



**Terminal Evaluation Report of the Mainstreaming Natural
Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation
Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and
Management of Biosphere Reserves in Viet Nam Project (PIMS
5659)**

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International Consultant: Stephanie Hodge

National Consultant: Ha Thi Thu Tran

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Sincerely,
Stephanie Hodge and Ha Thi Thu Tran
TE Consultant

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by an independent consultant evaluator team and is a product of the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP. The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of UNDP Country Office or the UNDP Senior Management.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. Purpose and objectives of the TE	6
1.2. Scope and Timing of the TE	6
1.3. Methodology	6
1.4. Ethics	11
1.5. Limitations	11
1.6. Structure of the report	12
2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION	13
2.1. Project start and duration	13
2.2. Project development context	13
2.3. Problems that the project seeks to address	17
2.4. Immediate and development project objective and expected results	17
2.5. Theory of Change	18
2.6. Total resources	23
2.7. Main stakeholders	24
2.8. How the TE fits within the context of other ongoing and previous evaluations	26
3. FINDINGS	28
3.1 Project Design	28
3.1.1. Analysis of Design, Results Framework	28
3.1.2. Assumptions and Risks	29
3.1.3. Lessons from other relevant projects incorporated into project design	30
3.1.4. Planned stakeholder participation	31
3.1.5. Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector	32
3.1.6. Gender responsiveness of project design	33
3.1.7. Social and Environmental Safeguards	34
3.2. Project Implementation	35
3.2.1. Adaptive management	35
3.2.2. Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements	38
3.2.3. Project Finance and Co-finance	40
3.2.4. Monitoring & Evaluation	41
3.2.5. UNDP implementation/oversight and Implementing Partner execution, overall project implementation/execution, coordination and operational issues	42
3.2.6. Risk management and Social and Environmental Standards	43
3.3. Project Results and Impacts	45
3.3.1. Progress towards objective and expected outcomes	45
3.3.2. Relevance	49
3.3.3. Coherence	49

3.3.4.	Effectiveness	49
3.3.5.	Efficiency	52
3.3.6.	Sustainability	52
3.3.6.	Country ownership	54
3.3.7.	Gender equality and women's empowerment	55
3.3.8.	Cross-cutting issues	55
3.3.10.	Catalytic/Replication Effect	57
3.3.11.	Progress to Impact	58
4.	MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSON LEARNED	60
4.1.	Main Findings & Conclusions	60
4.2.	Recommendations	63
4.3.	Lessons learnt	66
ANNEXES		67
Annex 1.	TE ToR (excluding ToR annexes)	67
Annex 2:	TE Mission Itinerary	78
Annex 3:	List of key persons interviewed	81
Annex 4.	List of documents reviewed	84
Annex 5:	Evaluation Question Matrix	85
Annex 6.	TE Questionnaires	90
Annex 7.	Co-financing Table	97
Annex 8.	TE Rating scales	99
Annex 9.	UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators	100
Annex 10.	TE Report Clearance Form	101
Annex 11.	Final Log Frame Results (provided in separated file)	102
Annex 12.	GEF-7 Core Indicators (provided in separated file)	103
Annex 13.	Audit Trail (provided in separated file)	104
Annex 14.	Mid-term review's proposed changes (provided in separated file)	105

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BIA	Biodiversity Impact Assessment
BR	Biosphere Reserve
BR-MB	Biosphere Reserve Management Board
CO	Country Office (of UNDP)
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DONRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GOV	Government of Vietnam
IPPF	Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework
LEP	Law on Environmental Protection
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAB	Man and Biosphere
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MBA	UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MoCST	Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MOST	Ministry of Science and Technology
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NBCA	Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Reports
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PIT	Project Implementation Team
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PRODOC	Project Document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SESP	Social and Environmental Screening Procedure
TE	Terminal Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VEA	(former) Viet Nam Environment Administration under Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Table-1: Project Information

Project details		Project Milestones	
Project title	Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves in Viet Nam (BR project)	PIF Approval Date:	9 June 2016
UNDP Project ID (PIMS #):	5659	CEO Endorsement Date:	14 March 2018
GEF Project ID (PIMS #):	9361	Project Document (ProDoc) Signature Date (date project began):	6 February 2020
UNDP Business Unit, UNDP Award ID: UNDP Project ID:	UNDP-VNM 00100000.1 00100000	Date project manager hired:	1 May 2020
Country:	Vietnam	Inception Workshop date:	27 October 2020
Region:	Asia & Pacific	Mid-term Review Completion Date:	21 February 2022
Focal Area:	Multi-Focal Areas Biodiversity Land Degradation IP SFM	Terminal Evaluation Completion Date	27 November 2024
GEF Focal Area Strategic Objective:	SFM3: Restored Forest Ecosystems: Reverse the loss of ecosystem services within degraded forest landscapes SFM1 Reduce pressures on forest resources and generate sustainable flows of forest ecosystem services. BD-1 Program 1 BD-3 Program 6 BD-4 Program 9 LD-3 Program 4	Planned Closing date:	6 February 2025
Trust Fund [indicate GEF TF, LDCF, SCCF, NPIF]:	GEF TF	If revised, proposed op. closing date:	N/A
Executing Agency/ Implementing Partner:	MONRE		
Other execution partners:	Management Boards of Hoi An-Cu Lao Cham, Dong Nai, and West Nghe An Biosphere Reserves		
Project financing	At CEO endorsement (US\$)	At TE (US\$) (*)	
[1] GEF financing:	6,660,000	6,660,000	
[2] UNDP contribution:	1,000,000	1,483,422	
[3] Government institutions:	35,538,222	50,329,015	
[4] Other partners:	-	-	
[5] Total co-financing [2+3+4]	36,538,222	51,812,437	
PROJECT TOTAL COSTS [1+5]	43,198,222	58,412,737	

A) Project description

Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the “Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves in Vietnam” project (also referred as the BR project) aims to harmonize socio-economic development, sustainable natural resource management, and biodiversity conservation through an integrated landscape/seascape approach. It is implemented by the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency (NBCA) under the MONRE and selects the West Nghe An BR, Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An BR, and Dong Nai BR to mainstream sustainable resource use, protected area (PA) management, and biodiversity-conscious development measures and to enhance local livelihoods, restore degraded forests, and empower women's participation.

The project started on the 06 of February 2020 and will close in February 2025.

B) Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

In line with UNDP's programming policies and procedures for project quality assurance, the TE focuses on promoting accountability to beneficiaries and enhancing learning and documentation. The report assesses the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments.

The TE serves the 02 following main purposes, namely: (i) To demonstrate accountability to stakeholders on performance in achieving development results under the Project Document (ProDoc). The evaluation will also assess the contributions of the project to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, UNDP Viet Nam Country Programme Document 2022 - 2026, the Global Biodiversity Framework, NBSAPs, and SDGs; and (ii) To provide evidence of project accountability for implementing partners both government and non-governments, donors, and beneficiaries

C) Evaluation scope

The TE was conducted in line with the UNDP and GEF's Evaluation policies and procedures for project quality assurance. It assessed the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments. The evaluation covers project implementation from February 2020 to November 2024, with expected result till ending date of February 2025.

D) Evaluation methods

The methodology followed a participatory process that prioritized collaboration and feedback from key stakeholders. The sample was selected through purposive sampling, ensuring alignment with the project's objectives. In general, the focus of the sample was consistent with the project's intention to model and showcase BRs while supporting learning and technical assistance for the three main objectives outlined below. The evaluation was structured in four phases: a desk review, data collection through stakeholder engagement, analysis, and report writing. In the first phase, the evaluation team conducted a comprehensive desk review of project documents, such as the ProDoc, PIRs, and relevant policy frameworks. The second phase involved direct engagement with project stakeholders in Hanoi and in three project sites, through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with government representatives, the PMU, local communities, and key partners. This phase also included field visits to pilot BRs, where the evaluation team facilitated meetings with community members to ensure their voices were heard and their feedback integrated into the evaluation. In the third phase, the evaluation team analyzed the data collected through these participatory methods, ensuring that findings were triangulated across interviews, observations, and document reviews. The analysis focused on the project's support on the local biodiversity, the effectiveness of capacity-building activities, and the socio-economic benefits for local communities, particularly marginalized groups and women. The final phase involved in validating the findings with key management stakeholders in a feedback session to refine the conclusions and ensure that the evaluation accurately reflected their perspectives.

E) Evaluation rating table

Table-2: Evaluation rating table

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	S
M&E Plan Implementation	MS
Overall Quality of M&E	MS
Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	S
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	MS
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	S
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	HS
Effectiveness	S
Efficiency	MS
Overall Project Outcome Rating	S
Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	ML
Socio-political/economic	L
Institutional framework and governance	ML
Environmental	L
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	ML

F) Key findings and Conclusions

Project Design: The project featured a comprehensive design addressing critical goals, but faced challenges such as structural inefficiencies, a complex management framework, and insufficient participatory processes. Ambitious goals and unclear indicators further complicated implementation amidst political and operational barriers.

M&E system: While the M&E framework was well-designed and aligned with UNDP-GEF standards, it lacked an exit strategy and had some overly complex indicators. Implementation was generally effective, though data reporting and accessibility posed challenges.

Coherence: The project aligned well with Vietnam's UNDAF, UNDP's CPD objectives, and national priorities, making notable contributions to sustainable resource management, climate change mitigation, and inclusivity, especially for vulnerable groups

Relevance: The project demonstrated strong alignment with Vietnam's national strategies and international commitments, contributing significantly to biodiversity conservation, gender equity, and climate action while supporting UN and GEF objectives

Effectiveness: The project delivered key outcomes, including capacity building and biodiversity conservation, but gaps in stakeholder participation and resource strategies limited long-term sustainability. Small grants showcased innovative practices but lacked broader economic integration

Efficiency: The project efficiently utilized resources, meeting key targets within budget constraints. Minor delays in fund disbursement affected the pace of some activities.

Sustainability: The project shows a moderate likelihood of sustainability due to financial and governance risks, but strong community involvement and environmental benefits provide a solid foundation for continued impact.

Additionality: GEF funding and technical support enabled significant advancements in biodiversity conservation, integrating BR knowledge into legal frameworks and showcasing best practices through small-scale grants for sustainable livelihoods

Gender equality and women’s empowerment: The project made notable progress in integrating gender considerations, increasing women's participation, and challenging societal norms but struggled to achieve gender parity in decision-making and address barriers for women in remote areas.

Cross-cutting areas: The BR approach demonstrated the integration of conservation with poverty reduction, gender equality, and disaster risk reduction, advancing sustainable development through inclusive and nature-based solutions

Impact: The project delivered lasting impacts in maintaining or improving key ecosystems, stabilizing key species populations, and enhancing local livelihoods through targeted interventions, including legal framework enhancement, awareness raising, capacity building and livelihood development supporting.

Key success factors: Strong political support, stakeholder coordination, early provincial involvement, and a robust M&E system were pivotal to the project's success.

Key challenges: Challenges included an overly ambitious design, pandemic-related delays, lengthy procurement procedures, and the complexity of implementing activities across diverse regions.

G) Recommendations

Below recommendations take into account the timeframe available to implement recommendations.

Table-3: Recommendation table

No	TE recommendations	Responsible Party	Timeframe
A	Priority actions to be taken		
1	Conduct final coordination meetings with MARD, MONRE, DARD, and DONRE to align on outstanding activities and ensure smooth project closeout	NBCA	Jan-25
2	Review and update all project products/deliverables	NBCA/MONRE	Feb-25
3	Finalize and upload technical reports that were completed during and after TE stage to the UNDP's SharePoint folders	NBCA and UNDP	Feb-25
4	Finalize and officially circulate the report on lessons learned and good practices of the BR project to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Feb-25
5	Circulate the project's publications (printed and non-printed) to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Mar-25
6	Support the finalization and submission of the 10-year implementation report of Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve to UNESCO	NBCA/MONRE	Jun-25
7	Finalize and officially circulate the guidelines developed by the project to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Dec-25
8	Finalize and submit the regulations on management and environmental protection of Dong Nai BR for approval	Dong Nai BRMB	Dec-25
9	Finalize and submit for approval the decision on the establishment of Dong Nai BR Management Board	Dong Nai BRMB, NBCA/MONRE	Dec-25
10	Finalize and submit the feasibility report for the establishment of Pu Xa Lai Leng Nature Reserve for approval	Nghe An BRMB	Dec-25
11	Follow up for the approval of the regulations on management and environmental protection of West Nghe An BR	Nghe An BRMB	Dec-25
12	Finalize and submit the regulations on management and environmental protection of CLC-HA BR for approval	CLC-HA BR	Dec-25
13	Review and document the results of applying the biodiversity-friendly tourism certification in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR one year after the project completion	CLC-HA BR	Dec-25
B	Actions for long-term impact		

1	Scale up governance frameworks that engage local communities and promote collaboration across BRs through forums and learning platforms	MONRE/GOV	2025 and beyond
2	Foster deeper collaboration with UNDP, provincial governments, NGOs, and private partners to replicate successful initiatives nationally and internationally	MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond
3	Create a national-level coordination hub to serve as a platform for sharing best practices, facilitating communication, and promoting partnerships	NBCA/MONRE	2025 and beyond
4	Strengthen outreach efforts to educate the broader public on the importance of the BR approach for biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods	NBCA/MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond
5	Establish a robust monitoring system to track the impact of conservation activities in BRs over the long term	NBCA/MONRE	2025 and beyond
6	Implement blended financing strategies, grant programs, and partnerships with the private sector to support community-led conservation initiatives	NBCA/MONRE, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond
7	Expand biodiversity-friendly tourism models within existing BRs and to others	MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond

H) Lessons learned

- The project stressed the importance of aligning its design with national and local strategies to engage leaders and stakeholders effectively, fostering coordination for successful outcomes.
- The project highlighted the success of participatory co-management models in biodiversity conservation, emphasizing the need for enhanced local capacity-building to align conservation goals with community socio-economic needs.
- Through initiatives like eco-tourism, NTFP cooperatives, and sustainable agriculture, the project demonstrated that socio-economic benefits can be achieved alongside biodiversity conservation, setting a model for future efforts.
- Interventions based on proven models or aligned with local development plans minimized technical and financial risks, showcasing their effectiveness in sustainable development efforts.
- The project emphasized that interventions with long timelines, such as forest restoration and sustainable livelihoods, should begin early to ensure sufficient implementation and impact evaluation.
- Empowering women in leadership roles for conservation and livelihood programs improved community well-being and environmental sustainability, highlighting a scalable and impactful approach.
- Future projects should incorporate flexible designs to address political and institutional challenges while implementing integrated monitoring frameworks with clear indicators to ensure multi-sectoral collaboration and track progress toward shared goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose and objectives of the TE

In line with UNDP's programming policies and procedures for project quality assurance, the summative evaluation has focused on promoting accountability to beneficiaries and enhancing learning and documentation. This TE report assesses the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments.

The findings from this evaluation will be used, where necessary, to improve the design, implementation, and management of future biodiversity and development focused projects and interventions.

The evaluation will serve to inform current project stakeholders and other interested parties of the project's impacts and feasibility for further scaling-up interventions. These stakeholders include but are not limited to i) MONRE; ii) PMU; iii) PITs in the 3 sites; iv) Communities; and v) Others.

1.2. Scope and Timing of the TE

The **TE** was originally planned to take place over a 12-week period from June to September 2024. However, due to adjustments made to accommodate project timelines and logistical needs, the evaluation was ultimately conducted between **August and December 2024**.

The evaluation encompassed a thorough assessment of the project's performance, focusing on three primary areas. First, it examined the **Project Design**, which involved reviewing the project's ToC, the integration of gender equality and social safeguards, risk analysis, stakeholder participation, and overall management arrangements. Second, the **Project Implementation** phase was evaluated, concentrating on adaptive management practices, stakeholder engagement, financial management, and risk management, including social and environmental safeguards. Finally, the evaluation assessed the **Project Results**, measuring progress against the project's objectives and indicators. This included an examination of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the project's outcomes, with special attention given to cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, poverty alleviation, and climate change adaptation.

The **evaluation process** spanned **16 weeks** from **August to December 2024**, beginning with the **preparation phase** in early August. During this period, the TE team reviewed project documentation and finalized the Inception Report. From late August through early September, the evaluation team conducted field visits to three key BRs: **West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham-Hoi An, and Dong Nai**. These site visits were pivotal in gathering in-depth, localized insights through stakeholder meetings, interviews, and field observations.

Following the fieldwork, a draft TE report was completed in **November 2024**. A two-week period was dedicated to collecting feedback from stakeholders, which was then incorporated into the final draft. The **final TE report** was submitted in **December 2024**, which included evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Alongside the report, a **Management Response** was prepared by UNDP in consultation with project stakeholders.

1.3. Methodology

A. UNDP's Evaluation Approach

The TE employed a comprehensive and participatory methodology to ensure an inclusive, credible, and contextually relevant assessment. The approach adhered to established evaluation standards, including UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, GEF Project Evaluation Guidelines, and the OECD-DAC core criteria. The TE framework emphasized: (1) **Relevance** (alignment of the project objectives with national priorities, UNDP's strategic objectives, GEF's biodiversity conservation objective and the needs of beneficiaries), (2) **Coherence** (Compatibility of the project with other interventions in the country), (3) **Effectiveness** (the extent to which the project objectives were achieved or are expected to be achieved), (4) **Efficiency** (how economically resources were converted into results), (5) **Impact** (broader effects of the project, including intended and unintended changes), and (6) **Sustainability** (likelihood that project benefits will continue after the project's completion) while integrating cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, inclusion of vulnerable groups, disability considerations, and human rights. An Evaluation Framework that offers more detail on each evaluation criteria is presented in [Annex 5](#).

Most evaluation criteria were rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability was rated from Likely (L) down to Unlikely (U). The ratings against each criterion are 'weighted' to derive the Overall Project Performance Rating. The greatest weight is placed on the achievement of outcomes, followed by dimensions of sustainability.

The UNDP's Evaluation Guidelines provided detailed descriptions of the key elements that need to be demonstrated at each level (from Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory) for each evaluation criterion (See [Annex 8](#)). The TE evaluator considered all evidence gathered during the evaluation in relation to this matrix in order to generate valuation criteria performance ratings.

In addition to 6 evaluation criteria outlined above, this TE addressed a number of strategic questions related to gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusivity of vulnerable and marginalized groups, disabilities and human rights formulated in the TOR (see [Annex 1](#)). Evaluation findings related to these topics of interest were also included in the TE report.

B. Data collection

Secondary data sources

In order to review available documents (legal, financial, technical), the evaluators were given access to SharePoint folders maintained by the UNDP. Therein, a large volume of documents was found and well-organized by themes/topics for easy follow. Relevant secondary data consisted in Project Design Documents presented to and approved by UNDP, GEF and MONRE, jointly referred to as Project Document (ProDoc), as well as implementation documents such as PIRs, SESP, ESMF and project outputs (publications, case studies, , etc.). Additional materials (i.e., national policy documents) were also collected from trustful sources and reviewed. The full list of documents reviewed is presented in [Annex 4](#).

Primary data sources

Sampling Methodology

A purposeful sampling approach was used to identify key stakeholders and data sources that were most relevant to the evaluation criteria. For this evaluation, which was largely normative and implementation-focused, the majority of the interviews were conducted with government partners at both the national and provincial levels. Respondents (both men and women, from any ethnicity and age group) were selected based on the priority in terms of their role in implementation and learning from the exercises. This strategy allowed for a focused examination of critical aspects of the project and facilitated engagement with stakeholders who had direct experience with its implementation. The sampling strategy prioritized inclusivity, ensuring representation from key groups, focused on national government agencies, provincial authorities, but extending to interview with community-based organizations, and marginalized communities in project sites.

b. Field visits and case studies

Field visits to all three pilot BRs—West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, and Dong Nai—were integral to the TE. Each reserve provided a unique case study, reflecting the project's diverse focus areas and contextual challenges. The West Nghe An BR emphasized forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods, while Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR focused on marine conservation and biodiversity-friendly tourism. The Dong Nai BR highlighted land-use planning and ecosystem restoration. These visits enabled the team to document project activities, observe outcomes firsthand, and engage directly with local stakeholders, enriching the evaluation with detailed contextual insights. Field visit plan is presented in [Annex 2](#).

c. Data collection tools

Data were verified by triangulation as much as possible by using different tools to corroborate inputs and responses: interviews, field observations and document reviews. The evaluation questionnaires were tailored to different respondent groups (see [Annex 6](#)). The full list of persons contacted and interviewed is provided in [Annex 3](#).

C. Data analysis

The primary mode of analysis relied on securing evidence to support the project's result pathways and the main element of its reconstructed ToC. Two underlying questions that were central to the examination of change processes taking place along the ToC pathways were: 1. What did the project's intervention contribute to changes in behavior and policy? and 2. How and why did these changes occur?

To gather evidence addressing these questions and demonstrating the relationship between project efforts, results and impact, the TE evaluators established attribution of project outcomes whenever possible. When direct attribution was not possible due to limited evidence, the TE evaluators aimed to identify substantive contributions or credible associations. This approach relied on triangulation evidence and information from multiple sources as much as possible and adhered to the UNDP's Evaluation Guidelines on using ToC in project evaluations.

D. Integration of Cross-Cutting Issues

The evaluation explicitly addressed cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability to ensure alignment with international frameworks like the SDGs and the Leave No One Behind principles. A comprehensive evaluation framework was employed, which included specific indicators for each of these issues, enabling a thorough analysis of how the project addressed these concerns throughout its design and implementation.

Gender

Gender equality was central to the evaluation methodology, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the project's impact on both women and men at all stages. The evaluation aimed to assess the project's contribution to reducing gender disparities and empowering women, with a focus on identifying barriers and opportunities. Gender-sensitive indicators were developed in consultation with project stakeholders, emphasizing outcomes such as women's participation in activities, changes in gender roles, and improvements in women's access to resources, services, and decision-making positions.

1. **Gender-Sensitive Indicators:** Indicators tracked progress on women's participation, leadership, resource access, and empowerment. These included metrics on women's involvement in activities, leadership roles, and access to education and financial resources.
2. **Gender Representation in Sampling:** The evaluation aimed for equal gender representation, especially from marginalized groups, including rural and indigenous women. Gender-specific focus groups and discussions were conducted to capture women's unique perspectives.
3. **Gender-Responsive Data Collection:** Methods included gender-sensitive surveys, focus groups, and interviews with female participants to explore their experiences, challenges, and the benefits they gained from the project.
4. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Gender-disaggregated data helped identify barriers like social norms and mobility restrictions for women. Opportunities, such as improved decision-making and financial autonomy, were also highlighted.
5. **Mainstreaming Gender in Design:** The evaluation assessed whether gender considerations were integrated into project strategies, activities, and risk management, ensuring that women's needs were addressed in planning and capacity-building efforts.
6. **Gender Equality in Monitoring:** The project's M&E systems tracked gender-specific outcomes, ensuring gender-disaggregated data was collected to monitor women's participation and empowerment.
7. **Gender-Specific Training:** The evaluation examined training modules aimed at women's leadership and financial literacy, assessing completion rates, impacts, and feedback from participants.

Gender-Sensitive Indicators:

1. **Women's Participation in Project Activities:** The percentage of women involved in capacity-building activities, workshops, and decision-making meetings.
2. **Changes in Gender Roles and Norms:** Tracking shifts in gender dynamics, such as the percentage increase in women holding leadership positions.
3. **Women's Access to Resources:** The proportion of women reporting increased access to economic resources, education, and financial management training.
4. **Empowerment through Skills Training:** The percentage of women who completed training programs aimed at leadership, resource management, or financial literacy.
5. **Satisfaction with Project Outcomes:** Survey questions on women's satisfaction with the project's impact on their economic opportunities, social status, and decision-making power.

Data Collection and Analysis:

- The **sampling strategy** ensured gender inclusivity, particularly from marginalized groups such as indigenous communities and rural women.
- **Data collection tools:** including interviews, surveys, and focus groups, were designed to capture the experiences of women, especially regarding their roles in the project's activities, the benefits they received, and the challenges they faced.
- **Gender-Disaggregated Data:** Focused on identifying gender-specific barriers and opportunities that emerged during project implementation. For instance, women in target communities reported increased decision-making power in household financial management, while others faced barriers like limited mobility or restrictive social norms.

Examples of Data collection

- **Focus group discussions** with women on their economic empowerment through the project's training programs.
- **Surveys** measuring changes in women's involvement in local decision-making.
- **Gender-disaggregated data** from interviews to assess barriers women faced in accessing project resources.

Social Inclusion

The evaluation emphasized social inclusion, ensuring participation from marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds. Social inclusion indicators included:

1. **Representation of Marginalized Groups:** The number of marginalized individuals involved in project planning, implementation, and leadership roles.
2. **Access to Project Resources by Marginalized Groups:** Ensuring equal access to resources, services, and opportunities for marginalized groups.
3. **Inclusion in Decision-Making Processes:** The percentage of marginalized group representatives in community decision-making bodies.
4. **Barriers to Participation:** Identifying social or cultural barriers that hindered full participation from marginalized groups.

Examples of Data Collection:

- **Focus groups** with marginalized communities to discuss barriers to accessing resources and social impacts.
- **Surveys** on participation in decision-making and leadership activities.
- **Interviews** with community leaders to assess the social inclusion impact and identify gaps.

Environmental Sustainability

The evaluation also examined the project's impact on environmental sustainability, focusing on its contribution to sustainable development and environmental conservation. Indicators for environmental sustainability included GEF-7 core indicators¹.

1. **Impact on Local Biodiversity:** Tracking changes in local flora and fauna, using environmental assessments or biodiversity surveys.
2. **Sustainable Land and Resource Management Practices:** Adoption rates of sustainable practices promoted by the project.
3. **Eco-Friendly Technologies and Practices:** The percentage of participants adopting eco-friendly technologies, such as renewable energy or water-saving irrigation.
4. **Environmental Awareness and Behaviors:** Changes in community awareness of environmental issues and sustainable behaviors, such as recycling and energy conservation.
5. **Long-Term Environmental Impact:** Monitoring improvements in environmental conditions like soil quality, water management, or forest preservation.

Examples of Data Collection:

¹ Refer to: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/10530_core_indicator_worksheet.pdf

- **Surveys and interviews** with participants using sustainable farming techniques or conservation methods.
- **Focus groups** with local environmental stakeholders to discuss the broader environmental impact of the project.
- **Environmental assessments** to track biodiversity changes and resource management outcomes.

By disaggregating environmental data, the evaluation team identified regional differences in the project's environmental impact, highlighting areas where additional support may be needed to ensure sustainability.

E. Evaluation Process

The evaluation followed a phased process that adapted to the project's complexity and the practical realities of data collection and stakeholder engagement. The methodology was grounded in Utilization-Focused and Participatory Evaluation principles, aligning closely with the project's objectives and stakeholder needs. The process was implemented in four distinct phases:

Phase 1: Desk Review and Methods Development

The evaluation began with a comprehensive desk review of all relevant project documents, including the ProDoc, annual PIRs, budget revisions, SESP, baseline data, and midterm GEF Core Indicators/Tracking Tools. National and local strategic and legal frameworks were also examined to assess the project's alignment with broader biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals. This foundational review established a clear understanding of the project's design, objectives, and anticipated outcomes, providing a basis for designing subsequent data collection efforts.

The participatory approach was chosen for this evaluation to ensure that it accurately reflects the experiences, insights, and concerns of key stakeholders (largely government officials and their close partners in implementing the showcase of the BR approach) throughout the project's implementation. This approach was crucial for several reasons:

1. **Stakeholder Ownership:** Given the project's focus on implementation and Knowledge sharing of good practices concerning biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development, it was essential to involve local communities, government entities, and other key stakeholders in the evaluation process. Their participation helped ensure that the evaluation captured the full scope of the project's impact, particularly in terms of local benefits and challenges.
2. **Inclusive and Transparent Process:** By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, the participatory approach allowed for a more inclusive and transparent evaluation process. This method provided stakeholders with a platform to share their perspectives, leading to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the project's outcomes.
3. **Ensuring Relevance and Practicality:** The participatory approach was designed to align the evaluation with the real-world needs and priorities of local communities and project implementers. By incorporating feedback directly from those involved in or affected by the project, the evaluation could identify practical, actionable insights that could inform future project designs and interventions.
4. **Enhanced Credibility:** Involving stakeholders in the evaluation process helped strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of the findings. When stakeholders are actively engaged and their perspectives are considered, it increases the likelihood that the evaluation outcomes will be accepted and acted upon by all parties involved.

In summary, the participatory approach was chosen to ensure that the evaluation was grounded in the lived experiences of stakeholders, allowing for a more nuanced and credible assessment of the project's achievements and areas for improvement.

Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Data Collection

The second phase involved extensive stakeholder engagement to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including government counterparts, the PMU, implementing partners, direct beneficiaries, provincial committees, and community-based organizations. The TE team carried out field missions to Hanoi to meet with national partners at MONRE, UNDP, MARD and MAB and then to all three pilot BRs—West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, and Dong Nai—where they engaged with local communities and project beneficiaries.

Participatory workshops provided an additional platform for stakeholders to share their insights, validate findings, and contribute to the co-creation of recommendations. The field visits also included direct observations of project sites, allowing the team to document environmental conditions, implementation quality, and evidence of project outcomes.

Phase 3: Data Analysis and Validation

The collected data were analyzed using a gender-responsive and inclusive approach. Evidence was triangulated from multiple sources—documents, interviews, and field observations—to ensure reliability and credibility. Gender-disaggregated data were evaluated to assess outcomes related to women’s empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Key evaluation questions and criteria, outlined in an evaluation matrix, guided the analysis, ensuring that all aspects of the project’s performance were systematically addressed. Findings were then synthesized into an evidence-based and results-oriented draft report, which was shared with stakeholders for validation and feedback.

Phase 4: Report Writing and Finalization

The final phase involved refining the draft report based on stakeholder inputs, producing a comprehensive evaluation document that addressed gaps and provided actionable recommendations. The final report explicitly documented the methodology, including its rationale, assumptions, challenges, strengths, and limitations. Special emphasis was placed on the integration of gender equality, disability inclusivity, and human rights throughout the evaluation process.

1.4. Ethics

As part of the inception phase of the TE, all evaluators signed a comprehensive Code of Conduct ([Annex 9](#)) to uphold the highest ethical standards throughout the evaluation process. This commitment to ethical practice was fundamental to ensuring the integrity and credibility of the evaluation. The evaluators recognized that ethical considerations were crucial not only for the quality of the evaluation but also for fostering trust among stakeholders involved in the process.

A primary ethical principle guiding the evaluation was confidentiality. All materials and information gathered during the evaluation, including interview transcripts and stakeholder feedback, remained confidential. The evaluators were dedicated to protecting the identities of participants, ensuring that sensitive information was safeguarded. By anonymizing data wherever applicable, the evaluation team aimed to create a secure environment where stakeholders felt comfortable sharing their insights and experiences.

In addition to confidentiality, informed consent was a cornerstone of the ethical framework guiding the evaluation. Stakeholders participating in interviews and focus group discussions were fully informed about the purpose of the evaluation and their role within it. Participation was entirely voluntary, and stakeholders had the right to withdraw at any time without facing any repercussions. This approach respected the autonomy of all participants and acknowledged their right to make informed choices regarding their involvement in the evaluation.

The evaluation team was also committed to treating all stakeholders with respect and dignity. By valuing diverse perspectives and ensuring that every voice was heard, the team fostered an inclusive atmosphere throughout the evaluation process. This respect for stakeholders was integral to capturing the nuances of their experiences and insights, ultimately leading to more robust findings.

Transparency was another vital ethical principle emphasized during the evaluation. The evaluators provided clear and accurate information about the evaluation process, methodology, and findings. By doing so, they aimed to build trust and collaboration among stakeholders, encouraging open dialogue and engagement throughout the evaluation.

Finally, the evaluators-maintained impartiality and objectivity throughout the evaluation process. They were committed to avoiding any conflicts of interest that could undermine the integrity of the evaluation. By adhering to these ethical principles, the evaluation team not only sought to produce credible and reliable findings but also aspired to foster a respectful and safe environment for all participants involved.

1.5. Limitations

The TE encountered several limitations that impacted the depth and breadth of the analysis. One significant challenge was the accessibility of remote areas where project interventions took place. The geographical isolation of all communes involved meant that the team could not fully capture the perspectives of all relevant participants, resulting in gaps in understanding the project’s overall impact

and effectiveness. To address these accessibility issues, the consultant team collaborated with local representatives and community leaders, who facilitated communication and organized smaller focus group discussions in their areas. This approach helped to gather a more diverse range of perspectives, compensating for the physical limitations imposed by remote locations.

Another challenge is community engagement. The evaluation team faced difficulties in reaching certain community members due to logistical constraints and unfavourable weather at site (for example, in Hoi An BR), resulting in an incomplete understanding of local perspectives and experiences. Limited involvement from diverse community groups, particularly marginalized populations, hindered the ability to capture a holistic view of the project's impacts and effectiveness. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect the sentiments and insights of all stakeholders, particularly those directly affected by the project's implementation. To ensure broader community representation, the evaluation team implemented targeted outreach efforts aimed at marginalized groups. This included engaging local NGOs and civil society organizations (for example: Provincial/District/Commune Women's Unions, Farmer's Unions, Youth unions, Community development groups) that work closely with these populations, allowing for better access to their insights and experiences. Additionally, the team utilized participatory approaches, such as community workshops, where local voices could be actively heard and documented.

Language barriers also presented a challenge during the evaluation, as many stakeholders preferred to speak in local dialects and languages. To overcome this challenge, the evaluation team included national consultants and local people fluent. The national team member played a crucial role in translating discussions, ensuring that stakeholders' insights were accurately captured and understood. Their cultural knowledge further enriched the evaluation process, enabling the team to build rapport with key stakeholders and local community members and foster trust, which is essential for candid and meaningful conversations.

The project design faced significant limitations, particularly in the clarity of its work areas and results framework. The absence of clearly defined boundaries for knowledge and learning activities within the project's overall scope created challenges in establishing accountability and measuring success. This was especially evident in the project's aim to use coordination and learning to influence the scaling up of good practices. Without well-articulated indicators for coordination, stakeholder engagement, and the expected outcomes of learning and knowledge-sharing activities, it was difficult to assess their contribution to—or impact on—project outcomes. This lack of specificity hindered the ability to evaluate how effectively these elements supported the project's goals. This ambiguity limited the evaluation team's ability to conduct a comprehensive outcome analysis, especially regarding institutional frameworks for continued BR coordination at both national and provincial levels. To overcome these challenges, the evaluation team conducted an in-depth review of existing project documentation during the inception phase. By engaging with key project implementation stakeholders, the team worked to clarify the objectives and results framework, developing a more structured evaluation matrix for national and demonstration levels. This process included revisiting the project's logical framework to identify key performance indicators and ensure they were aligned with the overarching goals of the project. By refining these components, the team enhanced its ability to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of project interventions systematically.

Moreover, the evaluation noted a need for a formal knowledge management strategy regarding the engagement and collaboration with MARD and other key National level actors i.e. MAB involved in the project. The absence of a cohesive strategy for coordinating knowledge and learning efforts among stakeholders led to missed opportunities for collective learning and synergy, further complicating the assessment of project effectiveness. This collective engagement not only enriched the evaluation process but also encouraged stakeholders to reflect on their roles and contributions, enhancing collaboration moving forward.

1.6. Structure of the report

The TE report adheres to the format outlined in the UNDP-GEF TE guidelines. It includes a description of the methodology, an overview of the project, and findings organized into three main areas: (i) Project Design/Formulation, (ii) Project Implementation, and (iii) Project Results and Impacts. The report concludes with sections on Conclusions, Recommendations, and Lessons Learned.

In compliance with the guidelines, certain aspects of the project are evaluated using the prescribed rating scale ([Annex 8](#)). Co-financing details ([Annex 7](#)) are presented under financial management section, while the updated core indicators are included in project result section. Additionally, an Audit Trail documenting addressed comments is provided as in [Annex 13](#).

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1. Project start and duration

According to the ProDoc, the total project duration was 5 years from Feb 2020 to February 2025. The project's key milestones was summarized in Table below.

Table-5: Timeline and Key Dates

Project duration	60 months
PIF Approval Date (through Decision No.1753/QD-BTNMT by MONRE)	Jun 9, 2016
CEO Endorsement Date	Mar 14, 2018
Project Management Board (PMB) establishment Date (through Decision No.1330/QD-TCMT by MONRE)	October 15, 2019
Planning and Implementation Teams (PITs) establishment Date (through Decision No.4290/QD-UBND by Nghe An PPC, Decision No.3368/QD-UBND by Dong Nai PPC and Decision No.4055/QD-UBND by Quang Nam PPC)	October – December 2019
Project Document Signature Date (project start date):	Feb 6, 2020
Project Steering Committee establishment date	May 06, 2020
Date of Inception Workshop	Oct 27, 2020
First Disbursement Date	May 20, 2020
Expected Date of Mid-term Review	Jan 15, 2022
Actual Date of Mid-term Review	Feb 21, 2022
Expected Date of TE	Nov 6, 2024
Actual Date of TE	Dec 30, 2024

2.2. Project development context

Socio-economic and environmental context

Ranked 16th globally in terms of biodiversity, Vietnam boasts a rich variety of species, encompassing 20,000 plant species and 12,500 animal species. Despite this distinction, the country faces a significant decline in biodiversity due to widespread deforestation, unsustainable land conversion, pollution, and climate change. The loss of national forest cover, along with wildlife poaching and trading, has driven over 300 species to the edge of extinction. Recognizing the urgency, Vietnam has prioritized conservation efforts since the late 1980s, resulting in the establishment of 176 PAs by 2021. However, these PAs, primarily located in impoverished regions, pose a challenge in balancing conservation and development goals. They are mostly managed as "prohibited areas," lacking meaningful community involvement, leading to pressure from local populations due to restricted access.

To address this issue, a network of BRs was established, building upon the existing PAs. Aligned with UNESCO's MAB strategy, the concept of BRs strives to ensure human-nature harmonious co-existence in designated landscapes through the integration of biodiversity conservation goal into socio-economic development planning. Since 2000, Vietnam has recognized 11 BRs, covering 4.8 million hectares and housing over 3.3 million people, many of whom are native inhabitants. However, the effectiveness of Vietnam's BR network in integrating biodiversity conservation into landscape and seascape planning remains limited.

In response to these challenges, the "Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of BRs in Vietnam" project (BR project) was initiated. Funded by the GEF, the BR project, aimed to harmonize socio-economic development, sustainable natural resource management, and biodiversity conservation through an integrated landscape/seascape approach. Given the existing legal and practical infrastructures, the project, aimed to create overarching legal and institutional frameworks for this integrated management approach in various BRs, resulting in a set of guidelines for improved practices. To promote the implementation of the integrated management approach, the BR project selects the West Nghe An BR, Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An BR, and Dong Nai BR (see **Figure 1**) to examine their conditions and gradually mainstream sustainable resource use, PA management, and biodiversity-conscious development measures. The project's support in the 3 selected BRs has virtually helped

enhancing local livelihoods, restoring degraded forests, and empowering women's participation, among other objectives. It also responds to the UN SDG - Strategic Goal C (to improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity) and Target 12 (by 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has improved and sustained), the country outcome outlined in the UNDAF/Country ProDoc.

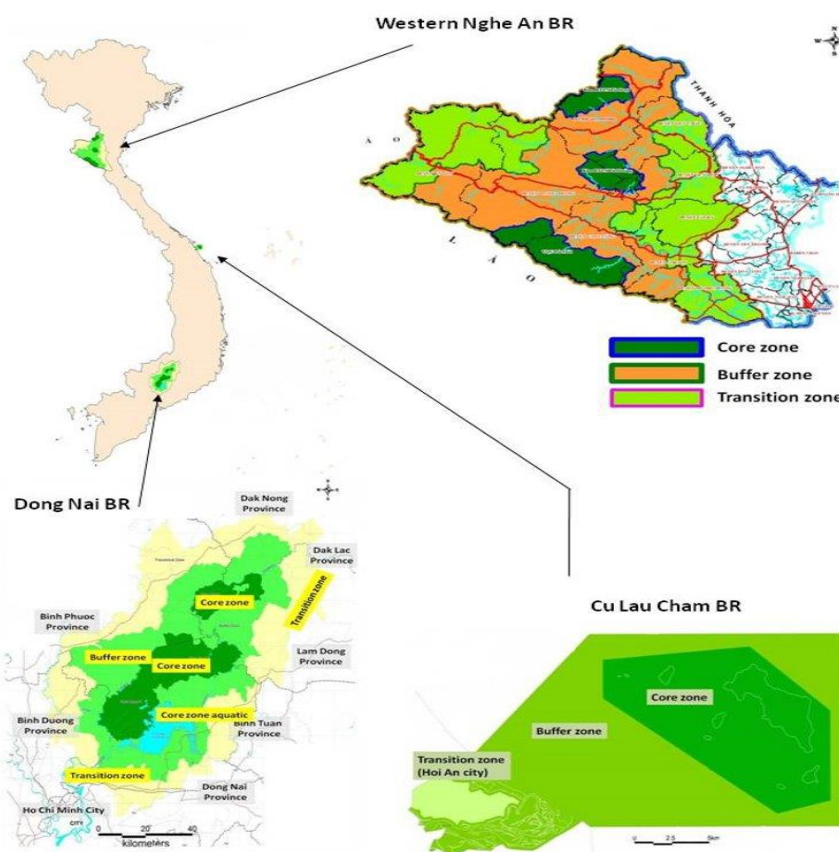


Figure-1: The project site

Legal Framework For Environmental Protection, Biodiversity Conservation, PA and BR Management

Before and during the implementation of the BR project, Vietnam established a comprehensive framework for environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and PA management. This framework includes various strategies, laws, and regulations, though few directly address BRs.

Key strategies, such as the *Socio-Economic Development Strategy for Vietnam 2011–2020* and the *Sustainable Development Strategy 2011–2020*, outline national goals emphasizing environmental sustainability and social harmony. The *SEDS for 2021–2030* further prioritizes social issues and environmental protection.

The *Law on Environmental Protection (LEP)*, first adopted in 1993 and amended multiple times, provides a legal foundation for environmental management and promotes green initiatives. While revisions to the Biodiversity Law are underway, the ongoing LEP revision offers opportunities to integrate BIA into provincial planning.

The *Law on Biodiversity (2008)* serves as an umbrella law for biodiversity protection, assigning responsibilities to various government bodies. Although it does not explicitly reference BRs, the National Biodiversity Strategy, approved in 2013, targeted an increase in BRs by 2020. Key provisions of the 2008 law include: (i) Establishing a legal framework for conserving natural ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity; and (ii) Creating biodiversity conservation areas.

In 2017, several laws relevant to biodiversity conservation were enacted, including the *Law on Planning* established national planning systems with an emphasis on integrated approaches for sustainable development. The *Law on Forestry* promoted forest quality improvement and required sustainable forest management plans for PAs. The *Law on Fishery* advocated for sustainable marine resource management. The *Law on Tourism* encouraged eco-tourism and environmental protection in tourism development, although it lacks provisions for tourism in PAs, BRs.

The 2020 LEP, effective January 1, 2022, introduced 2 articles directly addressing BRs as a form of Natural Heritage: (i) Provision on Natural Heritage; and (ii) Environmental protection measures for Natural Heritage. The Law also a critical role in regulating activities within BRs to ensure ecological sustainability with key aspects, including: (i) environmental impact assessment (EIA) – any development projects in or near BRs must conduct comprehensive EIA to evaluate potential ecological impacts and (ii) sustainable development – harmonizing conservation efforts with socio-economic development, ensuring the balance between nature conservation with human activities in BRs.

Supporting the 2020 LEP, *Decree 08/2022/ND-CP* provides specific regulations on: (i) criteria, order, procedures and authority for establishing and recognizing international BRs; (ii) order, procedures and authority for nominating natural heritage for international recognition and (iii) guidelines for investigation, assessment, management and environmental protection of natural heritages.

Additionally, *Circular 02/2022/TT-BNTMT* details the implementation of certain articles of the LEP, including the development and approval of regulations and plans for management and environmental protection of natural heritages.

The *National Strategy on Environmental Protection to 2030, towards 2050* highlights protecting the natural heritage environment, expanding conservation areas and biodiversity corridors, protecting and restoring ecosystems, preventing the decline of species and genetic resources and enhancing environmental protection in exploitation and use of natural resources. The Strategy sets a goal to expand and improve the management effectiveness for natural heritages (including BRs) and establish at least 2 new BRs by 2025 and 4 new BRs by 2030, targeting a total of 14 BRs by 2030.

Collectively, these laws, sub-laws and strategies form robust regulatory framework supporting biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resources management. Legal framework for BR management - including: nomination and withdraw process, institutional arrangement; zoning; planning, environment protection, assessment, periodical reporting and financial mechanisms for international BRs and has been steadily enhanced.

Institutional Context for BR management

The management of BRs in Vietnam is characterized by a complex governance structure that lacks clear delineation at the national level. Although the MONRE is generally tasked with overseeing BRs, MARD is responsible for overseeing the PA core zones of the BRs. This division of responsibility creates challenges in terms of actual and effective oversight.

To address these challenges, a collaborative approach has been adopted, involving various line ministries, local authorities, and the MAB National Committee. The design and preparation of the BR project were based on national priorities, with active participation from relevant national agencies working on biodiversity. Additionally, agencies focused on land degradation and land degradation neutrality, such as the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE), play a critical role. DONRE is the main government project partner at the BR level, supported by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

1. Ministry Responsibilities:

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs:** play an important role in the BR management through National UNESCO Committee
- **MONRE:** Responsible for environmental governance, including BR management as per Decree No. 36/2017/ND-CP. MONRE provides guidelines for BRs and oversees biodiversity management.
- **MARD:** Handles forest and fisheries management, biodiversity conservation, and oversees PAs through its specialized administrations. This ministry is crucial for the development and management of the national PA system.

- **MPI:** Focuses on sustainable development and planning frameworks guided by socio-economic strategies.
- **MOST:** Manages scientific and technological administration, coordinates conservation activities for genetic resources, and oversees registration of traditional knowledge.
- **MOCST:** Responsible for cultural and tourism management, promoting sustainable tourism development through initiatives like the “Green Lotus label”.

2. **Provincial Role:**

- Provincial People's Committees (PPCs) play a significant role in managing BRs and are responsible for developing regulations, known as the "BR Management Regulation," that guide BR administration. Their authority varies by site.

3. **Local Management:**

- At provincial and district levels, specialized departments mirror national ministries, receiving technical guidance but reporting to PPCs.

4. **MAB National Committee:**

- This consultative body facilitates national and international cooperation for BRs and includes members from various academic and governmental institutions.

5. **Site Management:**

- Each BR has a management board, comprising 1 Director (usually a vice-chairman of the PPC), 2- 4 Vice Director (typically directors of provincial departments, such as: DARD, DONRE or Directors of NPs, PAs located in the core zone of the BRs) and other members (generally leaders or officers of from relevant departments, agencies, NPs, PAs in Core zones of BRs,

This institutional framework reflects a decentralized approach to managing BRs in Vietnam, with multiple ministries and local authorities sharing responsibilities, which can lead to challenges in coherent management and policy implementation (see **Figure 2**).

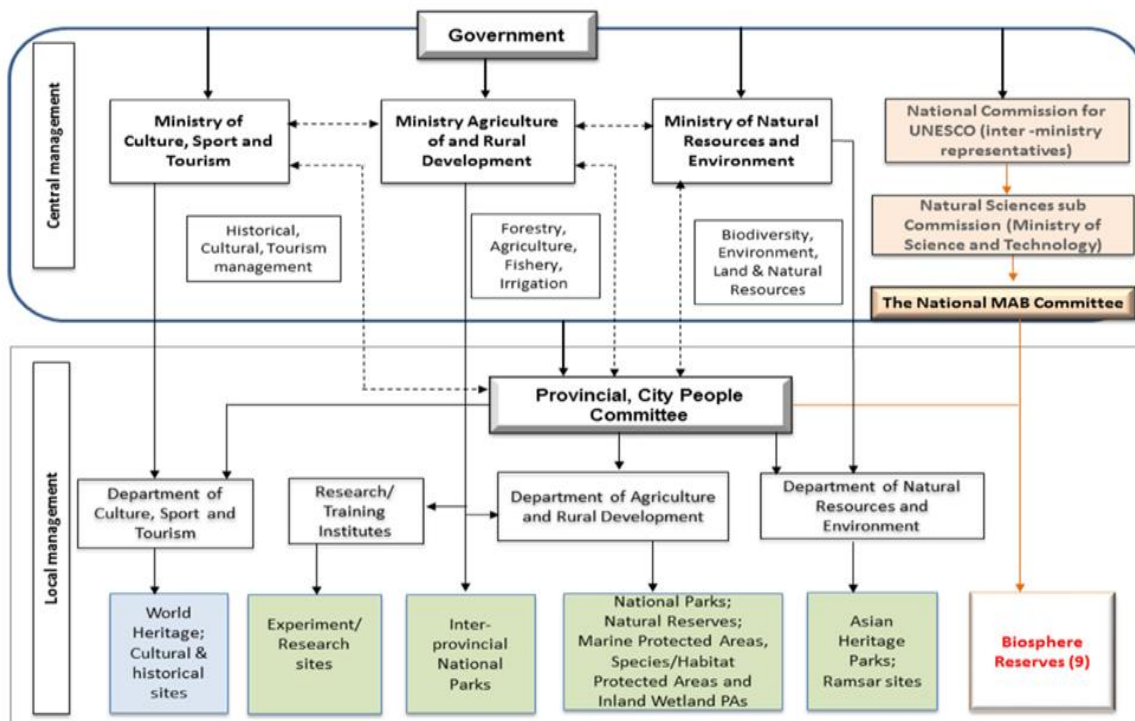


Figure-2: Vietnam BR Institutional Arrangements

2.3. Problems that the project seeks to address

Vietnam faces significant challenges in biodiversity management, primarily driven by overexploitation, habitat loss, fragmentation, and ecosystem degradation. These issues stem from changes in land use, infrastructure development, and environmental pollution, all of which contribute to the ongoing decline of various species and habitats. Additionally, climate change is increasingly recognized as a growing threat that is expected to compound existing pressures on biodiversity in the medium to long term.

In response, the GoV acknowledges the urgent need for a cohesive strategy that balances socio-economic development with biodiversity conservation, particularly in biodiversity-rich areas. One proposed solution is the implementation of integrated BR planning and management. However, several barriers currently impede progress towards this goal.

First, there is a notable **lack of an integrated framework for promoting sustainable development and biodiversity conservation within BRs**. As a relatively new concept, BRs had not been included in national biodiversity legislation, resulting in an absence of legal support for their management. This deficiency leads to the lack of a dedicated funding stream from the central government to sustain BR activities. Although the MAB National Committee has been established, it lacks the institutional power and operational capacity to enforce a coordinated approach. The absence of clear mandates for planning and management across BR landscapes means that each BR operates without uniform regulations, leading to fragmented and ineffective management efforts.

Second, **institutional structures and stakeholder capacities at targeted BR sites are ineffective at integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use into overall planning and management**. Current provincial socio-economic development master plans largely overlook biodiversity conservation, and sectoral plans, such as those for tourism and industry, often fail to account for potential environmental impacts. This situation is exacerbated by the continuous degradation of forests and a lack of capacity for sustainable forest management. Many communities within BRs rely on unsustainable practices for their livelihoods, resulting in inherent conflicts between conservation and development. This conflict is fueled by a lack of community-based conservation programs that promote sustainable practices and a significant absence of financial resources to support these initiatives.

Finally, there is **limited awareness among sector agencies, the public, and key industrial sectors regarding the importance of integrating landscape and seascape planning**. Although there is widespread acknowledgment of the need for such integrated approaches, there is little cross-sector vision for implementation, and capacity for leading these efforts is lacking. Major sector agencies, including those for forestry, agriculture, and tourism, manage resources based on individual sectoral interests, resulting in minimal collaboration. Despite having conducted a participatory process to identify biodiversity priorities articulated in the NBSAP, Vietnam lacks critical baseline data on ecosystems and species, which hampers effective stewardship. Furthermore, local communities often do not understand the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services, which undermines support for conservation efforts.

2.4. Immediate and development project objective and expected results

In response to the above, the main objective of the BR project is to “mainstream natural resource management and biodiversity conservation objectives into socio-economic development planning and management of BR in Viet Nam”. The project objective would be achieved through the implementation of 3 inter-related and mutually complementary components that will ultimately generate the following outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Regulatory and institutional framework to avoid, reduce, mitigate, and offset adverse impacts on biodiversity and reduced pressures on ecosystems in BRs in place.
- Outcome 2: Integrated multi-sector and multi-stakeholder planning and management operational in three BRs to mainstream PA management, sustainable resource use, and biodiversity-friendly development.
- Outcome 3: Knowledge management, monitoring, and evaluation support contribute to equitable gender benefits and increased awareness of biodiversity conservation

The following table summarized the project objective and outcomes, as well as the expected results for each component at TE stage.

Table-6: Expected Results

Project objective and expected outcomes	TE targets
Project Objective: To effectively mainstream biodiversity conservation and natural resources management objectives into governance, planning and management of socio-economic development and tourism in BRs	1.22 million ha effectively managed through participatory approaches
	(i) 2,500 households directly benefiting from sustainable natural resources management and improved and alternative livelihoods and incomes; (ii) 20% increased average incomes; (iii) 40% woman beneficiaries
	Progress towards institutionalization of multiple use and sustainable BR planning and management approaches as measured by National MAB Committee formalized, legally mandated and functional as coordination body
	9,350 direct beneficiaries; 756 women beneficiaries (40%) 17,157,547 tCO ₂ eq.
Outcome 1. Regulatory and institutional framework to avoid, reduce, mitigate and offset adverse impacts on biodiversity and reduced pressures on ecosystems in BRs in place.	Revised BD Law/Law on Environmental Protection (LEP); (ii) other instruments: 01 Decree Implementing the Law; (iii) guidelines clarifying BR nomination, planning and management submitted to be adopted
	Increase of institutional capacity as measured by a 30% increase in UNDP National and Provincial Capacity Development Scorecard of baseline values
	After the new LEP and BIA guidelines come into effect, at least 50% of newly-permitted development projects in the identified key sectors in 3 BRs that trigger requirement for environmental assessment integrates BIA guidelines
	20% increase in funding over baseline for BR management in 03 BR covered by the BR project
Outcome 2. Integrated multi sector and multi-stakeholder planning and management operational in three BRs that mainstreams PA management, sustainable resource use and biodiversity-friendly development	Average increase by at least 30 points in METT
	Areas for set-aside mapped, agreed with provincial governments and approved; 60,000 ha set-aside for non-exhaustive use (included within the BR buffer zone)
	4,000 ha of degraded forests (and other ecosystems) under improved restoration through assisted natural regeneration to improve connectivity.
	Maintained or improved populations of key species in BRs from current baseline values
	At least 50% of sampled hotel and tourism facilities (to be identified during the baseline assessment) within selected BRs adopt biodiversity-friendly certification standards
	1,945,829 ha of landscapes under sustainable management
Outcome 3. Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation contributes to equitable gender benefits and increased awareness of biodiversity conservation	At least 50% (of which at least 40% women) of sampled community members, hoteliers, tour operators and sector agency staff aware of potential conservation threats and adverse impacts of unplanned developments
	At least 8 new best practices demonstrated and lessons from project documented and disseminated and planning for replication in progress

2.5. Theory of Change

The original Theory of Change (ToC) in the project document did not fully capture the intermediate states needed to link the inputs, activities, and outputs to the desired outcomes and long-term impacts. In particular, the absence of clear intermediate steps made it challenging to understand the progression of change and how specific activities would lead to tangible results. As a result, we undertook a reconstruction of the ToC to ensure that each phase of the project was logically connected and that the pathway to achieving the project's goals was more transparent.

Reconstruction of the TOC

The reconstruction thus focused on identifying the intermediate states that bridge the gap between the immediate outputs and the long-term outcomes. These intermediate states are crucial because they highlight the processes that need to occur for the project's goals to be realized. Through this process, we explicitly outlined the key drivers and assumptions, which are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the activities and the realization of outcomes.

For example, the initial outputs (such as revised BD Law and LEP, ecosystem restoration, and the establishment of multi-sectoral planning platforms) needed to be tied to intermediate states, like the adoption of new regulations, increased stakeholder collaboration, and enhanced community awareness. These intermediate states are critical milestones that mark the transition from outputs to the desired final outcomes.

Key Intermediate States Identified:

1. **Regulatory and Institutional Capacity Building:** The revision of laws and guidelines, along with capacity-building activities, are expected to lead to an increased institutional capacity to manage biodiversity in the BRs. This creates an intermediate state where the regulatory framework is functional and institutions are empowered to enforce it.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration:** The establishment of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder planning platforms is an intermediate state that ensures continuous cooperation between different sectors (e.g., government, communities, private sector). This collaboration is necessary to integrate biodiversity conservation into broader development plans.
3. **Community Participation and Awareness:** The dissemination of best practices and the implementation of gender-sensitive M&E systems are expected to lead to increased community awareness and participation in sustainable practices. This intermediate state creates the necessary conditions for local buy-in, which is essential for the long-term sustainability of the project.
4. **Resource Allocation for Sustainable Management:** Increased funding for BRs management, alongside the operationalization of restoration activities, marks an intermediate state where financial resources are allocated to support the ongoing sustainability of the BRs.

By explicitly recognizing these intermediate states and linking them to the activities and outputs, the reconstructed ToC becomes a more comprehensive and actionable framework. It also allows for a clearer understanding of how the project will evolve over time, ensuring that stakeholders are aligned on the pathway to achieving the desired impacts.

If-Then Analysis Integration:

As part of the reconstruction, we used the If-Then analysis framework to further clarify the dependencies between activities, outputs, and outcomes. This approach helped us identify specific conditions under which the project is most likely to succeed. For example:

- If the BD Law and LEP are revised and implemented effectively, then a stronger regulatory framework will be in place, reducing pressures on ecosystems.
- If multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platforms are established, then integrated management practices will be adopted, leading to more sustainable outcomes in the BRs.

This If-Then analysis helped ensure that the reconstructed ToC was both logical and feasible, with clear links between actions, intermediate milestones, and final goals.

By reconstructing the ToC to include intermediate states, drivers, assumptions, and an If-Then analysis, we have provided a clearer, more actionable roadmap for the project. This updated ToC better captures the process of change and provides a solid foundation for monitoring progress and ensuring that all necessary conditions are met for the project to succeed in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into socio-economic development planning in Vietnam.

Reconstruction of the ToC with Driver and Assumption Analysis

Goal:

To mainstream natural resource management and biodiversity conservation objectives into socio-economic development planning and management of BRs in Vietnam, leading to improved ecosystem health, sustainable livelihoods, and enhanced biodiversity conservation.

Inputs:

1. Governmental and institutional support
2. Funding and resources from UNDP and co-financing partners
3. Technical expertise in biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource management, and climate change adaptation
4. Stakeholder involvement across multiple sectors
5. Existing regulatory frameworks
6. Baseline data on biodiversity and socio-economic indicators

Activities:

1. **Regulatory and Institutional Framework Development:**
 - Revision and strengthening of the BD Law and the LEP
 - Development of new guidelines for BR nomination, planning, and management
 - Capacity-building activities for national and provincial authorities
2. **Multi-sector and Multi-stakeholder Planning and Management:**
 - Establishment of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder planning platforms
 - Mapping and agreeing on areas for set-aside within the BRs
 - Support for ecosystem restoration and integration of biodiversity-friendly practices
3. **Knowledge Management and Monitoring:**
 - Collection and dissemination of knowledge and best practices
 - Regular monitoring using METT and other indicators
 - Gender-sensitive M&E systems to ensure equitable benefits

Outputs:

1. **Regulatory and Institutional Outputs:**
 - Revised BD Law, LEP, and guidelines adopted
 - Enhanced institutional capacity (30% increase in capacity score)
 - Established legal and institutional frameworks for biodiversity conservation
2. **Planning and Management Outputs:**
 - Signed agreements for setting aside 60,000 ha of BR buffer zones
 - 4,000 ha of ecosystem restoration completed
 - Sustainable practices in 1,945,829 ha of landscapes
 - 50% of tourism facilities adopting biodiversity-friendly standards
3. **Knowledge Management and Monitoring Outputs:**
 - 8 new best practices documented and shared
 - 50% of community members and stakeholders aware of biodiversity threats
 - Monitoring and evaluation reports produced, focusing on gender-sensitive indicators

Outcomes:

1. **Outcome 1: Regulatory and Institutional Strengthening:**
 - Legal framework for biodiversity conservation in place (BD Law/LEP)
 - Enhanced institutional capacity and formalized coordination body (National MAB Committee)

- Increased funding for BR management (20% over baseline)
- 2. **Outcome 2: Integrated Multi-sector and Multi-stakeholder Management:**
 - Operational multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder planning in BRs
 - 60,000 ha set aside for non-exhaustive use in BR buffer zones
 - 4,000 ha of degraded ecosystems restored
 - Key species populations maintained or improved
 - 50% of tourism facilities with biodiversity-friendly certification
- 3. **Outcome 3: Knowledge Management and Gender Inclusion:**
 - 50% of community members, tourism operators, and sector staff aware of conservation threats
 - 8 best practices replicated and shared
 - At least 40% of project beneficiaries are women

Impact:

- **Long-term Environmental Impact:** Increased biodiversity, restored ecosystems, and enhanced ecosystem services.
- **Socio-economic Impact:** Sustainable livelihoods improved local incomes, and enhanced climate resilience.
- **Institutional Impact:** Institutionalized multi-sectoral governance, mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into national development plans.

Drivers:

1. **Political Will:** Government commitment to enforcing revised legal frameworks and supporting biodiversity conservation.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Active participation of local communities, government agencies, and private sector partners in the project.
3. **Capacity Building:** Continuous investment in training and resources to strengthen institutional and community capacity.
4. **Funding Availability:** Continued financial support from UNDP, co-financing partners, and national sources.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Robust M&E frameworks that ensure accountability, transparency, and data-driven decision-making.

Assumptions:

1. **Regulatory Support:** The new BD Law and LEP will be adopted and enforced, leading to improved biodiversity conservation practices.
2. **Stakeholder Cooperation:** All stakeholders, including communities, government agencies, and the private sector, are willing to collaborate and engage in sustainable practices.
3. **Sufficient Resources:** Financial and technical resources will continue to be available for the successful implementation of project activities.
4. **Institutional Change:** Key institutions, such as the National MAB Committee, will be established, functional, and adequately resourced.
5. **Community Adoption:** Local communities will adopt sustainable practices and actively participate in the project.
6. **Gender Equity:** The project will effectively reach women and ensure their active involvement in all stages, from planning to implementation.

If-Then Analysis:

This analysis links key activities to their expected outcomes, helping visualize how drivers and assumptions shape the project's success.

Table-7: If-then analysis

If	Then
If the BD Law and LEP are revised and implemented effectively,	Then a stronger regulatory framework for biodiversity conservation will be in place, reducing pressures on ecosystems.
If multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder planning platforms are established and operational,	Then more integrated, sustainable management practices will be adopted across the three BRs.
If ecosystem restoration efforts (e.g., 4,000 ha of degraded ecosystems) are successfully carried out,	Then biodiversity in the BRs will be enhanced, and connectivity between ecosystems will be improved.
If funding for BR management increases by 20% over baseline levels,	Then the BRs will have more financial resources to sustain long-term biodiversity conservation and sustainable development efforts.
If 50% of community members and tourism operators become aware of conservation threats,	Then there will be greater community involvement in conservation practices, contributing to a more sustainable tourism sector.
If gender-sensitive M&E systems are implemented,	Then the project will be able to track and ensure equitable benefits for both men and women, leading to improved gender equality in biodiversity conservation efforts.
If the National MAB Committee becomes a functional, legally-mandated coordination body,	Then there will be more effective cross-sectoral collaboration and enforcement of biodiversity-related policies.

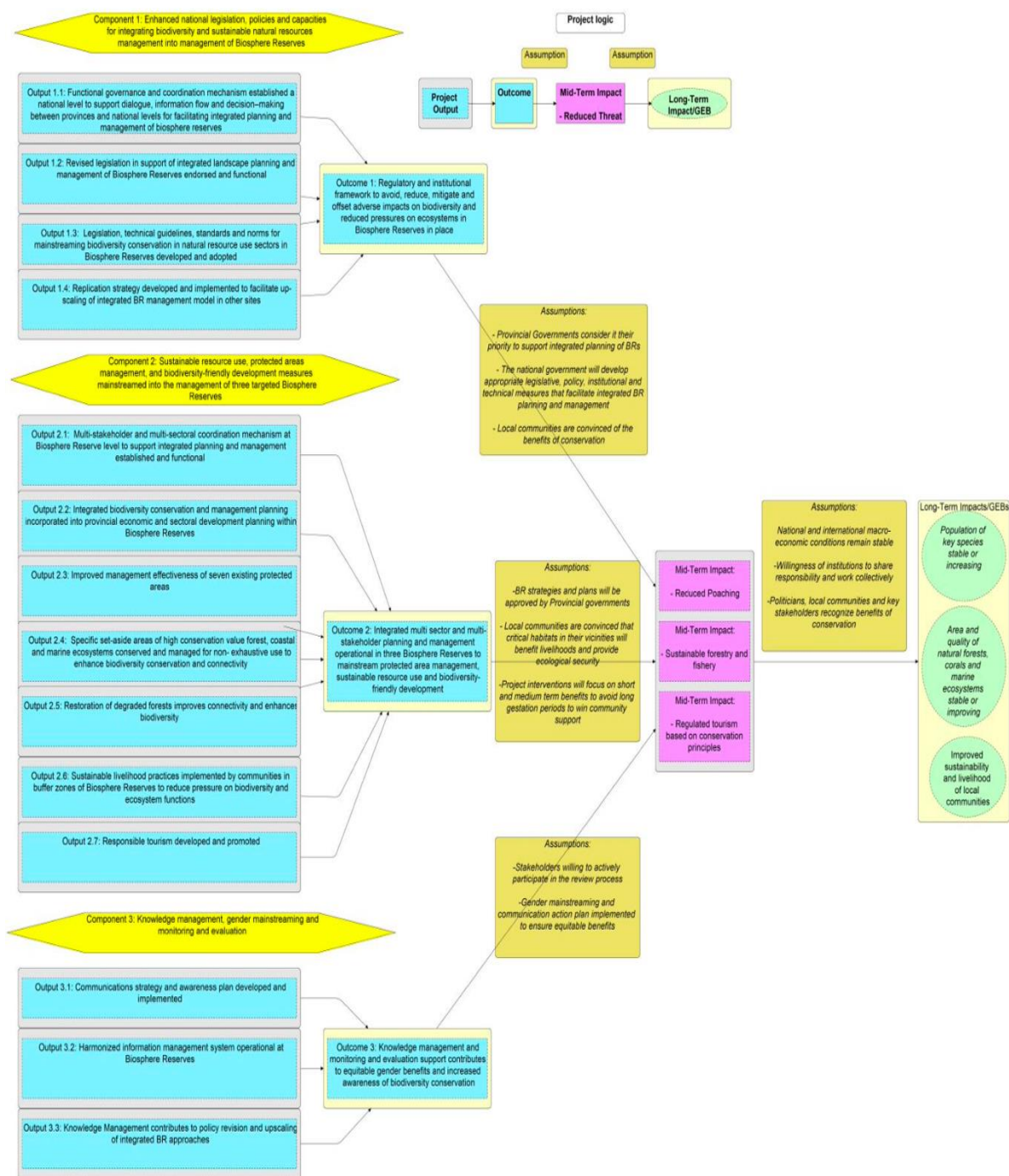


Figure-3: Project's ToC

2.6. Total resources

As outlined in the ProDoc, the initial project budgetary outlay was USD 43,198,222, comprising USD 6,600,000 from GEF resources, co-financing (confirmed at CEO Endorsement/Approval) of USD 1,000,000 from UNDP and USD 36,538,222 from involved governmental institutions, including: MONRE with USD 2,000,000; Quang Nam Province with USD 6,880,169; Dong Nai Province with USD 12,254,318, and Nghe An Province with USD 14,010,306.

2.7. Main stakeholders

In its design, the BR project involves a large number of stakeholders from the public and private sectors, NGOs and civil society. The characteristics of the main stakeholders and their roles or contributions related with the project are summarized in the following table as provided in the ProDoc:

Table-8: Key stakeholders

Key Stakeholder	Roles, responsibilities in the project and involvement mechanism
MONRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MONRE is the designated National Executing Agency (NEA) for the project. MONRE chairs the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and take a leading role in engaging national and local level stakeholders in implementing project activities. MONRE also lead annual review meetings on project planning and reporting and appraise and approve all project related documents, including annual work plans and quarterly work plans.
Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA)/Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA)/MONRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VEA is responsible for overall project implementation as Project Owner under delegated responsibility by MONRE. It is responsible for coordinating relevant stakeholders within VEA in support of the overall implementation of the project. VEA participates in annual review meetings, planning and reporting. BCA (also known as NBCA since November 2022) is responsible for day-to-day coordination and management of project activities at the national level and coordination of project activities at the provincial level, financial management and reporting as indicated in the work plan. BCA is also responsible for collaborating and liaising with other partners such as MARD, MOCST, MOST and its agencies, PPCs and DONREs, INGOs and VNGOs as well as other related projects.
National Assembly (NA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NA is a beneficiary of the project, outputs and results of which will inform legislative revisions in relation to BRs.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO is a recipient of the project outputs and outcomes, in support of its advisory role to the Prime Minister.
MARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MARD and its subordinate agencies including Vietnam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) and Directorate of Fishery (DoF) work in close cooperation with BCA(NBCA)/VEA to implement the project. MARD will collaborate in project activities to identify gaps, priority issues and solutions for sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation within the PA core zones of the BRs, including strengthening of PA management, identification of HCV set-aside forest and marine conservation areas, forest restoration in pilot BRs, as well as other capacity building and awareness raising activities
Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism (MoCST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOCST collaborates with the project to identify gaps and priorities in promoting bio-friendly tourism in BRs through development policy and legislation and models, as well as advisory on certification of tourism products and services
Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOST has the central role to coordination genetic resources conservation activities being conducted by relevant government organizations, research institutes, etc. MOST provides support in upscaling, dissemination and application of best practices and lessons learned in other BRs, as well as in developing proposals for expanding the BR network
Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPI is a beneficiary of the project results, specifically capacity building, training and policy advice on how to integrate land and natural resources use considerations into national and provincial planning procedures, strategies, and plans
Vietnam UNESCO National Man and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MAB National Committee provide consultation and information to support project implementation design. It is also one of the beneficiaries of

Biosphere (MAB) Committee	the project, targeted for strengthening their coordinating role in management of Vietnam's BR network through improved legal status, secretariat and relevant policies and guidelines developed
Provincial People's Committees (PPCs) in three pilot BRs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PPCs in pilot BRs and their subsidiary agencies participate in project implementation, providing information, support and co-financial contributions. The PPCs coordinate the activities of provincial departments and sectoral stakeholders, oversee implementation, management and monitoring of project activities in the respective pilot BR
District and Commune People's Committees (DPCs/CPCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPCs and CPCs are key project partners at the pilot BR site level, particularly in relation to implementing activities targeting at reducing threats to biodiversity arising from current economic development and livelihood practices. CPCs particularly participate in the commune conservation planning process and implementation of activities targeted at improving conservation outcomes as well as improved livelihood in selected communes and households
Provincial departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DONREs and DARDs participate in development of an integrated vision, mapping of natural resources and detailed planning of project activities, including HCV set-aside areas, forest restoration areas, EIA, guiding sustainable livelihood activities, including tourism. DPIs are beneficiary of project results, specifically related to integrated vision on land and natural resources use, sectoral responsibilities to mainstream biodiversity into strategies and planning in line with the BR concept. DOCSTs supporta tourism related initiatives, including certification, private-partnerships, and models for sustainable tourism practices
BR Management Boards (BR MBs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BR MBs of three pilot sites serves as co-implementation partners for project activities and establish the project implementation unit to support the BR MBs in implementing the project at the local level. The BR MBs are responsible for providing information and identifying priority issues at each site, for ensuring stakeholder coordination and involvement, and for planning and implementation of day to day activities in their respective BRs (including in core zones, buffer zones and transition zones), including the preparation of annual work plans, managing and reporting on grant proceeds, ensuring timely completion of activities and overall reporting to PPC, BCA/MONRE and UNDP on implementation issues and their resolution.
PA Management Boards (PA MBs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PA MBs directly involve in the planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities in their respective PAs, through providing information, identifying priority issues at each site, and participating in priority interventions on strengthening conservation of biodiversity in BR core zones, including through targeted livelihood activities as relevant. PA MBs also support strengthening conservation activities in identified HCV landscapes in BR buffer zones.
Local communities, ethnic minority groups and community-based organizations (CBOs), e.g. Farmers Associations, Fisheries Associations, Women's Unions, Youth Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communities, including CBOs, participate in the implementation of project activities and be direct beneficiaries of project investments in the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and in sustainable land, forest and fisheries management in BRs. In particularly, they will engage in: (i) preparation of commune conservation plans, including mapping of commune resources, identifying threats and responses to threats, identifying conservation and livelihood activities; (ii) the implementation of commune conservation plans, including relevant community groups and micro-revolving funds; (iii) training programs aimed at improving resource use and livelihood development, etc.

Research Institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities having forestry, agriculture, and conservation-related departments contribute through scientific knowhow and educational activities
National/local press and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project collaborate with national/local press and media on public awareness issues as well as project's results and best practices at the national level and in the three pilot BRs
Development Partners (DPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant DPs facilitate coordination and collaboration at national and BR landscape levels, to ensure convergence of ongoing programs
Local, national and international NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These NGOs all potential project partners in respect of co-financing, sharing experience, and providing technical support and consultations
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The private sector will collaborate in implementation of and support to responsible tourism initiatives, specifically certification and models for sustainable tourism products and services.
UNDP-Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roles and responsibilities of UNDP-Vietnam include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring professional and timely implementation of activities and delivery of reports and other outputs identified in the ProDoc. ○ Coordination and supervision of the activities, including ensuring alignment of the program with the UN's One-Plan for Vietnam. ○ Assisting and supporting VEA for organizing, coordinating and where necessary hosting all project meetings. ○ Responsibility for all financial administration to realize the targets envisioned in consultation with VEA. ○ Establishing an effective networking between project stakeholders, specialized international organizations and the donor community

2.8. How the TE fits within the context of other ongoing and previous evaluations

The MTR (2021) conducted in a hybrid mode (some site visits were done by the national consultant while the international consultant worked from distance and conducted online meetings) during Covid 19 provided a detailed analysis of the project's design, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. The MTR team reviewed essential documents, including the ProDoc, Results Framework, Inception Report, and GEF monitoring tools. The findings highlighted that, while the project was well-structured in terms of objectives and outcomes, weaknesses in the Results Framework hindered optimal project performance. Specifically, the framework did not comprehensively account for drivers—primarily focusing on negative ones like forest and biodiversity degradation—while missing positive drivers like stakeholder engagement and capacity building, which are vital for ecosystem restoration.

The MTR noted that the project's design included a logical structure with clear causal links between the main objectives, outcomes, and indicators. However, limitations in the Results Framework led to indicators that were overly complex, poorly aligned with actual outcomes, and unclear in distinguishing outputs from outcomes. For instance, some indicators intended as outputs, such as the establishment of a governance mechanism, were more appropriate as outcomes, reflecting broader impacts like enhanced decision-making and stakeholder involvement.

Although conducted at a rather early stage (after only 18 months from the actual implementation), the MTR also found that the project's administrative structure further constrained implementation. With multiple decision-making layers, time spent on planning, reporting, and administrative tasks outweighed time allocated for field activities. This overly complex setup delayed progress, a recurring concern among stakeholders. The Project Management Board was found to have an ambiguous role, oscillating between governance and execution. This structural bottleneck impacted efficiency, underscoring the need for streamlined governance and more targeted stakeholder engagement from the outset. This was reiterated during the current review. The terminal review reflected on the need for a technical oversight board along with the project board and steering committee focused on decision making. The absence of such led to MONRE PMU taking on all responsibility for drafting key documents - guidelines and legal documents and this led to a loss of ownership by key stakeholders i.e. MARD and MAB, provincial governments.

The MTR recommended refining the Results Framework and indicators for greater clarity and alignment with project goals. Suggested improvements (suggested changes to design and indicators were reflected in the MTR – See [Annex 14](#)) and these changes remain valid and included, although some of the MTR suggestions were reflected in the updated PRF post-MTR:

1. **Clarifying Outputs and Outcomes:** Outputs, like the establishment of governance mechanisms, should be distinct from outcomes, focusing on the immediate deliverables. Outcomes should capture broader impacts, such as improved decision-making.
2. **Revising Indicators:** Simplifying and clarifying indicators was essential, as several were too complex. For example, breaking down steps for a "national governance mechanism" could include stages like meeting frequency, developed frameworks, and institutionalized processes.
3. **Including Positive Drivers:** Emphasizing positive drivers, such as community engagement and institutional capacity building, could strengthen the ToC and ensure the project activities foster sustainable ecosystem restoration.
4. **Assessing Institutional Capacity:** Indicators should measure institutional capacity and stakeholder engagement quantitatively and qualitatively, enabling insight into gaps and progress areas.

The MTR concluded that, while the TOC was generally well-structured, adjustments would have improved its alignment with project realities. The inclusion of positive drivers and a more refined Results Framework could have bolstered project planning and implementation. The TE reaffirms the MTR's observations, noting proposed changes to the outputs². Regular reviews and adjustments to the Results Framework at inception and MTR stages are crucial for maintaining alignment with evolving project outcomes.

In summary, both the MTR and the TE underscore that the management needed to revisit governance structures, and monitoring frameworks at critical milestones and this would have enhanced efficiency and impact.

² The MTR recommended that the BR project should not include changes in legislation and policies as part of its expected outcomes, as these are entirely beyond the control of project management and often require a timeframe exceeding the project's duration. Furthermore, the project should focus on achieving a 20% increase in funding over the baseline specifically for the three target BRs rather than for all BRs in Vietnam. Additionally, the project should avoid setting a goal to increase the number of individuals of species monitored during implementation, as this number depends on monitoring points and trails, which can vary across different monitoring periods

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Project Design

3.1.1. Analysis of Design, Results Framework

The project's design exhibited a clear and logic structure, incorporating the necessary elements to achieve the expected results across different level of intervention (site and national). Its key strengths include: (i) a comprehensive problem analysis; (ii) a ToC with well-defined causality pathway; (iii) a strategic approach that effectively balanced biodiversity conservation with socio-economic development by embedding conservation principles within tourism and local development planning (iv) an explicit gender mainstreaming plan and (v) the use of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attributable/Achievable, Realistic/Relevant, Time-bound) objectives, supported by relatively clear indicators and targets.

The project's design, however, demonstrated several weaknesses, particularly in the results framework. Although the project design logically links objectives, outcomes, and indicators, it lacked an emphasis on positive drivers that could facilitate implementation(also see MTR analysis). Drivers mentioned in project documents primarily focus on negative influences, such as forest and biodiversity degradation, without exploring opportunities like local stakeholder participation and institutional capacity building. The review team identified the absence of participatory processes to define and leverage positive drivers as a missed opportunity, for example, what are the coordination platforms.

Structural inefficiencies also impede implementation. The project management structure includes multiple layers of decision-making that slow down planning, reporting, and supervision, leaving limited time for field activities. Confusion over the roles and responsibilities of the Project Management Board (PMB) was reported to have added to these challenges, with unclear distinctions between governance and execution functions. This ambiguity, combined with a cumbersome administrative structure, has contributed significantly to project delays.

The MRT findings were revisited during the TE, and it seems that little progress had been made to address the issues raised. The heavy administrative and reporting requirements, coupled with unclear management roles, continue to hinder implementation. Recommendations from the MTR emphasized the need to adapt the structure within the national framework and identify potential long-term policy changes. However, the structural inefficiencies remain largely unchanged, highlighting the challenges of navigating projects implementation within the existing system. The MTR suggested more pilot approaches to accelerate progress, including competitive funding for community-driven projects, private sector concessions for ecotourism, payment for forest ecosystem services using a watershed approach, and support for local certification initiatives. These options could have definitely helped balance short-term implementation needs with long-term systemic changes, but addressing the root causes of that short coming in the design remained critical and made this project as challenged to evaluate .

A central element of the project's strategy was its monitoring framework, which used a set of 15 mandatory indicators designed to track progress in key areas such as ecosystem management, livelihood improvements, institutional frameworks, and gender equality. While many indicators were well-defined and measurable (such as hectares under sustainable management), others lacked specificity. For example, the indicator on "positive changes in indicator species trends" needed clearer definitions to effectively track species over time, the indicator on "the adoption of biodiversity-integrated assessments (BIA)" was difficult to track because of their dependence on future legislative changes. Furthermore, some indicators, particularly those related to legislative reforms, were overly ambitious, given the project's timeline and the complex political landscape. In terms of relevance, most indicators aligned well with the project's goals, but some, like carbon sequestration metrics, were peripheral to the primary conservation objectives. Finally, time-bound indicators, such as METT capacity building scores, are challenged by the long-term nature of the capacity building and learning in general .

Additionally, the ambitious goals of aligning multi-level governance structures did not fully account for the political and institutional barriers that could impede progress, especially in regions like Dong Nai BR, where higher-level decision-making was critical for effective policy integration.

Another challenge was the complexity of the project's implementation. The multi-sectoral nature of the project, while important for addressing diverse issues, made coordination and resource allocation more difficult.

Finally, the lack of clear strategies for scaling successful practices beyond the demonstration sites limited the long-term impact of the project.

3.1.2. Assumptions and Risks

Main Finding: Over-Ambitious Scope and Complexity in the Adoption of the BR Approach in Viet Nam

This project was envisioned as a catalyst to showcase learning from site-level demonstration activities and generate good practices that could inform national guidelines and principles for sustainable biodiversity conservation and development. Through the BR model, the project aimed to integrate biodiversity conservation with sustainable development, refining the enabling environment, and embedding these lessons into policy frameworks for scale-up. While the project sought ambitious integration of these goals, challenges emerged—reflecting the complex evolution of the BR model and the need for deeper alignment with local contexts. The project's strategic focus on stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and integrated approaches demonstrated a clear intent to foster multi-level collaboration. However, the initiative highlighted the importance of realistic expectations, flexibility, and the need for adaptive strategies based on ground realities.

Assumption 1: Stakeholder Engagement as a Driver of Success

The project assumed that strong engagement with stakeholders—including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners—would lead to more effective planning and implementation. While some progress was made, the complexity of engaging multiple actors with diverse interests across BR sites was underestimated. Differences in priorities across provincial jurisdictions, as observed in Dong Nai BR, created fragmentation that hindered seamless collaboration.

Assumption 2: Capacity Building for Conservation and Economic Development

Strengthening local institutions and communities in sustainable resource management was another core assumption. While capacity building is essential, the project uncovered gaps in institutional capacity and resource availability. Many local institutions relied heavily on small, low-value grants primarily focused on forest protection, with limited exploration of alternative economic activities. Although efforts like goat and cow husbandry showed some positive outcomes, the project must balance the protection focus activities and with develop sustainable economic models linked to biodiversity. This highlighted the need to integrate **livelihood strategies with conservation efforts**, tapping into unexplored opportunities such as genetic resources or partnerships with local businesses. Moving forward, stronger collaboration with the private sector will be critical to creating sustainable livelihoods that align with biodiversity goals.

Assumption 3: Integrated Natural Resource and Forest Management

The project relied on integrated natural resource management to reduce environmental pressure while enhancing community livelihoods. The local BR governance structures successfully initiated discussions on integrated management, **local priorities and competing interests** and the adoption of sustainable practices. The finding emphasizes that future initiatives must always embed greater sensitivity to community needs and ensure **ongoing support and training** to foster buy-in from local stakeholders. Without continued capacity building and engagement, efforts to link biodiversity conservation with sustainable development will not happen.

Assumption 4: A Supportive Policy Environment for Implementation

Collaboration with government agencies, including MONRE, was identified as a crucial element for success. While the project made meaningful progress in engaging ministries, bureaucratic hurdles and misalignment in agency priorities posed obstacles to seamless collaboration. The **complexity of navigating multiple levels of government** hindered the creation of a cohesive policy environment. Despite these challenges, the groundwork laid by the project provides a valuable foundation for future efforts to achieve policy coherence. Strengthening coordination between government agencies will be essential for ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Assumption 5: Collaboration with Key Partners for Long-Term Success

The project aimed to foster strong partnerships with the MARD, the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program, and other key stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs). However, limited engagement with these critical partners missed valuable opportunities to showcase successful co-management practices and leverage these examples as models for broader application. The absence of a national-level coordination mechanism, such as an oversight committee, limited the project's ability to address coordination challenges, draw lessons from site-level co-management practices, and promote these successes as scalable solutions. In addition to the need for structured technical oversight, it is essential that the project actively demonstrates and documents

effective co-management practices. Highlighting these practices will build momentum for inclusive biodiversity conservation, encourage stakeholder buy-in, and drive the project's adaptive management approach.

Overall, this project offers critical insights into linking biodiversity conservation with sustainable development through the BR model. To maximize its impact, establishing a national coordination structure that includes technical working groups, project boards, and steering committees—engaging government, private sector, NGOs, and CSOs—is essential. Providing guidance from the national level to local communes will support consistency, showcase effective co-management, and encourage best practices. Documenting and communicating these experiences effectively will be vital for replicating successes across Vietnam. This will ensure that biodiversity conservation efforts are not only sustainable but also widely supported and scalable for long-term impact.

3.1.3. Lessons from other relevant projects incorporated into project design

Lessons learned from previous projects that informed the design and implementation of the BR Project, through interviews with UNDP and key stakeholders, that led to the rationale for this project design including the long experience of implementing GEF-supported projects in the natural resources and biodiversity conservation by both UNDP and MONRE. Most recently, the “Capacity Building for the Ratification and Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing in Viet Nam” (“ABS project”) was implemented from 2016-2021 and the “Conservation of Critical Wetland PAs and Linked Landscapes” from 2015-2021”, both by MONRE and UNDP.

1. Importance of a Comprehensive Legal Framework

- **Lesson:** Projects lacking a strong legal basis often face challenges in implementation. Future projects should advocate for clear legal frameworks that define roles, responsibilities, and financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation.
- **Application:** The BR Project prioritized the establishment of robust legal and regulatory frameworks that support the management of BRs and biodiversity objectives.

2. Need for Institutional Coordination

- **Lesson:** Weak institutional coordination can hinder effective project implementation. Past projects highlight the need for clear communication channels and defined roles among stakeholders.
- **Application:** The BR Project established a central PMU, provincial PIT, local BR – a strong coordination mechanism among governmental bodies, NGOs, and community stakeholders to enhance collaboration and streamline decision-making.

3. Integration of Biodiversity into Development Plans

- **Lesson:** Projects that integrate biodiversity conservation into socio-economic development plans are more likely to succeed. Previous projects often struggled with insufficient incorporation of biodiversity in local plans.
- **Application:** The BR Project ensured biodiversity objectives to be explicitly included in local and regional socio-economic development plans to minimize conflicts and promote sustainable practices. The project provides Guidelines for mainstreaming biodiversity into socio-economic plan; provincial stakeholder meeting on BR management; integrated approach in BR management plan, etc. Guidelines for mainstreaming biodiversity into socio-economic plan; provincial stakeholder meeting on BR management; integrated approach in BR management plan, etc.

4. Community Engagement and Ownership

- **Lessons:** Successful projects actively engage local communities, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for conservation efforts. Previous initiatives that overlooked community involvement faced resistance and implementation challenges.
- **Application:** The BR project implemented strategies for meaningful community participation, ensuring that local voices to be heard and integrated into decision-making processes.

5. Realistic and Measurable Objectives

- **Lesson:** Projects with overly ambitious objectives often face challenges in achieving their goals. Previous experiences suggest that setting realistic and measurable targets enhances accountability and progress tracking.
- **Application:** The BR Project developed clear, achievable, and specific indicators that reflect the project's scope, ensuring that progress could be effectively monitored and reported.

6. Financial Sustainability and Investment Strategies

- **Lesson:** Financial constraints have historically limited the success of biodiversity initiatives. Previous projects have shown the need for dedicated funding mechanisms and strategies to secure sustainable financing.
- **Application:** The BR Project should provide for the development of financing strategies, such as public-private partnerships or innovative funding mechanisms, to ensure long-term sustainability of conservation efforts.

7. Adaptive Management and Learning

- **Lesson:** Flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are crucial for project success. Previous projects that utilized adaptive management strategies were better equipped to handle unforeseen challenges.
- **Application:** The BR Project should thus be a hub for the incorporated adaptive management principles, allowing for iterative learning and adjustments based on ongoing assessments and stakeholder feedback.

8. Capacity Building

- **Lesson:** Building the capacity of local institutions and stakeholders is essential for long-term success. Previous projects emphasized the need for training and knowledge sharing.
- **Application:** The BR Project has included extensive capacity-building components aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of local partners, ensuring they are equipped to manage biodiversity conservation effectively.

3.1.4. Planned stakeholder participation

Main Finding: The project has successfully established a collaborative framework that integrates biodiversity conservation with sustainable development through multi-stakeholder engagement, demonstrating the value of partnerships among government agencies, local communities, and international organizations. However, challenges emerged due to the lack of formalized co-management³ structures and the limited involvement of key partners, which impacted the effectiveness of stakeholder participation and innovation. Additionally, while significant successes were achieved, there is an urgent need for comprehensive documentation and knowledge sharing to capture these collaborative approaches, ensuring that lessons learned can inform future initiatives. Enhancing local capacity and improving communication among stakeholders will be crucial for fostering sustainable outcomes in biodiversity management.

Sub findings:

- **Successful Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement:** This project was fundamentally designed as a collaborative effort, aiming to integrate biodiversity conservation with sustainable

³ **Co-management** refers to a collaborative governance approach where responsibility and decision-making for resource management are shared between government authorities and local stakeholders, including communities, NGOs, and private sector partners. This approach fosters joint accountability, promotes sustainable practices, and integrates diverse perspectives to achieve shared conservation and development goals. Hodge et al (2008), in the *Yellowstone Co-management*, describes it as “a dynamic and adaptive partnership that merges scientific knowledge with traditional practices, empowering local actors while maintaining overarching governance structures.” This concept is particularly relevant in the context of Biosphere Reserve (BR) projects, where the balance between biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods relies heavily on participatory governance and collective stewardship. By adopting co-management practices in the BR project, stakeholders such as local communities, MONRE, MARD, and international partners collaborate on critical aspects like biodiversity-friendly tourism, marine resource management, and ecosystem restoration, ensuring inclusive decision-making and sustainable outcomes

development through multi-stakeholder engagement. Notably, it achieved significant milestones in establishing a participatory BR network at both national and provincial levels. Effective collaboration occurred across various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and international partners, contributing to successful project execution. The project showcased the potential of diverse partnerships to enhance biodiversity outcomes while addressing socio-economic needs.

- **Need for Formalized Co-Management Structures:** Despite the successes in stakeholder collaboration, the project faced challenges due to the complexities arising from numerous stakeholders and existing institutional dynamics. A key finding was the lack of structured co-management of natural resource in BRs arrangements at the national level. While design efforts emphasized collaboration, the absence of a technical working mechanism hindered the development of critical outputs, such as the normative products for implementing the 2020 Environmental Law and MONRE's 2022 circular. Moving forward, it is crucial to formalize these collaborative efforts as a co-management practice through structured mechanisms, fostering partnerships that acknowledge local contexts.
- **Involvement of Key Partners and Financing Strategy Changes:** The project's design involved a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including MONRE, UNDP, MARD, and local actors, to align national priorities with international frameworks. However, the limited involvement of critical partners like MARD and MAB Committee weakened cross-sector synergies and reduced opportunities for innovation. The project's financing flow underwent a significant shift, moving from direct funding to provinces to a centralized model under MONRE, which, while enhancing financial accountability, restricted local autonomy and innovation.
- **Importance of Documentation and Knowledge Sharing:** The project highlighted successful collaborative approaches and stakeholder engagement. However, there is a pressing need to document these successes comprehensively to establish a knowledge repository that can be shared with future initiatives. By showcasing the effectiveness of this collaborative model, the project can serve as a reference for similar efforts, reinforcing the importance of participatory decision-making and multi-stakeholder engagement in biodiversity management.
- **Enhancing Local Capacity and Understanding Stakeholder Dynamics:** Engagement from local communities, government units, and various stakeholders was critical to the project's success. However, a nuanced understanding of local contexts and stakeholder dynamics remains essential. The complexities of engaging diverse groups within BR settings were underestimated, impacting the effectiveness of stakeholder participation. The lack of stakeholder engagement for the BR management (e.g. lack of NGOs, private sector or communities in the BR management board) is more because of the mindset of the state management rather than just the capacity of the stakeholder. Such a mindset is not yet open for non-state players to be involved. Enhancing the capacity of local institutions and communities is crucial to align capacity-building efforts with the realities of local governance structures and resources.

3.1.5. Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector

Evaluators learned that Viet Nam is hosting a suite of interconnected initiatives, each designed to address the unique environmental challenges faced by the country. These initiatives not only share a common vision but also complement one another through strategic synergies, enhancing their collective impact on local communities and ecosystems. For instance, most recently, the "Capacity Building for the Ratification and Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing in Viet Nam" ("ABS project") was implemented from 2016-2021 and the "Conservation of Critical Wetland PAs and Linked Landscapes" from 2015-2021", both by MONRE and UNDP.

At the forefront is the **GEF 6 Project**, formally known as "Mainstreaming Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of BRs in Vietnam." With a substantial budget of **\$6,660,000** and a focus on integrating biodiversity considerations into socio-economic planning, this initiative lays a solid foundation for the sustainable management of Vietnam's rich BRs. The project has established strong partnerships with the National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (NBCA) and the MONRE, ensuring alignment with national priorities and commitments to international biodiversity frameworks.

Complementing this flagship initiative are **six Local Value Grant (LVG) Projects** under the broader GEF 6 Project umbrella. With a combined budget of **\$900,000**, these projects involve grassroots

organizations, such as farmer unions and women's groups across various provinces. By empowering local stakeholders and promoting sustainable practices, these LVG Projects enhance community engagement and contribute to the overarching goals of biodiversity conservation.

Further bolstering Vietnam's biodiversity efforts is the **GEF 7 Initiative**, which comprises several pivotal projects, including the **Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support** and the **Sustainable Forest and Forest Land Management in Vietnam's Ba River Basin Landscape**. These initiatives, with budgets of **\$270,000** and **\$2,183,105** respectively, are designed to tackle critical challenges in forest management and biodiversity conservation, emphasizing a proactive approach to preserving Vietnam's natural resources.

Additionally, the **GEF 7 project focused on promoting wildlife conservation and responsible nature-based tourism**, budgeted at **\$7,150,000**, seeks to harmonize conservation efforts with economic development. By fostering responsible tourism practices, this initiative not only protects biodiversity but also provides sustainable livelihoods for local communities, demonstrating the potential for economic and environmental goals to coexist.

The **Global Biodiversity Framework Fund** is another essential component, scheduled to commence in **2025** with a budget of **\$5,150,000**. This initiative aims to support the update of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) while ensuring ongoing compliance with global biodiversity commitments. This is just a soft pipeline at this point.

Lastly, the **GEF-8 Umbrella Programme**, budgeted at **\$450,000**, represents a strategic effort to consolidate and update Vietnam's national reports, facilitating a comprehensive approach to biodiversity management.

Together, these initiatives form a cohesive network, reinforcing one another through shared objectives, resources, and stakeholder engagement strategies. By fostering collaboration among various implementing partners, including local government entities, NGOs, and community organizations, they ensure that biodiversity conservation is rooted in the local context and driven by those who are most affected.

Through continuous monitoring and evaluation, these linked initiatives not only respond to the immediate environmental challenges but also promote long-term sustainability and resilience in the face of future uncertainties. By learning from each project's experiences and successes, Vietnam is poised to lead the way in sustainable development, demonstrating that effective biodiversity conservation is not only necessary but achievable through integrated, community-driven efforts.

3.1.6. Gender responsiveness of project design

During the project design, a Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Action Plan was conducted.

The analysis showed that in Vietnam, women continued to face serious obstacles in their daily lives, including poverty, limited access to higher education and employment opportunities, as well as persistent discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and in three selected sites (West Nghe An BR, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR and Dong Nai BR), women played a critical role in both livelihood development activities (mostly from agricultural production, medicinal plant collection, forest product exploitation, organic farming, community eco-tourism, industrial agricultural tree plantation and homestay business) and resource conservation but had very limited role in decision-making on the livelihood choices and development for their families and were not often involved in training courses, social networks, local meetings or micro-credit systems, therefore, women had limited access to knowledges, skills or inputs to adapt their households and livelihood practices to enhance their own wellbeing.

The Mainstreaming Action Plan provided specific actions and recommendations to be integrated into the project design and implementation with clear management arrangement to: (i) strengthen women's capacities in policy/decision making, management, planning and implementation of BR related policies at central level; (ii) strengthen institutional capacity at all level on gender equality and women's participation in BR management, livelihood and sustainable use of natural resources; (iii) enhance capacity, skills and competence of women in technical aspects related to BR management, biodiversity conservation and livelihood promotion; (iv) promote women's participation in BR co-management and sustainable use of natural resources within three BRs; (v) promote women's roles in livelihood activities within three pilot sites; (vi) monitor and evaluate women's participation and their empowerment through the project interventions; (vii) enhance roles of women in implementation of the project; (viii) ensure high participation of women in project activities through innovative communication strategy and methods; Improve women's role in decision-making.

Gender equity was identified as one of the main objectives of the BR project as the project result framework included a gender specific output under Mandatory indicator number 1.3.2 (40% women beneficiaries).

3.1.7. Social and Environmental Safeguards

The project demonstrated effective management of social and environmental risks through the implementation of UNDP's SES and its SESP. These frameworks were integral to identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks linked to income-generating and resource development activities. The SESP ensured that investments were technically feasible, socially acceptable, environmentally sound, and aligned with an ecosystem-based management approach.

Key Safeguard Instruments

The project developed and implemented the following safeguard strategies:

- Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)
- Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF)
- Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Plan (GA/MAP)
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) with a functional Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)
- Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP)
- Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP)

Risk Assessment and Categorization

During project planning, the SESP categorized the overall project risk as **Substantial**, identifying key areas of concern, including:

1. Development of set-aside areas,
2. Forest rehabilitation,
3. Livelihood improvement initiatives, and
4. Community-based tourism activities.

Following consultations and fieldwork during implementation, this categorization remained unchanged, with four out of ten identified risks rated as substantial. These risks included potential adverse environmental impacts, economic displacement, and challenges with stakeholder engagement.

Risk Mitigation

To address these risks, the project deployed comprehensive safeguard measures tailored to each BR:

1. **West Nghe An BR (WNA BR):**
 - **Sustainable Practices:** The project introduced non-timber forest product (NTFP) models and sustainable ecotourism practices, ensuring environmental protection and community benefits.
 - **Capacity Building:** Local ethnic minority communities received training in sustainable agricultural practices and ecotourism. This approach avoided displacement and strengthened community resilience.
 - **Forest Protection and Resource Restoration:** Regulations were developed for sustainable resource use, including guidelines for forest conservation and ecosystem restoration.
2. **Cu Lao Cham-Hoi An BR (CLC-HA BR):**
 - **Biodiversity Conservation:** Native species nurseries and community-based conservation initiatives were established, protecting biodiversity in the Hoi An World Heritage Site and Cu Lao Cham archipelago.
 - **Stakeholder Engagement:** Regular consultations were held in Tan Hiep commune and Cu Lao Cham Island, ensuring participatory design and implementation of activities.

3. Dong Nai BR (DN BR):

- **Forest Rehabilitation:** The project restored 732 hectares of degraded forest and protected an additional 2,000 hectares through community-based approaches.
- **Livelihood Alternatives:** Sustainable forest management activities mitigated risks of economic displacement associated with conservation initiatives.
- **Resource Management:** Sustainable resource management plans minimized risks of overharvesting NTFPs and ensured equitable access to resources.

Stakeholder Engagement and Gender Inclusion

The project adopted a **participatory approach**, involving grassroots communities, ethnic minorities, NGOs, CSOs, and private sector entities in all phases of implementation. Evidence of this inclusive approach includes:

- Over **40% participation by women** in project activities, particularly in livelihood improvement initiatives, despite cultural and physical limitations.
- Development of gender-sensitive strategies aligned with local traditions, empowering women and reducing gender inequalities.
- Culturally appropriate interventions to uphold ethnic minority traditions and ensure equitable participation in project benefits.

Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)

The GRM, overseen by the MONRE, provided accessible channels for communities to report grievances. Evidence of its functionality includes:

- Multiple reporting channels available at no cost to stakeholders.
- Fair and transparent grievance resolution processes, supported by designated focal points.

Monitoring and Technical Support

The project was closely monitored by the PMU and co-implementing partners, with regular reporting to national focal points. UNDP Vietnam provided technical support and capacity building to ensure compliance with SES requirements. Site visits confirmed the presence of safeguards before activity implementation.

Outcomes and Evidence of Success

- In all BRs, the project obtained **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)** from ethnic minorities, ensuring culturally sensitive interventions.
- Risks categorized as substantial, such as economic displacement and overharvesting, were mitigated through participatory planning, sustainable livelihood initiatives, and targeted training programs.
- Over **732 hectares of forest** were rehabilitated, and community-based conservation models were adopted to safeguard biodiversity and enhance local ownership of natural resources.

Despite the substantial risk categorization, the project minimized adverse impacts through its small-scale, localized interventions and commitment to participatory planning. This approach allowed the project to adhere to SES principles while achieving sustainable outcomes for communities and ecosystems.

3.2. Project Implementation

3.2.1. Adaptive management

Main finding: Adaptive management is assessed as the ability to adjust the project design and implementation to adapt to changing political, regulatory, environmental and other conditions outside of the control of the PITs. It involves in a systematic, iterative approach to improving resource management by learning from outcomes and adjusting strategies based on new information and experiences. The BR project exemplified adaptive management principles through its responsiveness to emerging challenges and its commitment to continuous improvement, especially during and after the MTR phase.

Use of MTR for Adjusting Indicators

During the MTR, the PITs critically assessed progress against established targets, identifying areas that required recalibration to ensure the project's goals remained relevant and achievable. Key findings from the MTR highlighted both successes and challenges, prompting the following adjustments:

1. **Target and Indicators Realignment:** The MTR revealed that certain outputs and targets were too general given the project's context and capacity. In addition, changes to the logical framework i.e. indicators were suggested during MTR to allow for focus on mechanisms for coordination and engagement with communities that demonstrated higher readiness and capacity for participation. The changes made to the project's ToC during implementation have been instrumental in refining the design and supporting the PMU in effectively managing the project during its second half. The revisions addressed several key issues in the original design, which enhanced the clarity, measurability, and realism of the project's expected results, making it better aligned with both the project's capacity and its long-term goals. Below is a discussion of how these changes impacted the project's design and supported the PMU's efforts in the second half of implementation:

1. Improved Clarity of Outputs and Outcomes

One of the primary changes (refer to the separate TE Annex) was the distinction between outputs and outcomes, which had previously been confused in the original ToC. By clarifying this, the revised ToC set more realistic expectations for what the project could achieve within its given timeframe and resources. For example, the original focus on establishing governance and coordination mechanisms at the national level was adjusted to reflect that the project could only propose mechanisms, leaving their formal establishment to other authorities. Similarly, outputs such as "legislation endorsed" were adjusted to "proposal for legislation," which acknowledges that the endorsement is beyond the project's direct control.

This adjustment significantly helped the PMU in managing expectations and prevented the team from over-committing to outcomes that were outside their sphere of influence. It provided a clearer roadmap of what the project could realistically achieve, thus preventing resource waste on unrealistic targets and aligning stakeholders' expectations with actual project capabilities.

2. Increased Specificity and Measurability

The revised outputs and outcomes became more specific, incorporating clear targets and deliverables. For example, in the case of forest restoration, the output now specifies the number of hectares to be restored, rather than simply stating a goal of "restoration." Similarly, changes to livelihood practices now have defined targets, such as the number of communities involved in buffer zones for biodiversity (BD) conservation. These revisions made it easier for the PMU to track progress, measure success, and report on tangible results.

The clearer, more specific metrics also made it easier for the PMU to monitor progress, adjust activities as needed, and make data-driven decisions. This specificity helped the PMU in making adjustments to the implementation strategy in real-time, based on actual performance against the newly defined targets.

3. Alignment with Project Capacity and Resources

The project's design was adjusted to align more closely with its actual capacity, resources, and control. For instance, shifting from a goal of establishing national-level governance mechanisms to proposing them, and from endorsing revised legislation to proposing it, allowed the project to work within its realistic capacity. This helped the PMU avoid overextending resources on activities that would depend on external political processes, thus enabling the team to focus efforts on areas within their control, such as creating proposals, building relationships, and influencing stakeholders.

These adjustments helped the PMU avoid over-promising results that were beyond their reach, thus preventing frustration and confusion among stakeholders. The clearer focus on what was feasible allowed for better resource allocation, as well as a more targeted approach in the second half of the project.

4. Outcome-Oriented Focus for Long-Term Impact

By refining the outputs and focusing more on intermediate outcomes (such as improved dialogue and integrated planning), the project shifted from a focus on deliverables to a focus

on the broader impacts the project was aiming to achieve. These changes aligned with the project's long-term objectives of systemic change and sustainability in biodiversity conservation and resource management.

For the PMU, this shift made it easier to engage stakeholders on a strategic level, focusing not just on short-term outputs, but on the deeper, more meaningful impacts of integrated biodiversity management. It also allowed for better alignment with national and provincial development goals, ensuring that the project remained relevant and influential beyond its immediate deliverables.

5. Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The clearer, more specific outputs and outcomes also supported better stakeholder engagement and communication. By defining more specific targets (such as the number of stakeholders to be engaged, or the number of communities to implement sustainable livelihood practices), the PMU was able to measure and report more effectively on its engagement efforts. This was particularly important for building relationships with local communities, governments, and other stakeholders whose involvement was crucial for the success of the project.

Moreover, the revised ToC included a more detailed communication strategy, which helped the PMU improve its messaging and outreach efforts. The focus on clear deliverables for awareness-raising and information dissemination allowed the PMU to ensure that stakeholders were well-informed and could track progress, ultimately fostering stronger collaboration and support for the project.

6. Strengthened Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

With the revisions providing clearer outputs and outcomes, the project's monitoring and evaluation efforts became more streamlined. The revised ToC provided a clearer basis for M&E by establishing measurable, outcome-focused targets. This improved the PMU's ability to track progress effectively, conduct mid-course corrections where needed, and assess whether the project was on track to meet its long-term goals.

The revised ToC also helped the PMU define the information needed to report accurately to donors, stakeholders, and the broader project team, ensuring that data collection efforts were more aligned with the project's objectives.

7. Risk Management and Adjustments

By revisiting the project's assumptions and outputs, the PMU was reportedly more equipped to identify potential risks and make timely adjustments to its strategy. The revision process post MTR led to a clearer understanding of what was under the project's control and what depended on external factors (such as political processes or external legislation). This understanding allowed the PMU to anticipate risks related to stakeholder buy-in, external delays, and changing political landscapes, and to mitigate these risks by focusing on aspects of the project within their control.

- 2. Incorporating Feedback:** In response to the MTR, the project implemented regular community meetings and feedback loops, ensuring that local voices were heard and integrated into project planning and execution.
- 3. Resource Allocation:** The review underscored the necessity for reallocation of resources to areas demonstrating higher impact potential. For example, the project shifted funds from grant under LVGs (with a total of \$ 890,000) to enhance investment budget for set-aside area (\$240,000) and forest restoration (\$650,000)

Role of UNDP in Procurement

Recognizing the challenges posed by slow procurement processes, the UNDP played a crucial role in facilitating the timely implementation of the project. UNDP assisted in streamlining procurement procedures, ensuring that necessary goods and services were acquired promptly. Their support enabled the successful implementation of the first contracts, allowing the project to maintain momentum and deliver essential activities on schedule.

Day-to-Day Management Strategies

Incorporating adaptive management into day-to-day operations was essential for fostering resilience and responsiveness throughout the project. Several strategies were employed:

- **Continuous Monitoring:** A monitoring framework was established to track progress against revised targets regularly and included quarterly assessments but evaluators found it could have been better on the community engagement metrics and biodiversity indicators, i.e. allowing for timely adjustments based on real-time data.
- **Flexible Planning:** The project adopted a flexible planning approach, permitting adjustments to activities as new insights emerged. For instance, when unforeseen environmental changes impacted habitat restoration efforts, the team quickly revised their strategies to focus on alternative restoration sites, ensuring continued progress.
- **Stakeholder Workshops:** Regular stakeholder workshops were conducted to facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. These workshops served as platforms for discussing challenges and successes. These could have been improved as Knowledge and learning sessions to enable stakeholders to collectively brainstorm solutions and adjust implementation strategies based on shared experiences.
- **Documentation of Lessons Learned:** The project could have better prioritized a focus on documenting lessons learned from both successes and failures. This documentation was shared with all stakeholders, creating a repository of best practices that could inform future initiatives and foster a culture of continuous learning.

Through adaptive management and lessons learned, supported by UNDP's facilitation of procurement processes, the project navigated challenges and enhanced capacity to achieve its objectives. However, it could have placed a stronger emphasis on the catalytic aspects of knowledge and learning, as the intervention was intended to build capacity through a learning and sharing approach. The integration of MTR findings into daily operations helped the project remain partially aligned with the evolving needs of stakeholders and the dynamic environmental context.

3.2.2. Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements

The project has involved a diverse range of stakeholders during the project implementation, including relevant government institutions at both central and local levels, private sector organizations, academia, civil society organizations along with other relevant institutions. The following table summarizes the actual roles and participations of various stakeholders:

Table-9: Actual stakeholder participation

Key Stakeholder	Role and participation in project implementation
MONRE and its constituent authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MONRE is the designated National Executing Agency (NEA) for the project. MONRE chairs the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and take a leading role in engaging national and local level stakeholders in implementing project activities. MONRE also lead annual review meetings on project planning and reporting and appraise and approve all project related documents, including annual work plans and quarterly work plans
Vietnam Environment Administration (VEA)/Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA)/MONRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VEA is responsible for overall project implementation as Project Owner under delegated responsibility by MONRE. It is responsible for coordinating relevant stakeholders within VEA in support of the overall implementation of the project. VEA participates in annual review meetings, planning and reporting. • BCA (also known as NBCA since November 2022) is responsible for day-to-day coordination and management of project activities at the national level and coordination of project activities at the provincial level, financial management and reporting as indicated in the work plan. BCA is also responsible for collaborating and liaising with other partners such as MARD, MOCST, MOST and its agencies, PPCs and DONREs, INGOs and VNGOs as well as other related projects.
Department of Forestry (DOF) (under MARD)/Division of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOF (earlier known as Vietnam Administration of Forestry or VNFOREST) and its subordinate agency as Division of Protection and Special Use Forest joined in BR project as a member of PMU. However, the role of DOF

Protection and Special Use Forest	is not clear (especially in the later stage of the project) and the influence of DOF on technical guidelines related to forest management and biodiversity conservation within PA core zones of the BRs developed by the BR project is negligible.
Vietnam UNESCO National Man and Biosphere (MAB) Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under a redesigned institutional arrangement, the MAB National Committee will provide consultation and information to support project implementation design. However, the MAB Committee has limited influence over the MONRE's and BR project's activities, not been fully involved in the project outputs and limited access to all BR project materials, including guidelines for the implementation of BRs at three selected sites. MBA Committee has only joined some activities of BR project such as development of guideline for preparing 10 year periodic review of BR operation in Vietnam.
Provincial People's Committees (PPCs) in three pilot BRs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nghe An, Quang Nam and Dong Nai PPCs participate in project implementation, providing institutional arrangements, overall direction, information, support and co-financial contributions. These PPCs have coordinated the activities of provincial departments and sectoral stakeholders, overseen implementation, management and monitoring of project activities in the respective pilot BR in their provinces
District and Commune People's Committees (DPCs/CPCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPCs and CPCs are key project partners at the pilot BR site level, particularly in relation to implementing activities targeting at reducing threats to biodiversity arising from current economic development and livelihood practices. CPCs has particularly participated in the commune conservation planning process and implementation of activities targeted at improving conservation outcomes as well as improved livelihood in selected communes and households
Provincial departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DARD is the primary technical government partner of this project at the pilot BR level, with key partner support being provided by DONRE. Both DONRE and DARD staff have participated in the BR Management Board, and as such in development of an integrated vision, mapping of natural resources and detailed planning of project activities, including HCV set-aside areas, forest restoration areas, EIA, guiding sustainable livelihood activities, including tourism
BR Management Boards (BR MB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BR MBs of three pilot sites serve as co-implementation partners (CIP) for project activities under Component 2 and establish the project implementation unit to support the BR MB in implementing the project at the local level. The BR MBs is responsible for providing information and identifying priority issues at each site, for ensuring stakeholder coordination and involvement, and for planning and implementation of day to day activities in their respective BRs (including in core zones, buffer zones and transition zones), including the preparation of annual work plans, managing and reporting on grant proceeds, ensuring timely completion of activities and overall reporting to PPC, BCA/MONRE and UNDP on implementation issues and their resolution.
PA Management Boards (PA MBs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within the three pilot BRs, PA MBs have directly involved with the planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities in their respective PAs, through providing information, identifying priority issues at each site, and participating in priority interventions on strengthening conservation of biodiversity in BR core zones, including through targeted livelihood activities as relevant. PA MBs have also supported strengthening conservation activities in identified HCV landscapes in BR buffer zones.
Local communities, ethnic minority groups and community-based organizations (CBOs), e.g. Farmers Associations,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communities, including CBOs, have participated in the implementation of project activities and be direct beneficiaries of project investments in the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and in sustainable land, forest and fisheries management in BRs. Specifically, they have engaged in: (i) preparation of commune conservation plans, including mapping of commune resources, identifying

Fisheries Associations, Women's Unions, Youth Unions	threats and responses to threats, identifying conservation and livelihood activities; (ii) the implementation of commune conservation plans, including relevant community groups and micro-revolving funds; (iii) training programs aimed at improving resource use and livelihood development, etc.
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vietnam National Forestry University, Ho Chi Minh Nong Lam University, Nha Trang Institute of Oceanography, Northern Forest Inventory and Planning Institute, Research Institute for Forest Ecology and Environment (under Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences) and other academia organizations have joined the BR project as consultation service suppliers, contributing to the development of forestry, agriculture, terrestrial/marine biodiversity conservation related guidelines and implementation of forest restoration, forest zoning for natural regeneration and livelihood development, etc.
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The private sector cooperates with the BR project in implementation of and support to responsible tourism initiatives (specifically certification and models for sustainable tourism products and services) and organic agriculture production. This role needs more visibility in the decision making forums at the BR level.
UNDP-Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roles and responsibilities of UNDP-Vietnam include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring professional and timely implementation of activities and delivery of reports and other outputs identified in the ProDoc. Coordination and supervision of the activities, including ensuring alignment of the program with the UN's One-Plan – now UN's Cooperation Framework - for Vietnam. Assisting and supporting VEA for organizing, coordinating and where necessary hosting all project meetings. Responsibility for all financial administration to realize the targets envisioned in consultation with VEA. Establishing an effective networking between project stakeholders, specialized international organizations and the donor community

Overall, the project has been effectively in coordinating and building coherent partnerships among different organizations and parties, particularly at local level. Key ministries, including MARD, MOST, and the MAB Committee, were not fully engaged at the national level while private sector was not present in board meeting at the sub national level which was mostly discussion of government and selected vetted participations.

3.2.3. Project Finance and Co-finance

The project had a total planned project cost of USD 43,198,222. However, the project reported a total of USD 58,412,437 mobilized by the TE stage (1,32 times higher than planned). Co-financing has largely come from provinces' contribution, particularly Nghe An province, through parallel programs and investments in biodiversity conservation (see **Table 10**).

Table-10: Confirmed sources of Co-financing at TE stage

Co-financing (type/source)	UNDP		MONRE		Nghe An Province		Quang Nam Province		Dong Nai Province	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Cash (USD)			400,000	460,087	113,500	103,860	128,755	28,177		
Grants (USD)	1,000,000	1,483,422	1,891,169	1,891,160	13,896,806	24,109,276	6,487,014	5,866,627	12,245,318	11,870,132
In-kind support (USD)			102,260	102,260						
Total (USD)	1,000,000	1,483,422	2,000,000	2,460,535	14,010,306	32,564,088	6,615,760	5,894,795	12,254,318	11,870,132

Within GEF resource, as of November 2024, the project reports that 97 percent delivery, leaving quite small amount of funding for 2025. This is great effort of the UNPD CO and PMU in accelerating implementation to deliver the project as at the time of the 2024 PIR reporting (30 June 2024), the cumulative financial delivery of the project was reported at approximately 65% of the total approved budget.

The distribution of spending over the years shows a varied allocation, with the highest expenditure observed in 2023 (21% of the total budget), followed by 2024 (41%, when combining Q1-Q3 and QWP4). This indicates a strong focus on the final phase of the project, likely reflecting both the consolidation of previous activities and the preparation for final deliverables.

The spending in 2022 and 2021 reflects the foundational work and early operational efforts, with gradual increases in 2022 (17%) and 2021 (13%). A notable proportion of the 2024 budget (26%) is earmarked for QWP4, which includes salary and ISS payments, further underlining the importance of operational costs in the final stages.

The anticipated budget for 2025 (3%) is relatively low compared to the preceding years, likely due to the winding down of the project and preparation for final reporting.

Overall, the project has adhered closely to its financial projections, with a clear focus on executing and finalizing the initiatives in the later stages, ensuring that the set goals are met before project closure.

Regarding financial management, the project has been annually audited according to UND HACT audit policies on NIM project, based on the Micro Assessment results. The final audit is underway at the time of this TE report is prepared.

Project finance and co-financing, however, were generally not well-documented due to the management divide between UNDP and the PMU, as well as between the PMU and the PITs.

Table-11: Project Budget Spending by Year

Year	Sub-total (in USD)	% of Total Budget	Source
2020	258,767.75	4%	CDR 2020
2021	896,723.93	13%	CDR 2021
2022	1,161,358.55	17%	CDR 2022
2023	1,374,117.15	21%	CDR 2023
2024	1,029,680.44	15%	CDR Q1-Q3
2024	1,729,352.18	26%	QWP4
2025	210,000.00	3%	Draft QWP1/2025
Total	6,660,000.00	100%	

3.2.4. Monitoring & Evaluation

The M&E design at entry: The M&E framework was described in detail in Section VII of the Project Document. Accordingly, it comprises standard M&E items for UNDP-GEF project such as the Inception Workshop and Report, GEF Project Implementation Report (PIR), meeting minutes of the PSC, audit, Independent Mid-term Review (MRT), UNDP-GEF Focal Area Tracking Tools, Terminal Evaluation and Final Report. Annex 12 of the Project Document includes a monitoring plan that defines data collection process for the defined indicators in the PRF including data collection methods, frequency, means of verifications, assumptions and responsibility of data collection. Annex 13 of the Project Document covers on the evaluation plan (MRT and TE). The M&E framework, however, does not address the exit strategy. While it is not a standard UNDP-GEF requirement, an exit strategy is highly necessary to ensure continuity between the project's ending and the post-project period. It is particularly important for formally establishing post-project arrangements with MONRE/VEA to sustain the delivery of the sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity conservation program. In addition, some refinements to some indicators particularly for establishing coordination platforms and incentivizing knowledge sharing between projects during implementation could have improved its practicality.

M&E plan implementation: In the Inception phase, an 1-day Inception Workshop was organized on October 27, 2020, in Hanoi to refamiliarize stakeholders with the project's objectives, outcomes and performance indicators as well as to establish a shared comprehension among UNDP, UNEP, PMU, PITs in regards of each partner's roles and duties. Meanwhile, the Project Steering Committee (PSC)

was established in May 2020 and met for the first time in 2022 and since then, it has been regularly held twice per year. In total, the PSC met 4 times since the launch of the project and has been providing strategic support on oversight based on the progress made. The SPS meeting highlighted a focused effort on extending the project to further its impact in improving sustainable nature resource management and biodiversity conservation. These meetings addressed critical operational aspects such as enhancing stakeholder engagement, coordination mechanisms and financial sustainability. The PSC's decision on the proposal to extend the project duration (no later than Feb 2025) highlights the commitment to overcome existing challenges and close the project on time.

The project submitted 4 PIRs in total, the first one was in 2021. For each indicator, the PIR has presented brief details on what has been achieved and the scope of key deliverables and their impact, other parts of the PIRs were generally detailed to monitor the performance of the project.

The project commissioned a MTR in early 2022 (1 ½ year after initiation of the project activities). The MTR offered a total of 6 recommendations aiming at corrective action for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. In response, the PMU prepared a "Revised Strategic Result Framework and Summary of the Changes by the MRT" to partly address the MTR's recommendations.

The GEF core indicators were carried out during the project development and were updated at the MTR state and end of the project (see [Annex 12](#)) as part of this TE.

The evaluators had access to all reports submitted to date. However, the format in which the data and information were presented required careful review and navigation to extract relevant evidence. The 2024 outputs and reports (particular financial documents) also need to be fully updated for better monitoring and assessment.

Table-12: Monitoring & Evaluation Rating Table

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	S
M&E Plan Implementation	MS
Overall Quality of M&E	MS

3.2.5. UNDP implementation/oversight and Implementing Partner execution, overall project implementation/execution, coordination and operational issues

The BR project was implemented under UNDP's National Implementation Modality (NIM). As the GEF Implementing Agency, UNDP holds ultimate responsibility to the GEF Secretariat and Council for the appropriate use of GEF financial resources, as well as for any cash co-financing managed through UNDP accounts. In this project, UNDP-Vietnam has been responsible for the following: (i) Ensuring the professional and timely implementation of activities, as well as the delivery of reports and other outputs specified in the ProDoc; (ii) Coordinating and supervising activities to ensure alignment with the UN's One-Plan for Vietnam; (iii) Assisting and supporting VEA in organizing, coordinating and where necessary hosting project meetings; (iv) Managing all financial administration in consultation with VEA to achieve the project's targets; and (v) Establishing an effective networking among project stakeholders, specialized international organizations and the donor community. UNDP

The Implementing partner for this project is the MONRE, particular VEA and NBCA, which is in charge in managing the project, including the monitoring and evaluation of project interventions, achieving project outcomes and for the effective use of UNDP resources.

Overall, discussions with informant stakeholders indicated strong appreciation for UNDP's role and the technical and support services it provided throughout the project's implementation. NBCA was also appreciated by its responsibility in effective execution of activities, maintaining strong stakeholder engagement and managing risk efficiently but some challenges in inter-agency coordination persisted and some delays in its recruitment and procurement process have caused delays in some project activities and outputs.

Table-13: UNDP's implementation rating table

Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	S

Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	MS
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	S

3.2.6. Risk management and Social and Environmental Standards

As mentioned above, UNDP's SES screening was carried out at design so that project programming would minimize social and environmental risks. In addition, the SESP analysis was carried out for ensuring that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts would be avoided, minimized, mitigated and managed. The SESP allows the project to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. With specific risk management measures laid out in the SESP, the project can be ready to respond when needed.

Table-14: Risk management

Project risk	Risk assessment	Risk management measure
Risk 1: Human right - Lack of government and/or Community Capacity to meet Obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to legislation, policies, and guidelines requires the involvement and support of both government and communities – there may not always be sufficient knowledge or capacity in these groups • Policymakers and other key stakeholders do not understand the value of BRs or support their function as a framework for landscape level conservation and sustainable development • Changes in land use, including use of natural resources, could result in some communities having restricted access to areas previously available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BR project supported to revise LEP and contributed to the development and approval of Decree 08/2022/ND-CP to clarify roles and responsibilities of key sector and stakeholders, including formal legal status for BRs • Awareness raising to generate political and public support by implementation of Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy and action plans • Identify capacity building needs through a needs assessment of government and local communities • Tailor training activities to meet specific requirements of the different stakeholders and ensure that they have the skills to participate in relevant aspects of the project • Training for communities participating in sustainable natural resource management, forest restoration and livelihoods • Extensive stakeholder engagement – implementation of the SEP, Framework for Participatory Landscape Planning and Management for BRs, Framework for Planning, Implementation & Monitoring of Commune Conservation Plans • Implement the Monitoring Plan
Risk 2: Gender and Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and other vulnerable people may not be fully involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the project interventions and getting benefits from such initiatives, rather landowners and other influential persons may have more control on local level decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and seek to reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over resources and the benefits of development. • Sub-projects will ensure that both women and men are able to participate meaningfully and equitably, have equitable access to project resources, and receive comparable social and economic benefits. • Sub-projects will not discriminate against women or girls or reinforce gender-based discrimination and/or inequalities. • Sub-projects will ensure precautionary measures are in place to prevent potential exposure of beneficiaries, workers, and

		<p>affected people to sexual exploitation and abuse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-projects will ensure precautionary and control measures are in place to prevent potential exposure of beneficiaries, workers, and affected people to health and safety hazards. • Implement the Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Action Plan
Risk 3: Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction of new legislation or policies could have unintended adverse impacts. This could give rise to grievances or objections from affected stakeholders. • There is also potential for stakeholders to not fully participate in decisions affecting them (i.e. legislative/policy changes) • Some alternative livelihoods, restoration of forest and marine resources can have long gestation periods which can undermine community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework for Participatory Landscape (and Seascape) Planning and Management for BRs • Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) - prior to enactment of new legislation/policies to evaluate the effect of policy/legislation changes on a broad, cross-sectoral basis with the aim of making 'upstream' development decision making more sustainable • Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy • SEP and GRM to provide a mechanism for stakeholder to raise and seek resolution of objections. • Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework • Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Action Plan
Risk 4: Biodiversity and natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project interventions on biodiversity conservation, sustainable harvest of non-forest products, livelihood improvements and improved fisheries activities could occur within and adjacent to PAs and critical habitats • The project includes reforestation, harvesting non-timber products and aquatic species that could impact on the status and health of such populations • Alternative livelihoods, such as tourism operations within BRs could result in adverse impacts, such as loss of habitat to infrastructure, traffic, noise, waste, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Framework for Planning, Implementation and Monitoring of Commune Conservation Activities – mapping BRs and avoidance of adverse areas and screening of investments. • ESMF – investment screening process to ensure that they comply with sound social and environmental principles. • Planning and Management of High Conservation Forests and Set-Asides– mapping of resources, agreements on use of native species, and setting of harvesting limits • Stakeholder Engagement Plan • Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework • Monitoring Plan – Alternative Livelihood Plans and Commune Conservation Plans would set harvests within acceptable sustainable limits and status of populations monitored throughout the project period
Risk 5: Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disasters and climate change may affect the implementation and results of project initiatives. • Reforestation and harvesting of natural resources are exposed to climate and disaster risk. • Developments, such as eco-tourism can increase exposure to climate and natural disasters • The gestation time for reforestation/restoration of natural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEP and Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy to improve awareness of climate and ensuring measures to improve climate resilience • Participatory planning processes to ensure alternate livelihoods consider and factor in climatic and natural disaster conditions and • ESMF outlines procedures for screening potential investments developed as part of the Commune Conservation Planning. • Emergency Response Plans

	<p>areas and some alternative livelihoods can be quite long, thereby increasing the chance of them being impacted by a climatic or natural disaster before the benefits are fully realized</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring Plan: The condition of the natural ecosystems would be monitored to ensure that activities do not damage these sensitive ecosystems so that it is in a better overall situation to manage climate changes.
<p>Risk 6: Displacement and resettlement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zonation – re-zonation could result in restricted access to land and natural resources. Creation of new set asides or PAs and improved zoning of the BRs for multiple different uses, community rights of access may be restricted in specific areas. This could result in economic displacement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of advice/recommendations to ensure any changes in legislation/policy do not have unintended consequences • Stakeholder Engagement Plan and GRM - Carry out community consultation on the purpose and benefits of making changes to land use • Framework for Participatory Landscape Planning and Management and - Participatory Framework for planning, implementation and monitoring of Commune Conservation Activities will delineate areas to be set asides in a manner to avoid limitations on existing community resource use rights and access and ensure that decisions regarding restrictions, if any, on resource use will not be imposed, but will involve through an informed, transparent and consultative community consensus building process, and any restrictions, if any will be adequately compensated to match or exceed loss of incomes or livelihoods • Planning and Management of HCVF and Set-Asides – establish non-consumptive use set asides planned and managed under community governance mechanisms. • IPPF and subsequent IPPs if required. • ESMF for screening of project investments • Alternative Livelihood Plans
<p>Risk 7: Indigenous People</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to legislation could have impacts on ethnic minorities (both intended and unintended). • Zonation or re-zonation of BRs could result in restrictions in the use of land claimed by ethnic minorities. • Selection of beneficiaries for various investments under Commune Conservation Plans could have adverse impacts on ethnic minorities – e.g. ethnic minorities may be under-represented in the beneficiary recipients, or interventions may run counter to traditional practices and customary law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the IPPF – where ethnic minorities are known to occur or utilize land/resources • Equitable representation - ensure the representation of EMs in project activities, including empowering them as key resources for project implementation • Capacity building • Communications, training, and gender materials used for dissemination of information must be suitable with local cultures and languages, particularly for EMs • Implement the SEP/GRM

3.3. Project Results and Impacts

3.3.1. Progress towards objective and expected outcomes

Overall, the project achieved its objective of mainstreaming natural resource management and biodiversity conservation objectives into socio-economic development planning and management of BRs in Vietnam (see [Annex 11](#)).

Outcome 1: Regulatory and institutional framework to avoid, reduce, mitigate, and offset adverse impacts on biodiversity and reduced pressures on ecosystems in BR in place

Output 1.1: Functional governance and coordination mechanism established at national level to support dialogue, information flow and decision-making between provinces and national levels for facilitating integrated planning and management of BRs

Indicator 1: Revised LEP and 01 Decree supporting the implementation of the LEP and guidelines on BR nomination, planning and management submitted to be adopted

Under this output, the BR project conducted a lot of studies on national and international best practices on BR management, biodiversity conservation, integrated natural resource management, etc. contributing to the development or revision of the Law on Environmental Protection (LEP) 2020 (No.072/2020/QH, dated November 17, 2020); Decree No.08/2022/ND-CP on guidelines for implementing the revised LEP 2020, with Article 153 promulgating the regulations on BRs management, dated January 10, 2022; Circular 02/2022/TT-BTNMT of MONRE on guidelines for implementing some articles in revised LEP 2020, dated January 10, 2023.

Other outputs such as Draft Decree on BR management in Vietnam (some stipulations from this draft Decree related to the management of BRs were integrated in the Decree 08/2022/ND-CP and Circular 02/2022/TT-BTNMT); Draft National Strategy for BRs Management in Vietnam; Draft Plan for extending and enhancing the management of the BR system in Vietnam, etc. have been developed and submitted for approval.

Many guidelines focusing on BR management and biodiversity conservation, such as: Guidelines on KBA identification in Vietnam; Guidelines on KBA management in Vietnam; guidelines on identification and management of high conservation value forest (HCVF) in Vietnam; Guidelines on sustainable forest management with the participation of local communities; Guidelines on forest restorations for degraded forest areas in BRs; Guidelines on integration of biodiversity conservation in provincial planning process; Guidelines on BR documenting and nomination in Vietnam, etc. were also developed, providing new tools and technical assistance for BR MBs at three sites to improve their management efficiency in a systematic ways.

However, discussions with stakeholders at both central and local levels revealed several challenges: (i) An excessive number of guidelines were developed under the project, making it difficult for parties, particularly local authorities and agencies, to adopt and apply all the provided documents effectively; (ii) Certain guidelines, especially those related to forest ecosystem management in BR areas, lacked innovation and were not significantly different from existing guidelines issued by MARD; (iii) Some guidelines were not well-founded and failed to incorporate stakeholder feedback adequately during the consultation process.

Output 1.2: Increase in institutional capacity for biodiversity management.

Indicator: Increase of institutional capacity as measured by a 30% increase in UNDP National and Provincial Capacity Development

Under this Output, the BR project has conducted 92 training courses on diverse topics and deployed forms of communication to raise awareness and skills for stakeholders at both central and local levels. As a result, institutional capacity as measured by an overall 34.83% increase in UNDP National and Provincial Capacity Development Scorecard of baseline values.

The discussion with stakeholders at three pilot sites showed positive signal of increased institutional capacities for planning, implementation and monitoring integrated BR management.

Output 1.3: Requirements for BIA incorporated into the new legal framework.

Indicator: After the new LEP and BIA guidelines come into effect, at least 50% of newly-permitted development projects in the identified key sectors in 3 BRs that trigger requirement for environmental assessment integrates BIA guidelines

Under this Output, the BR project developed a guideline on integration of BIA in EIA process (applied nationwide), conducted 3 training courses on BIA, EIA at local level and a study on reviewing the BIA application for newly development project at 3 target BRs. The study results showed that, after the new Law of Environment Protection and BIA guidelines come into effect, 100% of newly permitted development projects in the three target BRs conducted BIA.

Output 1.4: Strategy for financing BRs agreed with national and provincial governments.

Indicator: 20% increase in funding over baseline for BR management in 03 BR covered by the BR project

With the support of the project, the 2020 LEP includes stipulations on the financial allocation to BRs from the state budget. As per the latest report conducted by an independent consultant team, funding for BR management in 03 BRs covered by the BR project increase from USD 405,777 (in 2017) to USD 1,641,867 (in 2024) (equivalent to 305%).

Expected Outcome 2: Integrated multi-sector and multi-stakeholder planning and management operational in three BRs to mainstream PA management sustainable resource use and biodiversity-friendly development

Output 2.1: Improved METT scores for PAs.

Indicator: Average increase by at least 30 points in METT.

According to the result of the last assessment conducted in November 2024, the average METT scores of PAs in 3 target BRs increased by 38 points. In particular, Dong Nai NR: 67 (increased 30 points from baseline data); Cat Tien NP: 75 (increased 37 points) Pu Mat NP: 68 (increased 31 points); Pu Hoat NR: 80 (increased 55 points); Pu Huong NR: 65 (increased 40 points); Cu Lao Cham MPA: 76 (increased 35 points).

Output 2.2: Set-aside areas for non-exhaustive use mapped and approved.

Indicator: Set-aside areas (high conservation value forests and other ecosystems) for non-exhaustive use of at least 60,000 ha resulting in total avoided

Under this Output, 62,940 ha of set-aside areas in West Nghe An BR and Dong Nai BR were identified (via biological, socio-economic, environmental and institutional mapping process) and invested for sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable livelihood development, capacity building and other supports. Most of the support activities in the set-aside area were designed based on previously/existing proven successful models, however, since they have been carried out for short course of time, it's too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these models under the support of the BR project despite interviews with stakeholders and field observations show positive signals on the success of them.

Output 2.3: Restoration of degraded forests implemented.

Indicator: At least 4,000 ha of degraded forests (and other ecosystems) under improved restoration through assisted natural regeneration to improve connectivity

Under this Output, the BR project conducted forest inventory activities, identified and invested for restoration of 4,005.13 ha of degraded forest areas (including 2,000 ha in West Nghe An BR; 2,000 ha in Dong Nai BR and 5.13 ha in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR). So far, forest restoration activities have been deployed in 3 sites for less than 1 year. It's too early to conclude about the success of these models. However, all forest restoration activities were carefully designed with the participatory of different stakeholders and have been deploying by experienced contractors as leading research institutions (i.e., Northern Forestry Inventory and Planning Institute and Research Institute for Forest Ecology and Environment) in forestry sector.

Output 2.4: Monitoring trends for selected indicator species established.

Indicator: Maintained or improved populations of key species in BRs from current baseline values

Under this Output, work packages were done to monitor the population of key 3 BRs, including: Barbei's Langur (*Presbytis barbei*) and White-cheeked crested gibbon (*Nomascus leucogenys*) in West Nghe An BR; Gaur (*Bos gaurus*), Black Shank Douc (*Pygathrix nigripes*) and Yellow-crested Gibbon (*Nomascus gabriellae*) in Dong Nai BR and Land crab (*Gecarcoidea lalandii*) and coral reef in CLC-Hoi An BR.

Monitoring activities were carried out in three phases of project implementation: beginning (May 2021), mid-term (September 2023) and final (June 2024) and the reports on changes in the populations of the monitored species are now available for reference. However, since monitoring activities were not done with consistent methodology and monitoring time frame, the monitoring results might not accurately reflect the actual trends of the monitored species populations.

Output 2.5: Training on biodiversity-friendly certification standards completed.

Indicator: At least 50% of sampled hotel and tourism facilities (to be identified during the baseline assessment) within selected BRs adopt biodiversity-friendly certification standards

According to the PIR 2024, the accumulated number of hotel and tourism facilities which has been certified with BRs biodiversity-friendly certification standards is 5 households of total 24 registered tourism facilities/households, account for 21% of sampled hotel and tourism facilities (including 5/18 tourism facilities/HHs in CLC BR, 0/2 tourism facilities/HHs in DN BR, and 0/4 tourism facilities/HHs in WNA BR). Progress has been made to achieve the target by the end of the project.

Output 2.6: New area of landscapes under sustainable management identified.

Indicator: New area of landscapes under sustainable management: 1,945,829 ha.

The BR project has done various interventions and activities for better management of 1,737,650 ha landscapes in the buffer zones and transition zones of 3 BRs (584,241ha in Dong Nai BR; 21,915 ha in Cu Lao Cham BR, and 1,131,494 ha in West Nghe An BR). For examples: best national and international practices and models on BR management and integrated natural resources management approaches were collected and synthesized for developing required legal documents and guidelines to be applied in project activities; new legal documents that formally recognizes the BR as a "Natural Heritage Site" for protection with detailed regulations on the nomination, management, and budget allocation requirements for BR management were developed; new guidelines supporting BR management and biodiversity conservation to be applied in BRs were developed by the project and published through the BCA/MONRE management/ information system, websites, printed versions, training courses and other communication channels to related stakeholders for applications and references; detailed baseline assessments were conducted for identifying proper interventions/supporting activities in three target BRs, etc.

Expected Outcome 3: Knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation contribute to equitable gender benefits and increased awareness of biodiversity conservation

Output 3.1: Increased awareness among community members and stakeholders regarding conservation threats.

Indicator: At least 50% (of which at least 40% women) of sampled community members, hoteliers, tour operators, and sector agency staff aware of potential conservation threats and adverse impacts of unplanned developments.

The project documents show that: The BR project conducted a study on evaluating the awareness of stakeholders and developed a plan for awareness raising at both central and local level. By September 2024, there were 12 training courses conducted by the PMU, focusing on BR management, integration of biodiversity conservation into provincial planning, biodiversity conservation and new regulations on BR, with 605 participants (in which, women accounting for 39%); 22 training courses conducted by PITs, focusing on biodiversity monitoring, METT tool, sustainable livelihood development and sustainable use of natural resources, with 563 participants (in which women accounting for 39%); 58 training courses conducted by PITs for local communities in 3 BR, focusing on sustainable livelihood models of LVGs, with 2,011 participants (in which, women accounting for 44.3%)

With the support of the BR project, open access websites of the BR project and three target BRs were also developed or upgraded for effective knowledge sharing on a broader scale.

According to the latest project report, at least 75.2% (of which at least 51.5% women) of sampled community members, hoteliers, tour operators and sector agency staff aware of potential conservation threats and adverse impacts of unplanned developments.

Output 3.2: Best practices for biodiversity conservation identified and disseminated.

Indicator: At least 8 new best practices demonstrated, and lessons from the project documented and disseminated, with planning for replication in progress.

The discussion with stakeholders at three pilot sites showed that there are at least 19 potential best practices, including: 10 models under Low Value Grant, 09 models supporting for set-aside areas and some other potential models on eco-tourism and biodiversity-friendly certification that can be documented and disseminated for upscaling or replication.

According to the PMU, the documentation of best practices has been carried out by a consultant team under Package 49 and will be available for sharing before the BR project closes in February 2025.

3.3.2. Relevance

The BR project was designed based on identified needs and prior work, receiving approval shortly thereafter. Its design focused on supporting and showcasing good practices at three BR sites—West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, and Dong Nai—as showcases for effective stakeholder engagement, participatory decision-making, and biodiversity-friendly livelihood activities in core and buffer zones.

The BR project demonstrated strong alignment with Vietnam’s national priorities and strategies for sustainable resource use, biodiversity conservation and equitable gender promotion and Vietnam’s international commitments and international commitments. It directly supported the implementation of Vietnam’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to 2030 with a vision to 2050 with the overall objective of protecting and restoring ecosystem in Vietnam and enhancing their integrity and connectivity; Vietnam’s National Climate Change Strategy to 2050, which aims at reducing the country’s greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050; and Vietnam’s National Green Growth Strategy in 2021-2030 with a vision to 2050.

Also, the BR project contributed to Vietnam’s obligations under the UNCBD (particularly, the Aichi Biodiversity targets of reducing habitat loss through sustainable land-use planning and expanding PA coverage and improving management effectiveness), UNCCD, and UNFCCC. Furthermore, the project addressed relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) by fostering biodiversity conservation and climate resilience within BRs.

The BR project was also in line with the UNDP-Vietnam Country Program Document (2022-2026)⁴, which includes direct activities aiming at: (i) shared prosperity through sustainable economic transformation; (ii) climate change, disaster resilience and environmental sustainability; and (iii) governance and access to justice.

The BR project was directly relevant to the GEF-7 Biodiversity Focal Area Investment and Associated Programming, Objective No.1 (Mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes); Objective No.2 (Addressing direct driver to protect habitats and species) and Objective No.3 (Further developing biodiversity policy and institutional framework). The project’s GEF-7 Core Indicator Worksheet (see [Annex 12](#)) showed that the project fully achieved all 6 mandatory GEF-7 Core indicators, including: Core Indicator 1 - Terrestrial PA created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (394,213 hectares were reported as achieved under improved management, slightly exceeding the expected target of 393,856 hectares); Core Indicator 2 - Marine PAs created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (The area under improved management significantly surpassed expectations, with 23,500 hectares achieved against an expected baseline of 10,598 hectares); Core Indicator 3 – Area of land restored (4,005.23 hectares of land restoration were achieved against the expected target of 4,000 hectares); Core Indicator 4 – Area of landscapes under improved practices (the achieved area of 1,737,650 hectares was close to the expected 1,945,829 hectares); Core Indicator 6 – Greenhouses gas emission mitigated (A report conducted by an international independent expert indicates an reduction of CO₂ emissions by over 33.88 million metric tons, predominantly from land use changes and sustainable agricultural practices); Core Indicator 11 – Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment (the project directly benefited 14,746 individuals, with gender-disaggregated data showing a notable engagement of 3,740 female and 6,164 male beneficiaries, exceeded the original target of 9,350 people).

3.3.3. Coherence

As above mentioned (Section 3.1.5), the project was coherent with the objectives and priorities for Viet Nam’s UNDAF and UNDP’s CPD 2022-2026 that was agreed with the GoV. It contributed to improve sustainable natural resources management, reduce the impact of climate change and improve the livelihood of local communities, including women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups.

3.3.4. Effectiveness

Main Finding: The project effectively delivered its targeted outcomes, producing significant outputs in capacity building, technical guidelines, and demonstration projects at BRs. While stakeholders praised the project’s impact on awareness and biodiversity conservation, concerns emerged about sustainability due to gaps in coordination, inconsistent stakeholder participation, and limited resource strategies. Knowledge products met output targets, but delays in vetting and approval hindered policy

⁴ See: <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/publications/country-programme-document-viet-nam-2022-2026>

integration. The small grants program successfully demonstrated sustainable practices but requires broader economic engagement to maximize impact. Moving forward, the project must strengthen interagency collaboration, tailor communication efforts, and integrate value chain development to ensure long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

Sub Findings

- **Achievement of Outputs:** The project demonstrated strong operational effectiveness, achieving 85% of its targeted outcomes, as verified by the final PIR and TE. Deliverables included the development of technical guidelines, capacity-building programs, and demonstration projects at BRs. These achievements indicate the project's ability to foster site-level progress and build knowledge. However, there were some limitations in aligning these outputs with long-term policy objectives, underscoring the need for improved strategic coordination.
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Positive feedback from stakeholders reflected increased awareness and action toward biodiversity conservation, with participants recognizing the value of the project's capacity-building efforts. However, concerns emerged regarding the sustainability of these achievements, particularly around resource management strategies for BRs. Stakeholders highlighted challenges in interprovincial coordination, which will require higher-level governance support for long-term success.
- **Quality of Knowledge Products:** While quantitative output targets were achieved, the practical use of the knowledge products especially the livelihood good practices remain delayed. Many of the upstream normative projects – Guidance for management also require further vetting from the MARD and other relevant stakeholders. This bottleneck has hindered the project's ability to integrate these outputs into national policy frameworks and institutional processes, slowing momentum toward sustainable development goals.
- **Communication and Participation Challenges:** The project faced challenges with stakeholder engagement, including inconsistent attendance at meetings by sectoral representatives. This lack of continuity affected institutional learning and delayed decision-making. Additionally, communication strategies were not adequately customized to different stakeholder groups, which limited the project's influence on BR financing needs and policy expansion for sustainable economic development.
- **Small Grants Program and Local Livelihoods:** The project's small grants program made valuable contributions by demonstrating the integration of biodiversity conservation with sustainable livelihoods, such as using goats and cows to protect sensitive ecosystems. However, the program was limited in scope, focusing on production rather than value chain development. However, evaluators also found market development was part of the support in cases but limited. Greater impact could be achieved through broader economic engagement, including the stimulation of local businesses and more structured support for market integration.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Core Indicator 1: Terrestrial Protected Areas Created or Under Improved Management for Conservation and Sustainable Use (Hectares)

- Achieved: 1,790,511 hectares
- Expected: 393,856 hectares (MTR); 394,213 hectares (TE)
- PIF Stage: Endorsement
 - Indicator 1.1: Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly Created
 - No new areas created
 - Achieved: N/A
 - Indicator 1.2: Terrestrial Protected Areas Under Improved Management Effectiveness
 - Western Nghe An BR: 1,299,795 hectares
 - Pu Mat NP: 94,715 hectares (IUCN II, METT Score: 68 at TE)
 - Pu Huong NR: 40,187 hectares (IUCN IV, METT Score: 65 at TE)
 - Pu Hoat NR: 85,880 hectares (METT Score: 80 at TE)
 - Dong Nai BR: 969,993 hectares

- Cat Tien NP: 72,770 hectares (IUCN II, METT Score: 75 at TE)
- Dong Nai NR: 100,304 hectares (IUCN Ia, METT Score: 67 at TE)

Core Indicator 2: Marine Protected Areas Created or Under Improved Management for Conservation and Sustainable Use (Hectares)

- Achieved: 21,915 hectares
- Expected: 10,598 hectares (MTR); 23,500 hectares (TE)
 - Indicator 2.1: Marine Protected Areas Newly Created
 - No new areas created
 - Achieved: N/A
 - Indicator 2.2: Marine Protected Areas Under Improved Management Effectiveness
 - Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An BR: 21,915 hectares
 - Cu Lao Cham MPA: 10,598 hectares (IUCN V, METT Score: 76 at TE)

Core Indicator 3: Area of Land Restored (Hectares)

- Achieved: 4,005.13 hectares
- Expected: 4,000 hectares (MTR)
 - Indicator 3.2: Area of Forest and Forest Land Restored
 - Degraded forests under restoration through assisted natural regeneration: 4,005.13 hectares

Core Indicator 4: Area of Landscapes Under Improved Practices (Hectares; Excluding Protected Areas)

- Achieved: 1,737,650 hectares
- Expected: 1,945,829 hectares (TE)
 - Indicator 4.1: Area of Landscapes Under Improved Management to Benefit Biodiversity
 - Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An BR (Landscape & Seascape): 21,915 hectares
 - Western Nghe An BR (Landscape): 1,131,494 hectares
 - Dong Nai BR (Landscape): 584,241 hectares

Core Indicator 6: Greenhouse Gas Emission Mitigated (Metric Tons of CO₂e)

- Achieved (TE): 33,888,724 metric tons of CO₂e
- Expected (MTR): 17,157,547 metric tons of CO₂e
 - Indicator 6.1: Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU Sector
 - Land Use Changes:
 - Deforestation: 7,143,776 metric tons of CO₂e
 - Afforestation: 989,707 metric tons of CO₂e
 - Agriculture (Annual): 1,757,700 metric tons of CO₂e
 - Agriculture (Perennial): -49,000 metric tons of CO₂e
 - Degradation/Management: 7,315,364 metric tons of CO₂e

Core Indicator 11: Number of Direct Beneficiaries Disaggregated by Gender as Co-benefit of GEF Investment (Number)

- Total: 14,746 beneficiaries
 - Female: 3,740
 - Male: 6,164
 - Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An Biosphere Reserve
 - Female: 740
 - Male: 1,110
 - Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve
 - Female: 1,480
 - Male: 2,220
 - Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve

- Female: 1,480
- Male: 2,220
- 100 Provincial Personnel Targeted for Training
 - Female: 40 (3 achieved)
 - Male: 60 (16 achieved)

3.3.5. Efficiency

Main Finding: The evaluation of the project’s efficiency reveals an implementation marked by both significant accomplishments and critical challenges. While the project effectively disbursed a substantial portion of its budget and completed major activities in a timely manner, moderate resource utilization and the absence of technical oversight mechanisms limited its overall effectiveness. The limited PMU and the provincial PIT staff further constrained its ability to manage the ambitious workload, highlighting the need for improved coordination and resource allocation especially for Knowledge management and learning intention of the demonstration project.

Sub Findings:

- **Resource Utilization:** The project demonstrated moderate use of financial and human resources during execution, suggesting potential inefficiencies. The PMU at the national level was understaffed for the ambitious workload envisioned for a learning-focused project. This staffing shortfall, combined with heavy responsibilities related to normative product development, hindered the project’s execution. Establishing a knowledge hub at the MONRE could enhance efficiency in supporting learning across BRs.
- **Activity Completion:** Despite the challenges, major project activities were completed in a timely manner, adhering to budget and procurement constraints. However, there remains significant potential to improve efficiency through better resource allocation strategies.
- **Need for Interdepartmental Technical Oversight** While MONRE led the project, it was essential that other key departments, such as the MARD and MAB, have a more practical and active role in the technical oversight process. The lack of direct involvement from these departments slowed the collaborative vetting of draft normative products tied to legislation. This absence of broader technical oversight impeded the effective implementation of a "learning by doing" approach across the three BRs, ultimately delaying progress and hindering the achievement of the project’s intended outcomes.
- **Project Finance Delivery:** Project finances were managed through the UNDP, PMU and PITs. However, modifications to the agreement during implementation led to a reduction in provincial responsibilities, which negatively impacted coherence and coordination among stakeholders. This fragmentation adversely affected broader project outcomes and overall efficiency.

Evidence of Efficiency:

- A good percentage of the budget was effectively disbursed by 2024, with planned activities closely aligned with expenditures, demonstrating moderate financial efficiency.
- A comparison of projected versus actual timelines reveals continual improvement in project delivery, indicating enhanced efficiency over time.

Table 15 – Project Outcome Rating Table

Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	HS
Effectiveness	S
Efficiency	MS
Overall Project Outcome Rating	S

3.3.6. Sustainability

Financial Sustainability

Throughout the BR project, financial sustainability proved to be a mixed area, particularly regarding the small grant initiatives. To effectively catalyze such initiatives, funding is required in the form of grants or through a dedicated national or provincial program. Several income-generating activities, such as eco-

tourism programs and cooperatives for non-timber forest products, laid a foundation for future financial continuity but a source of stimulus is needed⁵.

Additionally, there were limitations to sustainability of these in the absence of capital and good risk based planning. Some financial activities, particularly eco-tourism, remain vulnerable to economic fluctuations, as seen when visitor numbers dropped sharply during the rainy season. Local governments have provided co-financing, but the overall financial dependency on external donors raises concerns about continuity. Without additional, sustainable and innovative funding streams—such as government grants linked to small green business and innovation, private-sector partnerships or local revenue mobilization—there is a risk that conservation and resource management activities might decline after the project closes. Thus, while financial mechanisms were initiated, their long-term sustainability requires further development to mitigate risks tied to fluctuating market conditions and limited local government budgets.

Socio-Economic Sustainability

The BR project successfully integrated socio-economic benefits into its conservation activities, demonstrating how local livelihoods could align with environmental objectives. In several project sites, sustainable agricultural practices like rotational grazing and organic farming improved soil health and crop yields, reducing communities' dependence on unsustainable farming.

A key strength was the project's focus on empowering marginalized groups, including women and ethnic minorities. In one highland BR, an outreach program targeted ethnic minority women, equipping them with agricultural skills and market access for bamboo-based crafts. This initiative not only provided economic opportunities but also improved household resilience. Similarly, in coastal areas, community-led fishing groups restored mangrove ecosystems, ensuring both environmental gains and the protection of fishery-dependent livelihoods.

While these efforts significantly improved economic stability, some gaps remain. The poorest households and vulnerable groups experienced challenges accessing project benefits equally, highlighting the need for ongoing support to maintain inclusiveness. Nonetheless, the integration of local knowledge into sustainable livelihood initiatives is a promising indicator of socio-economic sustainability.

Institutional Framework and Governance Sustainability

The project's governance framework was strengthened through the formation of BR management boards, which ensured participatory decision-making processes. These boards included diverse stakeholders, from local community leaders to government representatives, and promoted transparency by integrating grievance redress mechanisms.

However, challenges in institutional capacity were evident. While the project trained local officials on sustainable resource management practices, the capacity of local institutions to maintain these systems independently remains limited. Coordination between agencies—such as forest management authorities and local fisheries departments—was not always seamless, leading to occasional delays in governance decisions.

The governance structures are well-positioned to support long-term conservation, but the institutional framework would benefit from continued capacity-building and stronger inter-agency collaboration to ensure smooth management in the future.

Environmental Sustainability

The environmental outcomes of the BR project have shown considerable promise. In project sites visited, actions are aimed at restoring biodiversity and improving ecosystem services. Community-led

⁵ In one of the biosphere reserve sites visited, a women-led cooperative focused on harvesting medicinal plants. This initiative not only generated income for local women but also provided long-term incentives for conservation by promoting the sustainable use of forest resources. The revenue from selling medicinal plants created a financial buffer for conservation activities, ensuring that the ecosystem remained protected while benefiting the community economically. Similarly, community-based eco-tourism ventures in the coastal villages visited capitalized on seasonal visitor flows, creating revenue streams that partially funded local conservation projects. In one case, a village established guided tours showcasing the area's biodiversity, including birdwatching and eco-friendly boat rides. The fees collected from these activities were reinvested into preserving the local ecosystem and providing sustainable livelihoods for the villagers, creating a self-sustaining model of financial support for conservation.

initiatives are demonstrating how environmental sustainability could be achieved through local stewardship.

Additionally, the adoption of sustainable land-use practices—such as agroforestry and organic farming—has reduced deforestation and promoted ecosystem health. In one BR area, for example farmers experimented with new rice varieties, witnessing firsthand how such change improved yields and reduced soil degradation, encouraging widespread adoption of these practices.

However, certain environmental risks persist. Climate change poses an ongoing threat, with unpredictable weather patterns affecting both ecosystems and livelihoods. The potential resurgence of illegal activities, such as logging or overfishing, also presents a challenge if monitoring efforts decline after project closure. Nonetheless, the project's focus on ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation suggests strong environmental sustainability prospects.

Overall Sustainability Rating:

With ongoing support and strategic adjustments, the BR project can achieve sustainable outcomes that balance environmental protection with socio-economic development. The project has demonstrated the importance of participatory governance, local knowledge integration, and community empowerment in building resilient socio-ecological systems and learning across BRs.

Table 16 – Sustainability rating table

Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	ML
Socio-political/economic	L
Institutional framework and governance	ML
Environmental	L
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	ML

3.3.6. Country ownership

Main findings: The evaluation highlighted strong national and local ownership, a critical factor for the project’s achievements and sustainability. The MONRE exhibited a high level of commitment, providing both leadership and continuity, which was mirrored at each of the BR sites.

Sub Findings:

- **Government and Local Engagement:** The active role of MONRE in steering the project at the national level facilitated effective interagency collaboration and mobilization of resources. Additionally, MONRE’s partnerships with provincial and district authorities in each BR underscored strong government ownership, supporting sustainable resource management practices and policy alignment with national environmental priorities.
- **Support for Project Outcomes and Sustainability:** At each project site, government agencies, local authorities, and community members demonstrated clear buy-in, promoting forward momentum from outputs to sustainable outcomes. Local capacity-building initiatives empowered communities to manage resources independently, and the commitment observed among local stakeholders’ signals that the project’s benefits are likely to extend beyond the funding period.
- **Inclusive Ownership for Broader Impact:** Efforts to engage a wide range of stakeholders—including indigenous communities, women’s groups, and local youth—at each site reflect a comprehensive approach to ownership that extends to marginalized groups. This inclusive ownership model helps ensure that the project’s outcomes are relevant and resilient. At the national level, support for cross-sectoral collaboration between MONRE and other relevant ministries (e.g., agriculture, tourism, and local government) has laid the foundation for embedding BR management into broader national development strategies.

In summary, the high level of government and local ownership at both national and site levels has positioned the project for long-term sustainability and scalability. Continued support from MONRE, coupled with increased attention to institutionalizing project outcomes across sectors, will be essential to realizing the project’s full impact in Vietnam’s BRs.

3.3.7. Gender equality and women's empowerment

The project made meaningful progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment in conservation and livelihood activities. Women's involvement in technical meetings and training programs improved cultural norms. The project implemented localized trainings and flexible scheduling, with ongoing efforts to shift entrenched societal norms by explicitly engaging women.

The project's Gender Action Plan successfully integrated gender considerations into governance, policy, and community engagement, but further work is needed to reach the 50% target for female participation in decision-making bodies. This project demonstrated the interconnectedness of gender equality and environmental sustainability, underscoring the importance of empowering women as central stakeholders in ecosystem management and conservation efforts.

Gender-Responsive Actions and Achievements: The project ensured that biodiversity conservation and provincial economic planning incorporated gender-sensitive approaches. Training materials emphasized women's roles and experiences, aiming to achieve at least 40% female participation in technical sessions. Although the project promoted women's involvement at every level, social norms and logistical barriers continued to restrict women's full participation, particularly in remote ethnic communities.

3.3.8. Cross-cutting issues

The project's success in mainstreaming natural resource management and biodiversity conservation into socio-economic development planning was deeply intertwined with cross-cutting issues. These included gender empowerment, socio-economic development, the inclusion of marginalized groups, the integration of local knowledge into environmental practices, etc.. By addressing these areas, the project demonstrated that environmental sustainability and community well-being are mutually reinforcing goals. Below is an analysis of how these cross-cutting issues were integrated into the project's outcomes.

Gender Empowerment and Socio-Economic Initiatives

The project empowered women by providing them with access to training, resources, and leadership roles in environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods:

- **In Cam Thanh Commune, Hoi An City, Cu Lao Cham BR:** Women participated in developing social economic development plans and managing marine resources by taking the leader positions in commune people committees and leading long-term community livelihood development and environment protection programs led by the Hoi An City People's Committee.
- **Demonstration Projects on Sustainable Agriculture:** In rural farming communities, women-headed households received **agriculture training** on seedling selection, planting and harvesting techniques for organic fruits (in West Nghe An and Dong Nai BR) and organic rice (in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi an BR). The adoption of sustainable practices reduced dependency on chemical fertilizers, improved soil health, and secured better crop yields, increasing household incomes.
- **Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Cooperatives:** Women-led cooperatives focused on harvesting bamboo shoots, medicinal herbs and decorative materials. For examples, in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR, most of facilities which exploit NTFPs for producing handicraft products serving for eco-tourisms are now under management of women. These efforts showcased a sustainable alternative to logging and enhanced local income streams, reducing the economic pressure to engage in unsustainable practices.

Integration of Local Knowledge and Environmental Sustainability

The project leveraged traditional knowledge in conservation practices, ensuring that environmental activities were both locally relevant and sustainable:

- **In West Nghe An BR:** Under the support of the BR project, the ethnic communities have stopped their spontaneous and massive exploitation of *Camellia chrysantha* in natural forests. Instead, they have been trained in zoning, protection and sustainably exploitation of *Camellia chrysantha*. As a result, harvested volume and income from *Camellia chrysantha* have doubled while natural forests have been better protected.

- **In Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR:** Dynamite fishing or other destructive fishing practices have been gradually replaced by more traditional and sustainable fishing practices under the support of the BR project, to reduce negative impacts on marine ecosystems and support coral reef restoration and sustainable tourism development

The active participation of local populations in biodiversity conservation also strengthened ownership of these efforts and contributed to long-term sustainability.

Addressing the Needs of Marginalized Groups and Persons with Disabilities

The project sought to address historical inequalities by focusing on the inclusion of vulnerable groups:

- **Ethnic Minority Outreach Programs:** Since project design phase, “ethnic minority priority” has been always one of the fixed criteria in identifying priority activities, technical supports and allocating fundings. Ethnic minority households and communities were always given highest priority in selecting participants in project activities, especially those involved in training, capacity building, awareness raising and in set-aside areas. As a result, in West Nghe An and Dong Nai BRs, 59.2% of people who participated in training courses/technical meetings conducted by the BR project were ethnic minorities and over 61 % of households selected for forest allocation, forest protection, livelihood improvement through revolving funds and LVG models were ethnic minorities.
- **Inclusive Training Programs:** In West Nghe An BR, under the activity of replicating sustainable livelihoods from sustainable planting and harvesting *Camellia chrysantha*, *Bambusa sp.*, *Dendrocalamus membranaceus* Munro, 100% poor and ethnic minority households in Dong Van and Thong Thu communes of Que Phong District, despite being selected to join the project or not, were provided with improved knowledge and capacity to develop sustainable livelihood through training courses on: (i) zoning, protecting, additional planting and sustainably harvesting *Bambusa sp.*; (ii) preserving, developing and sustainably harvesting *Camellia chrysantha* associated with natural forest protection; (iii) preserving and developing sustainable harvesting methods for *Alpinia blepharocalyx Kschum* associated with degraded natural forest protection and enrichment; and (iv) Developing *Dendrocalamus membranaceus* Munro models to create livelihoods and improve protective capacity for protection forests in Hua Na Hydropower Reservoir.

Through these initiatives, the project addressed systemic inequalities and ensured that marginalized groups were not left behind.

Conflict Resolution and Transparent Governance

The project established mechanisms for resolving resource-use conflicts, promoting accountability and community trust:

- **Grievance Redress Mechanism:** In Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR, marine resource access (e.g., surrounding areas of coral reefs, where fish are more abundant) disputes emerged between diving-based tourism facilitates and fisherman communities. The BR project facilitated negotiations among conflicting parties, ensuring equitable distribution of marine resources.
- **Participatory Governance Structures:** Regular meetings held by BR management boards ensured that diverse stakeholders, including women’s groups and ethnic minorities, were engaged in decision-making processes. This participatory governance model fostered transparency and strengthened the community’s sense of ownership over local resources.

These conflict-resolution mechanisms highlighted the project’s commitment to fairness and accountability in resource management.

Strengthening Environmental Regulations and Governance

Collaboration with local governments was a key focus to create an enabling environment for sustainable practices:

- **Regulatory Frameworks for Forest and Fisheries Management:** The project partnered with local governments to **revise policies** on sustainable forestry (in Nghe An and Dong Nai provinces) and fishery management (in Quang Nam province). Local officials and communities were trained on best practices, ensuring that regulatory enforcement aligned with biodiversity objectives. This effort improved governance structures, laying the foundation for long-term conservation efforts.

- **Integration of Biodiversity into Provincial/Local Planning:** The project successfully advocated for the inclusion of biodiversity considerations in provincial planning process by developing technical guidelines and organizing training courses and capacity building events to introduce and facilitate of the application of technical guideline in practice. Under the support of the BR project, 19 communes in 3 BRs (10 in West Nghe An BR, 6 in Dong Nai BR and 3 in Hoi An – CLC BR) has revised their socio-economic development plans to include biodiversity conservation. These efforts aimed to institutionalize sustainability principles within local governance structures, ensuring lasting environmental benefits.

Environmental Awareness and Community Engagement Campaigns

Awareness campaigns were integral to fostering environmental stewardship and changing community attitudes toward natural resources:

- **Community Workshops on Ecosystem Services:** In Cam Thanh Commune (Hoi An-Cu Lao Tram BR), **village-level workshops/events** educated residents about the benefits of ecosystem services, such as fish, water supply, water regulation, recreational opportunities and provided by wetlands. These workshops promoted community engagement in **wetland restoration efforts**.
- **Youth Engagement Programs:** Youth groups were involved in **monitoring wildlife** (in West Nghe An and Hoi An – Cu Lao Tram BR) and **tree planting activities** (in West Nghe An and Dong Nai BRs) as part of environmental education campaigns. This fostered a sense of responsibility toward biodiversity conservation among the younger generation.

3.3.10. Catalytic/Replication Effect

Main finding: The project has exhibited a catalytic nature that fosters learning, collaboration, and the potential for replication. Through partnership development, resource mobilization, and a focus on knowledge sharing, it has laid a solid foundation for extending its impacts beyond immediate objectives. The indicators of replication—interest from other regions, the formation of stakeholder networks, documented successes, and advocacy for policy change—underscore the project’s capacity to influence and inspire similar initiatives both locally and regionally. As the project continues to evolve, it is well-positioned to contribute significantly to the implementation of participatory governance approaches in Vietnam and beyond.

The project has demonstrated a distinctly catalytic nature, effectively initiating processes that extend beyond its immediate goals and contributing to a broader framework of sustainable practices. This catalytic effect is characterized by several key elements, supported by evidence from the project’s data:

- **Partnership Development:** The project has successfully forged partnerships among a wide array of stakeholders, including national and local government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations. Evidence of this is seen in the active participation from national and local government units, as well as volunteer support established in specific cases, such as the marine PA initiative. These collaborations have laid the groundwork for shared responsibility in managing BRs, fostering a culture of collective action essential for sustainable environmental governance.
- **Attracting Funding:** The project catalyzed co-funding and partnerships that enhance its impact. This is evident from the secured co-financing which illustrates its ability to leverage resources beyond initial commitments. The financial data shows that a good percentage of the budget was effectively disbursed in 2024, with planned activities aligned with expenditures, demonstrating financial efficiency and the project’s attractiveness to other funding bodies. This however is an area for focus for sustainability as the livelihoods will need a secure funding source like a small grants program.
- **Knowledge Management and Capacity Building:** As a learning project, it has placed a strong emphasis on knowledge management as both a component and a modality for implementation. This is highlighted in the project’s focus on catalyzing learning about the participatory BR approach within Vietnam’s unique context. The documentation of gaps in participatory governance models and the establishment of a robust multi-stakeholder network for ongoing biodiversity and bioeconomy learning initiatives further empower local communities to effectively engage in governance processes.

- **Advocacy for Participatory Governance:** The project has been instrumental in advocating for the participatory governance model, emphasizing its benefits within the unique context of Vietnam. The emerging partnerships among broader stakeholders underscore the project's role in showcasing the "how to do" participatory governance effectively, even as the "benefits" from this approach are yet to be concretely justified through economic analysis and policy advocacy.
- **Indicators of Replication:** The foundations laid by the project indicate promising opportunities for replication, marked by several key indicators supported by project data:
- **Interest from Other BRs:** There is growing interest from other provinces and regions and stakeholders eager to adopt the project's approaches because project documents including successes in management, conservation and development of BRs in Nghe An, Quang Nam and Dong Nai have been openly shared through information channels of PMU and three targeted BRs. The emphasis on documenting best practices and the project's alignment with national policies suggest that it can serve as a valuable template for similar initiatives elsewhere.
- **Formation of Multi-Stakeholder Networks:** The project has unearthed gaps around participatory governance and the need for a multi-stakeholder network, highlighting the potential for replication as these networks mature. The firm /formal establishment of a BR national network is crucial for facilitating ongoing learning initiatives and collaborative efforts.
- **Documented Success Stories:** The project has begun to document and share success stories and best practices, which provide tangible evidence of the project's impact. This documentation serves as effective advocacy tools for encouraging replication in other areas.
- **Policy Advocacy and Economic Justification:** By emphasizing the need for economic analysis and showcasing the benefits of the participatory governance approach, the project is paving the way for broader acceptance and adoption of its strategies. The documentation of success stories will be vital in illustrating the project's value to policymakers and promoting its replication. The project implemented an effective exit strategy by initiating the terminal evaluation **six months prior to the operational closure**. This proactive approach allowed the project team to assess and prioritize the remaining work necessary to complete the project in alignment with the expected results. Key actions during this period focused on consolidating knowledge products, such as documenting **good practices for showcasing**, establishing **web hosting** for knowledge-sharing platforms, and finalizing **guidelines** to ensure the sustainability of the project's outputs.
- Additionally, efforts were made to **document the creation of a knowledge hub**, which is intended for **future scaling** and replication purposes. This hub serves as a critical resource for disseminating information, best practices, and lessons learned, ensuring that the project's impact and successes can be continued and adapted for broader application. By prioritizing these deliverables and ensuring they were ready for future use, the project has laid a strong foundation for ongoing success and knowledge transfer beyond its closure.
- The exit strategy thus has focused on recommendations during the evaluation on completing key activities six months before the project closure, prioritizing the consolidation of knowledge products, finalizing guidelines, and establishing a knowledge hub for future scaling. This proactive approach ensured the project's results were well-documented, sustainable, and ready for replication, allowing for effective knowledge transfer and long-term impact beyond the project's lifespan.

3.3.11. *Progress to Impact*

The long-term impacts of the project, as identified in the ProDoc, include: (i) population of key species stable or increasing; (ii) area and quality of natural forest, coral reefs and marine ecosystems stable or improving; (iii) improved sustainability and livelihood of local communities. The project has successfully met its core indicators through its targeted interventions, including the expansion of PAs, improved species status, enhanced capacity for biodiversity conservation, and tangible improvements in ecosystem services. The project's focus on sustainable land use and stakeholder engagement has ensured that these achievements are both effective and sustainable in the long term. By linking these successes to specific indicators, the TE evaluators can confidently report that the project has made a measurable and positive impact on biodiversity conservation, as outlined below:

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management

- **Indicator:** At least 1.22 million hectares of BRs managed through participatory approaches; **Achievement:** 1,81 million ha managed effectively through participatory approaches across 3 BRs; **Result:** Target exceeded by 49%.
- **Indicator:** At least 60,000 ha set aside for high conservation value forests; **Achievement:** 62,940.66 ha set aside for conservation in 3 BRs; **Result:** Target exceeded by 4.9%.
- **Indicator:** 4,000 ha of degraded forests restored, with an expected sequestration of 17.16 million tCO₂eq over 20 years; **Achievement:** 4,005.13 ha restored, with an estimated 33,88 million tCO₂eq sequestered over 20 years; **Result:** Target exceeded in restoration and carbon sequestration.
- **Indicator:** Maintained or improved populations of key species in BRs; **Achievement:** Monitoring data shows population stability or improvement for key species (e.g., Gaur, Gibbon, Coral reefs); **Result:** Target achieved with effective biodiversity conservation.

Socio-Economic Impact and Livelihood Development

- **Indicator:** 2,500 households benefiting from sustainable resource use; 20% income increase; 40% women beneficiaries; **Achievement:** 3,125 households benefited; income increase validated; 40% women beneficiaries; **Result:** Target exceeded for households and equity metrics.
- **Indicator:** 9,350 direct beneficiaries, including 40% women; **Achievement:** 14,746 beneficiaries (41.8% women); **Result:** Target exceeded by 58%.

Policy, Institutional, and Capacity Development

- **Indicator:** Multiple-use and sustainable BR management approaches institutionalized in 3 BRs; **Achievement:** National and site-level frameworks, guidelines, and regulations institutionalized for participatory BR management; **Result:** Target achieved.
- **Indicator:** 30% increase in institutional capacity (UNDP Capacity Scorecard); **Achievement:** 34.83% increase (average 74.83% across national and provincial levels); **Result:** Target exceeded.
- **Indicator:** Revised Law on Environmental Protection (LEP) and associated instruments; **Achievement:** LEP and supporting decrees/guidelines approved in 2020–2022, with effective implementation in BRs; **Result:** Target achieved.

Sustainable Practices and Climate Mitigation

- **Indicator:** 17.16 million tCO₂eq mitigated over 20 years; **Achievement:** 33.88 million tCO₂eq mitigated over 20 years; **Result:** Target exceeded by 97%.
- **Indicator:** At least 50% of new development projects in key sectors in BRs integrate BIA; **Achievement:** 100% of new development projects integrate BIA, although the quality varies; **Result:** Target exceeded.

Funding and Best Practices

- **Indicator:** 20% increase in funding for BR management; **Achievement:** 305% increase in funding from \$405,777 to \$1,641,867 (2017–2024); **Result:** Target exceeded by 15-fold;
- **Indicator:** At least 8 best practices documented and disseminated; **Achievement:** 19 potential best practices identified, with final evaluation pending; **Result:** Progress on track (expected completion by February 2025).

Awareness and Certification

- **Indicator:** 50% of sampled hotels/tourism facilities adopt biodiversity-friendly standards; **Achievement:** 21% adoption as of October 2023 (expected to increase by February 2025); **Result:** Target likely to be achieved by project end.
- **Indicator:** 50% (40% women) of community members aware of conservation threats; **Achievement:** 75.2% awareness achieved (51.5% women); **Result:** Target exceeded.

4. MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSON LEARNED

4.1. Main Findings & Conclusions

Project Design: The project showcased a well-structured design, incorporating essential elements like problem analysis, a robust ToC, gender mainstreaming, and SMART objectives to address its goals. However, its implementation faced significant challenges, including structural inefficiencies, an overcomplicated management framework, and a lack of participatory processes to leverage positive drivers. While the monitoring framework provided valuable metrics, some indicators were overly ambitious or lacked clarity, further complicating progress tracking. The ambitious goals of aligning governance structures and scaling successful practices were hampered by political, institutional, and operational barriers.

M&E system: The project's M&E framework was robustly designed, incorporating standard UNDP-GEF requirements. While the framework outlined comprehensive data collection processes and responsibilities, it lacked an exit strategy—a critical component to ensure post-project continuity and sustainability of the program's achievements. Additionally, certain indicators could have been refined to better facilitate coordination and knowledge sharing during implementation. M&E implementation was generally effective. However, challenges remain, particularly in the accessibility and clarity of reported data. The format of reports required significant effort to extract relevant evidence.

Coherence: The BR project demonstrated strong coherence with Vietnam's UNDAF and UNDP's CPD 2022-2026 objectives, aligning with national priorities and international frameworks. It significantly contributed to sustainable natural resource management, climate change mitigation, and the enhancement of local livelihoods. By prioritizing inclusivity, the project supported women, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable groups, reinforcing its commitment to equitable development and long-term sustainability. These achievements underscore the project's relevance and effectiveness in addressing Vietnam's socio-economic and environmental challenges.

Relevance: The BR project demonstrated exceptional alignment with Vietnam's national strategies and international commitments, particularly in biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource management, gender equity, and climate action. Its contributions directly supported Vietnam's National Biodiversity Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, and Green Growth Strategy, as well as global obligations under the UNCBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC, and SDGs. By aligning with the UNDP-Vietnam Country Program and achieving significant results against GEF-7 Core Indicators, the project showcased its relevance in advancing both national and international objectives.

Effectiveness: The project effectively delivered its targeted outcomes, with significant achievements in capacity building, technical guideline development, and site-level demonstration projects within BRs. Stakeholders acknowledged its positive impact on biodiversity conservation and awareness, but concerns over long-term sustainability reveal gaps in coordination, stakeholder participation, and resource strategies. While the project met its quantitative output targets, bottlenecks in vetting and approval processes delayed the integration of knowledge products into national policy frameworks. The small grants program showcased innovative practices for biodiversity-friendly livelihoods but lacked broader economic engagement and value chain development necessary for maximizing impact.

Efficiency: In so far as project management was concerned and external changes, the transition to a centralized funding model under MONRE introduced challenges for provincial autonomy but improved financial accountability and oversight. The workplans/reports were approved by MONRE and UNDP. However, the workplans for the sites were developed by the PITs/BR MB based on the NIP-CIP contract. Provincial finances and activities were managed directly by the PIT (the budget was transferred to PITs directly), which increased the responsibility and workload of the PMU and BCA in managing and approving documents. Despite this, activities and budgets were directly managed by the PIT. This shift streamlined resource management, ensuring that funding was effectively allocated to priority areas. Despite some challenges, the project demonstrated efficient budget disbursement, aligning expenditures with planned activities. A key lesson learned is the importance of adopting a results-based design over an activity-based approach, with clear targets and defined outcomes at the component level. The project's lack of clarity on some intended outcomes—particularly around coordination and sustainability—highlighted the need for more precise planning in future initiatives.

Sustainability: While the BR project has laid a good foundation through its biodiversity reserve approach, there is still work to be done to ensure the sustainability and scalability of these impacts. The limited focus on securing resources for small enterprises that link conservation with economic growth

is a significant barrier to long-term impact. Without continued funding and strengthening local capacities, the full potential of the project could be at risk. To maximize its impact, the project should refine its strategies for long-term financial sustainability, ensuring that small businesses continue to thrive and contribute to conservation efforts. Scaling up geographically and deepening support for local actors will be essential for realizing the project’s long-term goals.

Additionality: The GEF project’s catalytic funding and technical support, coupled with its “provinces learning from and with each other through a sharing and improving together” approach facilitated by the PMU, significantly advanced the implementation of biodiversity conservation in Vietnam’s BRs. By firmly integrating BR knowledge into the national legal framework and establishing multi-sector planning mechanisms, the project exceeded expectations by contributing to national biodiversity objectives through practical, on-the-ground implementation. Its inputs during implementation provided tangible value across the diverse contexts of the supported BRs. The linked up GEF funding⁶ through the Small Grants Program added significant value by providing access to small-scale grants for livelihood initiatives in all three BRs. This funding was essential for showcasing good practices and promoting sustainable development

Gender equality and women’s empowerment: The project made commendable progress in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in conservation and livelihood activities, effectively integrating gender considerations into its design and implementation. By prioritizing localized training, flexible scheduling, and culturally sensitive approaches, the project challenged entrenched societal norms and increased women’s participation in technical meetings and conservation efforts. However, challenges remain, particularly in achieving the 50% target for female representation in decision-making bodies and addressing barriers faced by women in remote ethnic communities.

Cross-Cutting Areas: The BR approach emphasizes the interconnectedness between biodiversity conservation and cross-cutting areas such as poverty reduction, human rights, gender equality, and disaster risk reduction (DRR). This project successfully demonstrated these linkages across the three sites, illustrating how conservation efforts can advance sustainable development and social inclusion. Examples include: integrating gender-sensitive strategies into livelihood programs; ensuring equitable access for marginalized groups; promoting nature-based solutions to enhance community resilience and economic opportunities. These practices underscore the potential of the BR model to address multiple development challenges simultaneously. It is essential to document these experiences and communicate the linkages clearly to strengthen future programming and ensure effective sharing and scaling of best practices.

Orientation toward impact: To date, the project has effectively demonstrated its capacity to deliver lasting impacts by stabilizing or increasing populations of key species, improving the quality of forest and marine ecosystems, and enhancing local livelihoods. These achievements stem from the project’s comprehensive interventions, including strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks, raising awareness and capacity for sustainable natural resource use and biodiversity conservation, and implementing sustainable livelihood models tailored to the specific needs of each locality.

Key success factors: The project’s strategic approach, strong political support, early involvement of provincial leaders, stakeholder coordination, and well-designed M&E system were key to its success.

Key challenges: Key challenges hindering the project from achieving its targets included an ambitious multi-target design, delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, lengthy procurement procedures, and the complexities of implementing activities across broad geographical areas

Overall, the BR project demonstrated a rating of “Moderately Satisfactory”. The table below provides a summary of rating results by evaluation standards and rating justifications.

Table-17: Overall project rating

Evaluation standard	Rating	Summary assesemnt
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)		

⁶ The project successfully integrated two key GEF funding modalities, effectively demonstrating the broader project goals while also supporting community-led initiatives, such as sustainable livelihoods, through a grant funding mechanism. This represents an excellent practice. However, further efforts are needed to refine the small grants model and identify sustainable, country-specific solutions for financing local initiatives that align with broader policy goals

M&E design at entry	S	M&E system was well planned with clear indicator targets and detailed guidance available for monitoring
M&E Plan Implementation	MS	Activities monitoring was strong; result monitoring was done but not always well-documented and updated (particularly for 2024 year); some monitoring results were reliant on narratives without a strong evidence base (i.e., number of technical meetings/awareness-raising workshops), particularly at local level.
Overall Quality of M&E	MS	M&E was well designed but not always fully followed
Implementation & Execution		
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	S	UNDP actively involved in all stages of the project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, using UNDP standard financial management, recruitment and procurement systems and procedures
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	MS	MONRE/NBCA has relatively well-performed in coordinating and managing the project. However, the mechanisms for consultation, feedback, and information sharing with stakeholders—particularly the beneficiaries identified in the ProDoc, such as MARD, MAB, and MoST—require significant improvement to enhance collaboration and maximize project impact
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	S	Both UNDP and the PMU effectively provided the necessary technical, implementation, financial management, recruitment, and procurement support during the project's implementation. However, concerns were raised regarding the lengthy consultation processes and delays in recruitment and procurement approvals, which impacted the timely completion of some project activities and outputs
Assessment of Outcomes		
Relevance	HS	Strongly aligned with Vietnam's national strategies and policies and international commitment, UNDP and GEF's and global strategic priorities on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development
Effectiveness	S	The majority of outcome indicators (85%) were achieved, some even exceed; Lots of outputs were high quality, in place or in use (i.e., document, technical guidelines, species monitoring results, sustainable livelihood development models, etc.); Great efforts were made by the UNDP, PMU and other partners towards achieving the project goal; High likelihood of impact
Efficiency	MS	Project has successfully utilized most of its allocated financial resources. Project has adjusted well to adapt with delays caused by Covid, institutional changes and introduction of new bidding requirements. However, it was found difficult to assess the efficiency of co-financing under the forms of in-kind contributions and grants.
Overall Project Outcome Rating	S	Overall, the project has adapted relatively well to various implementation challenges and delays and has implemented most of its planned activities with a budget utilized rate of 97% (as of December 2024);

		Some late-stage activities, such as forest restoration and sustainable livelihood development, require ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness; Some other initiatives, such as biodiversity-friendly tourism certification and documentation of best practices, need to be expedited to ensure completion before the project's closure
Sustainability	Rating	
Financial resources	ML	Although many project activities were designed based on proven successful practices and integrated into local socio-economic development plans—such as forest restoration, sustainable livelihood development, and tourism—to enhance financial sustainability post-project, concerns remain; Market risk factors and the limited capacity of localities to mobilize financial resources from state budgets and other sources pose significant challenges to ensuring the financial sustainability of these initiatives
Socio-political/economic	L	Political interest and commitments on sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation are relatively strong in Vietnam; nationally and locally, project interventions are politically and socio-economically acceptable;
Institutional framework and governance	ML	Some BR management related regulations supported by the project are still pending approvals, which hinders the institutional framework and governance sustainability
Environmental	L	The project itself is a great advocate for addressing environmental and climate issues and all of its interventions were environmentally viable
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	ML	Availability of required financial resources and delays in approval and adoption of some relevant legal frame-work pose some challenge for overall sustainability

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the detailed analysis and conclusions of the evaluation exercise following are the main recommendations:

Table-17: Recommendation table

No	TE recommendations	Responsible Party	Time frame	Note
A	Priority actions to be taken			
1	Conduct final coordination meetings with MARD, MONRE, DARD, and DONRE to align on outstanding activities and ensure smooth project closeout	NBCA	Jan-25	
2	Review and update all project products/deliverables	NBCA/MONRE	Feb-25	There are some project deliverables/products, such as technical reports, guidelines, management plans and financial documents that have been presented as incomplete drafts or showed gaps and inconsistent

				information and data. These deliverables/products require thorough review, update, and finalization to ensure accurate monitoring and assessment
3	Finalize and upload technical reports that were completed during and after TE stage to the UNDP's SharePoint folders	NBCA and UNDP	Feb-25	Technical reports include those were used as evidence for indicators: (i) increase in funding for 3 targeted BRs, (ii) increase in METT score of 6 PAs; (iii) total area of set-aside being invested; (iv) total area of forest restored; (v) accumulated number of facilities certified with biodiversity-friendly standards; (vi) GHG benefits from improved management effectiveness of the protected areas, restoration and sustainable practices in PA buffer and transition zone
4	Finalize and officially circulate the report on lessons learned and good practices of the BR project to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Feb-25	The report should highlight practical approaches, key challenges, and successful case studies that can inform future biodiversity conservation and sustainable development efforts in Vietnam.
5	Circulate the project's publications (printed and non-printed) to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Mar-25	Publications include policy briefs, research papers, guidelines, and communication materials to share project results and promote replication across other biosphere reserves in Vietnam.
6	Support the finalization and submission of the 10-year implementation report of Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve to UNESCO	NBCA/MONRE	Jun-25	The report should document progress on biodiversity conservation, socio-economic development, and cultural preservation, following UNESCO's biosphere reserve criteria.
7	Finalize and officially circulate the guidelines developed by the project to related agencies, including the BRs in Vietnam	NBCA/MONRE	Dec-25	Guidelines include: KBA identification and management, HCV area identification, target species monitoring, integration of biodiversity conservation in provincial planning, revolving fund establishment, BR nomination process, BR management plans, and biodiversity-friendly certifications for tourism facilities.
8	Finalize and submit the regulations on management and environmental protection of Dong Nai BR for approval	Dong Nai BRMB	Dec-25	Regulations should address zoning, permitted activities, biodiversity monitoring, and community participation in conservation efforts.
9	Finalize and submit for approval the decision on the establishment of Dong Nai BR Management Board	Dong Nai BRMB, NBCA/MONRE	Dec-25	The management board structure should ensure clear roles and responsibilities, with representation from government agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders.

10	Finalize and submit the feasibility report for the establishment of Pu Xa Lai Leng Nature Reserve for approval	Nghe An BRMB	Dec-25	The feasibility report should assess ecological significance, socio-economic implications, and resource requirements for the proposed nature reserve.
11	Follow up for the approval of the regulations on management and environmental protection of West Nghe An BR	Nghe An BRMB	Dec-25	Ensure alignment with national environmental protection laws and incorporate feedback from local stakeholders to facilitate approval and implementation.
12	Finalize and submit the regulations on management and environmental protection of CLC-HA BR for approval	CLC-HA BR	Dec-25	The regulations should integrate biodiversity-friendly tourism practices and community-based conservation measures to enhance sustainability.
13	Review and document the results of applying the biodiversity-friendly tourism certification in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An BR one year after the project completion	CLC-HA BR	Dec-25	The review should evaluate the certification's impact on tourism practices, local livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation, providing recommendations for scaling up and improving the approach
B	Actions for long-term impact			
1	Scale up governance frameworks that engage local communities and promote collaboration across BRs through forums and learning platforms	MONRE/GOV	2025 and beyond	
2	Foster deeper collaboration with UNDP, provincial governments, NGOs, and private partners to replicate successful initiatives nationally and internationally	MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond	
3	Create a national-level coordination hub to serve as a platform for sharing best practices, facilitating communication, and promoting partnerships	NBCA/MONRE	2025 and beyond	
4	Strengthen outreach efforts to educate the broader public on the importance of the BR approach for biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods	NBCA/MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond	
5	Establish a robust monitoring system to track the impact of conservation activities in BRs over the long term	NBCA/MONRE	2025 and beyond	

6	Implement blended financing strategies, grant programs, and partnerships with the private sector to support community-led conservation initiatives	NBCA/MONRE ,UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond	
7	Expand biodiversity-friendly tourism models within existing BRs and to others. For example, continuing to focus on marine tourism in Hoi An and conservation efforts in Dong Nai	MONRE, BRs, UNDP, Partners	2025 and beyond	

4.3. Lessons learnt

Following is a summary of the main lessons learnt during the BR project implementation:

- The project highlighted the critical importance aligning its design with national and local strategies and policies. This approach aims to attract interest of and engage leaders at all levels, ensuring their active involvement directing and coordinating efforts among diverse stakeholder, sectors and areas and creating optimal conditions for effective implementation and the successful achievement of its desired outcomes.
- The project successfully showcased co-management approaches, particularly in engaging local communities, women, and local governments in biodiversity conservation related planning and decision-making processes. This participatory model has proven to be an effective way to align conservation objectives with the socio-economic needs of the communities. The model has the potential to be more robust with stronger support for capacity-building at the local level, ensuring that all stakeholders have the skills and resources to actively contribute to governance.
- The project demonstrated that socio-economic benefits could be achieved alongside biodiversity conservation through initiatives like eco-tourism, NTFP cooperatives, and sustainable agriculture. This integrated approach should be a guiding principle for future interventions.
- The project showed that interventions built on proven successful models (such as sustainable livelihood development under the LVG program) or aligned with sectoral or local development plans (such as sustainable tourism development, organic agriculture productions in Hoi An – Cu Lao Cham BR), effectively minimize technical and financial risks.
- The project emphasized that interventions needing sufficient time for implementation and impact evaluation, such as forest restoration and sustainable livelihood development, should be initiated early, preferably before the mid-term evaluation.
- The project also indicated that empowering women by providing leadership roles in conservation initiatives and livelihood programs helped improve both community well-being and environmental sustainability. This model should be expanded in future projects.
- Future projects should be designed incorporating flexibility in response to political and institutional challenges, ensuring adjustments are made as needed for effective coordination and stakeholder engagement and implement more integrated monitoring frameworks for multi-sectoral collaboration which is a system that establishes clear indicators and data collection methods across sectors to measure shared goals, track interdependencies, and provide actionable insights.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. TE ToR (excluding ToR annexes)

Terms of Reference for Project Terminal Evaluation

1 International Expert and 1 National Expert

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with UNDP and GEF M&E policies and procedures, all full- and medium-sized UNDP-supported GEF-financed projects are required to undergo a Terminal Evaluation (TE) at the end of the project. This Terms of Reference (ToR) sets out the expectations for the TE of the *full-sized* project titled “Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of BRs in Viet Nam” (PIMS 5659), **the BR Project** for short, which is implemented through the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency (NBCA) under the MARD of Viet Nam (MONRE). The project started on the 06 of February 2020 and will be in its *final* year of implementation in February 2025. The TE process must follow the guidance outlined in the document [“Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects.”](#)

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Ranked 16th globally in terms of biodiversity, Vietnam boasts a rich variety of species, encompassing 20,000 plant species and 12,500 animal species. Despite this distinction, the country faces a significant decline in biodiversity due to widespread deforestation, unsustainable land conversion, pollution, and climate change. The loss of national forest cover, along with wildlife poaching and trading, has driven over 300 species to the edge of extinction. Recognizing the urgency, Vietnam has prioritized conservation efforts since the late 1980s, resulting in the establishment of 176 PAs by 2021. However, these PAs, primarily located in impoverished regions, pose a challenge in balancing conservation and development goals. They are mostly managed as “prohibited areas,” lacking meaningful community involvement, leading to pressure from local populations due to restricted access.

To address this issue, a network of Biosphere Reserves (BRs) was established, building upon the existing PAs. Aligned with UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) strategy, the concept of BRs strives to ensure human-nature harmonious co-existence in designated landscapes through the integration of biodiversity conservation goal into socio-economic development planning. Since 2000, Vietnam has recognized 11 BRs, covering 4.8 million hectares and housing over 3.3 million people, many of whom are native inhabitants. However, the effectiveness of Vietnam's BR network in integrating biodiversity conservation into landscape and seascape planning remains limited. Sustainable and equitable development practices conscious of biodiversity conservation have not been materialized for agriculture-prone activities and the local economies.

In response to these challenges, the “Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves in Vietnam” project (BR project) was initiated. Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented from 2020 to 2024, the project aims to harmonize socio-economic development, sustainable natural resource management, and biodiversity conservation through an integrated landscape/seascape approach. Given the existing legal and practical infrastructures, the BR project aims to create overarching legal and institutional frameworks for this integrated management approach in various BRs, resulting in a set of guidelines for improved practices. To promote the implementation of the integrated management approach, the BR project selects the West Nghe An BR, Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An BR, and Dong Nai BR to examine their conditions and gradually mainstream sustainable resource use, PA management, and biodiversity-conscious development measures. The project's support in the 3 selected BRs has virtually helped enhancing local livelihoods, restoring degraded forests, and empowering women's participation, among other objectives.

The project objective will be achieved through the implementation of 3 inter-related and mutually complementary components that will ultimately generate the following outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Regulatory and institutional framework to avoid, reduce, mitigate, and offset adverse impacts on biodiversity and reduced pressures on ecosystems in Biosphere Reserves in place.
- Outcome 2: Integrated multi-sector and multi-stakeholder planning and management operational in three Biosphere Reserves to mainstream PA management, sustainable resource use, and biodiversity-friendly development.
- Outcome 3: Knowledge management, monitoring, and evaluation support contribute to equitable gender benefits and increased awareness of biodiversity conservation.

NBCA (previously the Vietnam Environment Administration – VEA) under MONRE is the designated National Executing Agency for the BR project, with the provincial departments, BR Management Boards, local communities, and varying community-based organizations as beneficiaries. Other key partners of the project include the MAB Committee, the MARD, and others.

PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project title	"Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves in Vietnam" (BR) - (PIMS 5659)	
UNDP Strategic Plan Outcome and Output	Output 1.3: Solutions developed at national and sub-national levels for sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste	
Country Programme Outcome and Output	Outcome 2.3: Policies, Systems and technologies in place to enable people to benefit from sustainable management of natural resources (forests, ecosystems), and reduced environmental and health risks	
Date project document signed	6 February 2020	
Project dates	Start date: February 2020	Planned end date: February 2025
Project budget	6,660,000 USD	
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation		
Funding source	Global Environment Facility (GEF)	
Implementing party⁷	Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency (NBCA)/Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE)	
Project locations	Nghe An, Quang Nam and Dong Nai provinces	

The project is closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) to 2020, Vision to 2030, its Implementation Framework, the Aichi Targets, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

NBSAP 2020	Aichi Targets	SDGs
Goal 1: Identify the main causes of biodiversity loss; thereby reducing the pressure directly and preventing the decline of biodiversity in PAs	Strategic Goal B: Reducing the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use	SDG 2: End hunger
Goal 2: Properly resolve conflicts between conservation and development	Strategic Goal C: Improving the status of biodiversity by	SDG 14: Life below water

⁷ This is the entity that has overall responsibility for implementation of the project (award), effective use of resources and delivery of outputs in the signed project document and workplan.

	safeguarding ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity	
Goal 3: Conserve the system of PAs containing typical ecosystems, and various ecosystems	Target 12: By 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has improved and sustained	SDG 15: Life on Land
Goal 4: Enhance biodiversity conservation and development at the level of ecosystems, species and genetic resources		
Goal 7: Benefits from biodiversity and ecosystem services should be shared fairly and equitably with participation of local communities		

Women in Vietnam face significant gender challenges, including under-representation in decision-making roles, unequal household responsibilities, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. The BR project addresses these issues by ensuring gender mainstreaming throughout its interventions at both national and local levels. At the national level, it promotes equal opportunities for men and women policymakers, decision-makers, and practitioners. In the three selected biosphere reserves, the project empowers women through awareness-raising, education activities, and active participation in sustainable livelihood development and ecotourism. By involving women's unions and local stakeholders, the project enhances women's roles in planning and implementing biosphere reserve management, ensuring they benefit from training and capacity-building activities. This holistic approach not only addresses gender inequality but also promotes women's empowerment, leading to improved livelihoods and community well-being.

3. TE PURPOSE

In line with UNDP's programming policies and procedures for project quality assurance, the summative evaluation will focus on promoting accountability to beneficiaries and enhancing learning and documentation. The TE report will assess the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments.

The evaluation will cover project implementation from February 2020 to September 2024, with expected result till ending date of February 2025. Aside from the assessment of intended project impacts, the TE is also expected to conduct the identification of other unforeseeable impacts.

The findings from this evaluation will be used, where necessary, to improve the design, implementation, and management of future projects and interventions.

The evaluation will serve to inform current project stakeholders and other interested parties of the project's impacts and feasibility for further scaling-up interventions. These stakeholders include but are not limited to i) MONRE; ii) PMU; iii) PITs in the 3 sites; iv) Communities; and v) Others.

Purpose:

The TE is expected to serve the 02 following main purposes, namely:

- To demonstrate accountability to stakeholders on performance in achieving development results under the Project Document (Prodoc). The evaluation will also assess the contributions of the project to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, UNDP Viet Nam Country Programme Document 2022 - 2026, the Global Biodiversity Framework, NBSAPs, and SDGs
- To provide evidence of project accountability for implementing partners both government and non-governments, donors, and beneficiaries

4. TE APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The TE report must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable, and useful.

The UNDP Viet Nam Country Office will initiate this independent evaluation with a focus on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and incorporation of gender and other cross-cutting dimensions in accordance with the [OECD-DAC core evaluation criteria](#) and the evaluation norms and standards set by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

Particularly, the TE will take into consideration assessment of the project in line with UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and [GEF Project Evaluation Guidelines](#). Questions should be grouped according to the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria: (a) relevance; (b) coherence, (c) effectiveness; (d) efficiency; (e) impact and (f) sustainability.

The TE team is also required to employ methodologies and tools that are inclusive of vulnerable groups, disabilities, human rights, and gender considerations. It is essential to ensure that the TE report incorporates gender equality, women's empowerment, and other cross-cutting dimensions/issues such as LNOB and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system, which is disability-inclusive, human-rights-focused, and gender-responsive, is a vital component of the project's management mechanism, although there seem to be challenges in its effective utilization. This system plays a crucial role in project monitoring, risk management, learning and development, and making necessary adjustments. The project team recognizes the significance of collecting sex-disaggregated data in evaluating project outcomes, aligning with the goals of gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, human-rights programming. Triangulated data from PIRs, project documents, and monitoring activities indicate several points of significance.

Key questions related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and inclusivity of vulnerable and marginalized groups, disabilities, and human rights are as follows:

- To what extent is gender, vulnerable and marginalized groups, disability-inclusive, and human-rights analysis integrated into the project's design?
- Does the project effectively utilize the analysis to establish measures addressing gender equality issues?
- What methods were employed in conducting the gender, vulnerable and marginalized groups, disability-inclusive, and human-rights analysis?
- Is the gender marker assessment assigned to the project considered accurate?
- In what ways did the project contribute to the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups, disabilities, human rights, and gender equality, as well as women's empowerment?
- How were the issues on gender and vulnerable & marginalized groups identified and addressed in the project's design and implementation phases?

The TE team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure/SESP) the Project Document, project reports including annual PIRs, project budget revisions, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the team considers useful for this evidence-based evaluation. The TE team will review the baseline and midterm GEF focal area Core Indicators/Tracking Tools submitted to the GEF at the CEO endorsement and midterm stages and the terminal Core Indicators/Tracking Tools that must be completed before the TE field mission begins.

The TE team is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with the Project Team, government counterparts (the GEF Operational Focal Point), Implementing Partners, the UNDP Viet Nam Country Office, the Regional Technical Advisor, direct beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful TE. Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to executing agencies, senior officials and task team/component leaders, key experts and consultants in the subject area, Project Board, project beneficiaries, academia, local government and CSOs, etc. Engaged parties may encompass:

1. The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency/MONRE.
2. The BR Project Management Board (PMU).
3. United Nations Development Program: Vietnam Country Office (including the GEF/SGP team), UNDP Regional Technical Specialist in Bangkok
4. Provincial Committees (PPCs) of the provinces of Nghe An, Quang Nam, and Dong Nai
5. PITs in West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, and Dong Nai BRs.
6. Management Boards of Dong Nai, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An and West Nghe An BRs.
7. PA Management Boards and subordinate bodies in pilot Biosphere Reserves:
 - o West Nghe An (i.e.. Phu Mat National Park, Phu Hoat Nature Reserve, Phu Huong Nature Reserve);
 - o Cu Lao Cham- Hoi An Biosphere Reserve (i.e.. Cu Lao Cham Marine PA, Hoi An World Culture Heritage Site);
 - o Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve (i.e.. Cat Tien National Park and Dong Nai Culture Nature Reserve)
8. Relevant community-based organizations involved in livelihood development component of the project i.e. Nghe An Forestry Development Consultation Centre, Centre for Environment and Biological Resources – CEBR, Hoi An's Women Union, Tuong Duong District's Farmers Union, Gia Canh Commune's Farmers Union, and Vinh Cuu District's Women Union.
9. Commune People Committees, Village Leaders, and Community members that have are direct beneficiaries of the project and other local communities in and around the three pilot Biosphere Reserves.
10. Viet Nam UNESCO National Man and Biosphere (MAB) committee
11. MARD; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, etc.
12. Other relevant stakeholders.

Additionally, the TE team is expected to conduct field missions to 3 project piloted Biosphere Reserves of West Nghe An, Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, and Dong Nai.

The specific design and methodology for the TE should emerge from consultations between the TE team and the above-mentioned parties regarding what is appropriate and feasible for meeting the TE purpose and objectives and answering the evaluation questions, given limitations of budget, time and data. The TE team must use gender-responsive methodologies and tools and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other cross-cutting issues and SDGs are incorporated into the TE report.

Further use of these tools may be determined in consultation with the evaluation manager and key stakeholders, allowing for flexibility. The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the evaluation must be clearly outlined in the TE Inception Report and be fully discussed and agreed between UNDP, stakeholders, and the TE team.

The final report must describe the full TE approach taken and the rationale for the approach making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the evaluation.

5. DETAILED SCOPE OF THE TE

The TE will assess project performance against expectations set out in the project's Logical Framework/Results Framework (see ToR Annex A). The TE will assess results according to the criteria outlined in the [Guidance for TEs of UNDP-supported GEF-financed Projects](#)

The Findings section of the TE report will cover the topics listed below. A full outline of the TE report's content is provided in ToR Annex C.

The asterisk “(*)” indicates criteria for which a rating is required.

Findings

i. Project Design/Formulation

- National priorities and country drivenness

- Theory of Change
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)
- Analysis of Results Framework: project logic and strategy, indicators
- Assumptions and Risks
- Lessons from other relevant projects (e.g. same focal area) incorporated into project design
- Planned stakeholder participation
- Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector
- Management arrangements
- ii. Project Implementation
 - Adaptive management (changes to the project design and project outputs during implementation)
 - Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements
 - Project Finance and Co-finance
 - Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry (*), implementation (*), and overall assessment of M&E (*)
 - Implementing Agency (UNDP) (*) and Executing Agency (*), overall project oversight/implementation and execution (*)
 - Risk Management, including Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)
- iii. Project Results
 - Assess the achievement of outcomes against indicators by reporting on the level of progress for each objective and outcome indicator at the time of the TE and noting final achievements
 - Relevance (*), Effectiveness (*), Efficiency (*) and overall project outcome (*)
 - Sustainability: financial (*), socio-political (*), institutional framework and governance (*), environmental (*), overall likelihood of sustainability (*)
 - Country ownership
 - Gender equality and women's empowerment
 - Cross-cutting issues (poverty alleviation, improved governance, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster prevention and recovery, human rights, capacity development, South-South cooperation, knowledge management, volunteerism, etc., as relevant)
 - GEF Additionality
 - Catalytic Role / Replication Effect
 - Progress to impact

Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- The TE team will include a summary of the main findings of the TE report. Findings should be presented as statements of fact that are based on analysis of the data.
- The section on conclusions will be written in light of the findings. Conclusions should be comprehensive and balanced statements that are well substantiated by evidence and logically connected to the TE findings. They should highlight the strengths, weaknesses, and results of the project, respond to key evaluation questions and provide insights into the identification of and/or solutions to important problems or issues pertinent to project beneficiaries, UNDP and the GEF, including issues in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Recommendations should provide concrete, practical, feasible and targeted recommendations directed to the intended users of the evaluation about what actions to take and decisions to make.

The recommendations should be specifically supported by the evidence and linked to the findings and conclusions around key questions addressed by the evaluation.

- The TE report should also include lessons that can be taken from the evaluation, including best practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success that can provide knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (programmatic and evaluation methods used, partnerships, financial leveraging, etc.) that are applicable to other GEF and UNDP interventions. When possible, the TE team should include examples of good practices in project design and implementation.
- It is important for the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned of the TE report to incorporate gender equality and empowerment of women.

The TE report will include an Evaluation Ratings Table, as shown below:

ToR Table 2: Evaluation Ratings Table for the BR Project

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating⁸
M&E design at entry	
M&E Plan Implementation	
Overall Quality of M&E	
Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Overall Project Outcome Rating	
Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	
Socio-political/economic	
Institutional framework and governance	
Environmental	
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	

6. TIME FRAME

The total duration of the TE will be approximately 30 working days over a time period of 12 weeks starting on June 30, 2024. The expected TE timeframe is as follows:

Timeframe	Activity
<i>June 15, 2024</i>	Application closes
<i>June 30, 2024</i>	Selection of TE team
<i>July 1 -5, 2024</i>	Preparation period for TE team (handover of documentation)
<i>July 5 - 15, 2024</i>	Document review and preparation of TE Inception Report
<i>July 15, 2024</i>	Submission of TE Inception Report
<i>July 15 - 20, 2024</i>	Inception Meeting; Finalization and Validation of TE Inception Report; latest start of TE mission
<i>July 20- August 5, 2024</i>	TE mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits, etc.
<i>August 5 - 10, 2024</i>	Mission wrap-up meeting & presentation of initial findings; latest end of TE mission

⁸ Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight & Execution, Relevance are rated on a 6-point scale: 6=Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5=Satisfactory (S), 4=Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3=Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2=Unsatisfactory (U), 1=Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability is rated on a 4-point scale: 4=Likely (L), 3=Moderately Likely (ML), 2=Moderately Unlikely (MU), 1=Unlikely (U)

<i>August 25, 2024</i>	Submission of draft TE report
<i>August 25 -September 10, 2024</i>	Circulation of draft TE report for comments/feedback from project stakeholders – a consolidated set of comments is sent back to the TE team for refinement
<i>September 20, 2024</i>	Submission of final draft TE report with incorporation of comments on draft TE report into Audit Trail
<i>September 25, 2024</i>	Preparation and Issuance of Management Response by UNDP, in consultation with project stakeholders
<i>September 30, 2024</i>	Latest date for submission of full TE completion

Regarding site visits, the TE team (both **international and national experts**) is expected to conduct field missions to 3 project sites i.e. Biosphere Reserves of West Nghe An (for 5 days), Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An (for 2 days), and Dong Nai (for 3 days). All associated travel costs must be included in the financial offers. Site visit plans should be provided in the TE Inception Report.

7. TE DELIVERABLES

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Team leader	Team member	Responsibilities
1	TE Inception Report	TE team clarifies objectives, methodology and timing of the TE	No later than 2 weeks before the TE mission: <i>July 15, 2024</i>	4 days	4 days	TE team submits Inception Report to Evaluation Manager and project management
2	Presentation of Initial Findings after interviews and site visits	Initial Findings	End of TE mission: <i>August 10, 2024</i>	14 days (inclusive of site visits)	12 days (inclusive of site visits)	TE team presents to Evaluation Manager and project management
3	Draft TE Report	Full draft report (<i>using guidelines on report content in ToR Annex C</i>) with annexes	Within 3 weeks of end of TE mission: <i>August 25, 2024</i>	7 days	4 days	TE team submits to Evaluation Manager; reviewed by RTA, UNDP Viet Nam, GEF OFP (optional)
5	Final TE Report* + Audit Trail	Revised final report and TE Audit trail (<i>See template in ToR Annex H</i>)	Within 1 week of receiving comments on draft report: <i>September 20, 2024</i>	5 days	3 days	TE team submits both documents to the Evaluation Manager
	TOTAL			30 days	23 days	

All final TE reports will be quality assessed by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Details of the IEO's quality assessment of decentralized evaluations can be found in Section 6 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines.⁹

8. TE ARRANGEMENTS

⁹ Access at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/section-6.shtml>

The principal responsibility for managing the TE resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for this project's TE is the UNDP Viet Nam Country Office. The TE team will be accountable and report to the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) focal point of UNDP Viet Nam, who is the Evaluation Manager.

The Commissioning Unit will contract the evaluators and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the TE team. The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the TE team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits.

9. TE TEAM COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The evaluation will be carried out by 2 external evaluators, comprising a Lead Evaluator (international expert) with extensive experience in natural resource management (**Team Leader**) and a national expert (**Team member**). The Lead Evaluator will assume a leadership role, overseeing the entire evaluation process, ensuring successful execution, and bearing responsibility for the outcome. In their capacity as the team lead, they will be responsible for the design and primary writing of the TE report. The evaluation team will collaborate with project staff and stakeholders to pave the way for the effective and efficient implementation of the evaluation. The national expert will assess emerging trends regarding regulatory frameworks, budget allocations, capacity building, and work with the Project Team in developing the TE itinerary. The national expert, functioning as a focal point for stakeholders, will have to report to the Lead Evaluator and maintain communication with the Project/Commissioning Unit team to coordinate necessary actions.

The evaluator(s) cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation and/or implementation (including the writing of the project document), must not have conducted this project's MTR and should not have a conflict of interest with the project's related activities.

Evaluation Criteria

For International Expert - Lead Evaluator (Team Leader):

Mandatory criteria¹⁰	Score
- Minimum 10 years accumulated and recognized experience in the implementation and/ or evaluation of development projects related to natural resources and biodiversity conservation.	Pass/Fail
- Having conducted evaluation of at least 2 projects.	Pass/Fail
Weighted scoring criteria	
<u>Education</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's degree in Environmental Science, Environmental Management, Environmental/ Development Economics or other closely related fields (150); higher Degree: (200) 	200
<u>Experience</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 years accumulated and recognized experience in the implementation and/ or evaluation of development projects related to natural resources and biodiversity conservation. 	250
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience working with the GCF, GEF, or GCF/GEF project evaluation is an advantage Project evaluation/review experiences within United Nations system will be considered an asset. 	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience with and demonstrated understanding of result-based evaluation methodologies, application of SMART indicators and reconstruction and/ or validation of baseline scenarios (<i>The evaluation of this criterion will be based on how well and explicit the candidate</i> 	50
	150

¹⁰ Candidates who do not pass the mandatory criteria shall not be considered further for evaluation.

<i>demonstrates it in their CV, with follow up via interview and/or reference checking if necessary)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated understanding of issues related to gender and biodiversity. Experience in gender sensitive evaluation and analysis (<i>The evaluation of this criterion will be based on how well and explicit the candidate demonstrates it in their CV with follow up via interview and/or reference checking if necessary)</i> 	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work experience in the Asia-Pacific region of similar nature to the project, i.e. biodiversity conservation, natural resources management; <p>Experience in Vietnam is an advantage.</p>	100 50
<u>Language</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent written English and analytical skills (2 English reports led by the candidate on similar topic to be provided). 	100
TOTAL	1000

For the National Expert (Team member)

Criteria	Score
<u>Education</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master's Degree in Environmental Science, Environmental Management, Forestry, Natural Resources, Environmental/Development Economics or other closely related fields 	200
<u>Experience</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 years accumulated and recognized experience in the implementation and/ or evaluation of development projects related to natural resources and biodiversity conservation. 	250
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience working Protected Areas or similar entities; and/or communities in or around Protected Areas in Vietnam 	200
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in GCF/GEF project evaluation. 	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience with and demonstrated understanding of result-based evaluation methodologies (<i>The evaluation of this criterion will be based on how well and explicit the candidate demonstrates it in their CV, with follow up via interview and/or reference checking if necessary)</i> 	50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated experience in project stakeholder engagement, organization and facilitation of stakeholder meetings for interviews and discussion (<i>The evaluation of this criterion will be based on how well and explicit the candidate demonstrates it in their CV, with follow up via interview and/or reference checking if necessary)</i> 	100
<u>Language</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent written English (2 reports led by the candidate on similar topic to be provided) 	100
TOTAL	1000

Responsibility of Team leader:

Team leader (TL) is responsible for the progress and quality of all products produced through the assignment.

- (S)he leads the development of a joint work-plan for the review and evaluation.
- (S)he leads the development of the tools and methodology for the assignment.
- (S)he will be responsible for presenting the report and findings with inputs from the team member.

The evaluation team will conduct solitary and team interviews and dialogues as deemed necessary.

Responsibility of Team member:

As for the Team Member (TM), apart from joint activities, (s)he is responsible for

- facilitating the consultation processes with national and provincial partners; and
- providing inputs and conduct all tasks as assigned or agreed on by the TL.
- supporting the team leader as the interpreter/guide when conducting field visits.

More details on the work division should be developed by the selected consultants through their work-plan.

10. EVALUATOR ETHICS

The TE team will be held to the highest ethical standards and is required to sign a code of conduct upon acceptance of the assignment. This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. The evaluator must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The evaluator must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

11. PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- 20% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE Inception Report and approval by the Commissioning Unit
- 40% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the draft TE report to the Commissioning Unit
- 40% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE report and approval by the Commissioning Unit and RTA (via signatures on the TE Report Clearance Form) and delivery of completed TE Audit Trail

Criteria for issuing the final payment of 40%¹¹:

- The final TE report includes all requirements outlined in the TE TOR and is in accordance with the TE guidance.
- The final TE report is clearly written, logically organized, and is specific for this project (i.e. text has not been cut & pasted from other TE reports).
- The Audit Trail includes responses to and justification for each comment listed.

12. TOR ANNEXES

- ToR Annex A: Project Logical/Results Framework
- ToR Annex B: Project Information Package to be reviewed by TE team
- ToR Annex C: Content of the TE report
- ToR Annex D: Evaluation Criteria Matrix template
- ToR Annex E: UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators
- ToR Annex F: TE Rating Scales
- ToR Annex G: TE Report Clearance Form
- ToR Annex H: TE Audit Trail

¹¹ The Commissioning Unit is obligated to issue payments to the TE team as soon as the terms under the ToR are fulfilled. If there is an ongoing discussion regarding the quality and completeness of the final deliverables that cannot be resolved between the Commissioning Unit and the TE team, the Regional M&E Advisor and Vertical Fund Directorate will be consulted. If needed, the Commissioning Unit's senior management, Procurement Services Unit and Legal Support Office will be notified as well so that a decision can be made about whether or not to withhold payment of any amounts that may be due to the evaluator(s), suspend or terminate the contract and/or remove the individual contractor from any applicable rosters. See the UNDP Individual Contract Policy for further details:

https://popp.undp.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/UNDP_POPP_DOCUMENT_LIBRARY/Public/PSU_Individual%20Contract_Individual%20Contract%20Policy.docx&action=default

Annex 2: TE Misson Itinerary

1. Date

13 – 23/10/2024

2. Location

Hanoi, Nghe An, Dong Nai and Quang Nam

3. Mission objective

To gather detailed information and data required for the Terminal Evaluation of the BR project

5. Detailed Schedule

Date	Time	Place	Activities	Partners	Responsible
Sunday 13/10/2024			Arrive Hanoi		
Monday 14/10/2024	09h00 – 11h00	PMU office	Mini workshop with stakeholders	UNDP, GEF, VEA and project's partners in Hanoi	Stephanie and Ha
	14h00 – 16h00	PMU office	Deep interview with National Executive Agency staff and BCA staff		Stephanie
	16h00 – 18h00		Depart for Vinh, Nghe An		Ha
Tuesday 15/10/2024	09h00 – 11h00	UNDP office	Deep interview with UNDP CO and UNDP-GEF staff		Stephanie
	14h00 – 16h00	MARD office	Deep interview with MARD staff		Stephanie
	08h00 - 09h30	PPMU office (Nghe An DARD)	Inteviu and discussion on the project implementation, coordination, challenges and project's overall contribution to the locality's welfare	Nghe An DARD, Nghe An PMU, PIT, West Nghe An Bio Reserve Managment Board	Ha
	09h30 – 13h30		Move to Pu Hoat Nature Reserve by car		Ha

	14h00 – 15h00	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve office	Interview and discussion on the project execution and sustainability, community impact and local ownership	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve, PIT, (Relevant) Commune's People Committee (s), (Relevant) Commune's Farmer/Women Association (s)	Ha
	15h30 – 17h00		Field visit: forest rehabilitation and sustainable management/biodiversity monitoring models in Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve, PIT	Ha
Wednesday 16/10/2024	08h30 – 10h30	MAB office	Vietnamese UNESCO National Management and Biosphere (MAB) Committee staff		Stephanie
	14h00 – 16h00		Depart for Ho Chi Minh City		Stephanie
	07h00 – 09h30		Field visit: sustainable livelihood models in Pu Hoat Nature Reserve's buffer zone	PIT, Commune's People's Committee (s), Commune's Farmer/Women Association (s)	Ha
	09h30 – 16h00		Move back to Vinh city by car and depart for HCM city		Ha
	08h00 – 10h30		Move to Dong Nai Province		
Thursday 17/10/2024	13h30 – 15h30	Dong Nai BR office (Vinh Cuu Districts)	Interview and discussion on the project implementation, coordination, challenges and project's overall contribution to the locality's welfare	Dong Nai PMU, PIT, Dong Nai BR Management Board, Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve, Vinh Cuu district's Women Association	Stephanie and Ha
	15h30 – 16h30		Field visit: Forest restoration models in Ma Da Commune, Vinh Cuu District	PIT, Ma Da Commune's People Committee, Households	Stephanie/Ha
Friday 18/10/2024	08h30 – 10h30		Field visit: Sustainable Livelihood models in Gia Canh Commune, Dinh Quan District	Gia Canh Commune's People Committee, Gia Canh Commune's Farmer Women Association, households	Stephanie/Ha
	13h30-16h30		Move to Ho Chi Minh City by car		Stephanie and Ha
Saturday 19/10/2024	08h00 – 16h30		Team work and desk work in Ho Chi Minh city		Stephanie and Ha
Sunday 20/10/2024	08h00 – 17h30				

	08h00 – 11h00		Depart to Da Nang and move to Hoi An by car		
Monday 21/10/2024	13h30-14h30	Cu Lao Cham BR Office	Inteview and discussion on the project implementation, coordination, challenges and project's overall contribution to the locality's welfare	Quang Nam PMU, Project Implemenntation Team, Cu Lao Cham BR	Stephanie and Ha
	14h30 – 15h30		Field visit: Mangrove restoration models, community-based tourism models in Cam Kim commune, Hoi An city	Cam Kim commune's People Committee Hoi An city's Women Association, Relevant communities/households	Stephanie/Ha
	15h30 – 16h30		Field visit: Sustainable livelihood models under Low Value Grant in Cam Thanh Commune, Hoi An city	Cam Thanh commune's People Committee; Hoi An city's Women Association, Relevant communities/households	Stephanie/Ha
Tuesday 22/10/2024	07h30 – 11h30		Field visit: Marine conservation models in CLC Marine Protected Area	Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area Management Board, Relevant communities/households	Stephanie and Ha
	13h30 – 16h00		Return Hanoi and get ready for briefing		
Wednesday 23/10/2024	09h00 – 10h30	UNDP office	Wrap-up meeting	UNDP-Vietnam, BCA	Stephanie and Ha

Annex 3: List of key persons interviewed

Name	Gender	Organisation	Position
UNDP			
1. Hoang Thu Thuy	Female	UNDP Vietnam Country Office	UNDP Project Manager
2. Dang Thanh Phuong	Female	UNDP Vietnam Country Office	UNDP Staff
3. Nguyen Thi Thu Huyen	Female	UNDP Vietnam Country Office	UNDP Staff
4. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Han	Female	UNDP Vietnam Country Office	UNDP staff
NBCA/PMU			
1. Hoang Thi Thanh Nhan	Female	Project Steering Committee	Project Vice Director
2. Bui Xuan Truong	Male	BCA (MONRE)	Project Manager
3. Dang Thi Tuoi	Female	BCA (MONRE)	Staff
4. Doan Hong Ngan	Female	BCA (MONRE)	Staff
MAB Viet Nam			
1. Nguyen Hoang Tri	Male	MAB Viet Nam	President
2. Vu Thuc Hien	Female	MAB Viet Nam	Secretariat
VNFOREST (MARD)			
1. Tran Nho Dat	Male	VNFOREST (MARD)	Department of Protection and Special Use Forest Staff
Nghe An site			
1. Nguyen Danh Hung	Male	Nghe An DARD	Vice Director
2. Nguyen Thanh Chung	Male	Nghe An DARD	Official
3. Phan Sy Ninh	Male	Nghe An PIT	Field coordinator
4. Ngo Hai Luu	Male	West Nghe An BR	Technical staff
5. Doan Thi Hanh Lam	Female	West Nghe An BR	Chief Accountant
6. Nguyen Tien Hung	Male	West Nghe An BR	Technical Staff
7. Thai Thi Thao	Female	West Nghe An BR	Technical Staff
8. Nguyen Thi Thu	Female	West Nghe An BR	Technical Staff
9. Phan Thi Thu Hien	Female	West Nghe An BR	Technical Staff
10. Nguyen Thanh Nham	Male	Project's Contractor (Consultant Center for Forestry Development)	Director
11. Dao Thi Minh Chau	Female	Project's Contractor (Biological Resource and Environment Center)	Vice Director

12. Nguyen Van Hieu	Male	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Vice Director
13. Nguyen Van Nghia	Male	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Vice Director
14. Lo Van Hoai	Male	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Head of Forest Ranger Station
15. Nguyen Van Manh	Male	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Head of Department of Science and International Cooperation
16. Vo Hong Bien	Male	Pu Hoat Nature Reserve	Technical staff
17. Ho Anh Dung	Male	Dong Van Commune People's Committee	Vice President
18. Lang Thi Xoan	Female	Dong Van Commune Women's Union	President
Quang Nam site			
1. Nguyen Van Vu	Male	MB of Cu Lao Cham-Hoi An BR	Member
		Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area	Deputy Director
		BR Project Implementation Team	Vice Director
2. Tran Phuong Thao	Female	BR Project Implementation Team	Site Coordinator
3. Phan Cong Sanh	Male	Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area	Technical staff
4. Ngo Thi Tuyet Nhung	Female	Hoi An City's Women's Union	Chairwoman
5. Ngo Huyen Chan	Female	Cam Thanh Commune People's Committee	Vice Chairwoman
6. Le Thi Thu Sinh	Female	Cam Thanh Commune Women's Union	Member
7. Nguyen Thi Xuan Lien	Female	Cam Thanh Commune Women's Union	Member
8. Le Nhung	Male	Cam Thanh Commune Community	
9. Huynh Xuan Tranh	Male	Cam Thanh Commune Department of Extension Services	
10. Nguyen Ngoc Hung	Male	Cam Kim Commune People's Committee	Chairman
12. Do Manh Thuan	Male	Cam Kim Youth's Union	Leader
13. Cuc	Female	Cam Kim Commune's household	
14. Tay	Male	Cam Kim Commune's household	
15. Thieu	Male	Cam Kim Commune's household	
16. Tri	Male	Cam Kim Commune's household	
Dong Nai site		Cam Kim Commune's household	
1. Nguyen Hoang Hao	Male	MB of Dong Nai BR	Vice Director
		Dong Nai Culture Nature Reserve	Director
		BR Project Implementation Team	Director
2. Nguyen Thi Lan Phuong	Female	BR Project Implementation Team	Site coordinator

3. Ha Thi Yen	Male	BR Project Implementation Team	Technical staff
4. Truong Viet Anh	Male	MB of Dong Nai BR	Secretariat
		Dong Nai Culture Nature Reserve	Technical staff
5. Tran Huy Manh	Male	Project's Contractor (Southern Forest Inventory and Planning Institute) - Forest restoration models	Vice Director
6. Le Thi Thuy	Male	Project's Contractor (Vinh Cuu Women's Union) - LVGs models	Chairwoman
7. Ha Lap Quoc	Female	Vinh Cuu District People's Committee	Vice Chairman
8. Tran Thi Ngoc Linh	Male	Ma Da Commune Women's Union	Chairwoman
9. Do Thi Quang	Male	Vinh Cuu District's Household	
10. Hoang Thi Duyen	Female	Vinh Cuu District's Household	
11. Phan Thi Hao	Female	Vinh Cuu District's Household	
12. Nguyen Duc Noi	Male	Vinh Cuu District's Household	
13. Bien Huu Tan	Male	Gia Canh Commune People's Committee	Vice Chairman
14. Nguyen Xuan An	Male	Gia Canh Famer's Union (Project's contractor - LVGs)	Chairman
15. Nguyen Duc Cuong	Male	Dinh Quan District Forest Ranger	Staff
16. Trinh Thi My Dung	Female	Project's Contractor (Southern Institute of Ecology) - Set aside areas	
17. Huynh Huu Phuoc	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
18. K' Hong	Female	Gia Canh Commune's household	
19. Tran Le Duan	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
20. Le Van Phung	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
21. K' Tuyen	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
22. Tran Van Dac	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
23. K' Xuyen	Female	Gia Canh Commune's household	
24. Nguyen Van No	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
25. Le Van Que	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
26. Doan Minh Tuan	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
27. Hoac Thi Hue	Female	Gia Canh Commune's household	
28. Hoang The Hao	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
29. Lam Van Vinh	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
30. Le Van Ti	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	
31. Tran Khanh Son	Male	Gia Canh Commune's household	

Annex 4. List of documents reviewed

#	Item (electronic versions preferred if available)
1	Project Identification Form (PIF)
2	UNDP Initiation Plan
3	Final UNDP-GEF Project Document with all annexes
4	CEO Endorsement Request
5	UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) and Environmental and Social Management Framework, Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework, and Stakeholder Engagement Plans
6	Inception Workshop Report
7	Mid-Term Review report and management response to MTR recommendations
8	All Project Implementation Reports (PIRs)
9	Progress reports (quarterly, semi-annual or annual, with associated workplans and financial reports)
10	Oversight mission reports
11	Minutes of Project Board Meetings and of other meetings (i.e. Project Appraisal Committee meetings)
12	GEF Tracking Tools (from CEO Endorsement, midterm and terminal stages)
13	GEF/LDCF/SCCF Core Indicators (from PIF, CEO Endorsement, midterm and terminal stages); for GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects only
14	Financial data, including actual expenditures by project outcome, including management costs, and including documentation of any significant budget revisions
15	Co-financing data with expected and actual contributions broken down by type of co-financing, source, and whether the contribution is considered as investment mobilized or recurring expenditures (supporting Co-financing letter materialized letters must be submitted)
16	Audit and spot check reports
17	Electronic copies of project outputs (booklets, manuals, technical reports, articles, etc.)
18	Sample of project communications materials
19	Summary list of formal meetings, workshops, etc. held, with date, location, topic, and number of participants
20	Any relevant socio-economic monitoring data, such as average incomes / employment levels of stakeholders in the target area, change in revenue related to project activities
21	List of contracts and procurement items over ~US\$5,000 (i.e. organizations or companies contracted for project outputs, etc., except in cases of confidential information)
22	List of related projects/initiatives contributing to project objectives approved/started after GEF project approval (i.e. any leveraged or “catalytic” results)
23	Data on relevant project website activity – e.g. number of unique visitors per month, number of page views, etc. over relevant time period, if available
24	UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD)
25	List/map of project sites, highlighting suggested visits
26	List and contact details for project staff, key project stakeholders, including Project Board members, RTA, Project Team members, and other partners to be consulted
27	Project deliverables that provide documentary evidence of achievement towards project outcomes

Annex 5: Evaluation Question Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Relevance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project's objective align with the priorities of the local government and local communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of local stakeholders reporting alignment of project objectives with their stated priorities (target: 80% agreement). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local stakeholders, document review of local development strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews, desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project's objective fit within the national environment and development priorities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of national policy documents referencing the project's objectives (target: at least 3 official documents). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National policy documents, e.g., National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review, national level interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project concept originate from local or national stakeholders, and/or were relevant stakeholders sufficiently involved in project development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of stakeholder meetings held during project conception (target: at least 5 meetings with diverse stakeholder groups). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project staff, local and national stakeholders, project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visit interviews, desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project objective fit GEF strategic priorities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of GEF focal area indicators met by the project objectives (target: 100% alignment with at least two key GEF strategic priorities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEF strategic priority documents for the project approval period, current GEF strategic priority documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the project linked with and in line with UNDP priorities and strategies for the country? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of UNDAF and CPD priority areas addressed by the project objectives (target: alignment with at least 2 priority areas). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNDP strategic priority documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project's objective support the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other relevant MEAs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of CBD and MEA key elements explicitly addressed in project objectives (target: at least 3 key elements). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CBD website, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review
Efficiency			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project cost-effective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of financial management procedures rated as effective (target: $\geq 80\%$), financial delivery rate compared to expected (target: $\geq 90\%$), management costs as a percentage of total costs (target: $\leq 15\%$). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review, interviews with project staff

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are expenditures in line with international standards and norms? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of project costs aligned with norms and standards for similar donor projects in the region (target: $\geq 90\%$). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the project implementation approach efficient for delivering the planned project results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality rating of implementation structure and coordination mechanisms (target: $\geq 80\%$ positive feedback), stakeholder engagement quality score (target: $\geq 70\%$), monitoring mechanism effectiveness (target: $\geq 75\%$). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, national and local stakeholders, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews with project staff, national and local stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the project implementation delayed? If so, has that affected cost-effectiveness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average percentage of project milestones met on time (target: $\geq 90\%$), analysis of cost impact due to delays (target: cost increase $\leq 10\%$). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratio of cash and in-kind co-financing received to the expected level (target: $\geq 100\%$). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews with project staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the project leveraging additional resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total amount of additional resources leveraged compared to the initial project budget (target: leverage $\geq 15\%$ of the project budget). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews with project staff
Effectiveness			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the project objectives likely to be met? To what extent are they likely to be met? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress towards achieving project indicator targets compared to expectations at the current stage of implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key factors contributing to project success or underachievement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation and assessment of factors contributing to success or underachievement, including risk management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key risks and barriers that remain to achieve the project objective and generate Global Environmental Benefits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and assessment of remaining risks and barriers to achieving project objectives and Global Environmental Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the key assumptions and impact drivers relevant to the achievement of Global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions taken to address key assumptions and impact drivers relevant to achieving Global Environmental Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Environmental Benefits likely to be met?			
Results			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the planned outputs been produced? Have they contributed to the project outcomes and objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of planned outputs completed (target: ≥ 90%), qualitative assessment of output contributions to project outcomes (target: positive feedback from ≥ 75% of stakeholders). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff, project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the anticipated outcomes likely to be achieved? Are the outcomes likely to contribute to the achievement of the project objective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likelihood score of achieving anticipated outcomes (target: ≥ 80%), qualitative assessment of contributions of outcomes to project objectives (target: positive feedback from ≥ 75% of stakeholders). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff, project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are impact-level results likely to be achieved? Are they likely to be at a scale sufficient to be considered Global Environmental Benefits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of progress towards impact-level results (target: ≥ 75%), qualitative assessment of the scale of results in relation to Global Environmental Benefits (target: ≥ 70% positive stakeholder feedback). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff, project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, desk review
Sustainability			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are project results likely to be dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that any required financial resources will be available to sustain the project results once the GEF assistance ends? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence of project results on continued financial support, Likelihood of securing required resources for sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do relevant stakeholders have or are likely to achieve an adequate level of “ownership” of results, to have the interest in ensuring that project benefits are maintained? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of stakeholder ownership and commitment to maintaining project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do relevant stakeholders have the necessary technical capacity to ensure that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequacy of technical capacity of stakeholders to sustain project benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
project benefits are maintained?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the project results dependent on socio-political factors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of socio-political risks to sustaining project results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the project results dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of institutional and governance risks to sustaining project results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of project impacts and Global Environmental Benefits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of environmental risks that could affect the sustainability of project impacts and Global Environmental Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit interviews, Desk review
Gender Equality and other Cross Cutting Issues: Women's Empowerment, social inclusion, human rights, persons with disabilities, vulnerable groups, LNOB, SES			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the project contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress towards gender action plan targets, with specific metrics for gender indicators in the results framework (e.g., percentage increase in women's participation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff, project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways did the project's gender results advance or contribute to the project's biodiversity outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific linkages quantified, such as changes in biodiversity metrics directly attributable to gender-focused interventions (e.g., improved species conservation rates). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, project staff, project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were effects on local populations considered in project design and implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented positive or negative impacts on local populations, with metrics indicating the extent of these effects (e.g., survey results on community satisfaction). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, progress reports, monitoring reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, integrated into project activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of vulnerable groups actively involved in project activities and decision-making processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, stakeholder feedback, community assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, community consultations

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the project address human rights issues and the specific needs of marginalized communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and mitigation strategies for human rights risks, with metrics showing changes in the status of these communities (e.g., improvement in access to resources). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, human rights assessments, stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways did the project ensure that no groups were left behind in achieving its objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility metrics showing participation rates of marginalized communities, with specific targets (e.g., 75% participation from targeted groups). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, monitoring reports, community feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the project consider socio-ecological systems in its approach to gender and inclusion? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of SES principles integrated into project design and outcomes, with documented examples of these integrations (e.g., biodiversity assessments showing enhanced ecosystem resilience). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, ecological assessments, stakeholder feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, interviews, field visits
Additionality			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does the project provide added value compared to other initiatives or interventions in the region? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of project's unique contributions and added value relative to other ongoing or past initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Stakeholder interviews, Comparative analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, Interviews, Field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the project leveraged resources or partnerships that would not have been mobilized otherwise? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of resource or partnership mobilization that would not have occurred without the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Project staff, Partner organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, Interviews, Field visits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the project address gaps or needs that were not being met by other projects or stakeholders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of specific gaps or needs addressed by the project that were previously unmet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents, Stakeholder interviews, Needs assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review, Interviews, Field visits

Annex 6. TE Questionnaires

Tool 1 – Questionnaire for Project Management

Instructions:

Please answer the questions under each main heading, using the sub-questions as guides. Provide specific examples and evidence (e.g., statistics, dates, actual events, policies) to illustrate your answers.

Deadline:

Please submit your responses to shodge1@gmail.com by [insert due date].

1. PROJECT DESIGN, LOGIC, AND STRATEGIES

Formulation and Priorities

- How did the project align with national, regional, and international priorities?
- Which specific directives, policies, or laws did the project support? Have there been any changes in these priorities since the project began?
- How relevant was the project to key international and national policies (e.g., SDGs, climate change, DRR, biodiversity)?

Design Process

- Were you involved in the project design? If so, describe the process.
- How has the policy context evolved since the project's inception?
- What were the main national drivers for developing this project?
- How might the design have been made more relevant given the political context?

Strategy and Logic

- Was the project's rationale and logical framework effective?
- Did the project have a clear theory of change? How well was it aligned with national and sub-regional issues?
- Were the expected results clear to all stakeholders? How well did the outputs link to the expected outcomes?
- Were there any lessons learned regarding the project's design and logic?

2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Capacity Building

- Describe the approach to capacity building.
- How was adaptive management used in this project?
- What role did the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Project Boards play in guiding the project?
- Provide details about training, knowledge sharing, and policy advocacy efforts.

Management and Oversight

- Describe the overall project's management and oversight arrangements.
- How was staffing and procurement handled?
- What was UNDP's role in oversight and implementation?
- How often did UNDP representatives visit or interact with the project?
- Did the project have a partnership strategy? How effective was it?

Work Planning and Procurement

- Describe the work planning and budgeting process.
- How did the government procurement process work in this project?

Finance and Co-financing

- How were project finances monitored?

- Did you track co-financing? Provide details of expenditure per year.

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

- Describe the project's monitoring and evaluation system.
- What were the main lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation processes?

Gender Mainstreaming

- Did the project have a gender results and monitoring plan?
- What were the gender-related outcomes of the project?

Other Influencing Factors

- Were there any unintended consequences or unexpected results?
 - What were the key factors influencing project implementation?
 - How did management use adaptive strategies?
-

3. PROJECT RESULTS

Achievement of Goals and Outcomes

- Did the project achieve its expected outcomes? Why or why not?
- What were the most difficult and easiest national and regional outcomes to achieve, and why?
- What were the project's greatest results at the sub-regional and national levels?
- How did inter-sectoral collaboration contribute to project activities?

Sustainability

- What is the likelihood of this project's sustainability? Consider economic, political, environmental, and social factors.

Impact Level Results

- What were the main achievements and impact-level results of the project?
-

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Lessons Learned

- Reflect on the key lessons learned in the following areas:
 - Design
 - Management and Implementation
 - Finance
 - Results

Next Steps

- What are your recommendations for future projects? What should be the next steps?
-

Thank you for your time and insights!

Please ensure that your responses are comprehensive and include evidence where possible.

Tool 2 - National Focal Point Interview Questionnaire

Country:

Date/Time:

Name of Respondent:

Interviewer:

Section 1: Project Benefits and Results

1. Alignment with National Priorities:

- Was the project design aligned with your country's national sector development priorities and plans?

2. Involvement in Project Design:

- Were you consulted during the project design phase? If so, how?

3. Observed Benefits:

- What benefits have you observed from the project activities implemented in your country so far?

4. Capacity Building:

- How has the project contributed to building the capacity of your country to sustain the project activities after its conclusion?
-

Section 2: Project Achievability

5. Success in Delivering Results:

- How successful do you think the project has been in delivering results to date?

6. Unforeseen Delays:

- Were there any unexpected delays during the project startup? If so, what were they?

7. Achievability of Project Results:

- Do you believe the project results are achievable within the remaining timeframe?

8. Suggestions for Improvement:

- Can you suggest any improvements that could make project delivery more effective?

9. Barriers to Success:

- What barriers have you identified that could hinder the achievement of the project's outcomes and objectives?

10. Contribution of Local Partners:

- To what extent has the involvement of local partners contributed to the success of site-specific projects?
-

Section 3: Project Management Arrangements

11. Communication with national level: PMU under BCA and site level: (PIT):

- Has communication between the PMU/PIT and your country been clear, effective, and timely?

12. Feedback to PMU/PIT:

- Do you provide feedback to the PMU/PIT when you receive communications from them? How is this managed?

13. Awareness of PMU/PIT Contacts:

- Are you aware of the key PMU/PIT contacts for project management communications?

14. Annual Project Implementation Reviews:

- Does the PMU/PIT share the annual Project Implementation Reviews with you, and do you have an opportunity to provide feedback?

15. Suggestions for Improved Communication:

- How well do you think the PMU/PIT has communicated the project to your country and local partners? Can you suggest any ways to improve this communication?
-

Section 4: Sustainability

16. Post-Project Expectations:

- What does your country expect to happen at the end of the current project to sustain its results?

17. Importance of Continuation:

- How important is it to your country that the program continues after its scheduled end date?

18. Role of PMU/PIT in Sustainability:

- How relevant is the PMU to the continuation of project results after the project ends?

19. National Efforts for Sustainability:

- What actions can your country take to ensure that project results continue after the project concludes?

20. Ensuring PMU/PIT Continuation:

- What could your country do to ensure the continuation of the PMU/PIT after the project's end date?

Tool 3 - Non-Country Partner Interview Questionnaire

Non-Country Partner:

Date/Time:

Name of Respondent:

Interviewer:

Section 1: Project Benefits and Results

1. **Familiarity with the Project:**
 - How familiar are you with the project?
 2. **Involvement in Project Design:**
 - Were you consulted during the design phase of the project?
 3. **Observed Benefits:**
 - What benefits have you observed from the project activities implemented so far?
-

Section 2: Project Achievability

4. **Success in Delivering Results:**
 - How successful do you think the project has been in delivering results to date?
 5. **Unforeseen Delays:**
 - Were there any unexpected delays during the project startup? If so, what were they?
 6. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
 - Can you suggest any improvements that could make project delivery more effective?
-

Section 3: Project Management Arrangements

7. **Communication with PMU/PIT:**
 - Has communication between your organization and the PMU/PIT been clear, effective, and timely?
 8. **Feedback to PMU/PIT:**
 - Do you provide feedback to the PMU/PIT when you receive communications from them? How is this managed?
 9. **Suggestions for Improved Communication:**
 - How well do you think the PMU/PIT has communicated the project to countries and local partners? Can you suggest any ways to improve this communication?
-

Section 4: Sustainability

10. **Post-Project Expectations:**
 - What does your organization expect to happen at the end of the project to sustain its results?
11. **Role of PMU/PIT in Sustainability:**
 - How relevant is the PMU to the continuation of project results after the project ends?
12. **Future Relationship with PMU/PIT:**
 - How do you see your organization's relationship with the PMU continuing after the project concludes?

Tool 4 – Local Stakeholder Interview Questionnaire

Country/Project Site:

Date/Time:

Name of Respondent:

Interviewer:

Section 1: Local Benefits and Results

1. **Knowledge of the Project:**
 - How would you rate your knowledge about the project? (High/Medium/Low)
 2. **Importance of the Project:**
 - How important do you think this project is, and why? (Very/Moderately/Less)
 3. **Involvement in Project Design:**
 - Were you consulted during the design of the project?
 4. **Observed Benefits:**
 - What benefits have you seen from the project activities implemented so far?
 5. **Gender Participation:**
 - Is equal representation and participation of women and men in project activities encouraged? Please elaborate.
-

Section 2: Progress Towards Results

6. **Success in Delivering Results:**
 - How successful has the project been at delivering results in your area? (Excellent/Good/Poor)
 7. **Delays and Problems:**
 - Were there any delays during the project startup? Have you experienced any other problems?
 8. **Achievability of Results:**
 - How achievable do you think the project results are in your area within the remaining project time? (High/Medium/Low)
 9. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
 - What improvements could be made to make project delivery more effective?
-

Section 3: Project Management Arrangements

10. **Rating of Project Management:**
 - How do you rate the PMU/PIT's project management, communication, efficiency, and general administration? (Excellent/Adequate/Poor) Please elaborate.
 11. **Information on Project Progress:**
 - Have you been kept informed about the progress of the project? (Yes/No)
 12. **Communication with Local Partners:**
 - How well do you think the PMU/PIT has communicated the project to local partners?
 13. **Suggestions for Communication Improvement:**
 - Can you suggest any ways to improve communication?
-

Section 4: Sustainability

14. **Capacity Development:**
 - How has the project helped to develop the capacity to continue project activities after the project ends?
15. **Importance of Program Continuation:**

- How important is it to you that the program continues after September 2019? (For higher-level interviewees)
- 16. Plans to Continue Activities:**
- Do you plan to continue with the activities after the program finishes in September 2019? (Yes/No)
- 17. Role of PMU/PIT in Sustainability:**
- How important is the PMU/PIT to the continuation of project results after September 2019?
- 18. Assessment of Project Success:**
- How successful has the project been at delivering results in your area? (Excellent/Good/Poor)
-

Section 5: General Feedback

- 19. Major Strengths:**
- Please list 1 or 2 major strengths of the project.
- 20. Major Weaknesses:**
- Please list any major weaknesses.
- 21. Lessons Learned:**
- What are the key lessons learned so far?
- 22. Message for the Terminal Report (TR):**
- What message would you like conveyed in the terminal report?

Annex 7. Co-financing Table

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financer	Types of Co-financing	Co-financing amount confirmed at CEO	Materialized co-financing as of Dec 30, 2024
Salary for MONRE and NBCA staff to implement project	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE)	In-kind	102,260	102,260
Office operational cost and supporting activities	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE)	In cash	400,000	460,087
Project on Strengthening Partnerships to Protect Endangered Wildlife in Vietnam	The World Bank and MONRE	Grant	1,891,169	1,891,169
State budget for reciprocal implementation of the project for 5 years)	Nghe An Provincial People's Committee	Cash	113,500	103,860
Payment for environmental services	Nghe An Forest Development and Protection Fund	Grant	8,147,500	18,483,000
Project on Forest fire prevention project in Nghe An province	Nghe An Provincial People's Committee	Grant	750,000	858,832
Forest protection and development program)	Nghe An Provincial People's Committee	Grant	2,000,000	7,590,400
Elephant protection project	MOF and MIP	Grant	1,555,556	1,792,387
(JICA forestry project)	JICA	Grants	1,443,750	3,735,609
Counterpart funding for BR project	Hoi An People's Committee	Cash	128,755	28,177
Allocated budget for BR Management Board	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	264,674	74,192
Vocational training for locals affected by protected area zoning management activities	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	2,857	0
Culinary and food preparation skills training program	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	3,095	3,095
English skills training for Cu Lao Cham locals	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	3,819	3,819
Develop tourism service at Bai Huong	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	11,429	0
Sustainable livelihood development strategy to adapt to climate change	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	61,667	4,348
Coastal erosion prevention embankment construction in Hoi An	Quang Nam People's Committee	Grant	2,380,952	2,380,952

Water quality improvement around Chua Cau area	Quang Nam People's Committee and JICA	Grant	1,076,787	1,076,787
Tan Hiep Commune tourism development program 2015- 2020	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	23,810	23,810
Regular funding for resource conservation activities	Hoi An People's Committee	Grant	994,762	372,053
Scientific research program (Sea turtle restoration in Cu Lao Cham)	Quang Nam People's Committee	Grant	63,000	63,000
Project Green Annamites	USAID	Grant	1,864,571	1,864,571
Fixed costs for operating the activities of the Biosphere Reserve	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Cash and in-kind	428,212.90	649,121
Botanical garden construction project	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	1,381,215	392,452
Biodiversity conservation program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	2,507,505	1,739,326
Scientific research program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	451,197.10	343,225
Tri An lake comprehensive management and exploitation program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	1,183,748	1,172,638
Forest construction and development program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	2,765,147	862,822
Forest management and protection program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	1,925,875	3,738,048
Forest fire prevention and fighting program	People's Committee of Dong Nai Province	Grant	1,611,418	2,972,500
Total			35,171,562	45,059,988

Annex 8. TE Rating scales

TE rating Scales	
Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight, Execution, Relevance	Rating for Sustainability
<p>6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS): exceeds expectations and/or no shortcomings</p> <p>5 = Satisfactory (S): meets expectations and/or no or minor shortcomings</p> <p>4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS): more or less meets expectations and/or some shortcomings</p> <p>3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): somewhat below expectations and/or significant shortcomings</p> <p>2 = Unsatisfactory (U): substantially below expectations and/or major shortcomings</p> <p>1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe shortcomings</p> <p>Unable to Assess (U/A): available information does not allow an assessment.</p>	<p>4 = Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability</p> <p>3 = Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks to sustainability</p> <p>2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks to sustainability</p> <p>1 = Unlikely (U): severe risks to sustainability</p> <p>Unable to Assess (U/A): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.</p>

Annex 9. UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators

Evaluators/Consultants:

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

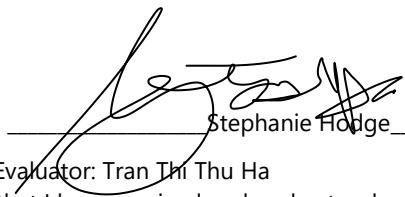
Evaluation Consultant Agreement Form

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

Name of Evaluator: Stephanie Jill Hodge

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

Signed at: New York, December 30, 2024

Signature:  Stephanie Hodge

Name of Evaluator: Tran Thi Thu Ha

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

Signed at: Hanoi, December 30, 2024

Signature:  _____

Project Terminal Evaluation Report Clearance Form

Terminal Evaluation Report for "Mainstreaming Natural Resources Management and Biodiversity Conservation Objectives into Socio-economic Development Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves in Viet Nam Project"

(UNDP Project ID 00100000 – PIMS 5659)

Reviewed and Cleared By:

Commissioning Unit (M&E Focal Point)

Name: Nguyen Thi Ngoc Han
Planning, M&E Analyst
UNDP Viet Nam



Signature: _____
Date: 23 December 2024

Name: Patrick Haverman
Deputy Resident Representative
UNDP Viet Nam

DocuSigned by:



Signature: _____
Date: 23-Dec-2024

Regional Technical Advisor

Name: Bipin Pokharel

DocuSigned by:



Signature: _____
Date: 26-Dec-2024

Annex 11. Final Log Frame Results (provided in separated file)

Annex 12. GEF-7 Core Indicators (provided in separated file)

Annex 13. Audit Trail (provided in separated file)

Annex 14. Mid-term review's proposed changes (provided in separated file)