u>

- Ugovor o poslovnoj saradnji GEF 7 i EPA (2024)
- Javni poziv za poljoprivredu GEF 7 Eko Fond (2.8.2024)
- GEF7 Ugovor o donaciji_MERT_NPCG (18-03-2024)

Work plan 2024

Komunikaciona strategija - Projekat GEFdraft

Project Board (PB) Meetings

1st PB Meeting (13 04 2023)

- Odluka o obrazovanju Radne grupe za finansiranje za odrezivi razvoj (08 December 2022)
- Pozivno pismo UO i Inception workshop_GEF7_12-13 april 2023.pdf
- 2.Agenda Upravni odbor (13.4.2023)

- List of participants- Governing Board (13 04 2023)
- Zapisnika sa 1. sastanka UO
- Predstavljanje projekta Marija Tripunovic
- SIGN UP LISTA-INCEPTION WORKSHOP (12.04.2023)
- Zapisnik sa I sastanka UO GEF 7, (13.04.2023)

2nd PB Meeting (25.07.2023.)

- Sign up list UO 25.07.2023
- Meeting Minutes- Second Meeting Signed.pdf

3rd PB Meeting (27.10.2023.)

- Sign up list UO 27.10. 2023
- Meeting Minutes- Third Meeting (Signed)

4th PB Meeting (26.12.2023.)

- 4th PB Meeting-Agenca
- 25 12 23 Work Plan for 2024
- Presenation for the 4th UO- overview March- December 2023)
- Sign up list 4. PB 26.12.2023
- 4th PB Meeting Minutes- Signed

5th PB Meeting (01.03.2024.)

- 1.2. Outline of the Report for 2023
- Outline of the report of the grant scheme (25.02.2024)
- Meeting Agenda (March 2024)

Memorandum of Undestanding (with other documents)

- 1. Parkovi Dinarida
- 2. NVO CZIP
- 3. EnvPro i RDA_IPA CBC Al-Mne SLW TBR
- 4. CDE
- 5. THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
- 6. EKO-FOND
- 7. NGO GREEN HOME
- 8. NVO Eko-Tim
- 9. Savez izvidjaca CG

GORA

TRAVELAIZER

Annex 7 Evaluability checklist

CRITERIA	COMMENTS	Y	1	N
1. Does the subject of the evaluation have a clearly defined ToC? Is there a common understanding as to what initiatives will be subject to evaluation?	The Biodiversity Project in Montenegro presents a clearly defined Theory of Change (ToC), which serves as a foundational blueprint guiding the project's efforts to protect biodiversity hotspots and integrate biodiversity conservation into sectoral policies and land-use planning frameworks. The ToC outlines the expected outcomes, including enhanced management of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), strengthened			
	capacities of national institutions, and mainstreaming of biodiversity across sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and forestry. The initiatives under evaluation are well-understood among stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive and focused evaluation process. This shared understanding aligns the evaluation with the project's overarching goals, facilitating a thorough assessment of both the process and impact of these initiatives.	Y	r	
	The ToC also provides a logical pathway for achieving the project's objectives, ensuring that all activities are strategically linked to desired outcomes.			
2. Is there a well-defined results framework for the initiative(s) that are subject to evaluation? Are goals, outcome statements, outputs, inputs, and activities clearly defined? Are	Yes, the Biodiversity Project is underpinned by a well-structured results framework, which clearly delineates its goals, outcome statements, outputs, inputs, and activities. This framework is essential for tracking the project's progress towards its objectives. The indicators within the framework are crafted to be SMART—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—thereby ensuring that the project's impacts are accurately measured and assessed.			
indicators SMART?	During the first year of its implementation, it was recognized that some indicators needed refinement to better align with the project objectives. These updates were implemented, resulting in a robust set of indicators that effectively measure the project's progress and impact. The results framework serves as a solid foundation for the evaluation, facilitating a structured and comprehensive review that aligns with the Terms of Reference. This framework not only aids in monitoring progress but also ensures that the evaluation can capture the nuanced impacts of the project across different sectors and stakeholders.	Y	r	
3. Is there sufficient data for evaluation? This may include baseline data, data collected from monitoring against a set of targets, well- documented progress reports, field visit reports, reviews, and previous evaluations.	Yes, there is a wealth of data available to support a thorough and nuanced evaluation. The project has gathered extensive baseline data, which is complemented by regular monitoring against established targets. This data collection has been supplemented by well-documented progress reports, comprehensive field visit reports, and inputs from previous initiatives. These resources provide a rich data repository, enabling an in-depth assessment of the project's progress and impact over time. The data includes contributions from various national stakeholders, adding depth and context to the evaluation. Additionally, the project has established mechanisms for continuous data collection and reporting, ensuring that the evaluation can draw on the most up-to-date information available.	Y	,	

	This comprehensive data set allows for a detailed analysis of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the project's outcomes, facilitating a balanced and informed evaluation.		
4. Is the planned evaluation still relevant, given the evolving context? Are the purpose and scope of the evaluation clearly defined and commonly	Yes, the planned evaluation remains highly relevant, especially in light of the evolving environmental and socio-economic context in Montenegro. T he evaluation is designed to provide critical insights into the effectiveness of the project in addressing the pressing challenges of biodiversity conservation in the region.		
shared among stakeholders? What evaluation questions are of interest to whom? Are these questions realistic, given the project design and likely data availability and resources available for the evaluation?	The purpose and scope of the evaluation are clearly defined and have been communicated effectively to all stakeholders, ensuring alignment and a shared understanding of the evaluation's objectives. The evaluation questions, which have been refined to better align with the evaluation criteria, are realistic and achievable given the project's design, data availability, and the resources allocated for the evaluation. These questions are designed to address the interests of various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and international partners, ensuring that the evaluation results are relevant and actionable. The evaluation will also consider the broader context in which the project operates, including political, social, and economic factors that may influence its implementation and impact. This relevance ensures that the evaluation will provide valuable insights that can inform future biodiversity conservation efforts in Montenegro and beyond.	Y	
5. Will political, social, and economic factors allow for effective implementation and use of the evaluation as envisaged?	Yes, the evaluation is designed to account for and navigate the complex political, social, and economic factors that may influence its implementation. The methodology proposed by the ET includes a Theory-based approach, supported by systemic review and contribution analysis methods. This comprehensive approach allows for a deep understanding of the existing and potential challenges in Montenegro, including governance and political issues, socio-economic challenges, and environmental threats. The evaluation will analyze how these factors interact and influence the project's outcomes, ensuring that the evaluation's findings are both relevant and actionable. Additionally, the evaluation process is designed to mitigate potential risks and leverage opportunities to promote institutional mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. The evaluation will consider these dynamic conditions, ensuring that the evaluation will consider these contribute to informed decision-making and the long-term sustainability of the project's impacts. This approach ensures that the evaluation is not only thorough but also sensitive to the broader context in which the project operates, enhancing its relevance and utility for future planning and implementation.	Ŷ	
6. Are there sufficient resources (human and financial) allocated to the evaluation?	Yes, the evaluation is well-resourced, both in terms of human expertise and financial allocations. The ET is composed of a team of experts with extensive experience in biodiversity conservation, environmental policy, and project evaluation, particularly within the regional context of Montenegro.	Y	

This expertise ensures that the evaluation will be conducted with a high level of technical proficiency and contextual understanding.	
Financial resources have been allocated to support comprehensive data collection, stakeholder engagement, and detailed analysis, ensuring that the evaluation can be carried out effectively and efficiently. The timeline for the evaluation is sufficient, allowing for a thorough review process that includes both primary data collection and in-depth analysis. The allocation of these resources reflects the importance of the evaluation and the commitment to ensuring that it meets the highest standards of quality and integrity. This resourcing also ensures that the evaluation can address the complex and multifaceted nature of the project, providing a comprehensive assessment of its outcomes and impacts.	

Annex 8: Co-financing table

Sources of co-financing	Name of co-financer	Type of cofinancing	Amount Confirmed at CEO endorsement (USS)	Actual Amount Contributed at stage of Midterm Review (USS)*	Actual % of Expected Amount
Contribution to the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network for Montenegro		Public Investment	3.089.404,00	324.946,91	10,52%
Management of the Ulcinj Salina Nature park from the Capital budget of Montenegro		Public Investment	1.194.743,00	17.120,69	1,43%
Annual calls for projects in support to tourism development	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern	Public Investment	3.285.543,00	377.118,09	11,48%
"DUE MARI – next generation tourism development" (INTERREG IPA CBC Italy- Albania-Montenegro) regional project	Region Development - MERS (previously Ministry of Sustainable Development and	Public Investment	298.686,00	268.546,19	89,91%
SMARTMED regional project	Tourism)	Public Investment	25.090,00	36.164,78	144,14%
Preparation and development of the Spatial plan of Montenegro and the General Regulation plan of Montenegro		Public Investment	2.986.858,00	162.513,54	5,44%
In kind contribution		In kind	41.816,00	148.421,05	354,94%
Total Ministry of Ecology, Sust	ainable Development and Northern	Region Development	10.922.140,00	1.334.831,26	12,22%
Market price policy measures within the Agro- budget including direct payments to farmers, measures for special support to wine production and bee growing and honey production, as well as agriculture risk management measures	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Public Investment	4.966.887,00	48.153.086,02	969,48%
Axis I of the Agro-budget where it concerns strengthening the competitiveness of wine, fruit, vegetable, olive, and medicine plant producers	-	Public Investment/Grant	1.655.629,00	108.342,36	6,54%

Axis 2 of the Agro-budget where it concerns measures for sustainable management of natural resources related to the support of traditional models of seasonal grazing on natural and semi-natural pastures, support to the local economy of farmers in mountainous areas, contributions to preserved biodiversity and genetic resources in agriculture, support to organic production and helping farmers to start applying good agricultural practices.		Public Investment/Grant	4.304.636,00	1.620.000,00	37,63%
Implementation of the National Forest Management Policy		Public Investment	1.655.629,00	0,00	0,00%
Total	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry an	d Water Management	12.582.781,00	49.881.428,39	396,43%
Green finance for private businesses	Investment for Development Fund (IRF)	Public Investment	5.518.764,00	0,00	0,00%
	Total Investment	for Development Fund	5.518.764,00	0,00	0,00%
Establishment of the Natura 2000 network in Montenegro financed through the state budget		Public Investment	1.173.709,00	921.665,96	78,53%
Supporting the Western Balkan region with regard to harmonization with EU conservation and climate directives, in order to promote Hungarian knowledge transfer into the Balkans' nature conservation sector as financed by the Government of Hungary and Bioaqua Pro Kft. The Project duration is 2020-2022	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Public Investment	31.690,00	0,00	0,00%
In kind contribution		In kind	14.085,00	21.668,47	153,84%
	Total Environmer	ital Protection Agency	1.219.484,00	943-334,43	77,36%
Management of the Ulcinj Salina Nature park from the budget of PENP	Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro (PENP)	Public Investment	182.139,00	1.030.595,60	565,83%

Strengthening of the protection of biodiversity of Montenegrin national parks (Skadar Lake, Durmitor and Biogradska Gora)		Public Investment	2.350.176,00	8.833.968,89	375,89%
	Total Public Enterprise National P	arks of Montenegro	2.532.315,00	9.864.564,50	389,55%
		TOTAL	32.775.484,00	62.024.158,57	189,24%

Annex 9: Proposal for revision of the Project indicators

The analysis of the indicators:

1. Indicator 1: # of Direct Project Beneficiaries Disaggregated by Gender (GEF Core Indicator 11)

This indicator monitors the number of beneficiaries; however, it fails to capture the depth of engagement or the long-term impacts on beneficiaries' behavior. Although reaching a substantial number of individuals is significant, the project must also evaluate beneficiaries' contributions to biodiversity conservation.

Proposed Expansion: Add a sub-indicator that tracks the specific actions beneficiaries are taking following their engagement with the project. For instance, tracking how many beneficiaries are involved in community conservation activities, policy advocacy, or biodiversity-friendly practices.

Target Revision: Given the delays in project implementation, the target of 50,000 may need to be revisited. Consider setting phased targets (e.g., 20,000 by midterm) and revise the focus from numbers to impact.

2. Indicator 2: Terrestrial Protected Areas Under Improved Management (Hectares) (GEF Core Indicator 1)

Although the extent of hectares under improved management is significant, the existing indicator does not adequately reflect the effectiveness of such management practices. It is essential to monitor whether these protected areas are genuinely contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystems..

Proposed Expansion: Include a sub-indicator that tracks biodiversity outcomes, such as reductions in illegal logging, poaching, or improvements in species health. Regularly evaluate whether management practices are improving conservation effectiveness.

Target Adjustment: The project has exceeded the area target, so additional qualitative targets could be added, such as ensuring comprehensive management plans are in place and followed.

Indicator 3: Area of Landscapes Under Improved Management to Benefit Biodiversity (GEF Core Indicator 4.1)

This indicator monitors areas that are managed for biodiversity; however, it remains ambiguous how such management contributes to biodiversity. The emphasis should be placed on whether landscape management results in enhanced species protection, restoration of habitats, or improvements in ecosystem health.

Proposed Expansion: Add metrics that track specific biodiversity improvements in these landscapes, such as habitat recovery, species population stability, or ecosystem services (e.g., water quality, soil health). These metrics will ensure that management leads to tangible outcomes.

Target Revision: Consider setting phased targets for different landscape types (e.g., forestry, agricultural land, KBAs) to ensure that each sector contributes effectively to the overall biodiversity goal.

Indicator 4: At Least 10% Increase in METT Score for Targeted National Protected Areas (PAs)

METT scores predominantly evaluate management capacity; however, this indicator does not assess whether such capacity translates into measurable biodiversity gains. It is essential for the project to guarantee that enhancements in management yield improved conservation outcomes.

Proposed Expansion: Add a conservation impact sub-indicator that tracks specific biodiversity outcomes related to the METT score increases. This could include metrics like reduced poaching incidents, improved species monitoring, or habitat restoration within the protected areas.

Target Revision: Rather than just focusing on increasing METT scores, include targets for biodiversity improvements tied to management changes (e.g., better species protection).

5. Indicator 5: International Nominations (UNESCO, Ramsar) Under Improved Management (280,000 ha)

The indicator fails to delineate the specific parameters that define "improved management." It is essential that it explicitly outlines the criteria that constitute improvement, which may include increased biodiversity monitoring, enhanced protective measures, or a reduction in habitat loss.

Proposed Expansion: Include biodiversity-focused metrics, such as water quality improvements in Ramsar sites or species recovery in UNESCO sites. These indicators would clarify the impact of improved management on biodiversity.

Milestones: Set clear milestones for each phase of improved management, such as the completion of management plans, adoption of conservation tools (e.g., drones, sensors), or increased staff capacity.

6. Indicator 6: Biodiversity Conservation Mainstreamed into Spatial Planning Frameworks

The indicator presently exhibits a deficiency in specifying the manner in which the integration of biodiversity into spatial planning yields conservation outcomes. It is imperative that it assesses the effectiveness of biodiversity considerations in land-use decision-making.

Proposed Expansion: Implement an indicator to monitor the number of critical habitats or sensitive ecosystems that are either protected or managed sustainably as a result of modifications to the spatial planning framework. Additionally, assess the quantity of land-use plans that incorporate biodiversity provisions.

Midterm Milestones: Assess the impact of biodiversity mainstreaming on actual land-use decisions, such as avoiding construction in sensitive areas or promoting biodiversity corridors.

7. Indicator 7: KBAs Covered by Specific Management/Protection Mechanisms Developed with Project Assistance

The indicator doesn't specify what "specific management/protection mechanisms" are in place or how effective they are. The project should define **specific actions** taken to protect these KBAs (e.g., monitoring, enforcement, zoning).

Proposed Expansion: Include an indicator that tracks biodiversity outcomes in these KBAs, such as species population growth, habitat quality, or reductions in illegal activities. These would ensure that management mechanisms are having a real impact.

Target Revision: Provide clear area coverage targets (in hectares) early in the project to track progress. Set specific interim goals to ensure management plans are implemented effectively.

8. Indicator 8: Unprotected KBAs and Valuable Biodiversity Hotspots Justified for Enhanced Protection Status

Although this indicator assesses the rationale for heightened protection, it does not monitor whether these areas subsequently receive formal protection or enforcement.

Proposed Expansion: Introduce a sub-indicator that tracks the legal status of these KBAs after justification, as well as how enforcement mechanisms (e.g., patrols, monitoring) are introduced. The project should ensure that justified areas move from identification to legal designation.

Target Revision: The 130,000 ha target may need to be expanded to cover the transition from justification to formal protection, including stakeholder engagement and capacity-building efforts.

Indicator 9: At Least 5 Small-Scale Tourism Operators Introduce Biodiversity-Sensitive Nature-Based Tourism Products

The indicator tracks the introduction of tourism products but does not assess their **biodiversity impact**. The project needs to ensure that these tourism products do not harm ecosystems.

Proposed Expansion: Include indicators that track the environmental impact of tourism activities (e.g., habitat disturbance, waste generation, species stress). This would ensure that biodiversity-sensitive tourism truly benefits conservation.

Milestones: Establish phased targets, such as number of eco-certifications granted or the adoption of biodiversity-sensitive practices by tourism operators by midterm.

Indicator 10: At Least 10% Increase in Annual Visitors in Targeted PAs

While the target focuses on increasing visitor numbers, it doesn't address the **impact** of increased visitation on biodiversity. The risk is that higher visitor numbers could lead to **environmental degradation**.

Proposed Expansion: Introduce sub-indicators that track the **carrying capacity** of these areas and the **impact of visitors** on **habitats**, **wildlife disturbance**, or **waste management**. Ensure that increased visitors do not compromise biodiversity goals.

Balanced Targets: Reframe the target to focus on **sustainable visitor growth**, ensuring that visitation aligns with **conservation priorities** (e.g., limiting visitors in sensitive areas).

Indicator 11: Comprehensive Management Tools in Place and Incentives for Biodiversity-Positive Forest Owners Promoted for at Least 600 ha of Private Forests

The indicator concentrates on management tools and incentives; however, it does not evaluate their efficacy in enhancing biodiversity outcomes. It is essential to assess whether these tools contribute to improved forest health, species conservation, or sustainable resource utilization.

Proposed Expansion: Incorporate sub-indicators that monitor specific improvements in biodiversity, including decreases in deforestation, recovery of forest cover, or enhancements in biodiversity within the 600 hectares of forests.

Incentive Monitoring: Monitor the uptake and impact of incentives on forest management to ensure that they are leading to long-term adherence to biodiversity-positive practices.

Indicator 12: Targeted Adaptation and Resilience Measures Developed and Implemented for at Least 1,000 ha of HCVF

The indicator doesn't specify what adaptation and resilience measures are being introduced or how they benefit biodiversity. The project should define **specific actions** (e.g., fire management, disease prevention, ecosystem restoration).

Proposed Expansion: Include indicators that track **biodiversity outcomes** related to resilience measures, such as improvements in **forest health**, **reduction in habitat fragmentation**, or **species population recovery**.

Intermediate Milestones: Track the **completion of resilience measures** and their **impact on biodiversity** by setting clear milestones for each phase of the adaptation process.

Indicator 13: Sustainable Mechanism for Agro-Environmental Incentives in Place to Encourage Biodiversity-Friendly Agricultural Practices

The indicator emphasizes the development of an incentive scheme; however, it fails to assess the impact of these incentives on biodiversity. It is essential to incorporate metrics that monitor advancements in soil health, species conservation, and the reduction of land degradation.

Proposed Expansion: Implement a supplementary indicator that monitors the incentive scheme's environmental impact, such as promoting biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices or reducing habitat destruction in key biodiversity areas (KBAs).

Target Revision: Guarantee the financial viability of the incentive scheme while ensuring it facilitates long-term improvements in biodiversity by establishing specific targets for biodiversity outcomes in agriculture.

Indicator 14: At Least 20 Small-Scale Farming Enterprises Benefit from Top-Up "Green" Payments (Gender-Disaggregated)

The indicator monitors the number of enterprises receiving green payments; however, it does not assess the impact of these payments on biodiversity enhancements. The project must guarantee that the financial support extended to farmers culminates in sustainable agricultural practices.

Proposed Expansion: Introduce sub-indicators that evaluate how these green payments contribute to the enhancement of soil health, water management, and habitat restoration. It is essential to ensure that the green payments yield quantifiable benefits for biodiversity.

Milestones: Establish midterm milestones, such as the number of farms adopting biodiversity-friendly practices, and systematically monitor the effects of these practices on ecosystem health.

Indicator 15: At Least 3 Knowledge Products Related to Biodiversity Conservation Mainstreaming into Sectoral Policies and Practices Developed and Disseminated

The indicator is primarily concerned with developing and disseminating knowledge products; however, it does not evaluate whether these products result in changes in policy or practice. The project must monitor the adoption and utilization of these products by relevant stakeholders.

Proposed Expansion: Sub-indicators that assess the application of knowledge products in decision-making processes and their influence on sectoral policies, including agriculture and forestry, should be introduced. Furthermore, it is crucial to evaluate the extent to which these products incorporate principles of gender equity and empowerment within conservation practices.

Midterm Milestones: It is essential to ensure that knowledge products are not solely developed but are also actively utilised in policy formulation. The project should track whether stakeholders are implementing the knowledge acquired in their respective domains by the midterm review.

Indicator 16: Number of Women and Men Accessing the Best Available Knowledge and Practice, Through Project-Supported Knowledge Products and Training

This indicator monitors access to knowledge; however, it does not evaluate whether such access results in enhanced conservation practices or capacity-building outcomes. It is essential for the project to monitor how participants are utilizing the knowledge acquired.

Proposed Expansion: It is recommended to incorporate sub-indicators that assess whether participants are effectively applying the knowledge gained to enhance biodiversity outcomes, such as improved species monitoring, habitat restoration, or sustainable resource management.

Specific Targets: Establish clear targets regarding the expected number of women and men who will apply the knowledge acquired by the midterm and project completion. It is crucial to ensure that the knowledge products contribute to long-term conservation impacts.

General Recommendations for Improvement:

- Emphasize Outcome-Based Indicators: Transition from monitoring outputs (e.g., area managed in hectares, number of participants) to evaluating outcomes (e.g., recovery of biodiversity, enhancement of habitats, implementation of conservation actions). This adjustment will guarantee that the project's endeavours result in measurable gains in biodiversity.
- Introduce Intermediate Milestones: Decompose each indicator into phased milestones or subindicators that monitor progress over time. This enables the opportunity for early adjustments should progress be slower than anticipated.
- Assess the Impact of Institutional and Behavioral Change: Evaluate how the project enhances
 institutional capacity and drives policy reforms to secure the long-term sustainability of biodiversity
 conservation initiatives. Additionally, measure the effects of knowledge dissemination and training
 on institutional practices.
- Guarantee Gender-Disaggregated Data: For indicators pertinent to capacity-building and knowledge dissemination, it is imperative to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data to ascertain how both women and men benefit from the project and contribute to biodiversity outcomes.

These refinements are intended to ensure that the indicators are more closely aligned with the project's biodiversity conservation objectives, facilitating more effective tracking of progress, with clearly defined milestones and measurable outcomes related to biodiversity impact.

Annex 10: Signed Code of Conduct Agreement Form

ANNEX E: EVALUATION CONSULTANT CODE OF CONDUCT AND AGREEMENT FORM

Evaluator:

- 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. Evaluator must respect people's right to provide information in confidence, and must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source. Evaluator 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. Evaluator 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, evaluator 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, evaluator 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 imitations, findings and recommendations.
- 7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.

Evaluation Consultant Agreement Form ¹			
Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System			
Name of Consultant: Ana Simonovic			
Name of Consultancy Organization (where relevant):			
I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.			
Signed at <i>place</i> on <i>date</i>			
Signature: Podgorica, 5 August 2024			

¹www.unevaluation.org/unegcodeofconduct

ANNEX E: EVALUATION CONSULTANT CODE OF CONDUCT AND AGREEMENT FORM

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- 6. Is responsible for their performance and their product(s), and responsible for the clear, accurate and fair written and/or oral presentation of study imitations, findings and recommendations.
- 7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.

Evaluation Consultant Agreement Form¹

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

Name of Consultant: Tomislav Novovic

Name of Consultancy Organization (where relevant):

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

Signed at place of date 05.08.2024, Belgrade

¹www.unevaluation.org/unegcodeofconduct

Annex 11: MTR Report Clearance Form

Mid-term Review Report Reviewed and Cleared By:

Commissioning Unit

Name: Bojan Tenjovic Data, Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst

Signature

—DocuSigned by: Bojan Tuyouic 691773F4FCC7467...

Date: 25/11/2024

UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisor

Name: Kaavya Varma

Signature

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Date: 25/11/2024