Conservation of Globally Important Biodiversity in High Nature Value Semi-Natural Grasslands Through Support for the Traditional Local Economy

Bulgaria

GEF Agency: United Nations Development Programme
Executing Agency: Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds

GEF Biodiversity Focal Area Strategic Objective BD-2, OP4
Medium-sized Project: GEF ID: 2730, UNDP PIMS: 3460
UNDP Atlas Project Number: 00046789

Terminal Evaluation
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Acronyms

AEPU	Agri-environmental Policy Unit
AES	Agri-environmental Scheme
APR	Annual project review
BGN	Bulgarian Lev
BSPB	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (of the EU)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHF	Swiss Franc
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
EFA	Executive Forestry Agency
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
ha	Hectares
HNV	High nature value
Km	Kilometers
MAC	Mobile Advisory Center
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MSP	Medium-sized Project
NAAS	National Agriculture Advisory Service
N/A	Not applicable
N/S	Not specified
NBCS	National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRDP	National Rural Development Programme
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Protected area
PIR	Project implementation Review
PMIS	Project Management Information System
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
ROtI	Review of Outcomes to Impacts
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPA	Special Protection Area
UA	Unable to assess
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States dollars

I. Executive Summary

1. The Bulgaria Grasslands project is classified as a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Medium-sized Project (MSP), with total GEF support of $0.95 million (not including $0.05 in project development funding), and originally proposed co-financing is $1.20 million United States dollars (USD), for a total project budget of $2.15 million USD. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the GEF Agency, and the project is executed under UNDP's non-governmental organization (NGO) execution modality, with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) as the national executing partner.

2. According to the project document, the overall project goal is *"to ensure long-term conservation of the high nature value grasslands of Bulgaria."* The project objective is *"to mainstream grasslands biodiversity concerns into Bulgaria's agricultural policy in order to reverse negative changes caused by unsustainable grazing, abandonment, and land conversion."* The project's strategy is to demonstrate the viability of agri-environmental schemes (AES) for preservation of high nature value (HNV) grasslands, integrate piloted AES for HNV grasslands into national policy-making, and disseminate the lessons and experience learned. The project objective was planned to be achieved through three main outcomes:

3. **Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of high nature value grasslands is demonstrated**

4. Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for high nature value grasslands in Bulgaria mainstreamed into national policy-making

5. **Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria**

6. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, terminal evaluations are required practice for GEF funded MSPs, and the terminal evaluation was a planned activity of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the Bulgaria Grasslands project. This terminal evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the standard evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation assesses project results based on expected outcomes and objectives, as well as any unanticipated results. The evaluation identifies relevant lessons for other similar projects in the future in Bulgaria and elsewhere, and provides recommendations as necessary and appropriate. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included three primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders; and c) field visits to relevant project sites in Bulgaria. The evaluation is based on evaluative evidence from the start of project implementation (September 2007) through April 2012 (with expected project closure in July 2012). The desk review was begun in March 2012, and the evaluation mission was carried out from April 17 – April 23, 2012.

7. The project has substantially achieved the project objective, and contributed to significant progress toward the overall project goal. The effective implementation of AES for HNV grasslands in Bulgaria remains a work in progress, but under this project critical efforts have been made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these measures. Impact level

results have been documented at the site level. The project's **Overall Achievement and Impact** is rated ***satisfactory***.

8. Project **relevance** is considered ***satisfactory***. The project supported important biodiversity conservation priorities in Bulgaria, and was responsive to the needs of local level stakeholders in the two project sites. Key national policies supported by the project include the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP), and Bulgaria's National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. Tied closely with this is the project's relevance to supporting Bulgaria's European Union (EU) commitments to environmental protection (e.g. Birds and Habitats Directives), as well as rural development, since joining the EU in 2007. The project is relevant to the GEF's biodiversity focal area strategies and priorities, namely Strategic Objective 2 "Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes, Seascapes, and Sectors." The project contributes to Bulgaria's implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as other relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

9. Based on all aspects of project implementation and financial management, project **efficiency** is rated ***highly satisfactory***. The NGO execution approach provided multiple opportunities for cost-effectiveness and resource leveraging by linking with other BSPB initiatives and through partnership building. Project management arrangements were well designed to take advantage of BSPB's strong technical capacity, while also ensuring efficient and flexible execution of project activities. Overall project management costs are at the GEF threshold of 10%, and project financial management was undertaken in line with UNDP and Bulgarian fiduciary norms and standards. The project was characterized by open communication and strong stakeholder participation. The project faced a longer-than-expected approval process due to the GEF-3 to GEF-4 transition, but was not negatively affected by commencing implementation simultaneously with Bulgaria's EU accession rather than beforehand, as originally envisioned.

10. The expected results for the three project outcomes were substantially achieved, and in some cases exceeded. Project **effectiveness** is considered ***highly satisfactory***. The project has directly influenced approximately 36,000 hectares (ha), and has the potential to influence the full territory of HNV grasslands in Bulgaria, covering an estimated 350,000 ha. In most aspects the project results exceeded expectations, while the project was not able to go as far as envisioned in two relatively small areas of planned project activities - developing management plans for the Ponor and Bessaparski Hills demonstration sites and supporting direct sales from traditional agriculture producers. The project Agri-Environmental Policy Unit (AEPU) produced notable results in influencing national AES policies, based in part on the experience gained through the project's own Grant Scheme, which successfully demonstrated AES approaches. Implementation of the Grant Scheme in the two demonstration sites (and all other aspects of the project) was supported by the project's Mobile Advisory Centers (MACs), which built excellent communication channels and working relationships with local resource users and decision-makers. The project's biodiversity monitoring and associated advocacy for sustainable development also represents a good practice example of applied analysis of biodiversity data for informed decision-making. The publication of multiple papers in peer-reviewed journals is a strong indication of the technical quality and capacity of the project.

11. While many positive results have been achieved, there remains a need to continue consolidating results and promoting good practices and lessons from the project experience. Prospects for sustainability are generally positive, particularly with regard to financial sustainability, although there remain some open questions on the other aspects of sustainability; overall **sustainability** is considered ***moderately likely***. The fact that BSPB will remain fully engaged on these issues following project completion is an excellent indicator of sustainability, and the project staff will be fully integrated in ongoing and upcoming relevant initiatives for which BSPB has secured funding exceeding the budget of the GEF funds under this project. While stakeholders from the local to national levels have expressed strong support for the project objective, there is now a need to further integrate the project experience in Bulgaria's government policy-making related to AES. The prime opportunity for this will be in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's (MAF) upcoming planning process for the 2014-2020 programming period. It is hoped that this process will be able to further address many of the significant remaining barriers to effective AES implementation. The major environmental threats the project was intended to face remain relevant at the national scale, while new threats continue to emerge, such as plowing of long fallow land due to perverse agricultural subsidy incentives from other elements of the NRDP.

12. The following are the recommendations of this evaluation report. Key lessons are also documented in the final section of the evaluation report.

13. ***Recommendation 1:*** Effective uptake of AES by small-scale resource users requires adequate support and information dissemination, which, as demonstrated by this project, is most effective when done face to face. Currently only the National Agriculture Advisory Service (NAAS) is formally responsible for providing support on AES at the national level, and, based on the slow level of disbursement of subsidy budgets under the NRDP, the current approach does not appear adequate. Based on the experience from this project, it is recommended that the relevant government institutions facilitate a new approach of allowing 3rd parties to provide support services to farmers on AES by opening opportunities for compensation for 3rd party service providers. This would enable an efficient competitive "marketplace" for such services, whereby the resource users themselves would seek support from the provider that best meets their needs.

14. ***Recommendation 2:*** While the project made excellent progress in engaging resource users within the project site to support uptake of AES, it is clear that barriers to effective and efficient application of AES also remain within the various government institutions involved, e.g. MAF, Executive Forestry Agency (EFA), NAAS, and others. There are opportunities for specific capacity development efforts to overcome these barriers, and this evaluation recommends that BSPB and other project partners (e.g. Bioselena) consider how they could support such capacity development activities in the future. The NRDP measures 111 and 114 may provide opportunities, and should be explored further.

15. ***Recommendation 3:*** The experience gained on AES through this project is certainly valuable within Bulgaria, but would also be useful in other countries, particularly EU accession countries such as Croatia. BSPB and UNDP should take any necessary steps to ensure that the project lessons are shared with key stakeholders in Croatia as it moves toward accession in 2013.

16. ***Recommendation 4:*** To effectively leverage AES by small-scale farmers in HNV grasslands, there is a need to raise the political profile of this segment of the agricultural sector in Bulgaria. Increasing the government's priority level for the small and medium enterprise (SME) agriculture sector would help drive increased resources and focus on the effective implementation of AES, relative to other aspects of national agricultural policies, thereby improving the environmental performance of the agriculture sector overall. One way to improve the political profile of this segment would be to organize SME farmers in producer associations, and other similar organizations, to strengthen their political and economic voice. Thus far, achievements in this area have been limited, but this evaluation recommends that this continue to be a priority for BSPB and other partner organizations in Bulgaria working to improve synergies between the agriculture and environmental sectors. Another opportunity for drawing more political focus on this issue is through the framework of Natura 2000, as these protected sites cover 34.3% of the national territory. Thus for more than one third of the country it will be critical for the government to find land management approaches that integrate nature conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

17. ***Recommendation 5:*** An excellent opportunity to further extend the lessons and experiences of the project can be found in the forestry sector, where similar compensatory payments for land users in Natura 2000 sites are in place. Having the participation of a representative of the Executive Forestry Agency on the Project Steering Committee (PSC) was intended to help create this linkage, and has undoubtedly been beneficial; but, according to this representative, the Natura 2000 compensatory payments for forest areas (covering approximately 1/3 of the country) are not yet effectively implemented. This evaluation recommends that to catalyze additional results at the national level BSPB and the Executive Forestry Agency should conduct a joint exercise to identify concrete steps that could be taken forward in the forestry sector based on the experience and lessons in the agriculture sector from this project.

18. ***Recommendation 6:*** The project had intended to support more activities on developing the local direct agricultural market, through the implementation of local eco-brands, and other such activities. Due to the national circumstances the project adaptively took another path, supporting the national ordinance for direct sales, which was a critical element. But the further development of this market, through eco-labels and direct sales venues, remains a critical opportunity and next step toward supporting traditional agricultural economies benefiting biodiversity. It is anticipated that BSPB will continue working on these issues through upcoming support from the Swiss Foreign Assistance Fund, and this evaluation also recommends that work be supported and continued in this regard. There are multiple examples in the region of successful regional eco-brands that could be drawn on to move in this direction in Bulgaria.

19. ***Recommendation 7:*** Through this project and other work, BSPB has developed a significant biodiversity monitoring database. The Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) is also responsible for biodiversity monitoring in the country, and uses such data to develop national reports on the state of the environment, and in international reporting to the EU and MEAs. While it would not be practical for BSPB to provide regular raw data updates of biodiversity monitoring data to the MoEW, there should be a systematic mechanism by which BSPB biodiversity monitoring data can be leveraged in MoEW reporting and analysis for

environmental management. This evaluation recommends that BSPB and the MoEW continue strengthening their information sharing relationship in this regard, possibly through a Memorandum of Understanding (or other similar mechanism) on the sharing and transfer for biodiversity data and analysis.

20. ***Recommendation 8:*** One of the lasting outputs of this project that has the potential for significant long-term benefits in the country is the publication on guidelines for management of HNV grasslands that is currently in production. This is exactly the kind of publication that is needed in Bulgaria, and elsewhere in the region, to continue mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in agricultural production landscapes. To ensure that this publication becomes well-known and widely used, BSPB should make a specific investment in the promotion and dissemination of this publication. Ideally these guidelines would be formally adopted by the relevant government stakeholders (particularly the MAF), and posted on their websites. Such guidelines would also be highly relevant in other countries in the region – for example, another GEF project in Belarus is working to mainstream biodiversity considerations in land-use planning outside protected areas, which includes significant agricultural lands. Although there are undoubtedly some differences in the ecological context in Belarus and Bulgaria, guidance on biodiversity friendly good practice for agricultural lands is greatly needed in Belarus, and would certainly be of value.

Bulgaria Grasslands Project Terminal Evaluation Rating Summary

Project Component or Objective	Rating
Project Formulation	
Relevance	S
Conceptualization / design	S
Country drivenness	S
Stakeholder involvement in design	S
Project Implementation	
Implementation Approach (Efficiency)	HS
Management implementation	HS
Use of the logical framework	S
Financial planning and management	S
Adaptive management	HS
Stakeholder participation and partnerships	HS
Use and establishment of information technologies	HS
UNDP supervision and support	S
Operational relationships between the institutions involved	S
Technical capacities	HS
Monitoring and Evaluation	MS
M&E design	MU
M&E plan implementation	S
M&E budgeting	S
Stakeholder Participation	S
Production and dissemination of information	S
Local resource users and civil society participation	HS
Establishment of partnerships	S
Involvement and support of governmental institutions	MS
Project Results	
Overall Achievement of Objective and Outcomes (Effectiveness)	HS
Objective: Mainstream the requirements for conservation of HNV grasslands into Bulgaria's agricultural policy	S
Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated	S
Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy-making	HS
Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria	S
Sustainability	
Overall Sustainability	ML
Financial	L
Socio-political	ML
Institutional framework and governance	L
Environmental	ML
Overall Achievement and Impact	S

Note: The ratings for the main evaluation criteria are narratively highlighted in the report; other ratings are not. Ratings explanation: HS – Highly Satisfactory; S – Satisfactory; MS – Moderately Satisfactory; MU – Moderately Unsatisfactory; U – Unsatisfactory; HU – Highly Unsatisfactory; UA – Unable to Assess; N/A – Not Applicable. Sustainability ratings: L – Likely; ML – Moderately Likely; MU – Moderately Unlikely; U – Unlikely.

II. Introduction: Evaluation Scope and Methodology

21. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, terminal evaluations are required practice for GEF funded MSPs, and the terminal evaluation was a planned activity of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the Bulgaria Grasslands project. The UNDP Bulgaria office initiated the terminal evaluation near the completion of the project's planned four-year implementation period. This terminal evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the standard evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation assesses project results based on expected outcomes and objectives, as well as any unanticipated results. The evaluation identifies relevant lessons for other similar projects in the future in Bulgaria and elsewhere, and provides recommendations as necessary and appropriate.

22. In addition to assessing the main GEF evaluation criteria, the evaluation provides the required ratings on key elements of project design and implementation. Further, the evaluation will, when possible and relevant, assess the project in the context of the key GEF operational principles such as country-drivenness, and stakeholder ownership, as summarized in Annex 3.

23. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included three primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders; and c) field visits to relevant project sites in Bulgaria. The evaluation is based on evaluative evidence from the start of project implementation (September 2007) through April 2012, and includes an assessment of issues prior to approval, such the project development process, overall design, risk assessment and monitoring and evaluation planning. The desk review was begun in March 2012, and the evaluation mission was carried out from April 17 – April 23, 2012. The list of stakeholders interviewed is included as Annex 4 to this evaluation report.

24. All evaluations face limitations in terms of the time and resources available to adequately collect and analyze evaluative evidence. Also, as is understandable, some documents were available only in Bulgarian language, although all key documents were available in English, and the composition of the evaluation team, with a national consultant, ensured that language was not a barrier to the collection of evaluative evidence. Altogether the evaluation challenges were not significant, and the evaluation is believed to represent a fair and accurate assessment of the project.

25. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with UNDP and GEF monitoring and evaluation policies and procedures, and in-line with United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.

26. The intended users of this terminal evaluation are BSPB as the project executive organization (including the project team), and the UNDP country and regional offices. As relevant, the terminal evaluation report may be disseminated more widely with additional stakeholders to share lessons and recommendations.

III. Project Overview and Development Context

A. Development Context

27. The Republic of Bulgaria is situated in the southeast part of Europe and has a total territory of 111,000 square kilometers (km). The population of the country, as per the latest census from February 2011, is 7.36 million people. Negative demographic trends for the last 30 years have lead to a population decrease of nearly 1.6 million people. Bulgaria is divided into six planning regions (at the level of the EU NUTS 2 classification), 28 administrative regions (NUTS 3) and 264 municipalities. 231 of the latter are classified as rural, representing 81% of Bulgarian territory and 42% of the population. Arable land accounts for some 3.3 million hectares (ha), while areas classified as 'permanent grasslands' and 'pastures' are estimated to 1.8 million ha.

28. Semi-natural grasslands are some of the most valuable ecosystems in the agricultural landscape and are the result of many centuries of stable agricultural management using the grasslands for grazing animals (pastures) or making hay (meadows) or combinations of both uses. As a result of this long-term management, the ecosystems associated with semi-natural grasslands are well developed, rich in species and characteristic of their bio-geographical region. Estimates suggest that a total of 350,000 ha of semi-natural grassland habitats in Bulgaria are important from a biodiversity point of view, including a rich variety of meadows and pastures. These so-called "high nature value" grasslands are home to remarkable biodiversity that includes over 51.5% of the Bulgaria's flora and 198 species of plants of international conservation importance. Semi-natural grasslands are essential for: (i) maintaining the diversity and abundance of breeding birds that is characteristic of Bulgaria; and (ii) supporting populations of globally-threatened species such as Corncrake *(Crex crex)*, Imperial Eagle *(Aquila heliacal)*, Saker Falcon *(Falco cherrug)* and the European Roller *(Coracias garrulous)*.

29. Bulgaria has gone through important political and economic changes for the last two decades. The fall of the communist regime in 1989 marked a new surge of the country towards democracy, ensuring equal rights of people and market based economy. The latter has, however, lead to the emergence of new issues and challenges most visible in the rural areas and affecting rural population. The structural adjustment in Bulgarian agriculture and the lack of government support resulted in different forms of land abandonment and collapse in animal breeding. As a result natural succession of flora, especially in semi-natural grasslands, is taking place and many of these are being 'invaded' by forests. Available estimates indicate a decline in the area of semi-natural pastures and meadows in Bulgaria from 1.8 million ha in the early 20th century to 1.2 million ha in the 1960s and less than 500,000 ha in the late 1990s. In addition, there is a significant fragmentation of land ownership in Bulgaria resulting from the land restitution process. The average size of the agricultural plots is 0.6 ha which is considered a significant barrier to long-term investments in the sector.

30. After joining the EU on 1 January 2007, Bulgaria started the process of reformulating its agricultural policy. A National Rural Development Strategy and National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) were developed, with overall objectives as follows:

- To develop a competitive and innovation-based agriculture, forestry and food processing industry

- To protect natural resources and the environment of rural areas
- To improve the quality of life and diversify job opportunities in rural areas
- To build local capacity and to improve local governance

31. The NRDP has been programmed to implement 30 measures distributed on four main axes in order to fulfill the objectives of the national rural development strategy. The total public support budget for the 2007-2013 program period is 3,278,771,726 euros. The budget is distributed among the axes as follows:

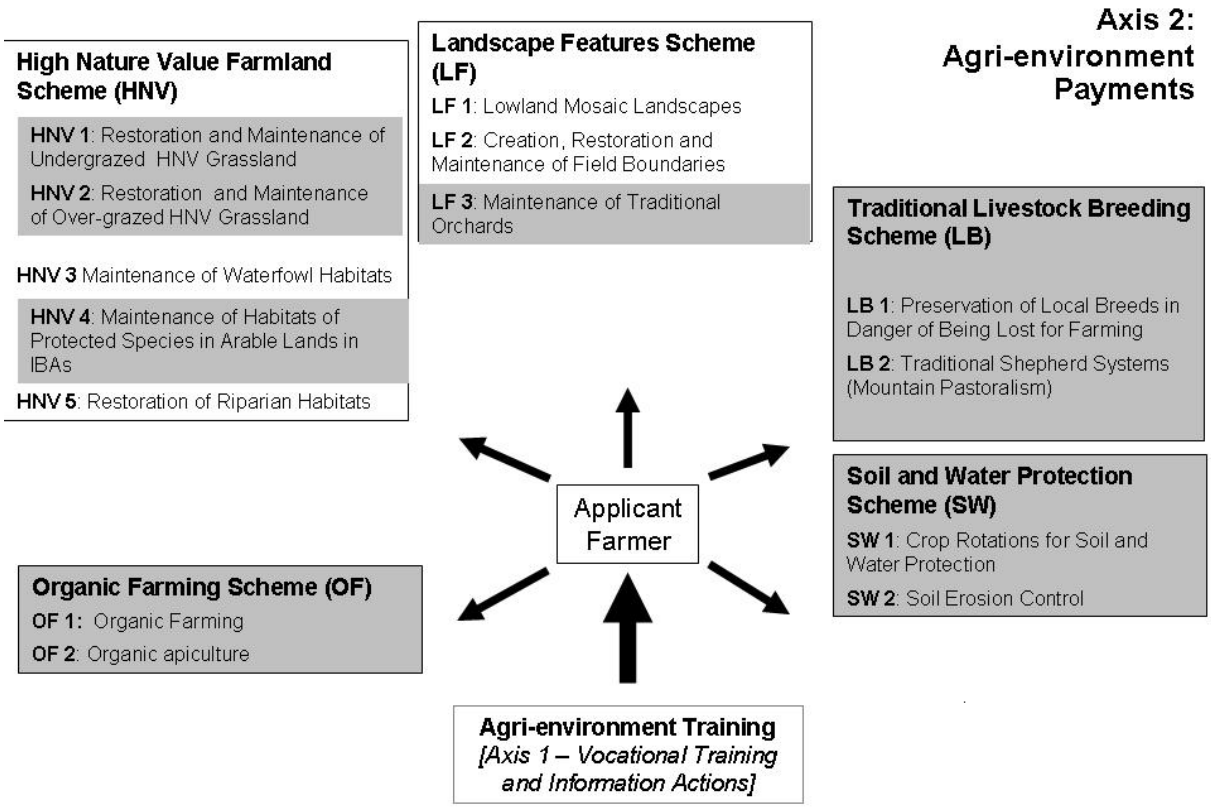
Rural Development Axes	Public Budgets 2007-2013, €	Share (%)
Axis 1 – Improving competitiveness	1,214,075,316	37.0%
Axis 2 – Improving the environment	777,394,110	23.7%
Axis 3 – Improving the quality of life in rural areas	905,291,684	27.6%
Axis 4 - LEADER	76,988,306	2.3%
Technical assistance	123,181,289	3.8%
National complements to direct payments	181,841,021	5.5%
TOTAL	**3,278,771,726**	

32. Under Axis 2, measure 214 is identified as the window for "Agri-environmental payments", which have the following objectives:

- Increase the environmental awareness and knowledge of farmers;
- Promote the use of environmental planning (multi-annual nutrient management planning and crop rotation;
- Support the development of organic farming as an environmentally-friendly method with economic potential;
- Preserve genetic variety of endangered local breeds and traditional crop varieties;
- Maintain biodiversity by encouraging the conservation of high nature value farmland, including support for traditional mountain pastoralism in designated areas;
- Maintain and restore traditional agricultural landscapes and landscape features with cultural, scenic or environmental value;
- Conserve soil and water resources, including in areas affected by severe erosion and at risk of high nutrient losses (e.g. Nitrate Vulnerable Zones);
- Encourage farmers on a voluntary basis to manage agricultural lands in Natura 2000 sites prior to measure 213.

33. Measure 214 is further divided into five sets of individual packages, as shown in Figure 1 below. The measures in gray began implementation as soon as the NRDP was approved, and the remaining measures were to be rolled out beginning 2010. The launch of NRDP represented the most significant opportunity for the conservation of HNV grasslands in Bulgaria, but the implementation of the measures was not smooth and included delays, and the interest in the measures from resources users and government institutions is still low. While some barriers such as the land tenure issues and the negative demographic trends continue to be visible, new issues have also emerged - notably the lack of experience, institutional capacity and a clear model to implement such environmental payment services.

Figure 1 Bulgaria NRDP Measure 214 Agri-environmental Schemes[1]



34. Measure 213 is for compensation payments for land users in areas designated as Natura 2000 sites. According to the NRDP, "Natura 2000 Measures for agricultural lands and forests depend on the formal designation of Natura 2000 sites and on the preparation of their management plans." Although Bulgaria's Natura 2000 network was supposed to be designated under EU guidelines by 2007, the process is ongoing with mapping of the proposed sites in progress at present. Nonetheless, implementation of Measure 213 was initiated in 2011 with support from BSPB, as further discussed in Section V.A.ii of this report.

35. The two project sites – Ponor and Bessaparski Hills, have relatively different socio-economic profiles for reasons relating to population demographics as well as alternative use of the land (other than for pasture). There are however many common variables such as rural poverty, lack of formal ownership or contractual agreement for the use of the grazed land, as well as the predominantly small size of animal holdings which fall short of qualifying for funding. There are also no formal organizations representing animal farmers and willingness to cooperate and levels of trust within the community are low, especially where minorities are present. Similar attitudes describe the relations between the farmers and government resulting in relatively poor cooperation and lack of official registration of farming production activities. A big hurdle on the road to development is the lack of formalized markets, for both milk and

[1] Source: Republic of Bulgaria Rural Development Programme (2007-2013), pg. 153.

especially meat, which results in low purchase prices as well as lack of fulfillment of any sanitation and health requirements for including local products into the formal commercial chain.

B. Concept Development and Project Description

i. Concept Background

36. The project idea originated in late 2004 with discussions between BSPB and UNDP environmental program staff. Because BSPB was the Bulgarian partner of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the United Kingdom (UK), BSPB had gained information on the functioning of AES in the UK, and thus had some knowledge of the subject long before Bulgarian accession to the EU, when such measures would be implemented in Bulgaria as well. Recognizing that few other stakeholders in the country had any insight on the application and effective functioning of such mechanisms (including relevant government institutions), BSPB identified the opportunity to demonstrate in Bulgaria the approach to effective uptake of AES. According to individuals involved in the project initiation process, BSPB presented the idea to UNDP, and demonstrated adequate data, capacity, and field contacts to indicate such a project could be effective. One aspect of the project concept that needed further development was the calculation of subsidy levels for the demonstration AES under the project, but the team resolved to move ahead as necessary with a learning-by-doing approach, which proved to be effective. Following the mutual agreement on the concept by UNDP, BSPB and relevant government partners, the concept was submitted to the GEF.

ii. Project Description

37. Keeping in mind that the project was designed just prior to Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the project's focus was to support the government partners in implementing the anticipated AES, under the correct assumption that the responsible government parties would not have the institutional or technical capacity to fully and effectively implement the measures in a timely manner. AES are subsidies for agricultural land use, structured to incentivize land management practices that have environmental benefits as well - in the context of this project, biodiversity conservation benefits. Such land management practices often include traditional agricultural practices, which are particularly critical to the long-term maintenance of semi-natural grasslands, the flora and fauna of which have become dependent on human activity over hundreds of years. The project approach was developed to address the following key threats to semi-natural grasslands in Bulgaria: Unsustainable grazing loads (under or over utilization); permanent land abandonment; and, land conversion (for arable land with intensive agriculture, or development activities). The root causes behind these threats relate to market conditions related to traditional pastoralism, and government policy incentives that favor traditional commodities over biodiversity friendly traditional pastoralism.

38. The project is classified as a GEF MSP, since the funding received from the GEF is less than $1 million USD. Total GEF support is $0.95 million (not including $0.05 in project development funding), and originally proposed co-financing is $1.20 million USD, for a total project budget of $2.15 million. The project is executed under UNDP's NGO execution modality, with BSPB as the national executing partner.

39. According to the project document, the overall project goal is *"to ensure long-term conservation of the high nature value grasslands of Bulgaria."* The project objective is *"to mainstream grasslands biodiversity concerns into Bulgaria's agricultural policy in order to reverse negative changes caused by unsustainable grazing, abandonment, and land conversion."* The project's strategy is to demonstrate the viability of AES for preservation of high nature value grasslands, integrate piloted AES for high nature value grasslands into national policy-making, and disseminate the lessons and experience learned. Since Bulgaria only joined the EU in 2007, the implementation of AES required a "learning by doing" approach, which the project sought to catalyze, considering the initial relative lack of capacity within the government on these measures.

40. The project objective was planned to be achieved through three main outcomes:

Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of high nature value grasslands is demonstrated

Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for high nature value grasslands in Bulgaria mainstreamed into national policy-making

Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria

41. The project's key milestone dates are shown in Table 1 below. The development period from pipeline entry to GEF approval was 28.5 months, and another four months were required to reach implementation start (first disbursement). The project inception workshop was then only held in Sofia, on November 20th, 2007 and the first Project Steering Committee Meeting was held December 14th 2007. Therefore, practically speaking, project activities began in early 2008, approximately 36 months after pipeline entry. Previous GEF program evaluations have determined that the average for GEF MSPs from PDF-A to implementation start (up to 2006) was approximately 30 months[2] – thus this project was slightly above average in this respect, seemingly due to the five-month delay resulting from the "re-pipelining" process. This was a non-standard part of the GEF project cycle implemented on a one-time basis when a new GEF CEO took office in mid-2006. At that time, due to resource constraints, all submitted concepts were required to go through a screening process of "re-pipelining." According to Bulgaria Grasslands project proponents, this project was one of the few approved during this timeframe. Pipeline entry to project operational closing spanned a total period of 89 months.

[2] GEF Evaluation Office.2007. "Joint Evaluation of the GEF Activity Cycle and Modalities," Evaluation Report No. 33. Washington, D.C.: GEF Evaluation Office.

Table 1 Project Key Milestone Dates[3]

Milestone	Expected date [A]	Actual date [B]	Months (total)
1. Pipeline Entry	Not Applicable	February 24, 2005	
2. PDF-A Approval	Not Applicable	March 7, 2005	0.5 (0.5)
3. First GEF Review	Not Specified	May 30, 2006	15.5 (16)
4. "Re-pipelining"	Not Applicable	October 19, 2006	5 (21)
5. Council Notification	Not Applicable	May 14, 2007	7 (28)
6. CEO Approval	Not Specified	June 5, 2007	0.5 (28.5)
7. Agency Approval	Not Specified	July 27, 2007	1.5 (30)
8. Implementation Start (first disbursement)	Not Specified	October 10, 2007	2.5 (32.5)
9. Mid-term Evaluation	November 2009	January 16, 2010	27 (59.5)
10. Project Operational Completion	September, 2011	June 30, 2012	29.5 (89)
11. Terminal Evaluation Completion	June 30, 2011	May 2012	N/A
12. Project Financial Closing	July 31, 2012	July 31, 2012	1 (90)

42. The project design was focused at the national level, but included site-based demonstration activities in two specific areas, Ponor Mountains and Bessaparski Hills, each located within a few hours drive of Sofia. Both sites have been identified as Natura 2000 sites for Bulgaria. Basic information on these sites is provided in Table 2 below, and a map of each site is shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, below.

Table 2 Bulgaria Grasslands Demonstration Site Characteristics

Site	Area (ha)	Date of Establishment	Main Grassland Habitats	Globally Important Species
Ponor Mountains – Protected zone BG0002005	31,377	Official designation September 5, 2008	Rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands; Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates; Sub-Pannonic steppic grasslands; Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands; Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils; Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the mountain to alpine levels; Mountain hay meadows	Corncrake, Imperial Eagle, and Saker Falcon
Bessaparski Hills – Protected zone BG0002057	14,765	Official designation December 12, 2008	Rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands; Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals; Sub-Pannonic steppic grasslands; Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands; Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	Souslik, Imperial Eagle, Lesser spotted eagle, and Saker Falcon

[3]Sources: 1.A. N/A; 1.B. Date of PDF-A application receipt by GEF Secretariat - GEF PMIS; 2.A. N/A; 2.B. GEF online database; 3.A. N/S; 3.B. Date of review sheet; 4.A. N/A; 4.B. Non-standard GEF project cycle step - Email from UNDP to GEF Secretariat - GEF PMIS; 5.A. N/A; 5.B. GEF PMIS; 6.A. N/S; 6.B. GEF PMIS; 7.A. N/S; 7.B. 2010 PIR; 8.A. N/S; 8.B. 2010 PIR; 9.A. 2010 PIR; 9.B. 2010 PIR; 10.A. 48 months after project first disbursement; 10.B. Communication from project team; 11.A. 2009 PIR; 11.B. Finalization of terminal evaluation report; 12.A. UNDP Bulgaria Country Office; 12.B. UNDP Bulgaria Country Office.

Figure 2 Ponor Mountains Project Site Map

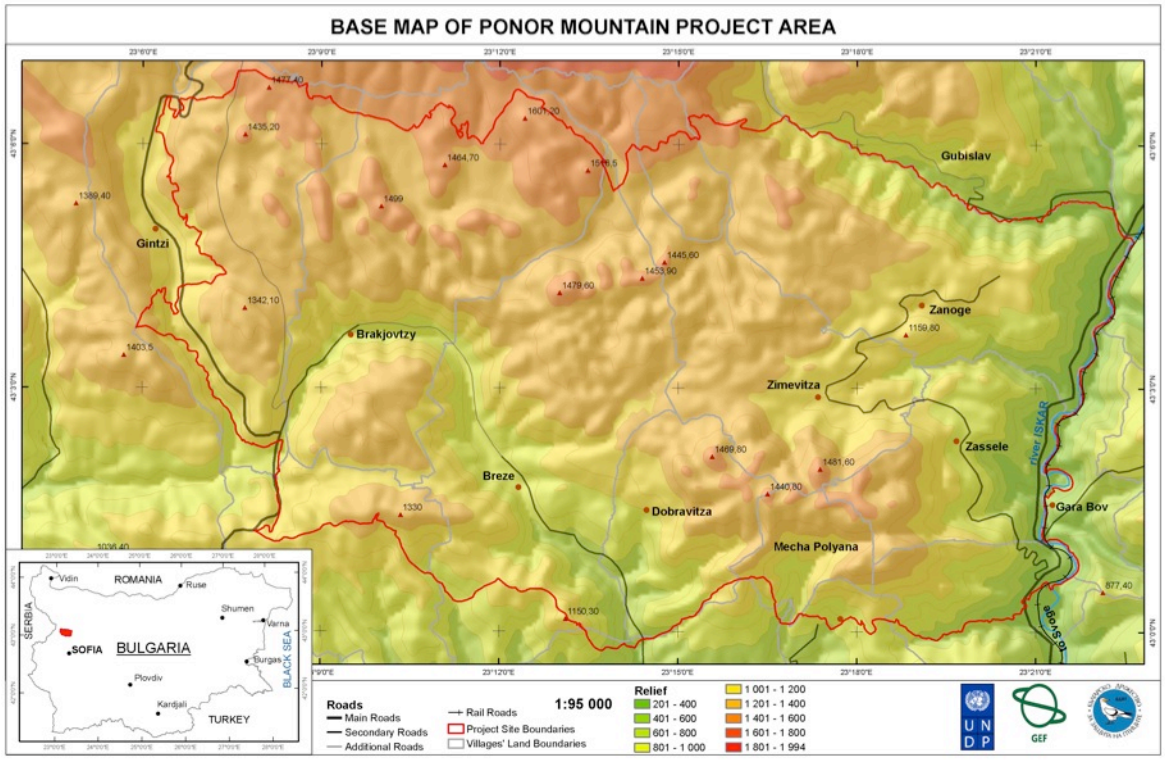
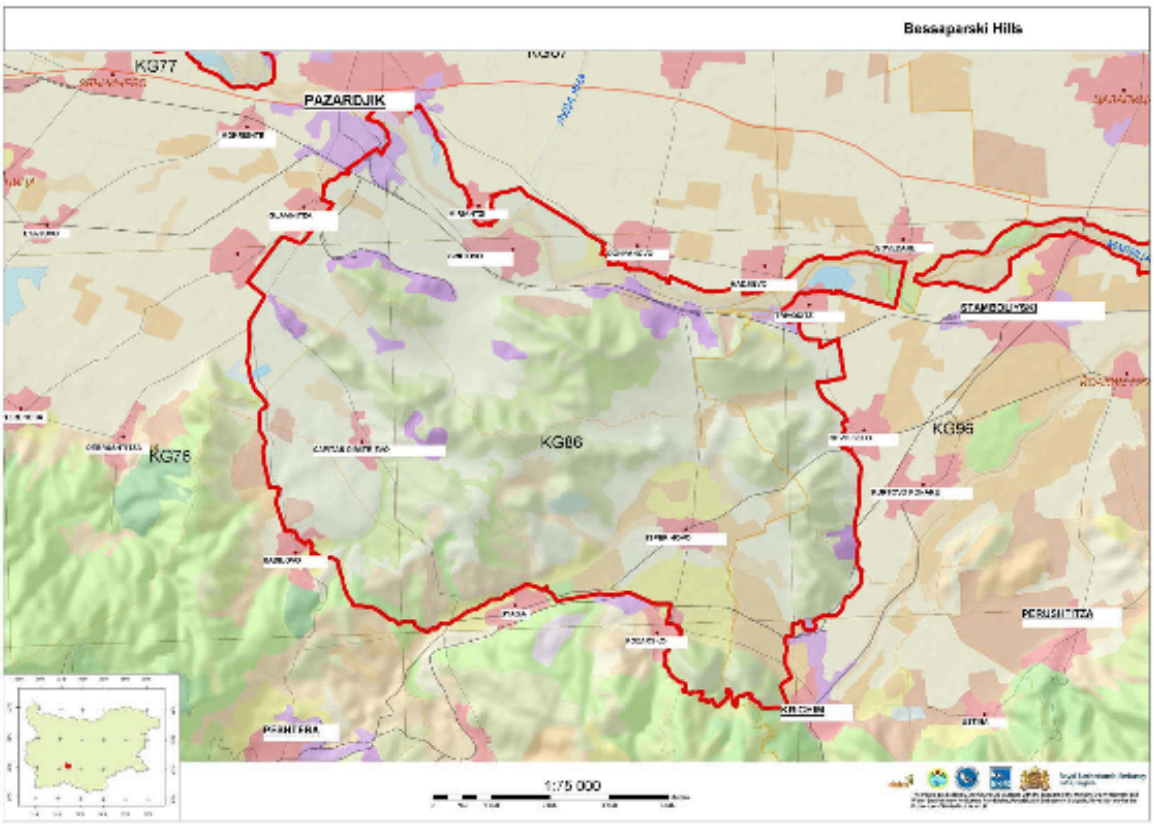


Figure 3 Bessaparski Hills Project Site Map



iii. Stakeholder Participation in Development

43. The project document describes[4] how various stakeholder groups were involved in project preparation, and how it was planned for them to be involved in project implementation. Project preparation included meetings and input from all key stakeholders, including, for example, 143 local farmers at the planned project sites, direct participation of the MAF staff in project preparation meetings, and consultations with key experts of the agri-environmental department. The project preparation appears to have been a fully participatory process, and all stakeholders interviewed during this terminal evaluation confirmed that they considered that stakeholder input was adequately incorporated in the project design. As discussed previously, the fact that the concept originated from a national civil society organization is an indicator of the country-drivenness of the project, along with the standard metrics of country-drivenness, such as the national relevance (discussed below) and the approval by the GEF Focal Point.

iv. Key Elements of Project Design and Planning

44. The project document is comprehensive, and includes relevant and necessary elements, such as stakeholder analysis and participation plan, threat analysis, risk assessment, monitoring and evaluation plan, sustainability analysis, replication plan, etc.

45. The project document includes a well-structured "Threats, Root Causes and Barrier Analysis" table (Annex 3 of the project document) which clearly outlines the rationale for how specific project outputs are responding to the threats/root causes/barriers identified. This type of threat matrix table is extremely useful for understanding the project logic and intervention strategy, and drawing direct linkages between the problems the project seeks to address and the strategy undertaken.

46. The risk analysis in the project document is another important tool for assessing the adequacy of project preparation and design. In the risk assessment for the Bulgaria Grasslands project[5] four overall risks are identified (ratings in parentheses):

- The EU will continue its payments for agri-environmental schemes (Low)
- Ministry of Agriculture is not committed to the incorporation of results and "lessons learnt" into the national policy making process (Low)
- Proposed tools for enhancing the economic viability of the traditional pastoral systems are not well prepared in design (Moderate)
- Results and lessons learnt from pilot HNV grassland areas are not positive and therefore cannot be clearly presented for replication to range of different audiences (Low)

47. The third risk also included additional specific risks related to the development and implementation of proposed AES. The project inception report includes an update on the project risk assessment, and includes additional risks, focusing on operational and financial aspects:

- Financing for preparation of management plans for the two pilot sites will become available towards the end of 2008 (Medium)

[4] See Table 3 in Section 2.e, pg. 51, of the project document.

[5] See Part 1.b), pg. 12, of the project document.

- The exchange rate of the US dollar to the [Bulgarian leva] declines further (Medium)
- Vulnerable groups (poor, landless and least educated farmers and minorities) are not interested in getting organization (Medium)
- Negative demographic tendencies (Medium)

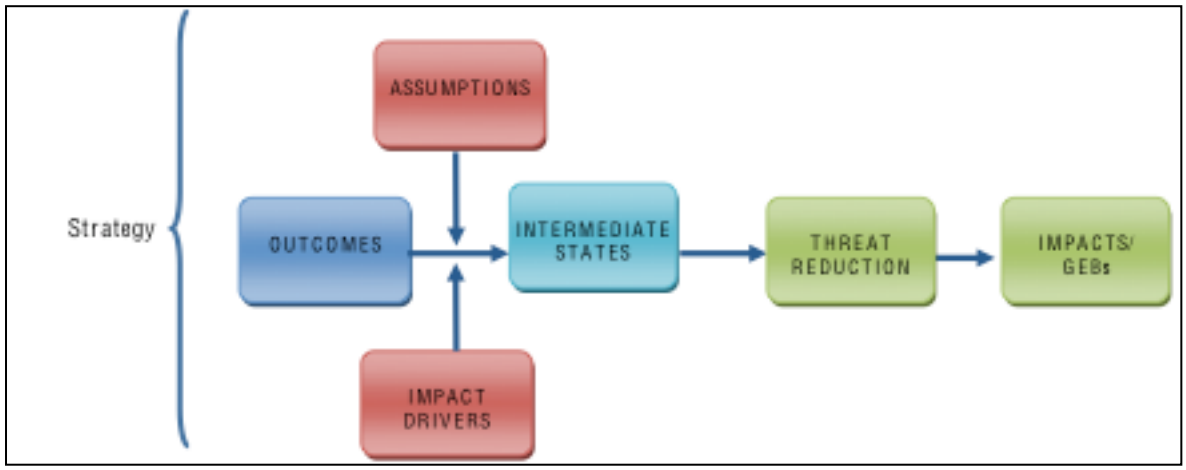
48. The inclusion of a significant number of new risks at the inception phase of a project can be an indicator of inadequate risk assessment during the project development phase, though it is important to recognize that new risks do emerge in the sometimes extended period between project development and implementation. This is a quality at entry issue commonly found in the GEF portfolio.

IV. Project Design and Implementation

A. Bulgaria Grasslands Project Outcomes-Impacts Theory of Change

49. A project's logical intervention approach, or theory of change, is the expression of the strategy chosen to achieve the objective. Based on the objective and strategy chosen, the project inputs and activities are designed to produce the outputs and outcomes required to eventually achieve impact level results. This "logic chain" defines the outcomes-impacts pathway. Figure 4 below indicates a generic project logic chain pathway.

Figure 4 Generic Theory of Change for Outcome-Impacts Pathways[6]



50. Articulating and understanding a project's theory of change can be a valuable step toward later assessment of the potential results. This is particularly true for a project such as the Bulgaria Grasslands project, which has an extended theory of change – that is, there are multiple steps in the process between the outcomes produced by the project and the intended results. The project is working to improve the implementation of AES, which in turn catalyze changes in land use management, which contributes to a reduction of threats to biodiversity, eventually leading to positive biodiversity benefits. To assess the likelihood of impact, the GEF Evaluation Office applies the Review of Outcomes to Impacts (ROtI) methodology. A draft ROtI framework for the Bulgaria Grasslands project is proposed in Annex 5 of this evaluation report.

[6] Source: GEF Evaluation Review of Outcomes to Impacts Handbook.

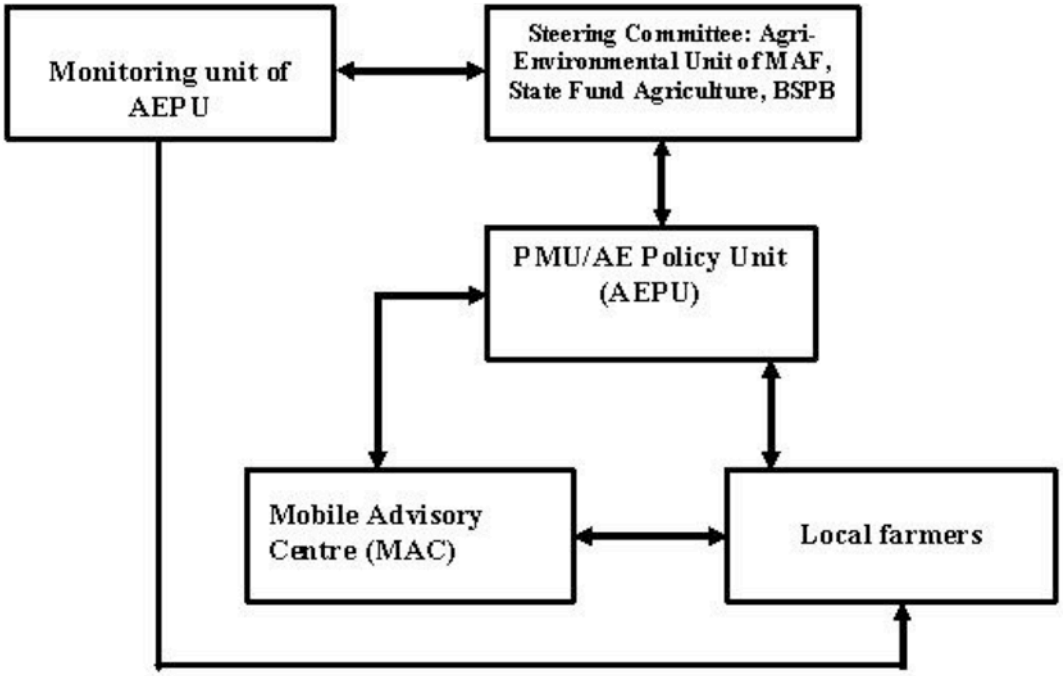
51. The ROtI methodology acknowledges and recognizes that time is required following completion of most GEF projects for sustained execution of the conditions processes leading to eventual changes in threats to or improved management of environmental resources. This is particularly true in the case of biodiversity conservation projects, as species populations and ecosystems take time to respond to project interventions to the extent that changes in environmental status can be identified and documented.

52. For the Bulgaria grasslands project it was expected that during the project lifetime there would be progress toward implementation of the necessary intermediate state as the AES measures – both under the project Grant Scheme and within the NRDP - were implemented at least in a limited scale by the farmers in the project sites. Additional steps are now required to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of AES in Bulgaria in HNV grasslands, as further discussed in later sections of this report.

B. Bulgaria Grasslands Project Implementation Approach

53. The project is implemented under UNDP's NGO execution approach, with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds as the executing organization. A diagram of the execution arrangements is shown in Figure 5 below. The Project Management Unit (PMU) consists of the project manager and technical support specialists, with the project managed from BSPB's Sofia office. There were two Mobile Advisory Centres (MACs) created instead of one – one for each project demonstration site. These were made up of two and three individuals, respectively, and these individuals also contributed to the policy and technical biodiversity monitoring aspects of the project. All individuals engaged through BSPB on the project were also working in an integrated manner on other BSPB projects and initiatives, which provided opportunities for efficiency and synergies with related efforts.

Figure 5 Bulgaria Grasslands Project Implementation Arrangements



Source: Project Document

54. The Project Steering Committee (PSC) is the management decision-making body for the project. According to the project document, "The PSC bears a major function in evaluating project progress and ensuring incorporation of its lessons into the national policy-making process. The PSC will meet once every 6 months to assess project's progress towards achievement of the planned project outputs and to review and provide guidance for further implementation." The PSC members are drawn from key relevant national government institutions (Box 1); there were eight PSC meetings held (Box 2). There was little turnover in the individuals participating in the PSC meetings, which undoubtedly positively benefited the project. The PSC formally met twice per year, at which point the project annual workplan and budget were approved, key issues discussed, and decisions taken. The project team maintained regular communication with PSC members, and could request time-sensitive decisions be taken on an ad-hoc basis as necessary.

Box 1 PSC Membership

- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- State Fund "Agriculture"
- UNDP
- Ministry of Environment and Water
- BSPB
- Executive Forest Agency

Box 2 Dates of PSC Meetings Held

- December 14, 2007
- June 11, 2008
- December 17, 2008
- December 15, 2009
- April 22, 2010
- December 15, 2010
- June 10, 2011
- February 2, 2012

C. Bulgaria Grasslands Project Relevance

55. Based on the assessment of project relevance to local and national priorities and policies, priorities related to relevant international conventions, and to the GEF's strategic priorities and objectives, overall project **relevance** is considered to be ***satisfactory***.

i. Relevance at Local and National Levels

56. The project is of strong relevance to implementation of the National Rural Development Programme (2007-2013), and the activities included under Axis 2 in particular. It has come at a particularly relevant time where the delay in the launch of agri-environmental measures has, in a way, perfectly fit within the project timing not only in terms of generating practical experience which was missing at the time but also in terms of influencing national policy through the inclusion of new measures in the NRDP, thus enhancing its uptake. On the other hand, the project's presence on the ground and close link to the beneficiaries of the EU support has contributed to the general awareness on NRDP and on resolving physical issues with the governance of the financial support.

57. The project was relevant to and supportive of Bulgaria's national biodiversity conservation priorities and strategies. Better integration of land, water and biodiversity management called for by the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy have all been embedded into the project design and implementation. In addition, the incentives provided by the project to local farmers, and the stimulus for the adoption of sustainable agricultural

systems and practices – including improved pasture management practices and wildlife habitat restoration - can be considered an important contribution as well. The increased role for NGOs in habitat restoration envisaged in the NBCS has materialized in a practical way through the project, providing BSPB a greater role in "developing and implementing restoration projects at the community or municipal level".

58. On a similar note, the project was relevant for the National Action Programme for Sustainable Land Management and Combating Desertification. Key notes here included project support to conserving and enhancing the potential of the land resources and their sustainable utilization (most importantly thorough introducing practices for adequate management of high nature value areas), integrating and implementing the sustainable land management policies at local level, improving information sharing and others.

59. The project was also relevant to strengthening the protected area (PA) system in Bulgaria as the two project sites fall within the Natura 2000 network (sites BG0002005 – Ponor and BG0002057 – Bessaparski ridove). Although it had limited flexibility in terms of aligning its work to large-scale government processes on the Natura 2000 management plan development, it did in practice establish the foundations for the adequate management of these areas.

Protected areas and zones in Bulgaria:

- Protected areas cover some 5% of the country territory including 3 National Parks; 11 Nature Parks, 54 reserves, 35 Maintained Reserves; 349 Nature Monuments, 500 Protected Sites
- Protected zones (Natura 2000) cover 34.3% of the country including 118 sites under the Birds Directive and 231 sites under the Habitat Directive

60. Along with the national policies, the project was highly relevant in terms of making important scientific contributions. These included increasing the information baseline for the target areas, mapping and determining the favorable conservation status of species and habitats encompassing the semi-natural grasslands, and developing guidelines for grassland managements on a national basis. Evidence of this is the number of peer-reviewed articles published in various journals and entering into the proceeding of scientific conferences both on national and international levels. The majority of the information on Ponor and Bessaparski Hills could directly feed into the National Biodiversity Monitoring Scheme with ongoing coordination with the MoEW, as recommended by this report.

61. At the local level the project was focused on local resource users, mainly farmers. It has received praise not only for supporting increased income opportunities through its grant scheme but also for making farmers aware of the biodiversity aspects of some grassland management systems and the global importance of specific habitat types and species. The project was also relevant in playing an important advocacy role at regional and local level by providing scientifically validated data, tools (such as GIS analyses) and providing technical input on potentially harmful (from a biodiversity perspective) investment proposals for local resource use (establishment of quarries, waste disposal sites, solar parks etc.) (further discussed in Section VI.D on impacts).

62. While the implementation of the project is grounded on a multi-stakeholder approach, the experience generated by the project has provided opportunities for enhanced participation of farmers and other local groups (such as 'Chitalishte') in different community based initiatives. This has increased the overall engagement of local communities in the local

economic development, better governance and socially and environmentally responsible planning, which is one of the areas covered by the NRDP. Evidence of this is the project involvement in supporting local authorities in establishing Local Action Groups and developing their development strategies that would receive support through the EU LEADER Programme (Axis 4 of NRDP).

63. As suggested above, the project was relevant to multiple aspects of Bulgaria's environmental commitments under EU accession, including implementation of the Natura 2000 network supporting the Birds and Habitats Directives and the implementation of EU support for the NRDP. The European Commission's 2007-2013 sectoral Operational Programme 'Environment' for Bulgaria also includes a priority on preservation and restoration of biodiversity.

ii. Relevance to Multilateral Environmental Agreements

64. The GEF is a designated financial mechanism for the United Nations CBD. As such, projects funded by the GEF must be relevant to and support the implementation of this convention. Bulgaria is a party to the CBD, having ratified the agreement on April 17, 1996. The Bulgaria grasslands project is relevant to multiple elements of the CBD, most notably in supporting the Addis Ababa principles and guidelines for sustainable use of biodiversity.[7]The project also contributes to specific elements of the CBD, such as Article 6. "General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use"; Article 7. "Identification and Monitoring"; Article 8. "In-situ Conservation"; Article 10. "Sustainable Use of Components of Biological Diversity"; Article 11. "Incentive Measures"; Article 12. "Research and Training"; Article 13. "Public Education and Awareness"; Article 14. "Impact Assessment and Minimizing Adverse Impacts"; Article 16. "Access to and Transfer of Technology"; and Article 20. "Financial Resources".

65. An additional relevant multilateral environmental agreement is the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), which aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. Particularly under the CMS, the project supports the Agreement on the Conservation of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Accord, and the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats. After accession the CMS entered into force for Bulgaria on September 1, 1999. The project is contributing to the objective of this Convention since the project area includes migration routes for multiple bird species that cross international boundaries, and covers habitats for notable bat populations.

iii. Relevance to GEF Strategies, Priorities and Principles

66. The GEF strategic priorities for each of its thematic focal areas (biodiversity, climate change, etc.) have evolved from one GEF phase to the next, but overall these priorities have remained roughly focused on the same broad areas of intervention. The project was partially developed under GEF-3 (July 2002-June 2006), approved under the strategic priorities for GEF-4 (July 2006 – June 2010),[8]and is also being implemented under the strategic priorities for GEF-5

[7] For additional information, see http://www.cbd.int/sustainable/addis.shtml.

[8] For the focal area strategic approach for GEF-4, see GEF Council document GEF/C.31/1, "Focal Area Strategic and Strategic Programming for GEF-4," July 16, 2007.

(July 2010 – June 2014).[9] The project is aligned under the second GEF-4 Strategic Objective for the biodiversity focal area: "To mainstream biodiversity in production landscapes/seascapes and sectors", and under this objective, it is focused on the third Strategic Program: "Strengthening the policy and regulatory frameworks for mainstreaming biodiversity." The expected outcome under this strategic program conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity incorporated in the productive landscape. The specified indicators for these outcomes are defined as number of hectares in production landscapes/seascapes under sustainable management but not yet certified, and number of hectares of production systems under certified production practices that meet sustainability and biodiversity standards.

67. By working to demonstrate and improve the effective incorporation of biodiversity enhancing measures in agricultural policy, the project is clearly and directly supporting this GEF strategic priority, and is directly contributing to both the first and second indicators for this strategic objective. The project is working directly with dozens of farmers in Ponor and Bessaparski, and influencing national policy that will be applied to high-nature value grasslands throughout the country. Establishing certification in the project areas (organic or biodiversity friendly agricultural production) is not a direct focus of the project, but the project is indirectly supporting efforts in this regard through promotion of local small-scale agricultural products, and the national direct sales ordinance, which link to the growing market for organic agricultural products in Bulgaria.

68. Furthermore, as highlighted throughout this evaluation, the project is supporting and meeting the GEF's core operational principles, as outlined in Annex 2 of this report.

D. Project Management and Cost Effectiveness (Efficiency)

69. Overall the **efficiency** of the project is rated ***highly satisfactory***. The NGO execution approach, as discussed in Section IV.B describing the implementation approach, has proven to be a cost-effective approach for carrying out the project strategy and design, and operationalized through regular work plans. The project management budget was at the UNDP-GEF targeted ceiling of 10% of project costs. The scale and scope of project results, with multiple examples of influencing national AES policy, are impressive for a project of this size. This has been the result of a technically well-qualified and dedicated project team; for example, a portion of the project savings that were re-budgeted into the Grant Scheme (see Section IV.D.ii below) were due to BSPB leveraging its own internal technical capacity rather than contracting external technical experts. In addition, the fact that as an NGO executing multiple related projects, BSPB has been able to achieve synergies within its own portfolio of work and with other civil society organizations working on similar issues. Numerous stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the important work carried out by the project team, and as one put it, this is "one of the good projects in the country."

70. The project approval process took longer than expected (as discussed in Section III.B.ii above), and it was originally envisioned that the project would begin prior to EU accession. However, this timing does not appear to have negatively affected project efficiency (though it is impossible to say what the project might have contributed if it were begun at the expected

[9] For the focal area strategic priorities for GEF-5, see GEF Council document GEF/R.5/31, "GEF-5 Programming Document," May 3, 2010.

time), and multiple stakeholders cited the project implementation timing as actually being beneficial for achieving its goals of effectively demonstrating AES measures and influencing national policy. Once approved, the start-up process took approximately six months. The project was given a ten-month no-cost extension (from expected closing in September 2011 through July 2012) to allow two full one year rounds of experience in implementing the grant scheme component, the initiation of which had been slower than expected. The Grant Scheme preliminary work on designing the measures and developing the program was undertaken in 2008 and 2009, and the program was then launched in early 2010.

71. The project team produced annual project review reports (APRs) (as well as completing the Project Implementation Review (PIR) form), and submitted to UNDP quarterly project review reports, reporting in a comprehensive manner by outcome on project activities carried out in the reporting period. Project funds were advanced by UNDP to BSPB on a quarterly basis, taking into account cash flow projections and the approved annual work plan. Annual work plans and corresponding budgets are prepared for approval by the PSC. Official annual or semi-annual budget revisions are completed as necessary (approved by UNDP), to reflect updates in the project work plan. As further discussed below, the most significant budget revision was a re-allocation of $27,000 to the Grant Scheme program based on savings from other project activities (e.g. reduction in scope of the management plan activity).

i. Financial Planning by Component and Co-financing

72. Table 3 below provides an overview of proposed and actual expenditures by component, including project management. Although there are still a few months until project completion, it is expected that project delivery of funds will near 100%. The majority of the GEF resources (39.6%) supported Outcome 1 demonstrating the viability of agri-environmental measures, and the Grant Scheme within it with a budget of some 267,402 USD as the biggest single incremental component. In the process of implementation, the total budget for Outcome 1 and Outcome 2 increased with 7.6% and 4.8% respectively compared to what planned in the project document, drawing from the budget for Outcome 3. These changes were adopted through formally approved budget revisions, and proved to be well justified in light of the success of Outcome 1 and 2.

73. The management of project funds (including budget revisions, disbursements, record keeping, accounting, reporting, auditing and utilization of accrued interest income in the project accounts) observed the UNDP rules and procedures in force. Project funds were operated through a separate bank account to the name of BSPB as an executing agency for the project. All types of disbursements were done via the account, except for procurement of payment for fees and travel of international consultants for the terminal project evaluation. The latter budget category was disbursed directly by UNDP. Quarterly financial reports were submitted to UNDP with the quarterly project reports, at which point the project also requested the quarterly cash advance to feed the account on the basis of cash flow projections. Only one significant budget adjustment was undertaken, to shift resources to the Grant Scheme, and one project revision was completed, related to the project extension. Minor budget adjustments were also done based on the annual work plan and the actual disbursement in the previous year (typically unspent funds for a certain year are transferred to

the following year). Based on the project's financial status tracked in the Atlas system, UNDP produced Combined Delivery Reports signed by the Executive Director of BSPB. The project is to conclude with a final end-of-project financial statement.

74. As an established legal entity in Bulgaria, BSPB complies with Bulgarian laws, norms, and standards. While working under the provisions of national legislation, BSPB is subject to an annual independent audit where project transactions were audited as part of the overall BSPB portfolio. The evaluation team did not have a chance to review these audit reports, but the PMU states that no significant issues were recorded. In 2009, the project was audited by UNDP (through the international firm KPMG). This audit ensued from the rule that each project must be subject to such audit at least in once in its lifetime or in case of a threshold of 600,000 USD disbursed annually is exceeded. According to the audit report "No material discrepancies in control and authorization procedures have been found during the 2008 audit of the Project that requires recommendations for improvement".

75. The planned and the actual co-financing of the project are shown in Table 4 below. Overall the level of co-financing expected at the project development phase was achieved and even surpassed. The biggest share came from MAF ($665,000), which is understandable given the project efforts to influence of Bulgaria's agri-environmental policy. These funds were only the estimated amounts for the two project sites for grassland management, as the national AES budget was many tens of millions of euros. Most of this represents the funds distributed among farmers for grassland management and/or compensatory measures under the Axis 2 measures of NRDP. UNDP through the JOBS project secured some $250,000 co-financing for the project and additional $30,000 in in-kind staff costs and administrative services to the project. BSPB's committed co-financing of $148,000 was leveraged with additional $55,000 mainly through the implementation of two projects having grasslands related or biodiversity management components.

Table 3 Project Planned Budget and Actual Expenditure Through March 31, 2012 (USD)

	GEF amount planned	% of GEF amount planned	Total planned	% of total planned	GEF amount actual	% of GEF amount actual	Total actual‡	% of actual total‡
Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated	304,000	32.0%	934,000	43.4%	375,278	39.6%	n/a	n/a
Outcome 2: Agri- environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy making	251,000	26.4%	631,000	29.3%	296,064	31.2%	n/a	n/a
Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria	300,000	31.6%	383,000	17.8%	175,906	18.6%	n/a	n/a
Monitoring and evaluation*	n/s	n/s	140,000	6.5%	n/s	n/s	n/a	n/a
Project coordination, management, monitoring and evaluation	95,000	10.0%	205,000	9.5%	100,765	10.6%	n/a	n/a
Total	950,000		2,153,000		948,013		2,208,000	

Sources: Project Document for planned amount; UNDP Combined Delivery Reports and Budget Revision of 2011 for actual GEF amounts (currently the table does not include actual spending for 2012).
**The M&E budget is drawn from all components of the project budget, and is not additional to the amounts shown for project components and management.*
***‡** The breakdown of co-financing was not specifically tracked by component because it was disbursed by the project partners rather than channeled through the project, and therefore the project team was not required to report co-financing by component.*

Table 4 Project Planned and Actual Co-financing Through March 31, 2012 (USD)

Co-financing (Type/Source)	UN Agency		Central Government		NGOs		Other Sources		Total Co-financing		Percent of Expected co-financing
	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Actual share of proposed
Grant											
Credits											
Loans											
Equity											
In-kind	$30,000	$30,000	$30,000	$30,000	$160,000	$165,000	$10,000	$10,000	$220,000	$235,000	106.8%
Non-grant instruments	$250,000	$250,000	$635,000	$635,000	$88,000	$138,000			$973,000	$1,023,000	105.1%
Other types											
Total	$280,000	$280,000	$665,000	$665,000	$248,000	$303,000	$10,000	$10,000	$1,193,000	$1,258,000	105.4%

ii. Flexibility and Adaptive Management

76. Flexibility is one of the GEF's ten operational principles, and all projects must be implemented in a flexible manner to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, and to ensure results-based, rather than output-based approach. Thus, during project implementation adaptive management must be employed to adjust to changing circumstances. The Bulgaria Grasslands project was implemented in a rather flexible manner and as the project manager joked, 'the entire project has been a good adaptive management exercise", particularly because the project was originally expected to be implemented prior to Bulgaria's EU accession rather than after. Indeed the approach the project has applied provided the opportunity to effectively deal with changing context, opportunities, and issues arising.

77. The project did not undergo changes to its overall strategy nor to its objectives during the implementation. No such changes are reported in the PIRs either. However, at the inception phase some modifications and adjustments were made with regard to the following:

- Incorporation into the project activity set of studies to verify baseline data for both project sites;
- Inclusion of a market study under Outcome 1 to identify the causes of low level of production within the project sites as a first step in the envisaged project intervention in influencing the market of local dairy production
- Revise the logical framework of the project to better reflect project activities
- Update the project management structure

78. The latter two are considered more essential in terms of the adaptive strategy of the project. The upgrade of the project management structure involved the establishment of two MACs - one per each project site as opposed to one team envisaged in the project document. This step was considered prudent in light of the desire to 'increase the project's interaction with local farmers and other stakeholders'. Looking at this retrospectively, given the success of the MACs, it should be mentioned that this adjustment has paid the project a lot of dividends.

79. At the inception phase various aspects of the project logframe were adjusted, including the addition and subtraction of indicators included in the project document version of the logframe. Further discussion on this is provided in the later Section VI.C.i on project M&E.

80. The inception report also marks some changes in the socio-economic parameters, changes in the legal and policy context (related mainly to NRDP), institutional changes and others, which the project seems to have handled quite well.

81. The project also suffered some budget reductions as a result of fluctuations in Bulgarian lev-USD exchange rate. In between project development (2005) and project launch (2007) the project 'lost' some 20% of its budget value. Luckily, by the time of disbursements associated with the project Grant Scheme (2010 and 2011), which represents the biggest portion of the project budget, the Bulgarian lev regained some of its value and these currency fluctuations did not cause severe reduction of project activities.

82. Along with the establishment of two MACs instead of one, probably the best additional example of the adaptive management approach applied by the project is the design of the Grant Scheme. Most importantly the scheme reflected the latest developments or rather lack

of development with the measures from Axis 2 of NRDP. Specific attention should be paid to the inclusion into the scope of the scheme of compensatory measure, where the proposed methodology for calculating the payments was subsequently used by the government for launching the Natura 2000 measure. This is to stress that the flexibility of the project had paid dividends with regard to making real impacts on national policy. Another example related to the grant scheme is the inclusion of additional municipalities (Chiprovtsi, Chuprene, Georgi Damyanovo and Berkovitsa) outside the two project sites. Although this step was grounded in the project team's fears that they would not be able to attract sufficient interest in the scheme from Ponor and Bessaparski Hills (which turned out to not be a problem) this expanded approach provided a great opportunity for upscaling project ideas.

83. Adaptive approaches were required on other project activities as well. It had been envisioned in the project document that the project would directly support production of local agricultural products through a small-scale milk production facility in Ponor, and developing regional eco-brands. A legal analysis at the start of the project indicated that this approach would not be feasible under current legislation, so the project team transitioned to working on the national ordinance for direct sales in partner with other civil society organizations (further discussed at multiple other points in this report). The project team also had to take a flexible approach to addressing the issues faced on the activity of producing management plans for the two project sites, when it become clear that government procedures would not facilitate the originally expected approach. This issue is further discussion in Section V.A.i below.

84. Last but not least, the project team should be given special credit for linking project activities with those of other initiatives and BSPB projects, which has provided good synergies and opportunities for mutual benefits. For example, the project has developed the Guidelines for Grassland Management but these will be published in the framework of an EU funded LIFE+ project on imperial eagle that BSPB is also implementing.

iii. UNDP Project Oversight

85. UNDP is the responsible GEF Agency for the project, and carries general backstopping and oversight responsibilities, as well as handling the financial accounts. UNDP sits on the PSC, and as noted in the project document, “the UNDP Country Office will be answerable as the agency responsible for transparent practices, appropriate conduct and professional auditing.” Project monitoring is carried out by the relevant UNDP staff in the Bulgaria office, and by the UNDP Regional Technical Advisor for biodiversity in the Bratislava Regional Center. UNDP staff have conducted joint monitoring missions with BSPB to the project pilot sites.

86. All evidence gathered during the evaluation mission indicates that UNDP has fulfilled its oversight and supervision responsibilities fully, with strong communication with key project partners and the project team. The project did not require significant political interventions from UNDP on its behalf, a role UNDP has undertaken in some project circumstances in other countries. UNDP has worked with the project team to ensure comprehensive and timely financial and progress reporting.

V. Bulgaria Grasslands Project Performance and Results (Effectiveness)

A. Progress Toward Achievement of Anticipated Outcomes

87. As described further below, the project adequately reached the project objective, and based on achievement of expected outcomes, **effectiveness** is rated ***highly satisfactory***.

88. Each of the project outcomes was implemented through a series of outputs and specific actions, as outlined in the annual project workplans. Under each of the outcomes below, the primary outputs are listed, and key results highlighted. The project logframe includes indicators and targets for each of the outcomes, which are assessed in Annex 3 with further review of the measureable logframe indicators and targets. Progress toward indicator targets is summarized under each of the components below.

89. Of note is the fact that within the mid-term evaluation of Bulgaria's NRDP, conducted by an external independent third party in 2010, the Bulgaria grasslands project was highlighted as a specific example of good practices supporting management of HNV grasslands.[10]

i. Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated

90. Outcome 1 was successfully achieved, and completion is rated ***satisfactory*.** There were six indicators to measure the success of outcome: four biodiversity indicators, the Tracking Tool reporting for GEF BD-2 projects, and one indicator related to the percentage of farmers from the project areas receiving support to adopt environmentally friendly land management practices. The biodiversity indicators, which the evaluation team finds more appropriate as objective indicators (they are indeed such in the project document, but were shifted towards Outcome 1 in the Inception phase), report no changes from the baseline in the population numbers for corncrake *(Crex crex)* and European souslik *(Spermophilus citellus)*, nor for the grassland bird index and the share of grass communities from the habitat "*mountainous mowing meadows*". This represents an achievement of project end targets, although some fluctuations were registered by the project biodiversity monitoring - for example as a result of the application of appropriate mowing techniques on five hectares, the souslik colonies at Petrohan area (Ponor site) have increased, while at Bessaparski hills as a result of increased plowing (for which incentives are basically provided from Axis 1 measures of NRDP) numbers are likely to have slightly declined. While impacts are difficult to tell for such a short lifetime of the project there is evidence showing important biodiversity benefits, even if they are at a relatively small scale; most important was the project work on restricting unsustainable investments (waste sites, expansion of gravel pits, stone quarries, etc.), further discussed in Section VI.D of this report on impacts.

91. The Tracking Tool, most important of all, observes two 'area' indicators relevant to the project - the landscape area directly and indirectly covered. Overachievement on both of these is reported - 36,000 ha (26,072 ha original target) and 350,000 ha (as opposed to 100,000 ha original target) respectively. While the achievement of the first one should not be doubted

[10] Agrotec SpA, 2010. "Ongoing and Mid-term Evaluation of the RDP 2007 – 2013; Mid-term Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme of Bulgaria; Covered Period 2007-2009," December 30th, 2010.

given the expansion of project activities in additional areas (see below in this section), the second figure should be taken a bit more cautiously. This figure represents the total area (as per latest scientific surveys) of HNV grasslands in Bulgaria, and its achievement is grounded on the understanding that all this area will be covered by the measures of Axis 2 of NRDP, which has been modified by the project support.

92. The project has unquestionably influenced policy changes; however, the current low uptake of the national AES suggests that this figure is more of a longer-term target rather than a current reality. The majority of grasslands are still 'outside' the eligibility layer either because there is little understanding of the specific features of grasslands, or simply due to misinterpretation of the aerial images, and this coupled with the more attractive incentives provided to farmers under Axis 1 (much easier to access and manage) represent the biggest barrier for expansion of sustainable management practices throughout the country. According to approximate figures cited by relevant project stakeholders, there are ~5 million ha of agricultural land in Bulgaria, but only 3.4 million ha are currently included as eligible for subsidies under the NRDP, and it is suspected that a large percentage of the 1.6 million ha balance is of grasslands and pasturelands, some of which would be applicable for AES; this was further indicated by one stakeholder who noted that in the Bessaparski site as much as 90% of pastures are not eligible for direct payment subsidies. It was noted that of the 620 registered farmers in Bessaparski, only about 20 are livestock farmers, and of these, only a few lease land that is eligible for direct payments. Some of the ~90% of ineligible land is eligible for measure 213 payments however, and six farmers in Bessaparski applied for this measure in 2011; another six are ready to apply for 2012 depending on whether their colleagues receive payment for 2011. Ideally all livestock farmers in the region would be participating. This eligibility layer issue is further discussed in Section V.D, which also highlights additional remaining barriers to full implementation of the national AES related to the socio-economic and ecological context in Bulgaria.

93. Regarding the indicator looking at the involvement of farmers in the national AES, this has been slightly underachieved given the existing problems with the AES (see previous paragraph). However, the evaluation team is of the opinion that this indicator does not adequately reflect project work, and does not capture project achievements in increasing the number of registered farmers participating in AES at the two project sites. For example, an initial indicator under this outcome was for 40% of economically active farmers in the regions have received at least one form of support payment from AES, where this percentage of farmers equaled 50 farmers; however, the number of registered farmers in the regions has increased significantly since project inception, and 40% would now be a much larger number of farmers.

94. ***Output 1.1*** *Biodiversity management plans as a basis for pilot agri-environmental scheme*

95. Under this output the project significantly enhanced the quantity, quality and availability of the biodiversity and environmental information on the two project sites. Large-scale field surveys were completed thus providing input to the identification, mapping and assessment of the conservation status of species and habitats in both Ponor and Bessaparski Hills. Recommendations on the zoning and management of the two pilot sites were also

provided. Furthermore, biodiversity monitoring was also carried out on an annual basis, including species additional to those listed in the logical framework of the project.

96. All biodiversity data, collected throughout the project, together with readily available maps and aerial images have been integrated and structured in a GIS database, a highly impressive result. This is a unique information platform that can be used for many types of planning activities and represents an excellent example of the achievements of the project. Its capabilities were demonstrated in the assessment of specific investment proposals for the two project areas, which, based on the data collected, were shown to be unsustainable and therefore officially contested. Effective use of the information was also made for the purposes of the project grant scheme design. It can also feed into the National Biodiversity Monitoring Scheme if an appropriate approach for coordination with MoEW is found. Last but not least, this data represents important scientific contribution evidenced by the large number of scientific peer-reviewed articles published by the experts directly involved in its collection.

97. The project however, was not able to go as far as hoped on developing management plans for the two project sites due to factors outside the control of the project team. First, the project had to wait for the adoption of the Ordinance on Management Plan Development for Protected Zones of the Natura 2000 Network (where the two project sites fall). Once this happened in 2009, the project was required to develop Terms of Reference as per the requirements of the Ordinance, which was done. Subsequently, however, the project was not given the "green light" as MoEW called for integrated management plan development for areas covered by both sites of the Habitats and Bird Directives (the case with Bessaparski hills and Ponor) and only after the process for mapping the sites under the Habitats Directive is completed in the framework of a large EU funded project, which is expected in 2014. All this has shown that there can be very limited flexibility when engaging with large scale government processes. On the positive note, the information collected by the project is a completed product of its own which can be directly used for management plan development, but efforts are still needed from BSPB to ensure this.

98. ***Output 1.2*** *A pilot agri-environmental scheme for encouraging farmers to adopt more biodiversity friendly land management practices in the selected HNV grasslands*

99. This output represents the biggest GEF contribution in financial terms. It included the development of a grant scheme for pilot testing AES, which contribute to protection of the biodiversity in agricultural lands and grasslands in particular. It provided the project with the needed experience that subsequently put it into a position to make the needed policy changes to NRDP - Axis 2. The grant scheme design was elaborated around the mitigation activities prescribed to address the threats to key species and habitats in the two pilot sites identified under Output 1.1.

100. The grant scheme supported four types of measures: (A) Natura 2000 – compensating farmers for extensive grazing in semi-natural pastures, which are not eligible for direct payments; (B) Agri-environment payments per hectare, compensating farmers for implementing specific management prescriptions, such as changing arable land into grasslands and follow-up maintenance, seeding with local species of grass, grazing according to a grazing plan; (C) Non-productive investments – these are investments that do not increase the farmers' income, but are beneficial to biodiversity, such as planting trees, installing nesting poles, build

little ponds, clear the area from invasive species; (D) Investment grants – aiming to assist farmers to improve their facilities and to improve their livelihoods, thus encouraging them to increase the flocks and area they manage and making them more competitive and able to benefit from the NRDP. Additional details on the project's AES are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5 AES of the Bulgaria Grasslands Project Grant Scheme

Measures	Activities
Area-based measures – Compensatory payments per unit of area paid annually	
A. Natura 2000 compensatory payment	A1. Grasslands management through grazing of habitats with codes 6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland species on calcareous substrates, 6220 Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals of the Thero-Brachypodietea , 6240 Sub-pannonic steppic grassland, 6250 Pannonic loess steppic grasslands, 62A0 Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands , 62C0 A2. Grasslands management – habitats with codes 6510 Lowland hay meadows and 6520 Mountain hay meadows through mowing A3. Grasslands management – habitats with codes 6510 Lowland hay meadows and 6520 Mountain hay meadows through grazing
B. Agri-environment payment	B.1. Transformation of arable land into extensive grasslands aimed at conservation of biodiversity. B.2. Reseeding the grasslands with hayseed in Bessaparski Hills
Investment measures – financing (90%) is based on approved projects	
C. Non-productive investments	The purchases of C.1. Slow grass cutting machines; and C.2. Electro-pastures; The establishment of: C.3. Shelters (cattle-pens) and huts for herds and people in the mountains aimed at stimulating pasture in remote areas; C.4. Watering-places; C.5 Pits for disinfection and prophylactics of the animals. The placement of C.6. Visibility signs; and C.7. Bird cages, platforms and perching posts; C.8. Designation of pedestrian and cycling routes; C.9. Maintenance and C.10. Construction of small natural water basins in the grasslands; C.11. Planting of trees (single or group of trees) from local species and their maintenance for 2 years; C.12. Purchasing of shepherd dogs;
D. Productive investments	D.1. Modernization and improvement of the milk farm production D.2. Grassland management D.3. Activities connected with diversification of the agricultural activities and conservation of the local products D.4. Public awareness activities – brochures, open days for demonstration and popularisation of traditional products. Design and maintenance of the farm web site, on-line sales, etc.

Source: Evaluation of the overall implementation, impact and results of the project pilot grant scheme for support of HNV farmers in three Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria: SPA "Ponor", SPA "Bessaparski Hills" and SPA "West Balkan Mountain", Kazakova Y. (2012)

101. The grant scheme had two calls for projects (2010 and 2011) and benefited from strong interest among farmers, helped by the proactive promotion campaigns undertaken by the MACs. The team decided to target farmers with at least 50 sheep or 15 cows, and who had land under contract for grazing their stock. The excess demand for the program did not match the initial low expectations of the project team, whereby they even included a third area as eligible outside Ponor and Bessaparski Hills. 45 projects were approved (out of 48 applications) at the

first call, 41 (out of 56 applications) were approved in the second call where priority was given to those farmers who have applied for A and B measures for a second year. This has allowed the project to more adequately assess the effect of the AES.

102. One good indicator of the success of the program's demonstration effort was that the second round of funding in 2011 saw an increase in the number of applications, while the national AES have not been able to significantly increase participation. The success of the grant scheme is undisputable; however it must be noted that similar to national programs, most of the interest of farmers has been attracted by the compensatory and investment measures and not that much by the agri-environmental measures that require active management. An evaluation of the grant scheme has been completed and provides significantly more detailed information on this aspect of the project than is included in this evaluation report. The final accounting by measure for the project Grant Scheme is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Committed Payments Per Measure and Per Call (BGN)

Measure	Contracts (BGN)		
	2010	2011	Total
A. Natura 2000 payment	79 032	64 868	**143 900**
B. Agri-environment payment	4 899	398	**5 297**
C. Non-productive investments	66 071	7 500	**73 571**
D. Productive investments	160 707	31 908	**192 615**
Total	**310 710**	**104 674**	**415 384**

Source: Evaluation of the overall implementation, impact and results of the project pilot grant scheme for support of HNV farmers in three Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria: SPA "Ponor", SPA "Bessaparski Hills" and SPA "West Balkan Mountain", Kazakova Y. (2012)

103. ***Output 1.3*** *Grassland eco-label and eco-products outlet to stimulate demand for grassland products*

104. Achievements under this output could have been more extensive, but again for reasons outside the scope of the project, success with original targets on establishing grassland eco-label and eco-products outlet have been limited. That is not to say the project has lacked the skills or the desire to do it. On the contrary, it has made commendable efforts in creating the lacking prerequisites for making the needed steps in this direction, indications for which were provided by the socio-economic and a market studies completed in the early days of the project. Among the direct barriers identified were the low price of raw milk, the monopolistic position of the dairies and the prohibition to process their own milk and sell it as yoghurt and cheese and thus to add value to it; consistency of the quality of products, improper packaging and labeling, marketing and promotion.

105. To address some of the root causes the project shifted its activities towards developing the required legal framework, which would allow on-the-farm processing and direct sale to consumers of dairy and meat products. Detailed research on the alleged EU prohibition on this was carried out to find that EU Regulation 852/2006 on Food Safety gives the flexibility to member states to elaborate national rules in this respect. The project joined forces with several other NGOs working in the same area, and in February 2009 established the "Clean Food, Fair Livelihood Coalition". The coalition's success came with the adoption of a MAF Ordinance on Direct Sales, and although the uptake of the opportunities it provides to small farmers is still

relatively low it is could be looked at as a critical step toward eco-labeling and stimulus of grassland products.

106. GEF projects have supported the development of regional and local eco-labels in multiple countries in the region, including Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In Poland, a GEF project helped initiate the "Barycz Valley Recommends" brand, which has been identified as a European best practice example.[11] In the Czech Republic, the GEF project helped strengthen a few regional brands that had been initiated under previous projects. These include the "Produced in Beskydy"[12] and "Sheep from Moravian Carpathians" labels, which are also part of a larger national Czech network of regional brands. In Hungary, a GEF project helped establish the "Living Tisza" Regional Trademark,[13] which has been leveraged to achieve important success with direct sales in Budapest of organic products from regional producers.

107. The results of the project's socio-economic assessment, as well as the numerous meetings with farmers from the two regions, made it clear that setting up a producers' organization will largely benefit local farmers in terms of their access to better markets and achieving better price for their production. To fill the identified gap, the project initiated and supported the registration of the Association of Sheep Farmers from West Balkan Mountain, which includes sheep farmers from both Ponor and West Balkan Special Protected Areas, where its sustainability is expected to be secured through funding under NRDP.

108. Other project initiatives under this output included numerous promotion campaigns and events such as international workshop on branding and certification of pro-biodiversity products; promotion of traditional local products through the Slow Food chain; participation at the national Bio & Eco Expo (November 2010), the Green Days Festival (2011 and 2012), the "Bio-mania" national festival of organic farming and HNV farming and others.

ii. Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy-making

109. Much of the success of the project rests on the results of the policy work on AES carried out at the local and national levels as well as on the strong community involvement, both of which have been carried out under this outcome. Hence, the achievement of Outcome 2 is considered ***highly satisfactory*** but this evaluation is based on the implementation of the activity set and the impacts ensuing or potentially ensuing from it rather than the achievement of the targets of the logframe; the logframe includes two indicators, which in the view of the evaluation team do not adequately capture the purpose of the outcome. The first indicator which looks at the integration of project identified biodiversity conservation activities into the national guidelines for grasslands management planning seems to have been achieved. Evidence of this is the excellent mainstreaming work completed by the project with regard to GAEC standards, amendment of the NRDP ordinances on implementing agri-environment measures and Natura 2000 measure; introduction of three new agri-environment sub-measures

[11] More information at http://www.dbpoleca.barycz.pl/, and http://www.regional-products.eu/en/best-practise/detail/12/three-years-of-the-barycz-valley-recommends-brand.

[12] More information at http://www.regional-products.eu/en/brands/detail/376/vyrobeno-v-beskydech.

[13] More information at http://www.elotisza.hu/.

designed under the project and included in the 6th notification to the EU for NRDP modification and others. The second indicator which sets the target of management plan development for the two project sites incorporating pre-tested biodiversity conservation measures, which appears more appropriate for Outcome 1, has not been achieved for external from the project reasons as described under Outcome 1 above.

110. The outcome includes two outputs with little difference on the expected impacts:

111. ***Output 2.1*** *Management model for agri-environmental schemes: establishment of an Agri-Environmental Policy Unit and Mobile Advisory Centre and* ***Output 2.2*** *Direct dissemination of results and lessons learnt from the two pilot areas to selected HNV grassland areas in Bulgaria*

112. An Agri-Environmental Policy Unit (AEPU) (simultaneously the PMU for the project) was established to ensure the link between the project's AES and its policy integration. In addition, two MACs (only one envisaged in the project document) were set as local outreach mechanisms. Stakeholders interviewed by the evaluation team did not hide their admiration and praise for the team, and it is clear that it has built a good reputation both at national and local level, particularly among local farmers. The excellent delivery by the team, and the strong partnerships and relationships they have built, has helped generate much goodwill and interest in biodiversity conservation throughout the two project sites.

113. By using its own experiences (mostly achieved under Outcome 1), the AEPU has significantly contributed to the adequate change of national policy on agri-environment. Participation in various working groups, mainly set up as consultative bodies for the NRDP, has been effectively used as an instrument. Among the indisputable impacts are: 1) the update of Measure 214 "*Agri-environment payments*" with inclusion of new sub-measures related to grasslands management; 2) elaboration of the Ordinance on implementation of measure 213 "*Natura 2000 Payments in Agricultural Lands*" through the introduction of mechanism for calculating the compensatory payments; 3) the adoption of Ordinance on direct sales which is considered an important benefit to SME farmers; and 4) the amendment of Standard 4.2 on maintaining grasslands in good agricultural and environmental condition to allow better conformity with local conditions (now up to 20 % bushes and trees can be maintained on HNV grasslands and those within Natura 2000 sites, which eliminated the perverse incentive of removing them, thus destroying natural landscape). The project also made its way into the four working groups operating under each of the axes of NRDP as well as in the Monitoring Committee of the NRDP. Even more so, through Birdlife's agricultural taskforce, the project is represented into the discussions on the 'greening' of Common Agricultural Policy at EU level.

114. These success stories would have not been possible without a proper information flow "from the ground" ensured by the MACs. They have been particularly keen on recording any issues and challenges with the implementation of the AES locally and by reporting back have ensured that local voice is heard at the government level. It did not come as a surprise to hear during the interviews for this evaluation, one farmer saying "These people have entered into our daily lives, their mobile numbers are on top of our contacts list!", which is a clear credit of the efforts the two teams have made. They have been there first in promoting the both project and national AES (for example, the teams helped promote the Natura 2000 measure 213 when it was launched in 2011), in providing support for filling-in the application forms, in advising

what is best to be done in terms of management practices in a certain farm, in supporting farmers prepare complaints for any misjudged payment. Perhaps most impressive is that the MACs significantly contributed to better understanding of biodiversity protection by farmers so they are aware that the support they are provided is not only for socio-economic dimensions meant at improving their livelihoods, but based on the biodiversity values of the landscape.

115. The increased number of registered farmers, especially in the Ponor area, or the gradual, although slow, trend of more people coming back to farming (here the result of the economic crisis in the country may have also played a significant share) are some of the latest developments in the two targeted sites since the project start. Indicative are the words of the mayor of a local municipality who said "A couple of years ago municipality lands were more of a burden to us. Now we could hardly find spare pastures to lend to local farmers, and our income from these lands increased from 1,000 BGN before the project started to some 46,000 BGN keeping the same prices." While one could always question the contribution of the project to this, it is certain that the information campaigns, the various training courses (notably on AES) and again, the face-to-face contacts between the project and the local people have all paid dividends.

116. Another specific result of the project work that also needs special attention is the developed guidelines on grasslands management. Prepared through the best scientific expertise in Bulgaria, this tool has the potential of significantly scaling up the project work not only throughout Bulgaria, but also possibly in neighboring countries with similar environmental features. The guidelines are a comprehensive tool, providing descriptions, distributions, illustrations and management recommendations of the various types of grasslands (natural, semi-natural, artificial, landscape elements etc.) that occur not only in the targeted project sites but also on a nationwide scale. It is a ready-to-be-used product, which, provided that it finds the right distribution channels and reaches the relevant institutions, may well play an important future role in any management plan for a protected area or zone, municipality pasture management plans[14] or even to define the look of the grassland management measures to be included in the Axis 2 measures in the new programming period (2014 - 2020).

iii. Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria

117. This outcome was focused on project management aspects, and the dissemination of lessons and good practices to catalyze and scale-up further results within Bulgaria and beyond. The logframe indicators and targets for this outcome were highly output focused, which may not adequately capture the impact of the results produced. Particularly for knowledge products and awareness raising activities it is helpful to understand how the information shared has been absorbed and carried on into future activities, but it is not always feasible to access this perspective. Indicator targets for Outcome 3 included three project lessons learned documents

[14] In 2011 the project looked into supporting the development of municipality grassland management plans, but due to the fact that municipality borders cover a much wider area than the project sites, and additional surveys were needed, the idea was deserted for budgetary reasons. It was agreed with respective municipalities that this should form a project of its own, and indeed one of these was included in a proposal for a cross-border project with Serbia.

disseminated in the region; two technical reports published in peer-reviewed journals; six public awareness raising workshops on biodiversity values of HNV grasslands in the six Bulgarian planning regions; and two international workshops on AES and payments for ecosystem services in Bulgaria. Each of the outcome indicator targets has been adequately met, and additional results have been produced under this outcome that are not necessarily captured by the logframe indicators. Overall, achievement of this outcome is rated ***satisfactory***.

118. ***Output 3.1*** *Adaptive project management enabling effective project implementation and proper monitoring and evaluation of its outcomes and impacts*

119. There were no specific logframe indicators related to this output, and adaptive management, project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation are discussed in detail in other sections of this report. These "operational" aspects of a project are not typically included as a project output in most UNDP-GEF project designs.

120. ***Output 3.2*** *Local public awareness-raising activities in support of the piloting of policy instruments for promoting the improved management of HNV semi-natural grasslands* and ***Output 3.3*** *National public awareness-raising activities about the biodiversity value of HNV semi-natural grasslands in Bulgaria*

121. The project team co-organized and presented topics related to AES at three information workshops in March 2011 in different regions of Bulgaria, also supporting the BSPB project "Together for the Danube".[15]Local workshops on AES had previously been held in the two project sites and in West Balkan region. Relevant project results are to be published in a dedicated issue of "*Zoologica Bulgarica*", a national scientific journal issued by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The project team has also participated in relevant national and local events related to awareness-raising for environmentally friendly food production.

122. Also under this outcome capacity development through BSPB staff training was conducted. An additional training in December 2011 on biodiversity fieldwork and database management was held for 25 people involved in other projects in Bulgaria related to AES, including a field visit study tour to Greece to see positive examples of the application of AES. The fact that BSPB will remain active in Bulgaria on these issues is of great value, as the knowledge and experience gained through this project will continue to be applied. National government stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation noted that BSPB staff are among the most knowledgeable experts on AES in Bulgaria.

123. ***Output 3.4*** *Lessons learned are shared for replication within Europe and with UNDP/GEF*

124. Two articles have been published in two international scientific journals with high "impact factor"[16], and two additional articles have been submitted for publication. Publishing

[15] According to project documentation, "This project is funded by the EU's cross-border cooperation funding facility. The main objective of the project is to improve nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources through sustainable development of the regions along the Danube River."

[16] The references for these publications are: K. Vassilev, H. Pedashenko, S. C. Nikolov, I. Apostolova& J. Dengler (2011): Effect of land abandonment on the vegetation of upland semi-natural grasslands in the Western Balkan Mts., Bulgaria, Plant Biosystems - An International Journal Dealing with all Aspects of Plant Biology, 145:3, 654-665. Nikolov, S. C., Demerdzhiev, D. A., Popgeorgiev, G. S. &Plachiyski, D. G., 2011. Bird community patterns in sub–Mediterranean pastures: the effects of shrub cover and grazing intensity. Animal Biodiversity and Conservation, 34.1: 11–21.

scientific articles related to the project in peer-reviewed journals is an excellent result that demonstrates the high level of technical quality supporting the project, and helps disseminate project results at the international level. Project team members also participated in a conference in Zagreb on November 3-4, 2011 on "*Policy Opportunities and Challenges in View of EU Accession and CAP post-2013*" organized by the European Forum for Nature Protection and Pastoralism. Project results had previously been presented at the European Congress for Conservation Biology in September 2009 in Prague. The project also welcomed a study tour group organized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature during which 34 individuals from government and civil society sectors from Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro visited Bulgaria in December 2011.

B. Additional Results

125. The project was able to achieve most of the results anticipated in the project document, and in many regards was able to go beyond expectations. Also interesting and important are the results that the project was able to catalyze that were slightly outside its scope. The project team's input to decisions related to local development investments in Ponor and Bessaparski, for example in diverting unsustainable investments in housing and quarrying, have made direct positive contributions to the environmental status of these regions. This has been highlighted at various points in this evaluation report.

126. As noted previously in this report, according to multiple stakeholders the project has helped catalyze an increase in the leasing of municipal land by local resource users in Ponor and Bessaparski Hills. In many cases farmers were historically using land for pasturing animals, but there is now a slowly growing culture of making formal legal agreements for land use rights. This is partly incentivized by the AES mechanisms, which provide farmers with additional income if they are recognized as the official users of a certain plot of land, and which also enables them to pay the land leasing fees.

127. The project has contributed to and catalyzed local civil society and municipal engagement on issues of rural sustainable development in the two project regions. As has been discussed elsewhere in this report, the project provided some basic support to the "chitalishte" community organizations in the project regions. These organizations are now building on these results, scaling-up some of the local festivals, and expanding their level of activity in other areas. The chitalishte "Zora" in Radilovo village has expanded the initial activity supported by the project into a range of community activities with increasing support from local government. The chitalishte in Kurtovo Konare that organized an annual festival of traditional rural livelihoods and foods with project support has been selected under a funding window for municipal participation in the NRDP for a three year program that will further raise the profile of the event at the national level, and expand the scope of the event.

128. On a related issue, another result that has not necessarily been captured through the logframe indicators is the project's input to local development strategies. The project team maintains good communication with local stakeholders, and when opportunities have arisen in local planning processes, the project team has provided input emphasizing the importance of traditional agriculture in rural HNV grasslands. These contributions have been opportunistic in that they could not have been foreseen in the project document at the time of project design,

but they are also contributing at the local level to the overall biodiversity mainstreaming objectives of the project.

129. Through the regular presence in the field and the environmental awareness raising activities carried out by the MACs, the project has catalyzed at least a low level of informal community-based monitoring of the Ponor and Bessaparski project sites. Local resource users that have participated in the project can be counted on to report illegal fires and other illegal activities in the sites, which is critical because these community members have an even more consistent presence in the field than the project teams, or local environmental enforcement authorities.

C. Stakeholder Participation During Implementation

i. Participation by stakeholders and partnerships

130. Stakeholder participation during implementation is rated ***satisfactory*****.** The interviews conducted during the evaluation mission revealed wide and meaningful stakeholder participation in the project's implementation and decision-making. The project has worked closely with, and through a large number of local stakeholders, notably the local municipalities (especially Godech, and less so in Svoge municipality), village mayors, regional and local offices of MAF, Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Waters, NGOs as well as individuals. This approach, of involving a wide range of civil society actors on various activities and to form good partnership has been effectively used to influence national policies and to introduce more targeted grassland management. The project has used diverse communication channels and this facilitated through its direct presence has helped building the needed relationships and trust especially at local level.

131. Strong engagement of local famers came naturally, as this was a key component of the project, but nonetheless, it was carried out successfully, being helped by a conscientious and transparent team that took various proactive steps to engage and inform local people. As already mentioned, one of the success stories of the project were the MACs as face-to-face contacts proved critical for engaging SME farmers. Outside the project grant scheme, this has significantly helped enhance the understanding of and the uptake of the national agri-environmental payments at the two project sites, although more work is needed to include farmers into the decision making processes, possibly through establishing producers associations. Excellent work has also been done on sensitizing local population on concrete and potential impacts adversely affecting biodiversity. Interviews with locals indicated that they have become more responsible in reporting cases of wildfires, illegal waste disposal, poaching, and moreover unsustainable investments (village mayors look to be sensitive on such cases).

132. The project has formed good operational relationships and has worked well with relevant government institutions, but in a structured and relatively limited way through the PSC, various working groups, individual meetings, etc. Overall the project strategy and approach could have been more actively targeting engagement and capacity development of government institutions on AES, particularly NAAS, and the technical units of Paying Agency responsible for controlling AES. This could have helped to limit some of the issues on the implementation of AES local farmers were faced with.

133. Establishment of partnerships has been another tool successfully used by the project. It will not be an overstatement to say that much of the project achievements in influencing national policies have come as a result of the proactive work of BSPB in uniting the efforts with several other NGOs which has made their voice heard within the relevant government institutions. The coalition formed, not only identified existing gaps in the national agricultural policy but also actively participated in the adequate amendment and supplement (based on project experiences) the relevant Axis 2 measures of NRDP but most notably in the adoption of a special Ordinance of direct sales in support of SME farmers. This has also come to show the importance of partners and coalitions in achieving results that would potentially be beyond an individual project. On a similar note, but at local level, the project facilitated the processes of establishment of at least three Local Action Groups, representing local interests, which are to function under the auspices of the EU LEADER Programme.

134. Overall, the project has also successfully completed the partnerships envisaged in the project document. A small note should be made however on the withdrawal of the Association of Milk Producers, which seem to have undergone internal problems and restructuring at some point in 2008 and 'basically ceased to exist' thus dropping out as a project partner.

135. While gender equality is one of UNDP's important areas of work it needs to be noted that there has not been any critical gender issues related to the scope of the project. There is a good gender balance in the project team with some key positions filled by women – for example, the Executive Director of BSPB, the project manager, and one of the experts in MACs. Although not specifically targeted, women were also well represented within the beneficiaries of the project grant scheme. While some positive results for local community revival and development were achieved through “chitalishte” a more direct targeted involvement of youth would have been beneficial in terms of uptake of project ideas especially regarding the link with biodiversity protection.

136. Previous GEF programmatic evaluations, such as the Third Overall Performance Study of the GEF and Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF, have indicated that among the critical elements to ensure sustainability of project results is strong stakeholder ownership of the processes and activities supported under the project. In this light the results of the project can be viewed optimistically given that BSPB and other project partners continue their proactive work on the project objective. Sustainability is further discussed in Section VI.A.

ii. Production and dissemination of information

137. As stated under the respective outcomes, the project has produced a number of reports, publications and awareness raising materials, and dissemination of these has been widespread. The review of the materials available to the evaluation team shows that the products are of excellent quality, but many are scientifically oriented and there is a doubt whether these have penetrated the understanding among local resource users. This has to a large extent been compensated by the activeness of MACs in holding face-to-face meetings and organizing different information campaigns (as are, for example, the campaigns promoting the measures from NRDP). Information has been extensively made available through the project website, though direct communication with farmers has proven more useful.

138. The project needs to further ensure dissemination of the produced guidelines on management of high nature value grasslands. In addition, there need to be effective means identified of providing all collected information to MoEW and the Environmental Executive Agency, making it possible to link with the national monitoring scheme and feeding into national reporting and reporting for MEAs.

D. Remaining Barriers to Effective and Efficient AES Implementation

139. There are a variety of barriers remaining to effective use of AES that could hamper implementation and scaling-up to the national level. First, and foremost a large percentage of HNV grasslands are currently 'outside' the eligibility layer either because there is little understanding of the specific features of grasslands in this part of the world, or simply due to misinterpretation of the aerial images used for defining what an eligible area is. The eligibility layer issue for AES is currently determined through aerial and other remote imaging data, and as previously noted, it is thought that a significant portion of grasslands may be among the 1.6 million ha of agricultural land in Bulgaria not currently eligible for subsidies under the NRDP. This approach for determining eligibility has created problems with the AES for small-scale livestock farmers. Following the initial promotion of AES measures, the MAF updated the assessment of which land parcels were valid for AES based on new imagery data, and based on this assessment some farmers' land under AES agreements was removed from eligibility, which resulted in penalties for these farmers. A government representative at the Bessaparski site noted that determining the eligibility and compliance of grassland management through remote sensing imagery can be very sensitive to the time of the year that the images were captured, because at certain times of year when the grass is not at its peak the limestone "shines through" and it appears that the land is not in use. Until this issue is adequately addressed (and compensated) there is likely to be limited receptivity to AES measures by local resource users.

140. A key issue for further implementation of AES in Bulgaria is the land tenure situation faced in many rural areas. As one project participant put it, the EU AES were designed based on Western European land tenure systems, which face confounding factors in former Eastern Bloc countries that have had to re-privatize land over the past 20 years. As highlighted at the beginning of this report, the average land parcel in Bulgaria is 0.6 ha, and there are many absentee landowners. Therefore it is quite difficult for small-scale farmers to secure use rights to a specific large area of land for a five year period – as is required for AES agreements under EU policy. This has been modified in Bulgaria by MAF so that AES agreements can be for one year, but farmers are still required to maintain use of the same land for five years, and penalties are applied if they cannot. The Natura 2000 compensatory payments have seen a more rapid and extensive uptake by local resource users because they only require a one-year engagement for a particular plot of land. Other factors also tie into this issue – for example, until 2011 municipalities did not have the legal capacity to lease municipal land for more than one year terms, and a significant portion of the land in the project sites (as well as in other regions in Bulgaria with extensive HNV grasslands) is municipally owned. Thus, since AES require a five-year commitment, municipal lands were effectively excluded from the program until 2011.

141. Related to the process of receiving payments and land eligibility, there is a major confidence gap for small-scale farmers with respect to national AES measures in Bulgaria. In

many cases payments have been significantly delayed, and there have been a range of issues related to enforcement and penalties that have turned farmers off from participating in the AES programs. In one example, when AES were first implemented there were instances when inspectors would visit farms in the wintertime – when fields were covered with snow – to assess compliance with mowing and grazing during the summer period. The complicated application process is a further deterrent. According to government stakeholders the process of implementing AES is getting better over time, and has improved significantly compared to the situation in 2007-2009 when the program was first implemented. Nonetheless there is already significant damage to the reputation of AES among farmers, and for stakeholders who primarily get information based on word-of-mouth and the experiences of their peers, it will likely take significant time for the beneficial use of AES to regain the confidence of the SME farming community. Farmers who have applied for the initial round of measure 213 are waiting to see if they will receive the expected payments, which is supposed to happen by mid-2012. If this initial round of measure 213 is successful there may be improved uptake in the future.

142. The incentives provided to farmers under Axis 1 are in a way more attractive being easier to access compared to those for agri-environment thus creating the potential of destroying HNV through unsustainable practices (for example plowing). In general the level of subsidy payments for AES is lower than for some direct/single area payments (other types of agricultural subsidies under the NRDP), and the application process and monitoring and enforcement for AES is more complicated for other types of agricultural subsidies (for example, the required five year term for AES agreements). In many ways this makes AES the measures of "last resort", applied for by farmers that are not eligible for any other agricultural subsidies. Therefore AES may help conserve biodiversity in some areas, but it does not put AES on par with other subsidies and may not allow adequate progress toward the overall goal of AES of ensuring environmentally sustainable agricultural production. Significant additional reforms in agricultural policies at the EU and national levels are necessary to further "green" agricultural support measures and ensure cross-compliance, facilitating greater uptake and implementation of AES. This is under discussion in EU policy working groups on "greening" the Common Agricultural Policy (which BSPB is contributing to), especially for Axis 1, and will hopefully come to fruition in an adequate manner as soon as possible. At the national level, continued lobbying by BSPB and participation in the processes related to the next planning period of NRDP should be actively pursued.

143. Related to the project's support for direct sales of traditional agricultural products (i.e. government ordinance on this issue) there are some cultural and socio-economic barriers to rapid progress on these issues. For example, it has been previously mentioned that official registration by small-scale farmers for direct sales under this ordinance has been somewhat slow; this is apparently partially due to the fact that to register under the ordinance farmers have to be officially recognized as commercial producers, which also means that they are subject to the relevant taxes.

144. The project grant scheme was successful in supporting many individual farmers in strengthening their business, and thereby promoting traditional agricultural approaches for the benefit of biodiversity. As the root cause of some aspects of biodiversity loss are related to the decreasing number of grazing animals in pastures and grasslands, the overall project goal in this

respect is to increase the number of sheep, cows and goats pasturing in these ecosystems. However, individual farmers face multiple barriers to increasing their herd size – for example, a farmer's infrastructure (e.g. barn, etc.) may not be adequate for larger herds, or they may be limited by the manpower in their typically family-run businesses. Therefore future efforts to support traditional agriculture may need to focus on reducing barriers to market entry to increase the number of farmers, rather than trying to increase the herd size of farmers already in the market. At the same time, supporting current farmers to ensure they do not exit the market is also critical.

VI. Key GEF Performance Parameters

A. Sustainability

145. While a sustainability rating is provided here as required, sustainability is a temporal and dynamic state that is influenced by a broad range of constantly shifting factors. It should be kept in mind that the important aspect of sustainability of GEF projects is the sustainability of results, not necessarily the sustainability of activities that produced results. In the context of GEF projects there is no clearly defined timeframe for which results should be sustained, although it is implied that they should be sustained indefinitely. When evaluating sustainability, the greater the time horizon, the lower the degree of certainty possible.

146. Based on GEF evaluation policies and procedures, the overall rating for sustainability cannot be higher than the lowest rating for any of the individual components. Therefore the overall **sustainability** rating for the Bulgaria Grasslands project for this terminal evaluation is ***moderately likely*****.**

i. Financial Risks to Sustainability

147. Sustainability on this aspect is considered likely. Financial sustainability of results is an important element of any project, and was raised in the project review comments of the Bulgaria grasslands project during the project approval phase in 2006 as a particular concern with respect to the sustainability of the policy advisory unit and MAC envisioned in the project design. The mechanisms proposed in the project document for financial sustainability of these activities have not come into being (advisory fees from AES), but fortunately other approaches have appeared that will support this ongoing work. To begin, utilizing the NGO execution approach has contributed to financial sustainability, because BSPB will continue operating in the country, and is integrating the experience and capacity gained under this project in other ongoing and future efforts. All staff from the grasslands project will be integrated in future ongoing work. BSPB is involved in at least three EU funded Life+ projects that include pilot testing of AES, under which elements of the current project will be carried forward[17] (further highlighted in Section VI.A.iv below). More specifically, a 4 million CHF Swiss-funded project will also be carrying forward further work on supporting the traditional economy in high nature value grasslands (also discussed further below).

148. Other aspects of the project focusing on capacity development of local resource users and of government institutions will inherently be carried on through the individuals involved.

[17] Life projects LIFE09 NAT/BG/000230, LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152, and LIFE08 NAT/BG/000277.

The key project results related to influences on the national policy framework do not require financial resources for sustainability, and it is further expected that the project experience will be incorporated in the government's planning for the 2014-2020 period.

ii. Sociopolitical Risks to Sustainability

149. The full range of stakeholders in each of the project sites, and at the national level, expressed strong support for the ongoing work of mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in agricultural policy. This was particularly the case among the local resource users involved in the project Grant Scheme. The key government institutions – the MFA, NAAS, and State Fund Agriculture – all are supportive of the AES approach, but have limited capacity to leverage full implementation of the measures based on the funding available. The next critical step to sustain project results will be for the project experience and lessons to be more fully integrated into the program for the 2014-2020 period, the planning for which will be undertaken in mid-2012 to mid-2013. The project timing is well set in that the project will reach completion and the full set of lessons should available to inform the planning process. To achieve this however, the planning process will have to be open and carried out in a timeframe to allow adequate input. Based on the capacity of the MFA, it is not clear how feasible this will be, and sustainability on this element is considered moderately likely.

iii. Institutional Framework and Governance Risks to Sustainability

150. Institutional and governance risks are not significant, and sustainability on this element is considered likely. The institutional framework related to AES is well established and does not face significant issues or changes. Multiple government institutions are involved and have clearly established roles, although there is an important need for additional institutional capacity among relevant government institutions. Although the institutional mechanisms involved are functional, there is significant room for continued improvement in all practical aspects of AES implementation.

iv. Environmental Risks to Sustainability

151. There are not acute environmental threats to the sustainability of immediate project results, but many of the key environmental threats to high nature value grasslands remain. These include overall socio-demographic trends contributing to the decline of traditional rural agriculture, cross-incentives from traditional agriculture subsidies, and continued pressure for economic investment in rural areas. Although AES measures have had some success in incentivizing new farmers to enter the market in rural areas, overall a much larger effort would be required to stem the large-scale flow of younger generations from rural to urban areas.

152. As discussed previously in Section V.D above, one of the significant current environmental threats is the plowing of unused land into arable to secure subsidies, even if the land will not subsequently be planted. Clearly it would be preferable from an environmental perspective (as well as an economic efficiency one) if these subsidies were restructured to ensure there are not incentives for land management measures that are environmentally harmful.

B. Catalytic Role: Replication and Scaling-up

153. Among the different project activities, naturally the AES have the highest replication potential. As suggested by the project document and latest scientific inventories, this potential could in the longer term be scaled-up to 350,000 ha of HNV of grasslands in Bulgaria, including natural meadows and pastures (semi-natural grasslands) mainly distributed in the lowlands, hilly regions and on the mountain slopes up to the upper tree line. Given the policy changes catalyzed by the project, achievement of this target is expected to come through the Axis 2 measures of NRDP, and is possible given the financial potential of the program. However, considering the current low uptake of the national AES this target may be optimistic. To validate the coverage under actual replication at present would require data from the MAF on the validation of the 2,047 applications (which covered an estimated 79,580 ha) for Natura 2000 compensation payments (measure 213) for 2011 – this data is not yet available because the validation and payment process for the first year of implementation of the measures has not yet been completed. It should be available later in 2012.

154. Regarding the compensatory payments piloted for the first time by the project, the methodologies developed for conducting the needed calculations have been taken by the government, approved by the European Commission and used so far for the Natura 2000 measure. These will continue to be applied, but have a further replication potential with regard to the Natura 2000 forestry measure, which was significantly delayed for a variety of reasons (mainly due to the fact that sites under the Habitats Directive are still not officially designated) and is now more likely to be launched in the next programming period.

155. Outside the NRDP, the project team and BSPB should be given special credit for their streamlined efforts in scaling-up various aspects of the work and building on the experiences so far, linking these to other initiatives. For example, an agri-environmental component has been strongly embedded into the design of three projects funded by the EU's Life+ program. These projects are "Conservation of the wintering population of globally threatened red-breasted geese in Bulgaria" which includes an agri-environmental component of about 90,000 euros comprising elaboration of the compensatory measures for farmers who incur losses from the geese grazing in their wheat; "Conservation of Egyptian vulture in Southern Bulgaria and Greece" with a budget of around 2.2 million euros where key project activities include forming of mobile advisory teams, inclusion of specific AES; and "Save the Raptors" which has agri-environment component aiming to establish good farming practices in areas that are habitats of Imperial Eagle, and other species. Regarding the latter two, the entire approach to working with farmers via mobile teams will be replicated.

156. As mentioned above, one area that needs continued strengthening after the project end relates to eco-labeling, promotion of products originating from sustainably managed grasslands, and ensuring broader use of the benefits the Ordinance on direct sales present for SME farmers. A perfect opportunity for up-scaling this work is an upcoming program of the Swiss Foreign Assistance Fund that is dedicating around 4 million CHF ($4.2 million USD) to show the link between nature protection - agriculture - ecosystem services. The design of this five-year program builds on the success of the project, which has been mentioned in the Memorandum of Understanding between Bulgaria and Switzerland. The start of the program will coincide with the end of the Bulgaria Grasslands project. A total of 2 million CHF ($2.1

million USD) will be allocated through BSPB and the Foundation for Organic Agriculture "Bioselena" to extensive farmers from West Balkan and Central Balkan Natura 2000 sites to support their registration for direct sales, processing their own milk and products, improving the production technology, participating in markets, setting up a farmers 'shop in Sofia, etc.

157. Other opportunities for replicating project activities were specifically sought by BSPB through the cross-border cooperation programs with Serbia and Turkey. Two such projects have been prepared to this end that are expected to apply project experience further in the West Balkan Mountains as well as in Sakar and Strandja.

158. Two other project activities that are expected to be up-scaled through EU funding are: i.) The biodiversity monitoring, the common bird monitoring in particular, which is co-funded by NRDP (another success of the project); and ii.) The work on stimulating stakeholder participation in decision making through the Local Action Groups which receive support from the LEADER Program (Axis 4 of NRDP).

C. Monitoring and Evaluation

i. Project Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation

159. The Bulgaria Grasslands project document includes a full description of the project M&E plan and activities. Annex 5 of the project document includes the summarized budgeted M&E plan, as per the standard UNDP approach. The summary table includes the planned M&E activities, responsible parties, budget, and expected timeframe. The M&E plan conforms to standard UNDP and GEF M&E procedures, standards and norms. Foreseen M&E activities include the inception workshop and report, APR/PIR, PSC meetings, mid-term internal evaluation, final external evaluation, terminal report, lessons learned, and audit. The total indicative M&E budget is given as $140,000 – excluding project team staff time - which is relatively high for a project of this size, although this did include some budgeting for measuring progress of AES, as well as a significant budget for the mid-term internal evaluation, for which savings were undoubtedly realized based on the approach ultimately taken for this activity.

160. Overall, the M&E plan was implemented as envisioned, or in a more results-based adaptive manner. Reporting was generally timely and comprehensive, with one or two exceptions due to circumstances beyond the control of the project staff. The anticipated PSC meetings were held, though not necessarily on a calendar year annual basis due to project specific circumstances – for example, the timing of the implementation of the grant scheme.

161. The key element of the project M&E system for a results-based approach is the project logframe, with indicators, baseline data, and targets. To meet GEF and UNDP M&E minimum standard, project logframe indicators must meet SMART criteria[18]. The Bulgaria Grasslands project logframe[19] is based on the standard UNDP logframe structure and approach. The logframe was further adjusted and updated at the inception phase, with changes to the

[18] The GEF Evaluation Office defines SMART indicators as those that are: Specific, Measureable, Achievable and Attributable, Relevant and Realistic, Timebound, Timely, Trackable and Targeted. See http://www.gefcountrysupport.org/report_detail.cfm?projectId=232 for additional information.
[19] See Annex 2, pg. 83 of the project document.

logframe outlined the inception report.[20] Specifically, eight new indicators were introduced, two were removed to 'reflect current situation', all indicators measuring biodiversity conservation achievements were moved from project goal to Outcome 1 'since this is the outcome directly related to management of biodiversity', the indicator measuring juniper succession was removed 'because it was estimated that for the duration of the project any significant change cannot be recorded', and a new indicator 'Grassland Bird Index' was introduced. While these changes do in a better way reflect the project realities, the evaluation team finds the grounding for such changes somewhat vague.

162. The logframe indicators and targets do not fully meet SMART criteria, though they do facilitate some assessment of project results. The results focus of the indicators and targets could be strengthened, and some indicators (especially for Outcome 3) are primarily at the output level – i.e. number of publications produced, number of workshops held, etc. - which have potential lower relevance to the long-term desired results. The project logframe includes a number of impact level indicators, which is an important element for assessing long-term results. It is generally preferable for impact level indicators to be included at the objective level of the logframe as a means for identifying the project's intended biodiversity impacts; it can also be reasonable to include impact indicators below the objective level in cases where there are specific field-based activities as project sub-components that will be contributing directly impacts. It should be recognized that identifying the project's contribution to impact level results is unlikely to be feasible by the end of most GEF projects. Impact indicators include:

- Density of Corncrake (*Crex crex*) at Ponor project site (target: stabilization at baseline)
- Distribution and size of colonies of European Souslik (*Spermophilus citellus*) target: stabilization at baseline)
- Grassland Bird Index (target: maintenance of baseline levels)
- Area of mountainous mowing meadows, as classified under CORINE Land Cover 2000 (target: stabilization at baseline)

163. The GEF SO2 Tracking Tool was applied and was also provided as an indicator in the logframe, to link with the GEF biodiversity focal area results framework. The final version of the tracking tool is included as Annex 4 to this evaluation report. The relevant GEF biodiversity focal area indicator for the mainstreaming strategic objective is the number of hectares of production landscape under sustainable use and biodiversity management. The number of hectares covered directly by the project is approximately 36,000 - with GEF support the project implemented various management practices on 26,072 ha, and worked with farmers using co-financing on approximately another 10,000 ha to catalyze the application of similar practices. The area indirectly covered is 350,000 ha, which is the total potential area of HNV grasslands in Bulgaria, which could be covered by AES under the NRDP, as influenced by the project.

ii. Environmental Monitoring

164. BSPB has conducted environmental monitoring in the two project sites, which feeds into BSPB's GIS-based database of environmental monitoring data collected in the areas where BSPB is working throughout the country. BSPB uses its monitoring database for additional activities

[20] See section A.2.6 of the project inception report.

such as notifying national and EU authorities of significant environmental infractions. It is anticipated that BSPB will continue working in the project sites, and thus will be able to maintain at least a basic level of environmental monitoring in the future. In this case it should be possible to assess possible biodiversity impacts in the project sites in the years following project completion. National environmental monitoring is the responsibility of multiple government institutions, particularly the MoEW, but the capacity for comprehensive national level monitoring is limited.

165. Although GEF project impact is defined in relation to environmental benefits, socio-economic changes are also important and often inter-related with environmental conditions. A socio-economic baseline study was conducted at the beginning of the project, but a subsequent study to assess trends was not planned and has not been conducted. This is further discussed under the project lessons in Section VII.A. As in other similar projects (e.g. the mountain grasslands project in the White Carpathians of the Czech Republic, GEF ID 1705), experience has shown that farmers are typically reluctant to provide information on the economic status and respective situation.

D. Project Impacts and Global Environmental Benefits

166. For the GEF biodiversity focal area project impacts are defined as documented changes in environmental status of species, ecosystems or genetic biodiversity resources. Global Environmental Benefits in the biodiversity focal area have not been explicitly defined, but are generally considered to involve sustained impact level results of a certain scale or significance. The project document specifically highlights the expected global environmental benefits of this project: “Global benefits will include securing of long-term protection for globally significant species occurring at high nature value grasslands.” In addition, “National benefits accruing from the project include demonstration of an innovative approach for Bulgaria potentially replicable to 350,000 ha of similar habitats in the country.”

167. The project has already generated some site level impacts, based on the documented avoidance of threats. According to the project team, in the four years of project implementation at the site level there were no environmentally harmful investments in the project sites. For example, a seven square km special protected area for an endemic plant species in Bessaparski Hills was created to help avert an expansion of a quarry in the area that would have destroyed this critical habitat. Using BSPB’s monitoring data and GIS database it was possible to show the exact boundaries of the area that needed to be protected. The project also worked with local authorities in one of the sites to stop a proposal for a large waste incineration plant within the Natura 2000 site boundaries. In another area a proposal for a new quarry was averted early in the process, and the investors were able to shift to a different area. According to analysis from BSPB’s database, this action alone preserved 136.2 ha of critical habitat.

168. In fact it is extremely difficult for GEF projects to demonstrate significant impact level results by the end of the project, as ecosystems and species populations can take a significant amount of time to measurably respond to conservation measures. In addition, environmental monitoring data is often inadequate to make these assessments. Ultimately the project’s impact will need to be assessed years in the future to appropriately consider how the use of

AES has influenced biodiversity status in HNV grasslands. As discussed in the preceding section, the fact that BSPB will continue working in the project regions on these issues and monitoring biodiversity would make impact assessment possible sometime in the medium-term future.

VII. Main Lessons Learned and Recommendations

A. Lessons from the Experience of the Bulgaria Grasslands Project

169. Below are lessons considered by the evaluation team to be some of the more significant lessons drawn from the project experience, but should not necessarily be considered comprehensive. The project team and stakeholders should continue analyzing and drawing on the project experience to identify additional or more comprehensive lessons, and support dissemination of these lessons through documentation in knowledge products.

170. ***Lesson 1:*** The most significant and critical lesson drawn from the experience of the Bulgaria Grasslands project is that face-to-face contact is required for effectively engaging SME farmers in relation to AES. The project MACs were widely cited as among the most successful aspects of the project, and demonstrated the value and effectiveness of such mechanisms to support the uptake of AES, as discussed in Section V.A.ii.

171. ***Lesson 2:*** Small investments can catalyze significant results at the community level. This has been noted in other GEF projects, and particularly through the GEF Small Grants Programme, but was further affirmed under this project with the experience of working with the chitalishtes. In the example from Radilovo village in the Bessaparski Hills site, the small reviving spark of activity in chitalishte "Zora" kindled with support of the project has grown into an engaged and dynamic community organization, supporting the community's needs in multiple areas. The traditional foods festival in Kurtovo Konare is also continuing to significantly grow following support from the project.

172. ***Lesson 3:*** One of the few issues where the project was not able to reach the results anticipated was on the development of the management plans for the two project sites under the auspices of the Natura 2000 mandate (as discussed in Section V.A.i). The lesson that can be drawn from this experience is that there can be limited flexibility when engaging with larger scale government processes. The government of Bulgaria is taking a systemic approach to the development of management plans for Natura 2000 sites within the country, and has not proven interested in taking single site-based exceptional approaches, even if they might be beneficial at the site level.

173. ***Lesson 4:*** The project activity on opening up the direct sales market provides an important lesson on the importance of partners and coalitions in achieving results that might otherwise be beyond the capacity of an individual project to reach. Under the project BSPB partnered with Bioselena and other civil society organizations to help push through the government ordinance facilitating direct sales from small-scale agricultural producers. The level of effort required to achieve an approved national policy on this issue was significant, and could not have been reached by BSPB or any other single organization on their own.

174. ***Lesson 5:*** The project's engagement with farmers in the two project sites was achieved through many different approaches, and demonstrates the lesson that effective stakeholder engagement requires appropriate timeframes and diverse communication channels. Face-to-

face contact is critical, but can be supported through media, community organizations, local government, telephone, email, and advertising. This is particularly true in the case of Bulgaria where there are few formal sectoral organizations, such as producers associations.

175. ***Lesson 6:*** Site-level engagement has synergistic benefits. The MACs under the project were frequently in the field at the project sites, and thus were able to gather information and provide support that would not otherwise have occurred without their physical presence. For example, the teams were able to educate and support the local communities on issues related to proposed development investments that would have had negative environmental impacts.

176. ***Lesson 7:*** This project's implementation, through NGO-based execution, has demonstrated the efficiency and effectiveness benefits that civil society can bring in supporting international donor funded environmental interventions. This naturally requires engagement of an NGO that has adequate capacity, but with the case of the nationally recognized BSPB, benefits included: increased management cost-effectiveness, increased sustainability, individual capacity development, lower bureaucracy for a results-based approach, the potential for synergies through partnerships, and objective scientific input to the government policy process.

177. ***Lesson 8:*** Another lesson on the practical implementation of AES is that monitoring and control of AES in grassland ecosystems requires an on-site control methodology, rather than using remote or aerial imagery. The latter cannot be used to effectively assess the extent to which the appropriate grassland management measures have been implemented, as it is not possible to distinguish grassland conditions through remote images. This approach leads to inconsistent results based on the personal discretion of office-bound personnel, who do not have adequate information to make an informed enforcement decision. AES monitoring and control must be implemented in a fair and consistent manner, and this is not possible solely through the use of remote assessment.

178. ***Lesson 9:*** The project team has made excellent use of biodiversity monitoring data and associated spatial analysis technologies, such as GIS. Through geo-spatial analysis the project was able to provide detailed and concrete objective scientific information for local decision-making related to proposed development investments. In particular, in one example, the project team was able to demonstrate the exact boundary of critical habitat for a plant species that was going to be affected by a proposed quarry expansion. This type of approach highlights the value of objective scientific data and spatial analysis to inform concrete local decision-making to achieve positive environmental outcomes.

179. ***Lesson 10:*** The project undertook a socio-economic baseline analysis, which was useful for informing the project approach for engaging local level resource users. However, it would also have been useful to have some kind of socio-economic analysis at the end of the project as well, to try to understand socio-economic trends, and, if possible in any way, to document some level of project influence.

180. ***Lesson 11:*** A final broad lesson that can be drawn from this project stems from the extent to which BSPB through the project, and along with partner organizations, was able to influence government policies and regulations related to AES. Although there is still much work to be done to incorporate the project experience in the planning for the 2014-2020 period, this experience has shown that when civil society actors have relevant experience and knowledge

on a key issue, and have good relationships with government institutions, there can be great opportunities for positively influencing national policy.

B. Recommendations for the Remaining Implementation Period

181. The recommendations from this terminal evaluation are provided below. Although the project is ending, there is still scope for recommendations to be followed-up by the executing organization (which will continue working on these issues within Bulgaria) and the national stakeholders responsible for managing biodiversity and agricultural activities in HNV grasslands.

182. ***Recommendation 1:*** Effective uptake of AES by small-scale resource users requires adequate support and information dissemination, which, as demonstrated by this project, is most effective when done face to face. Currently only the NAAS is formally responsible for providing support on AES at the national level, and, based on the slow level of disbursement of subsidy budgets under the NRDP, the current approach does not appear adequate. Based on the experience from this project, it is recommended that the relevant government institutions facilitate a new approach of allowing 3rd parties to provide support services to farmers on AES by opening opportunities for compensation for 3rd party service providers. This would enable an efficient competitive "marketplace" for such services, whereby the resource users themselves would seek support from the provider that best meets their needs.

183. ***Recommendation 2:*** While the project made excellent progress in engaging resource users within the project site to support uptake of AES, it is clear that barriers to effective and efficient application of AES also remain within the various government institutions involved, e.g. MAF, EFA, NAAS, and others. There are opportunities for specific capacity development efforts to overcome these barriers, and this evaluation recommends that BSPB and other project partners (e.g. Bioselena) consider how they could support such capacity development activities in the future. The NRDP measures 111 and 114 may provide opportunities, and should be explored further.

184. ***Recommendation 3:*** The experience gained on AES through this project is certainly valuable within Bulgaria, but would also be useful in other countries, particularly EU accession countries such as Croatia. BSPB and UNDP should take any necessary steps to ensure that the project lessons are shared with key stakeholders in Croatia as it moves toward accession in 2013.

185. ***Recommendation 4:*** To effectively leverage AES by small-scale farmers in high nature value grasslands, there is a need to raise the political profile of this segment of the agricultural sector in Bulgaria. Increasing government's priority level for the SME agriculture sector would help drive increased resources and focus on the effective implementation of AES, relative to other aspects of national agricultural policies, thereby improving the environmental performance of the agriculture sector overall. One way to improve the political profile of this segment would be to organize SME farmers in producer associations, and other similar organizations, to strengthen their political and economic voice. Thus far achievements in this area have been limited, but this evaluation recommends that this continue to be a priority for BSPB and other partner organizations in Bulgaria working to improve synergies between the agriculture and environmental sectors. Another opportunity for drawing more political focus on this issue is through the framework of Natura 2000, as these protected sites cover 34.3% of the

national territory. Thus for more than one third of the country it will be critical for the government to find land management approaches that integrate nature conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

186. ***Recommendation 5:*** An excellent opportunity to further extend the lessons and experiences of the project can be found in the forestry sector, where similar compensatory payments for land users in Natura 2000 sites are in place. Having the participation of a representative of the Executive Forestry Agency on the PSC was intended to help create this linkage, and has undoubtedly been beneficial, but according to this representative, the Natura 2000 compensatory payments for forest areas (covering approximately 1/3 of the country) are not yet effectively implemented. This evaluation recommends that to catalyze additional results at the national level BSPB and the Executive Forestry Agency should conduct a joint exercise to identify concrete steps that could be taken forward in the forestry sector based on the experience and lessons in the agriculture sector from this project.

187. ***Recommendation 6:*** The project had intended to support more activities on developing the local direct agricultural market, through the implementation of local eco-brands, and other such activities (as discussed in Section V.A.i under Output 1.3). Due to the national circumstances the project adaptively took another path, by supporting the national ordinance for direct sales, which was a critical element. But the further development of this market, through eco-labels and direct sales venues remains a critical opportunity and next step toward supporting traditional agricultural economies benefiting biodiversity. It is anticipated that BSPB will continue working on these issues through upcoming support from the Swiss Foreign Assistance Fund, and this evaluation also recommends that work be supported and continued in this regard. There are multiple examples in the region of successful regional eco-brands that could be drawn on to move in this direction in Bulgaria.

188. ***Recommendation 7:*** Through this project and other work, BSPB has developed a significant biodiversity monitoring database. The MoEW is also responsible for biodiversity monitoring in the country, and uses such data to develop national reports on the state of the environment, and in international reporting to the EU and multilateral environmental agreements. While it would not be practical for BSPB to provide regular raw data updates of biodiversity monitoring data to the MoEW, there should be a systematic mechanism by which BSPB biodiversity monitoring data can be leveraged in MoEW reporting and analysis for environmental management. This evaluation recommends that BSPB and the MoEW continue strengthening their information sharing relationship in this regard, possibly through a Memorandum of Understanding (or other similar mechanism) on the sharing and transfer for biodiversity data and analysis.

189. ***Recommendation 8:*** One of the lasting outputs of this project that has the potential for significant long-term benefits in the country is the publication on guidelines for management of high nature value grasslands that is currently in production (see Section V.A.ii). This is exactly the kind of publication that is needed in Bulgaria, and elsewhere in the region to continue mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in agricultural production landscapes. To ensure that this publication becomes well-known and widely used, BSPB should make a specific investment in the promotion and dissemination of this publication. Ideally these guidelines would be formally adopted by the relevant government stakeholders (particularly the MoA), and posted

on their websites. Such guidelines would also be highly relevant in other countries in the region – for example, another GEF project in Belarus is working to mainstream biodiversity considerations in land-use planning outside protected areas, which includes significant agricultural lands. Although there are undoubtedly some differences in the ecological context in Belarus and Bulgaria, guidance on biodiversity friendly good practice for agricultural lands is greatly needed in Belarus, and would certainly be of value.

C. Bulgaria Grasslands Project Terminal Evaluation Ratings

190. A management response document in relation to this evaluation report has been produced by BSPB and is available upon request.

Project Component or Objective	Rating	Notes/Justification
Project Formulation		
Relevance	S	The project was relevant at local and national levels for Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategies and priorities, particularly in contributing to the implementation of EU policies. The project was also relevant to GEF biodiversity focal area strategies, and supports implementation of multiple MEAs.
Conceptualization / design	S	There were no significant issues in the project design, though some aspects had to be adjusted following the delay in project approval, and some aspects could have been emphasized more such as capacity development of relevant government stakeholders.
Country drivenness	S	The project originated from national stakeholders, and was strongly supported by relevant organizations and institutions.
Stakeholder involvement in design	S	The project development period included extensive consultation and involvement of relevant stakeholders.
Project Implementation		
Implementation Approach (Efficiency)	HS	Based on the various elements below, overall project efficiency is considered highly satisfactory.
Management implementation	HS	The NGO execution approach, utilizing a nationally recognized and respected NGO, provided a range of benefits for efficiency, including synergies for the project with other work by BSPB, low management costs, enhanced sustainability, and opportunities for partnership and coalition building.
Use of the logical framework	S	The project team and UNDP have applied the logframe indicators and targets to support a results-based implementation approach.
Financial planning and management	S	Financial management aspects were carried out fully in line with UNDP and Bulgarian national norms and standards. Although some difficulties were faced due to exchange rate fluctuations, the risk management approach applied facilitated the project not having to cut any significant components of the project.
Adaptive management	HS	The project team faced and successfully addressed changes in context and other challenges by developing practical results-oriented approaches, including adding an additional MAC, and focusing on the direct sales ordinance to support local markets.

Stakeholder participation and partnerships	HS	The project implementation involved a range of stakeholders through partnerships and other approaches, including various other civil society organizations at the community and national levels. Strong communication with key government institutions was also a notable aspect of the project.
Use and establishment of information technologies	HS	The project's use of GIS technology sets a strong example and good practice for other biodiversity conservation efforts. The project also had a webpage on the BSPB website, used to disseminate information and outputs of the project.
UNDP supervision and support	S	UNDP carried out its supervision and oversight role as required, and strongly supported a results-oriented approach.
Operational relationships between the institutions involved	S	All relevant government institutions were involved, as represented on the PSC, and the project maintained open and good communication. The project was also engaged through participation in formal government working groups on key issues related to the project.
Technical capacities	HS	The project brought to bear excellent scientific and technical capacity, which was also strengthened during the course of the project. This is evidenced by participation by project team members in international conferences and workshops, and the publication of multiple scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals.
Monitoring and Evaluation	MS	Project M&E was implemented and budgeted effectively, and generally meets minimum standards with the exception of the logframe indicators, which could be improved on multiple fronts.
M&E design	MU	Overall the project M&E plan meets GEF and UNDP minimum standards, except on the element of the SMARTness and results-focus of logframe indicators and targets. This is a critical element of results-based management.
M&E plan implementation	S	The M&E plan was carried out as foreseen, supporting a results-based project implementation approach, but also serving the accountability function of M&E.
M&E budgeting	S	The budget allocated for M&E activities was adequate for a project of this size, and there were no challenges faced in M&E in relation to budgeting.
Stakeholder Participation	S	Based on the below criteria, stakeholder participation was fully adequate for the Bulgaria grasslands project.
Production and dissemination of information	S	The project produced multiple knowledge products and disseminated information through various channels, depending on the target audience and type of information. This was a strong element of the project, particularly with regard to scientific data and research.
Local resource users and civil society participation	HS	Engagement with local resource users was a specific part of the project by design, and was carried out in an exemplary manner, producing good practice examples and lessons for successful uptake of AES. In addition, BSPB engaged other civil society organizations on relevant key aspects of the project.

Establishment of partnerships	S	The coalition to achieve the national ordinance for direct sales from small scale agriculture producers was the primary example of partnership building, but within the scope of the project BSPB has also contributed to the work of the Leader+ Local Action Groups, as well as other initiatives.
Involvement and support of governmental institutions	MS	Key government institutions, such as the MAF and NAAS, were integral and supportive partners in the project approach and activities. All relevant government institutions participated through the PSC, in a structured but somewhat limited manner. This is partially due to the capacity constraints of these institutions, but also based on the project strategy of targeting on the "demand" side of AES by working with and supporting small scale farmers. There remain opportunities to strengthen the capacity and focus of relevant government institutions on AES.
Project Results		
Overall Achievement of Objective and Outcomes (Effectiveness)	HS	Although a few elements of the project design met contextual barriers (i.e. management plans), the project produced notable significant results, in some cases exceeding what might possibly have been expected at project approval. This includes the degree to which the project results and lessons have influenced national agricultural policy in Bulgaria, and should continue to catalyze positive outcomes in this realm in the future.
Objective: Mainstream the requirements for conservation of HNV grasslands into Bulgaria's agricultural policy	S	The project achieved significant results for mainstreaming HNV biodiversity conservation in agricultural policy in Bulgaria as expected under the project design; multiple barriers remain to effective large-scale implementation of AES at the national level.
Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated	S	There were strong results on multiple aspects of this outcome, particularly with the experience of the project grant scheme and biodiversity monitoring.
Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy-making	HS	Under this outcome the project achieved multiple significant results, linking the experience in the field of the MACs and the project grant scheme to influence national AES policy on multiple fronts.
Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria	S	The project produced a variety of knowledge documents, publications, and outreach materials. These were disseminated through international and national events and other mechanisms, and should further catalyze the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations in agricultural policy.
Sustainability		
Overall Sustainability	ML	The overall sustainability rating is based on the four components of sustainability, below, and cannot be higher than the lowest of any of the four components.
Financial	L	BSPB has secured financial resources to carry forward initiatives begun under the project, and further consolidate results into the national AES context.

Socio-political	ML	The full range of stakeholders expressed strong support for the continued work of mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in agricultural policy. The capacity and commitment of key government institutions to fulfilling their responsibility in this regard remains to be demonstrated in the upcoming planning process on AES for the 2014-2020 programming period.
Institutional framework and governance	L	The institutional framework related to AES is well established and does not face significant issues or changes. Multiple government institutions are involved and have clearly established roles. The institutional mechanisms involved are functional, though there is significant room for continued improvement in all practical aspects of AES implementation.
Environmental	ML	There are not acute environmental threats to the sustainability of immediate project results, but many of the key environmental threats to high nature value grasslands remain. These include overall socio-demographic trends contributing to the decline of traditional rural agriculture, cross-incentives from traditional agriculture subsidies, and continued pressure for economic investment in rural areas.
Overall Achievement and Impact	S	

VIII. Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation Terms of Reference

Annex 2: GEF Operational Principles

Annex 3: Logframe With Assessed Level of Target Delivery

Annex 4: Bulgaria Grasslands Final GEF SO-2 Tracking Tool

Annex 5: Bulgaria Grasslands Theory-of-Change Review of Outcomes to Impacts Framework

Annex 6: List of Persons Interviewed

Annex 7: Field Visit Schedule

Annex 1: Terminal Evaluation Terms of Reference

Note: For space considerations the annexes of the TORs have not been included.

Terms of Reference
for the terminal evaluation of the UNDP/GEF Project
Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy
(Award ID: 00046789)
PIMS 3460

I. Background information on the project

I. 1. General Context

Semi-natural grasslands are some of the most valuable ecosystems in the agricultural landscape and are the result of many centuries of stable agricultural management using the grasslands for grazing animals (pastures) or making hay (meadows) or combinations of both uses. As a result of this long-term management, the ecosystems associated with semi-natural grasslands are well developed, rich in species and characteristic of their bio-geographical region.

This is especially true in Bulgaria where a great diversity of environmental conditions have contributed to the widespread formation of several contrasting types of semi-natural grassland ranging from the high sub-alpine pastures of the mountain ranges to the wet meadows of the Black Sea coast – all of which: (i) are characterized by high floristic diversity; and (ii) provide important habitat for other groups of species, such as butterflies and breeding birds. Recent estimates (Meshinev *et al.*, 2005) suggest that a total of 350,000 hectares of semi-natural grassland habitats in Bulgaria are important from a biodiversity point of view, including a rich variety of meadows and pastures.

These so-called "high nature value" (HNV) grasslands are home to remarkable biodiversity that includes over 51.5% of the flora of Bulgaria (Petrova, 2002) and 198 species of plants of international conservation importance (Meshinev *et al.*, 2005). Semi-natural grasslands are essential for: (i) maintaining the diversity and abundance of breeding birds that is characteristic of Bulgaria; and (ii) specifically supporting populations of globally-threatened species such as Corncrake, Imperial Eagle, Saker Falcon and the European Roller.

All semi-natural grasslands need the continuation of traditional agricultural practices in order to survive. This means the continuation of: (i) traditional patterns of pastoralism (herding and grazing of sheep and cattle), including the seasonal movement of sheep and cattle to high mountain pastures for summer grazing (a form of transhumance commonly referred to as pendulation); (ii) hay-making on lowland and upland meadows for winter fodder; (iii) no use of agro-chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, and (iv) regular removal of invasive shrubs and trees from pastures and meadows, including the controlled use of fire.

Abandonment of farming, over-grazing, or even simple changes in cutting dates, will lead to loss of biodiversity in the grassland community as a consequence of shrub encroachment or the emerging dominance of competitive grassland species. Available estimates indicate a decline in the area of semi-natural pastures and meadows in Bulgaria from 1.8 million hectares in the early 20th century to 1.2 million ha in the 1960s and less than 500,000 hectares in the late 1990s. The remaining grasslands are now in great danger of being further degraded and lost due to the on-going pressures that have arisen from the processes of privatization and land reform following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s and the transition towards a market-based economy.

I.2. *Project "Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy" (the "Grasslands Project")*

The goal of the Grasslands Project is to ensure long-term conservation of the high nature value grasslands of Bulgaria and the project objective is to mainstream grasslands biodiversity concerns into Bulgaria's agricultural policy in order to reverse negative changes caused by unsustainable grazing, abandonment, and land conversion. At the time of project formulation Bulgaria was in the process of formulation its agri-environmental policy. There were barriers to including HNV grasslands into the agri-environmental measures, which justified the project. In the pre-accession period the EU allocated resources for testing agri-environmental measures in Bulgaria. However, these resources remained unused, because apart from the enabling legal environment, there was no EU support for capacity building, demonstration, and calibration of agri-environmental schemes beneficial to biodiversity conservation. This project was jointly prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture's Agri-environmental Department and the Bulgarian Society for the Preservation of Birds, to help build the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, create workable models for planning, disbursement, and monitoring of AES at HNV grasslands.

The project's goal is to ensure long-term conservation of the high nature value grasslands of Bulgaria and the project objective is to mainstream grasslands biodiversity concerns into Bulgaria's agricultural policy in order to reverse negative changes caused by unsustainable grazing, abandonment, and land conversion. This project will generate global benefits by securing of long-term protection for globally significant species occurring at high nature value grasslands. The project will also contribute to the growing global knowledge on sustainable pastoralism and agri-environmental instruments. The project will demonstrate an innovative approach for Bulgaria which can potentially be replicated to 350,000 ha of similar habitats in the country. The national capacity to develop and manage agri- environmental schemes will be improved. Furthermore links between decision makers, scientists, and farmers will be strengthened for maximum effectiveness. At the local level, the project will set up a model for formation of farmer associations, which will contribute to further social development and economic growth in grassland areas. Reversing overuse of grasslands, which this project is focused on, is also important from local economic point of view as well, because it results in reduction of their productivity and economic qualities.

In support of this, the project has three outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated;
- Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy-making;
- Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria.

The project, which is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB as executing agency), funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), started in October 2007 and will run through July 2012[21]. The direct GEF financing is USD 950,000. The expected co-financing is USD 1.2 million (from Government and NGOs).

So far the project has been subject to an internal mid-term evaluation from January 2010. The objective of this evaluation was to clarify progress in project implementation per outcome, clarify risks and uncertainties, and provide recommendations and guidance to UNDP country office and project team for the remaining project period.

The internal mid-term evaluation was conducted by the UNDP Biodiversity Regional Technical Advisor, jointly with UNDP Bulgaria country office. The project implementation was rated as *"Satisfactory".* Some of the comments of the internal mid-term evaluation include the following:

- The project is successfully moving on most of its components. The project has a very dedicated team, excellent supervision and quality-assurance from the UNDP Country Office. The project has been very proactive in managing risks; examples of its engagement in dialogue with government (roundtables, discussions), assistance to farmers on complaints to the SPA, moves to ban quarry mining, are all excellent examples of alert management of risks that threaten project targets. The project is noted for contribution to the improvement in existing legal documents (ordinances) regulating agri-environment payments and the standard for maintaining agricultural land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC)/cross-compliance.

- Some adjustments to project time-table have been made due to the present political situation, in particular the delay by Ministry of Environment and Water in declaring special protected areas and establishing the Natura 2000 network.

- The project is noted for organizing the events on grassland management and payments for ecosystem services, with representatives of DG Agriculture from EC and Bulgarian

[21] The project was approved on 15 July 2007 but effectively started on 10 October 2007 and was supposed to be operationally closed by 15 July 2011. The closing date of the project has been revised to 31 July 2012 to allow for a full two-year implementation of the project pilot grant scheme (January 2010 – December 2011), dissemination of project lessons learned, final project evaluation and reporting).

Government. The project team presented the project and emerging lessons to European Congress on Conservation Biology in Prague in 2009. Furthermore, the Paper "Effects of habitat structure and land abandonment on avian assemblages in the upland pastures of IBA Ponor, Bulgaria" which was accepted for publication by BirdLife International, contains lessons learned and will be disseminated to RBEC enviromental focal points following its publication.

II. Project Final Evaluation – introduction, evaluation audience, objectives and scope, expected products

II.1. Introduction

The independent external **Final Evaluation** will take place prior to the terminal tripartite review meeting and will focus on the same issues as the mid-term evaluation. The final evaluation will also look at impact and sustainability of results, including the contribution to capacity development and the potential for achievement of global environmental goals. The Final Evaluation should also provide recommendations for follow-up activities for the long-term sustainability - to be undertaken by BSPB and other partners (the Government and other institutions)..

This final evaluation is to be undertaken taking into consideration the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation policy (http://www.thegef.org/gef/node/4184) and the UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (http://www.undp.org/gef/evaluation.shtml).

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy at the project level in UNDP-GEF has four objectives: (i) to monitor and evaluate results and impacts; (ii) to provide a basis for decision making on necessary amendments and improvements; (iii) to promote accountability for resource use; and (iv) to document, provide feedback on, and disseminate lessons learned.

In accordance with UNDP-GEF M&E policies and procedures, all full-sized projects supported by the GEF should undergo a final evaluation upon completion of implementation.

This final evaluation is intended to assess the relevance, performance and success of the project. It looks at early signs of potential impact and sustainability of results, including the contribution to capacity development and the achievement of global environmental goals. It will also identify/document lessons learned and make recommendations that might improve design and implementation of other UNDP-GEF projects.

II.2. Evaluation audience

This Final Evaluation is initiated by the UNDP Bulgaria CO as the managerial and technical support agency to BSPB as Implementation Agency for the Grasslands project. UNDP-GEF is primarily interested in analysis of how successful implementation of the project has been, what impacts it has generated, if the project benefits will be sustainable in the long-term and what the lessons learnt are for future interventions in the country, region and other parts of the globe where UNDP-GEF provides its assistance.

II.3. Evaluation objectives and scope

This evaluation is expected to provide professional assessment of the project implementation successfulness against the set objectives and indicators, including contribution of the project to achieving global environmental benefits. The evaluation will also collate and analyze lessons learn and best practices obtained during the period of the project implementation that can be further taken into consideration during development and implementation of other GEF projects in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the world.

Specifically this final evaluation has the following objectives:

- to analyze and evaluate effectiveness of the results and impacts that the project has been able to achieve against the objective, targets and indicators stated in the project document;
- to assess effectiveness of the work and processes undertaken by the project as well as the performance of all the partners involved in the project implementation;
- to provide feedback and recommendations for subsequent decision making and necessary steps that need to be taken by the national stakeholders in order to ensure sustainability of the project's outcomes/results;
- to reflect on how effective the use of available resource has been use; and
- to document and provide feedback on lessons learned and best practices generated by the project during its implementation.

III. Products expected from the evaluation

The key product expected from this final evaluation is a comprehensive analytical report in English.

III.1. Contents

The evaluation report should, at least, include the following contents:

- Executive summary
  - Brief description of the project
  - Context and purpose of the evaluation
  - Main conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned
- Introduction
  - Project background
  - Purpose of the evaluation
  - Key issues addressed
  - Methodology of the evaluation
  - Structure of the evaluation
- The Project and its development context
  - Project start and its duration
  - Problems that the project seek to address

  - Goal, Objective and outcomes of the project Main stakeholders
  - Results expected
- Findings and conclusions
  - Project formulation
  - Project Implementation
  - Project Results
- Recommendations
- Lessons learned
- Mandatory Annexes: TOR (without annexes), itinerary, field visits, people interviewed, list of documents reviewed, project results framework, final stage Tracking tool, co-financing table, evaluation rating tables, etc.

More detailed break-down of the evaluation report into sections and ratings is given in Annex 1.

III.2. Additional notes to the report

Formatting:	Times New Roman – Font 11; single spacing; paragraph numbering and table of contents (automatic); page numbers (centred); graphs and tables and photographs (where relevant) are encouraged.
Length:	maximum 30 pages in total excluding annexes
Timeframe of submission:	first draft: 7 days after the end of the in-country mission. Tentative date: 1 May 2012; second draft: 4 days after receiving comments from BSPB, UNDP Bulgaria and UNDP/GEF Bratislava. Tentative date: 11 May 2012; final draft: 2 days after receiving comments from BSPB, UNDP Bulgaria and UNDP/GEF Bratislava on the second draft. Tentative date: 18 May 2012;
Should be submitted to:	UNDP Bulgaria

If there are discrepancies between the impressions and findings of the evaluation team and the aforementioned parties these should be explained in an annex attached to the final report.

IV. Methodology and evaluation approach

An outline of an evaluation approach is provided below however it should be made clear that the evaluation team is responsible for revising the approach as necessary. Any changes should

be in-line with international criteria and professional norms and standards (as adopted by the UN Evaluation Group[22]). They must be also cleared by UNDP before being applied by the evaluation team.

The evaluation must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. It must be easily understood by project partners and applicable to the remaining period of project duration.

In preparation for the evaluation mission, the project manager, with assistance from UNDP country office, will arrange for the completion of the tracking tool. The tracking tool will be completed/endorsed by the relevant implementing agency or qualified national research/scientific institution, and not by the international consultant or UNDP staff. The tracking tool will be submitted to the international evaluation consultant, who will need to provide his/her comments to it. Upon incorporation for the comments from the international evaluation consultant to the tracking tool, it will be finalized and attached as a mandatory annex to the final FE report.

The methodology to be used by the evaluation team should be presented in the report in detail. It shall include following:

- Documentation review (desk study) - the list of documentation to be reviewed is included in Annex 2 to this Terms of Reference and these will be provided in advance by the BSPB;
- Interviews will be held with the following organizations and individuals at minimum: UNDP Bulgaria, BSPB – National Project Director and Project Manager, Project Steering Committee members, Mobile Advisory Team members, grant scheme recipient farmers;
- Field visits (an indicative schedule attached in Annex 3);
- Questionnaires;
- Participatory techniques and other approaches for the gathering and analysis of data.

The evaluation team should also provide ratings of Project achievements according to GEF Project Review Criteria. Aspects of the Project to be rated are

1	Implementation approach
2	Country ownership/drivers
3	Outcome/Achievement of objectives (meaning the extent to which the project's environmental and development objectives were achieved)
4	Stakeholder participation/public involvement
5	Sustainability
6	Replication approach
7	Cost-effectiveness
8	Monitoring and evaluation

The ratings will follow GEF Terminal Evaluation guidelines (http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/Policies-TEguidelines7-31.pdf)

[22] See http://www.uneval.org/normsandstandards/index.jsp?doc_cat_source_id=4

Based on the guidelines, the Sustainability of Outcomes in rated using 4-point likelihood scale (likely, moderately likely, moderately unlikely, unlikely) and outcomes are rated as per following ratings:

HS	Highly Satisfactory
S	Satisfactory
MS	Moderately Satisfactory
MU	Moderately Unsatisfactory
U	Unsatisfactory
HU	Highly Unsatisfactory
NA	Not applicable

V. Evaluation team – qualifications and requirements

A team of two independent evaluators will conduct the evaluation. The evaluators selected should not have participated in the project preparation and/or implementation and should not have conflict of interest with project related activities.

The evaluation team will be composed of one international evaluator who will act as the Team Leader and one National Consultant. The evaluators shall have prior experience in evaluating similar projects. Former cooperation with GEF is an advantage.

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

- Recent experience with result-based management evaluation methodologies;
- Experience applying participatory monitoring approaches;
- Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Recent knowledge of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy;
- Recent knowledge of UNDP's results-based evaluation policies and procedures;
- Competence in biodiversity conservation and agri-environmental measures;
- Recognized expertise in the cross-cutting area of environmental protection, regional development and agri-environment as well as PEN (poverty – environment nexus);
- Knowledge of EU rural development policies and approaches and agri-environmental schemes and measures;
- Demonstrable analytical skills;
- Work experience in relevant areas (biodiversity conservation and agri-environmental schemes and measures) for at least 10 years;
- Experience with multilateral or bilateral supported capacity development projects;
- Project evaluation experiences within United Nations system will be considered an asset;
- Excellent English communication skills.

The evaluators must be independent from both the policy-making process and the delivery and management of assistance. Therefore, evaluators who have had any direct involvement with

the design or implementation of the project will not be considered. This may apply equally to evaluators who are associated with organizations, universities or entities that are, or have been, involved in the Grasslands policy-making process and/or delivery of the project. Any previous association with the project, the Project Administration (BSPB), Ministry of Agriculture and Foods, Ministry of Environment and Waters (MoEW), UNDP Bulgaria or other partners/stakeholders must be disclosed in the application.

If selected, failure to make the above disclosures will be considered just grounds for immediate contract termination, without recompense. In such circumstances, all notes, reports and other documentation produced by the evaluator will be retained by UNDP.

VI. Evaluation team – specific tasks

The International Team Leader will have overall responsibility for the delivery and quality of the evaluation products. Specifically, the International Team Leader will perform the following tasks:

- Lead and manage the evaluation mission;
- Design the detailed evaluation scope and methodology (including the methods for data collection and analysis);
- Decide the division of labor within the evaluation team;
- Conduct an analysis of the outcome, outputs and partnership strategy (as per the scope of the evaluation described above);
- Lead the drafting of the evaluation report; and
- Finalize the whole evaluation report.

The National Consultant will provide support the International Team Leader in the evaluation. Specifically, the National Consultant will perform tasks with a focus on:

- Review documents;
- Prepare a list of the outputs achieved under project;
- Organize the mission programme and provide translation/interpretation when necessary;
- Participate in the design of the evaluation methodology;
- Conduct an analysis of the outcome, outputs and partnership strategy (as per the scope of the evaluation described above);
- Draft related parts of the evaluation report;
- Assist International Team Leader in finalizing the evaluation report through incorporating suggestions received on draft related to his/her assigned sections.

The evaluation will be undertaken in-line with GEF principles[23]:

[23] See p.25-27 of the GEF's Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

- Independence
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Disclosure
- Ethical
- Partnership
- Competencies and Capacities
- Credibility
- Utility

VII. Implementation Arrangements

VII.1. Management arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this evaluation lies with UNDP Bulgaria. UNDP Bulgaria will contract the international evaluator and will ensure the timely provision of per diems. BSPB will contract the national consultant and will provide logistical support to the evaluation team - travel arrangements within the country, setting up stakeholder interviews, arranging field visits, coordinating with the Government etc.

VII.2. Timeframe, resources, logistical support and deadlines

The evaluation will be completed in the period from 11 April to 18 May 2011. The report shall be submitted for approval to the UNDP Bulgaria.

Prior to approval of the final report, first and final draft versions shall be circulated for comments to the project team, UNDP Bulgaria and UNDP/GEF Bratislava. If any discrepancies have emerged between impressions and findings of the evaluation team and the aforementioned parties, these should be explained in an annex attached to the final report.

The activity and timeframe are broken down as follows:

Activity	Timeframe and responsible party
Desk review	3 days by the International Team Leader and National Consultant (11 – 13 April 2012)
Briefings for evaluators	1 day by the BSPB/ UNDP (17 April 2012)
Field visits, interviews, questionnaires, de-briefings	6 days by the International Team Leader and National Consultant
Preparation of first draft report	7 days by the International Team Leader and National Consultant
Review and preparation of comments to draft report with preliminary findings from project stakeholders through circulation of	6 days BSPB, UNDP Bulgaria and UNDP/GEF Bratislava

the draft report for comments,	
Incorporation of comments and submission of second draft report	4 days by the International Team Leader and National Consultant
Review and preparation of comments to second draft report	4 days BSPB, UNDP Bulgaria and UNDP/GEF Bratislava
Finalization of the evaluation report (incorporating comments received on second draft)	2 days by the International Team Leader and National Consultant

Working Days:
Team Leader – 23 working days
National Consultant – 23 working days

The proposed dates for the in-country field mission to Bulgaria are from 17th to 23rd April 2012. The assignment is to commence no later than 11th April 2012.

Annexes
Annex 1: Preliminary Structure of the final evaluation report
Annex 2: List of documents to be reviewed by the Evaluators
Annex 3: Indicative in-country field mission schedule
Annex 4: Logical Framework of the Project
Annex 5: Financial planning/co-financing (table template)
Annex 6: Evaluation rating tables

Annex 2. GEF Operational Principles

http://www.gefweb.org/public/opstrat/ch1.htm

TEN OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATIONOF THE GEF'S WORK PROGRAM

1. For purposes of the financial mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the GEF will **function under the guidance of, and be accountable to, the Conference of the Parties** (COPs). For purposes of financing activities in the focal area of ozone layer depletion, GEF operational policies will be consistent with those of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its amendments.

2. The GEF will provide new, and additional, grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed **incremental costs** of measures to achieve agreed global environmental benefits.

3. The GEF will ensure the **cost-effectiveness** of its activities to maximize global environmental benefits.

4. The GEF will fund projects that are **country-driven** and based on national priorities designed to support sustainable development, as identified within the context of national programs.

5. The GEF will maintain sufficient **flexibility** to respond to changing circumstances, including evolving guidance of the Conference of the Parties and experience gained from monitoring and evaluation activities.

6. GEF projects will provide for **full disclosure** of all non-confidential information.

7. GEF projects will provide for consultation with, and **participation** as appropriate of, the beneficiaries and affected groups of people.

8. GEF projects will conform to the **eligibility** requirements set forth in paragraph 9 of the GEF Instrument.

9. In seeking to maximize global environmental benefits, the GEF will emphasize its **catalytic role** and leverage additional financing from other sources.

10. The GEF will ensure that its programs and projects are **monitored and evaluated** on a regular basis.

Annex 3: Bulgaria Grasslands Project Status of Objective and Outcome Indicators Target Delivery (from the 2011 PIR)

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
Objective: To mainstream requirements for conservation of HNV grasslands into Bulgaria's agricultural policy	1. 70% of conservation activities identified for the two pilot sites are eligible for funding under Axis 2 measures of the RDP after its mid-term revision in 2010.	3 types of activities currently eligible – grazing, mowing and management of protected birds habitats.	At least 3 additional measures funded after 2010	1: Measure 213 "Compensation for agricultural land in Natura 2000 sites" has been launched in 2011, where grassland managers are compensated for bans to remove landscape features, for mowing, and the use of fertilizer. Measure 214 "Agri-environment payments" will be amended to include compensation of turning arable land into grassland and its extensive management. Providing food and habitat management for wintering geese along the Black Sea coast will also be included in the NRDP.	Concur with self-reported results. This is not a SMART indicator for assessing project results however, without clear rationale for the planned target. According to the project team, at the time of project development it was difficult to design effective indicators due to the limited knowledge about the NRDP approach and AES. A more SMART and results-oriented indicator might have been something like – the percentage of HNV grasslands eligible under AES in Bulgaria.
	2. At least 50 % of the successful pilot tested AES are included as Axis 2 measure (AE measures or Natura 2000 measures, non, productive investments, forestry Natura, etc (app. 2010))	0 of the piloted measures are currently included	3 successfully piloted measures are included in the NARDP after 2010	1: 'Natura 2000' measure included in the NRDP in 2011, with 2,047 applicants nationwide and 79,580 ha covered. Three new HNV submeasures are sent for EC approval, deposited in December 2010 by MAF. Approval is expected by end of 2011 with sub-measures becoming operational in 2012	This indicator is somewhat repetitive of the previous indicator. Concur with self-reported results, which can be considered an over-achievement of the planned target. However, the actual amount of hectares covered under the Natura 2000 measure (measure 213) in 2011 remains to be confirmed following government validation and actual payments. The proposed sub-measures have been approved by the EU and incorporated in Bulgaria's AES. In addition the Natura 2000 measure was developed based on lessons from the project experience.
Outcome 1 -					The indicators proposed under Outcome 1 do not fully cover the project results and activities under this outcome. In addition, it is the view of this evaluation that impact level indicators (species, habitat, etc.) should be at the objective level of the logframe – they were originally for this project, but were later moved to Outcome 1. Alternative potential results-based indicators for this outcome could include the amount of eligible HNV grassland covered under AES in the project sites, the percentage of livestock in the pilot sites managed by farmers participating in the AES, or

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
					simply the number of livestock in the project demonstration areas. The publication of project experience in a special issues of a major Bulgarian scientific journal also documents the achievement of results under this outcome.
Outcome 1: Viability of agri-environmental measures for preservation of HNV grasslands is demonstrated	1. Density of Corncrake at Ponor project site	0.7 pairs/km2 at altitude over 1,100 m and 0.3 pairs/km2 at altitude below 1,100 m.	Stabilization at baseline level	Density of corncrake remains unchanged at Ponor project site	Concur with self-reported results, but this does not really reflect any contribution of the project. This is an example of an impact indicator that will need to be monitored in the future to further assess the contribution of the project. The work of the project would not have had a direct effect on the Corncrake population as yet, except in the fact of the large investments that the project team helped avoid in the project demonstration sites. There are few Corncrake individuals in the Bessaparski Hills site, which is why the indicator focuses on Ponor. The delineation of the altitude relates to the ecosystem zone at which beech zone forest transitions to grassland/pasture landscapes that are the predominant habitat for the Corncrake.
	2. Distribution and size of colonies of European Souslik	Ponor: 16 individuals/ha Beseparski Hills: 50.3 individ./ha	Distribution and average density at baseline level	No significant change from baseline;	Concur with self-reported results; also see comments on impact indicators above. There were some small areas where the souslik population was influenced by the project – in one five hectare site in Ponor the grant scheme supported grassland mowing beneficial to biodiversity, and project environmental monitoring has documented the appearance of new souslik colonies after two years of mowing. On the other hand, in Bessaparski, the plowing of unused land into arable land due to poor incentives from the NRDP may have negatively impacted the souslik population (some stakeholders believe this change of land use could be beneficial for the souslik), and the population will have to be monitored in coming years to document the effects.

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
	3. Grassland Bird Index (combined bird species index)	Ponor: 9.97 Beseparski Hills: 15.13	Maintain at baseline levels or register slight increase	Grass Bird Index remains at baseline level	Concur with self-reported results. This is an interesting indicator developed by BSPB that should be helpful in monitoring the status of biodiversity over time. Using detailed monitoring data and GIS analysis the BSPB team is able to estimate the density of species with 90% confidence levels, for species with a large enough monitoring data sample size. The analysis has shown that compared to the project baseline level the index is stable, looking at species that are within the confidence bounds. For species beyond the confidence bounds there are some preliminary negative indications, but they are not statistically significant. The project team also conducted an analysis looking at the past 20 years, which showed a decreasing index value in abandoned pastures compared to those that are still used.
	4. Share of grass communities in habitat "Mountainous mowing meadows"	Ponor: 2,448 ha (7.8%) based on CORINE Land Cover 2000	Stabilization at baseline level	Stable at baseline	Concur with self-reported results, but this indicator does not meet SMART criteria. The term "mountainous mowing meadows" apparently comes from a list of habitats under the EU habitats directive, but the phrase "share of grass communities in habitat" is not clear. Evidently the idea generally behind this indicator related to potential changes in the coverage of habitat types in Ponor, for which the baseline is stable in the project lifetime.
	5. Tracking tool for BD2 projects	The TT	No change compared to baseline; improvement where relevant	n/a	The relevant aspects of the tracking tool relate to hectares covered by project replication, with a potential target of 350,000 ha of grasslands, as discussed in the main body of the evaluation report. To validate the amount of coverage under actual replication would require data from the MAF on the confirmed amount of hectares covered by the 2,047 applications covering 79,580 ha for Natura 2000 compensation payments for 2011 – this data is not yet available because the validation and payment process for the first year of implementation of the measures has not yet been completed. It should be

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
					available later in 2012.
	6. At least 40% of economically active farmers in the project HNV grassland areas have received at least one form of support payment from the national Agri-environment Scheme for maintaining/ adopting environmentally-friendly land management practices	0 farmers	at least 50 farmers	20 farmers Problems continue to exist with agri-environment measures at national level. The main issue for farmers is the delay in payments for agri-environment, which has caused also delays in direct payments. Although the Minister of Agriculture has issued an ordinance that all payments should be processed by July 31 of the following year, delays continue to be the practice, which is very discouraging for farmers.	Concur with self-reported results; however, there are some problems with this indicator. The total number of farmers engaged under the project may have been slightly less than originally anticipated, but the scale of results is at least equivalent because of the project's approach of engaging farmers with the largest herds of livestock. The project has helped the farmers with the greatest number of animals access the national AES, but many barriers remain – as noted in the self-reported data at left, and previously in the body of this evaluation report. The indicator might have been improved by focusing on the hectares of coverage rather than the number of farmers. This indicator was also problematic because by using a percentage (40%), it assumed a stable number of economically active farmers in each area, when in reality the number of registered farmers has increased significantly, and thus the target value is no longer valid.
Outcome 2					
Outcome 2: Agri-environmental schemes for HNV grasslands in Bulgarian mainstreamed into national policy- making	All Project identified biodiversity conservation activities are included in the national guidelines for grasslands management planning in National Ecological Network sites with significant share of grasslands.	Zero	All identified and successfully tested	50% Comment: Although management plans for Natura 2000 sites will not happen any time soon in Bulgaria, good practice identified by the project has been mainstreamed into important MAF documents, such as the GAEC standards, ordinances on implementing agri-environment measures and Natura 2000 measure from the Rural Development Program; Municipalities are now required to have grazing plans; Three new agri-environment sub-measures have been designed under the project and included in the 6th notification to the EU for RDP modification. These measures	Concur with self-reported results. This indicator is somewhat repetitive from the objective level indicators. The project produced the manual on guidelines for grassland management, which will be published in 2012. Ideally these guidelines will be formally adopted by the relevant government institutions, but this remains to be seen.

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
				incorporate best practice for grassland management and are expected to be launched in 2012.	
	80% of all Project identified grassland biodiversity conservation activities are included in at least 2 Management Plans for SPAs with significant share of grasslands.	0 management plans	2 Management Plans for SPAs with significant share of grasslands prepared and include project-tested biodiversity conservation measures.	0 Management plans; MOEW refused to approve the ToR for management plan for Bessaparski hills with the reasoning that the site is included for mapping in another EU funded project for which MOEW is beneficiary. Such overlap could bring administrative difficulties and delays in the Ministry's project.	Concur with self-reported results. The management plans for the two project sites were not produced due to constraints from government processes outside of the control of the project, as previously discussed in the evaluation report. With the ongoing support of stakeholders involved in the project, hopefully the data, good practices, and guidelines produced under the project will be incorporated in the development of management plans in the future. Unfortunately the official government process for development of Natura 2000 management plans is not expected to commence until at least 2014, at which point the data and analyses developed under the project for the two sites will be somewhat out of date, although it is likely that the two project sites will have more substantive baseline information than other Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria that have not previously been involved in conservation projects.
Outcome 3					Overall, results under Outcome 3 have met or exceeded the targets for the indicators specified.
Outcome 3: Adaptive management and monitoring ensured, lessons learned and experience disseminated outside Bulgaria	At least 3 project lessons learned documentation submitted to all environmental focal points in UNDP offices in RBEC	0	3	4 One more paper published: Bird community patterns in sub-Mediterranean pastures (S Bulgaria): the effects of habitat structure and management. Animal Biodiversity and Conservation	Concur with self-reported results.
	At least two technical reports published in peer-review journals submitted to all environmental focal points in UNDP offices in RBEC	0 technical reports	2 technical reports	6 Farmers' Bird Guide; Bessaparski Hills - birds'paradize nearby Trakia highway; Bird community patterns in sub-Mediterranean pastures (S Bulgaria): the effects of habitat structure and management. Animal Biodiversity and Conservation	Concur with self-reported results.

Component	Indicator	Baseline	Target	2011 PIR Level	Evaluation Assessment
	At least 6 public awareness raising workshops on biodiversity value of HVN grasslands held in the 6 Bulgarian planning regions	0 workshops	6 workshops	8 workshops 3 additional workshops with farmers on awareness raising about HNV grasslands and AEM in the following regions: Danube (Kozlodui, Belene) Strandja (Burgas) Sakar (Yambol)	Concur with self-reported results.
	2 international workshops on agri-environment measures and Payment for Ecosystem Services held in Bulgaria	0 workshops	2 workshops	2 International workshop on sharing good practice in greening the EU agricultural policy, agri-environment measures and support to farmers took place in Sofia, 9-12 November. The project also hosted Birdlife's agricultural taskforce at that period.	Concur with self-reported results.

Annex 4: Bulgaria Grasslands Final GEF SO-2 Tracking Tool (5 pages)

Tracking Tool for Biodiversity Projects in GEF-3, GEF-4, and GEF-5

Objective 2:
Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation in Production Landscapes/Seascapes and Sectors

Objective: To measure progress in achieving the impacts and outcomes established at the portfolio level under the biodiversity focal area.
Rationale: Project data from the GEF-3, GEF-4, and GEF-5 project cohort will be aggregated for analysis of directional trends and patterns at a portfolio-wide level to inform the development of future GEF strategies and to report to GEF Council on portfolio-level performance in the biodiversity focal area.
Structure of Tracking Tool: Each tracking tool requests background and coverage information on the project and specific information required to track portfolio level indicators in the GEF-3, GEF-4, and GEF-5 strategy.
Guidance in Applying GEF Tracking Tools: GEF tracking tools are applied three times: at CEO endorsement, at project mid-term, and at project completion.
Submission: The finalized tracking tool will be cleared by the GEF Agencies as being correctly completed.

Important: Please read the Guidelines posted on the GEF website before entering your data

I. General Data	Please indicate your answer here	Notes
Project Title	Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy	
GEF Project ID	2730	
Agency Project ID	3460	
Implementing Agency	UNDP	
Project Type	MSP	FSP or MSP
Country	Bulgaria	
Region	ECA	
Date of submission of the tracking tool	April 13, 2012	Month DD, YYYY (e.g., May 12, 2010)
Name of reviewers completing tracking tool and completion date	Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager, BSPB; Alexander Atanasov, Steering Committee member, MAF; Raina Hardalova, SC member, MOEW; april 12, 2012	Completion Date
Planned project duration	4	years
Actual project duration	5	years
Lead Project Executing Agency (ies)	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB)	
Date of Council/CEO Approval	June 5, 2007	Month DD, YYYY (e.g., May 12, 2010)
GEF Grant (US$)	950,000	
Cofinancing expected (US$)	973,000	
Please identify production sectors and/or ecosystem services directly targeted by project:		
Agriculture	1	1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Fisheries		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Forestry		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Tourism		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Mining		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Oil		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
Transportation		1: Primarily and directly targeted by the project 2: Secondary or incidentally affected by the project
traditional milk products	2	

II. Project Landscape/Seascape Coverage

1. What is the extent (in hectares) of the landscape or seascape where the project will directly or indirectly contribute to biodiversity conservation or sustainable use of its components? An example is provided in the table below.

Foreseen at project start (to be completed at CEO approval or endorsement)		
Landscape/seascape[1] area directly[2] covered by the project (ha)	26,072	
Landscape/seascape area indirectly[3] covered by the project (ha)	100,000	
Explanation for indirect coverage numbers:	The basis for extrapolation is the expectation that NAEP will replicate project's experience of using agri-environmental schemes as a conservation instrument for all country's HNV semi-natural productive grasslands.	Please indicate reasons
Actual at mid-term		
Landscape/seascape[1] area directly[2] covered by the project (ha)	36,000	
Landscape/seascape area indirectly[3] covered by the project (ha)	100,000	
Explanation for indirect coverage numbers:	The basis for extrapolation is the expectation that NAEP will replicate project's experience of using agri-environmental schemes as a conservation instrument for all country's HNV semi-natural productive grasslands.	Please indicate reasons
Actual at project closure		
Landscape/seascape[1] area directly[2] covered by the project (ha)	36,000	With GEF funding, the project implemented various management practices at the area of 26,072 ha. It further worked (funded from co-financing) with farmers on about 10,000 ha further areas to trigger application of similar practices.
Landscape/seascape area indirectly[3] covered by the project (ha)	350,000	

Explanation for indirect coverage numbers:	The total area of grasslands in IBAs in Bulgaria is approximately 350,000 ha. In 2011, the Ministry of Agriculture launched a new measure, called 213 "Compensatory payments for agricultural land in Natura 2000 sites". This measure was based on the project experience and provides payments to farmers for sustainable grassland management in Natura 2000 sites, which include all IBAs. The measure is implemented country wide and the interest and uptake among farmers have been significant from all over the cuntry. Landscape area directly covered by the project has not changed since mid-term because the project aimed to implement the same measures on the same land for two consecutive years in order to assess results from the proposed agri-environment measures. In general, it is assessed that agri-environment measures should be implemented by farmers for at least 5 consequtive years in order to achieve positive biodiversity results. In the case of the project, the timeframe allowed only 2 years of grant scheme implementation, but it was important that it is implemented on the same land. Positive biodiversity results have been already identified, such as increased density of suslik colonies in the areas, which were maintained by farmers beneficiaries of the project grant scheme	u

[1] For projects working in seascapes (large marine ecosystems, fisheries etc.) please provide coverage figures and include explanatory text as necessary if reporting in hectares is not applicable or feasible.

[2] Direct coverage refers to the area that is targeted by the project's site intervention. For example, a project may be mainstreaming biodiversity into floodplain management in a pilot area of 1,000 hectares that is part of a much larger floodplain of 10,000 hectares.

[3] Using the example in footnote 2 above, the same project may, for example, "indirectly" cover or influence the remaining 9,000 hectares of the floodplain through promoting learning exchanges and training at the project site as part of an awareness raising and capacity building strategy for the rest of the floodplain. Please explain the basis for extrapolation of indirect coverage when completing this part of the table.

2. Are there Protected Areas within the landscape/seascape covered by the project? If so, names these PAs, their IUCN or national PA category, and their extent in hectares

Name of Protected Areas	IUCN and/or national category of PA	Extent in hectares of PA
Note: Five small natural monuments (0.5 to 88 ha) came into existence within the administrative regions targeted by the project since the project design. These protected areas, however, are outside the productive grazing grassland areas supported by the project, and are therefore not included in the project scope. The existence of these protected areas is irrelevant for project goal and activities.		

3. Within the landscape/seascape covered by the project, is the project implementing payment for environmental service schemes? If so, please complete the table below. Example is provided.

e.g. Foreseen at Project Start	*e.g. Water provision*	*Please Indicate Environmental Service*
	e.g. 40,000 hectares	*Extent in hectares*
	e.g. $ 10 per hectare per year	*Payments generated (US$)/ha/yr if known at time of CEO endorsement*
Foreseen at project start (to be completed at CEO approval or endorsement)	N/A	Please Indicate Environmental Service
	N/A	Extent in hectares
	N/A	Payments generated (US$)/ha/yr
Actual at mid-term	N/A	Please Indicate Environmental Service
	N/A	Extent in hectares
	N/A	Payments generated (US$)/ha/yr
Actual at project closure	N/A	Please Indicate Environmental Service
	N/A	Extent in hectares
	N/A	Payments generated (US$)/ha/yr

Part III. Management Practices Applied

4. Within the scope and objectives of the project, please identify in the table below the management practices employed by project beneficiaries that integrate biodiversity considerations and the area of coverage of these management practices. Please also note if a certification system is being applied and identify the certification system being used. Note: this could range from farmers applying organic agricultural practices, forest management agencies managing forests per Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) guidelines or other forest certification schemes, artisanal fisherfolk practicing sustainable fisheries management, or industries satisfying other similar agreed international standards, etc.

e.g. Foreseen at Project Start	*E.g., Sustainable management of pine forests*	*Please indicate specific management practices that integrate BD*
	FSC	*Name of certification system being used (insert NA if no certification system is being applied)*
	120,000 hectares	*Area of coverage*
Foreseen at project start (to be completed at CEO approval or endorsement)	Traditional grassland pastoralism (cattle and sheep): a combination of animal grazing (rotational grazing in optimal densities) and hay-making (including mechanical removal of shrubs) promoting maintenance of habitats beneficial for grassland-dependent species	Please indicate specific management practices that integrate BD
	n/a	Name of certification system being used (insert NA if no certification system is being applied)
	26072	Area of coverage
Actual at mid-term	Traditional grassland pastoralism (cattle and sheep): a combination of animal grazing (rotational grazing in optimal densities) and hay-making (including mechanical removal of shrubs) promoting maintenance of habitats beneficial for grassland-dependent species	Please indicate specific management practices that integrate BD
	n/a	Name of certification system being used (insert NA if no certification system is being applied)
	26072	Area of coverage

Actual at project closure	Traditional grassland pastoralism (cattle and sheep): a combination of animal grazing (rotational grazing in optimal	Please indicate specific management practices that integrate BD
	n/a	Name of certification system being used (insert NA if no certification system is being applied)
	26072	Area of coverage

Part IV. Market Transformation

5. For those projects that have identified market transformation as a project objective, please describe the project's ability to integrate biodiversity considerations into the mainstream economy by measuring the market changes to which the project contributed. The sectors and subsectors and measures of impact in the table below are illustrative examples, only. Please complete per the objectives and specifics of the project.

		Unit of measure of market impact
Name of the market that the project seeks to affect (sector and sub-sector)	*E.g., Sustainable agriculture (Fruit production: apples)*	*E.g., US$ of sales of certified apple products / year*
	E.g., Sustainable forestry (timber processing)	*E.g., cubic meters of sustainably produced wood processed per year*
Foreseen at project start		
Name of the market that the project seeks to affect (sector and sub-sector)	E.g., Sustainable agriculture (milk and meat products originating from HNV grasslands supported through agri-environmental schemes)	Zero US$ of sales
Actual at mid-term		
Name of the market that the project seeks to affect (sector and sub-sector)	E.g., Sustainable agriculture (milk and meat products originating from HNV grasslands supported through agri-environmental schemes)	Zero US$ of sales
Actual at project closure		
Name of the market that the project seeks to affect (sector and sub-sector)	E.g., Sustainable agriculture (milk and meat products originating from HNV grasslands supported through agri-environmental schemes)	Zero* US$ of sales
There is no official statistics on the sales of milk and meat products originating		

Part V. Policy and Regulatory frameworks

6. For those projects that have identified addressing policy, legislation, regulations, and their implementation as project objectives, Please complete these tables for each sector that is a primary or a secondary focus of the project. Please answer (1 for YES or 0 for NO) to each statement under the sectors that are a focus of the project.

Biodiversity considerations are mentioned in sector policy		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Biodiversity considerations are mentioned in sector policy through specific legislation		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	0	Yes = 1, No = 0
Regulations are in place to implement the legislation		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	0	Yes = 1, No = 0
The regulations are under implementation		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	0	Yes = 1, No = 0
The implementation of regulations is enforced		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	0	Yes = 1, No = 0
Enforcement of regulations is monitored		
Agriculture	1	Yes = 1, No = 0
Fisheries		Yes = 1, No = 0
Forestry		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tourism		Yes = 1, No = 0
Tragitional milk products	0	Yes = 1, No = 0

All projects please complete this question at the project mid-term evaluation and at the final evaluation, if relevant:

7. Within the scope and objectives of the project, has the private sector undertaken voluntary measures to incorporate biodiversity considerations in production? If yes, please provide brief explanation and specifically mention the sectors involved. An example of this could be a mining company minimizing the impacts on biodiversity by using low-impact exploration techniques and by developing plans for restoration of biodiversity after exploration as part of the site management plan.

The project aimed to ensure biodiversity considerations are present in Bulgarian agricultural policy and paractice. The main group of farmers targeted by the project are livestock farmers, who manage grasslands. Livestock farmers implement rotation grazing and maintain low livestock density to minimize impact on HNV grasslands; mowing of HNV meadows is delayed after 15 July 2010, to protect corncrake nesting habitats. Low impact grassland management was undertaken by about 50 farmers within the project area, Grasslands, which were not previously maintained are now included in the regular farming activities thus contributing to their good environmental condition. The project also designed agri-environemnt measures for wintering geese and imperial eagle habitats at national level, which were launched in 2012 with support from the National Rural Development Program. Cereal farmers are required to maintain winter wheat around lakes, which are wintering habitats for geese.

Part VI. Tracking Tool for Invasive Alien Species Projects in GEF 4 and GEF 5

Objective: The Invasive Alien Species Tracking Tool has been developed to help track and monitor progress in the achievement of outcome 2.3 in the GEF-5 biodiversity strategy: "improved management frameworks to prevent, control, and manage invasive alien species" and for Strategic Program 7 in the GEF-4 strategy.
Structure of Tracking Tool: The Tracking Tool addresses four main issues in one assessment form:
1) National Coordination Mechanism;
2) IAS National Strategy Development and Implementation;
3) Policy Framework to Support IAS Management; and
4) IAS Strategy Implementation: Prevention, Early Detection, Assessment and Management.
Assessment Form: The assessment is structured around six questions presented in table format which includes three columns for recording details of the assessment, all of which should be completed.
Next Steps: For each question respondents are also asked to identify any intended actions that will improve performance of the IAS management framework.

Prevention, control, and management of invasive alien species (IAS) Tracking Tool

Issue	Please select your score from drop down menu	Scoring Criteria		
National Coordination Mechanism				
1) Is there a National Coordination Mechanism to assist with the design and implementation of a national IAS strategy? (This could be a single "biosecurity" agency or an interagency committee).		**0:** National Coordination Mechanism does not exist **1:** A national coordination mechanism has been established **2:** The national coordination mechanism has legal character and responsibility for development of a national strategy **3:** The national coordination mechanism oversees implementation of IAS National Strategy	**Comment:**	**Next Steps:**
		Bonus point: Contingency plans for IAS emergencies exist and are well coordinated 0: NO 1: Yes		
IAS National Strategy Development and Implementation				
2) Is there a National IAS strategy and is it being implemented?		**0:** IAS strategy has not been developed **1:** IAS strategy is under preparation or has been prepared and is not being implemented **2:** IAS strategy exists but is only partially implemented due to lack of funding or other problems **3:** IAS strategy exists, and is being fully implemented	**Comment:**	**Next Steps:**
Policy Framework to Support IAS Management				
3) Has the national IAS strategy lead to the development and adoption of comprehensive framework of policies, legislation, and regulations across sectors.		**0:** IAS policy does not exist **1:** Policy on invasive alien species exists (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable) **2:** Principle IAS legislation is approved (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable. It may be that harmonization of relevant laws and regulations to ensure more uniform and consistent practice is most realistic result.) **3:** Subsidiary regulations are in place to implement the legislation (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable) **4:** The regulations are under implementation and enforced for some of the main priority pathways for IAS (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable) **5:** The regulations are under implementation and enforced for all of the main priority pathways for IAS (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable) **6:** Enforcement of regulations is monitored (Specify sectors in comment box if applicable)	**Comment:**	**Next Steps:**
Prevention				
4) Have priority pathways for invasions been identified and actively managed and monitored?		**0:** Priority pathways for invasions have not been identified. **1:** Priority pathways for invasions have been identified using risk assessment procedures as appropriate **2:** Priority pathways for invasions are being actively managed and monitored to prevent invasions (In comment section please specify methods for prevention of entry: quarantine laws and regulation, database establishment, public education, inspection, treatment technologies (fumigation, etc) in the comment box.) **3:** System established to use monitoring results from the methods employed to manage priority pathways in the development of new and improved policies, regulations and management approaches for IAS	**Comment:**	**Next Steps:**
Early Detection				

5) Are detection, delimiting and monitoring surveys conducted on a regular basis?		**0:** Detection surveys[1] of aggressively invasive species (either species specific or sites) are not regularly conducted due to lack of capacity, resources, planning, etc **1:** Detection surveys (observational) are conducted on a regular basis **2:** Detection and delimiting surveys[2] (focusing on key sites: high risk entry points or high biodiversity value sites) are conducted on a regular basis **3:** Detection, delimiting and monitoring surveys[3] focusing on specific aggressively invasive plants, insects, mammals, etc are conducted on a regular basis		
		Bonus point: Data from surveys is collected in accordance with international standards and stored in a national database. 0: NO 1: Yes		
		Bonus point: Detection surveys rank IAS in terms of their potential damage and detection systems target the IAS that are potentially the most damaging to globally significant biodiversity 0: NO 1: Yes		
Assessment and Management: Best practice applied				
6) Are best management practices being applied in project target areas?		**0:** Management goal and target area undefined, no acceptable threshold of population level established **1:** Management goal and target area has been defined and acceptable threshold of population level of the species established **2:** Four criteria are applied to prioritize species and infestations for control in the target areas: a) current and potential extent of the species; b) current and potential impact of the species; c) global value of the habitat the species actually or potentially infests; and d) difficulty of control and establishing replacement strategies. **3:** Eradication, containment, control and management strategies are considered, and the most appropriate management strategy is applied to achieve the management goal and the appropriate level of protection in the target areas (Please discuss briefly rationale for the management strategy employed.)	**Comment:**	**Next Steps:**
		Bonus point: Monitoring system (ongoing surveys) established to determine characteristics of the IAS population, and the condition of the target area. 0: NO 1: Yes		
		Bonus points: Funding for sustained and ongoing management and monitoring of the target area is secured. 0: NO 3: Yes		
		Bonus point: Objective measures indicate that the restoration of habitat is likely to occur in the target area. 0: NO 1: Yes		
		TOTAL SCORE		
	29	TOTAL POSSIBLE		

[1] Detection survey: survey conducted in an attempt to determine if IAS are present.
[2] Delimiting survey: survey conducted to establish the boundaries of an area considered to be infested or free from a pest.
[3] Monitoring survey: survey to verify the characteristics of a pest/IAS.

Annex 5: Bulgaria Grasslands Theory-of-Change Review of Outcomes to Impacts Framework

As discussed in Section IV.A of this report, the Review of Outcomes to Impacts methodology is an approach designed to assist in identifying potential and likely project impacts from a theory-based perspective. The key elements of this analysis are the assumptions, impact drivers, and intermediate states (defined in Table 7 below) required to move from outcomes to impacts.

Table 7 Theory of Change Definitions

Theory of Change Terms	Definition
Assumptions	The significant factors that, if present, are expected to contribute to the ultimate realization of project impacts, *but that are largely beyond the power of the project to influence or address*
Impact Drivers	The significant factors that, if present, are expected to contribute to the ultimate realization of project impacts, *and that are within the ability of the project to influence*
Intermediate States	The transitional conditions and processes between the project's outcomes and impacts that must be achieved in order to deliver the intended impacts

A draft Bulgaria Grasslands project theory of change is summarized in Table 8, below. This proposed theory of change breaks the project structure down into a slightly different view than is outlined in the project document by identifying the expected outcomes from each of the main project outputs. The three main "outcomes" identified in the project design above are further articulated as the main project strategies for achieving the objective.

Table 8 Bulgaria Grasslands Project Theory of Change

Strategy	Outcomes	Assumptions and Impact Drivers	Intermediate States	Impact
Strategy 1: Promoting uptake, and efficient and effective application of government subsidies (agri-environmental schemes) supporting environmentally	1.1 Effective application of AES at local level demonstrated, documented, and disseminated	ID: Adequate farmer awareness and understanding of AES ID: Effective operational and technical design of demonstration AES ID: Effectiveness of MACs in raising farmer awareness and mobilizing participation A: Openness of local stakeholders to engage in demonstration of AES A: Experience of successful	Biodiversity friendly agricultural practices are implemented at optimum scale, intensity, and geo-spatial arrangement in semi-natural HNV grasslands in Bulgaria and	Globally significant biodiversity in semi-natural HNV grasslands in Bulgaria is enhanced

Strategy	Outcomes	Assumptions and Impact Drivers	Intermediate States	Impact
friendly agricultural land management practices in HNV grasslands		demonstrations will be incorporated in national policy A: Socio-economic and political context does not present insurmountable barriers, for example related to land tenure, etc.	beyond, reducing threats to biodiversity	
	1.2 National AES policies and procedures adjusted to improve uptake, efficiency, and effectiveness over time	ID: Effectiveness of project team and stakeholders in engaging with policy makers ID: Technical quality of input to policy development process ID: Widespread adoption of AES by resource users A: Openness of policy makers to input from project stakeholders A: Adequate government institutional and technical capacity to develop and efficiently implement AES at national scale A: Incentives from other NRDP measures do not crowd out AES A: National and EU policy adoption process occurs within a reasonable timeframe		
	1.3 Increased quality and quantity of environmental monitoring data available to natural resource managers and political decision-makers to improve environmental outcomes of policy and decision-making	ID: Understanding of ecosystem dynamics of semi-natural HNV grasslands and associated land management practices is adequate ID: Technical ability to analyze complex data and present it in an easily reference-able manner by non-technical policy-makers and decision-makers ID: Collection of adequate quantity and quality of environmental monitoring data, and data on land management practices ID: Increased public awareness of and support for sustainable development, catalyzing decision-making A: Decision-making is conducted in a transparent manner based		

Strategy	Outcomes	Assumptions and Impact Drivers	Intermediate States	Impact
		on socio-economic and environmental merits, rather than on short-term unsustainable financial gains		
	1.4 Experience and lessons from AES implementation in Bulgaria is disseminated outside of Bulgaria	ID: Effective dissemination and uptake of experience and lessons A: Relevant good practices from Bulgaria will be incorporated in policies of other countries that apply AES		
Strategy 2: Catalyze incentives to increase supply and demand for environmentally friendly agricultural products produced in semi-natural HNV grasslands	2.1 SME farmers in semi-natural HNV grasslands have the ability to scale-up production to meet demand	ID: Access to capital ID: Adequate policy framework facilitating direct sales and other mechanisms for increased sales of agricultural products A: Environmentally friendly agriculture provides enough financial and other incentives to attract new market entrants A: Adequate availability of land, and ability to access use rights A: No insurmountable barriers to market entry	Production of biodiversity friendly agricultural products in semi-natural HNV grasslands at scale sufficient to positively influence ecosystem dynamics	Globally significant biodiversity in semi-natural HNV grasslands in Bulgaria is enhanced
	2.2 Increasing demand for biodiversity friendly agricultural products from semi-natural HNV grasslands	ID: Consumer awareness and incentives provided through product certification mechanism (e.g. “eco-label”) ID: Increased consumer awareness of environmental and health benefits from biodiversity friendly agricultural products ID: Adequate market outlets for consumers to access biodiversity friendly agricultural products A: When provided with necessary information, consumers will make environmentally friendly purchasing decisions A: Environmentally friendly agricultural products are price-competitive with non-environmentally friendly products		

Annex 6. List of Persons Met and Interviewed During Terminal Evaluation Mission

1. Ms. Maria Zlatareva, UNDP – Bulgaria Head of office
2. Ms. Emiliana Zhivkova, UNDP Programme Analyst
3. Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager
4. Ms. Nada Tosheva, BSPB Executive Director
5. Mr. Georgi Popgeorgiev, BSPB Biodiversity expert at the Project Mobile Advisory Team Bessaparski Hills
6. Mr. Dimitar Plachiiski, BSPB Rural Development Expert at the Project Mobile Advisory Team Bessaparski Hills
7. Ms. Edita Difova, BSPB Agri-environment Expert at the Project Mobile Advisory Team Bessaparski Hills
8. Mr. Stoyan Nikolov, BSPB Biodiversity Expert at the Project Mobile Advisory Team Ponor
9. Mr. Borislav Tonchev, BSPB Rural Development Expert at the Project Mobile Advisory Team Ponor
10. Mr. Mark Day, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
11. Ms. Yanka Kazakova, Project Grant Scheme Evaluator and National Expert for the Mid-term Evaluation of the National Rural Development Programme
12. Mr. Alexander Atanasov, Chief Expert at the Agri-environment Department, Rural Development Directorate, MAF and SC member
13. Ms. Raina Hardalova, Head of the Biodiversity Department at MOEW and SC member
14. Ms. Albena Bobeva, Senior expert at the EU Integration and International Cooperation Department, EFA and SC member
15. Ms. Nikolina Dimitrova, Senior Expert, Programme and Project Planning Department, EFA and former expert the NAAS
16. Mr. Yanislav Yanchev, Expert, Direct Payments Department, National Paying Agency and SC member
17. Mr. Georgi Ekov, Expert, Direct Payments Department, National Paying Agency
18. Mr. Stoilko Apostolov, Bioselena Foundation
19. Mr. Gerassim Gerassimov, Program Officer, Embassy of Switzerland in Bulgaria
20. Ms. Yulia Grigorova, WWF – Bulgaria and participator at the grant scheme project evaluation committee
21. Mr. Chavdar Gussev, Senior Researcher, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
22. Mr. Andrey Andreev, Mayor Godech Municipality
23. Ms. Iliana Nikolova, Senior Expert EU Projects at Godech Municipality and representative at the Local Action Group
24. Ms. Neli Nikolova, Senior Expert at the Municipal Service of MAF
25. Mr. Emil Todorov, farmer from Godech, project grant scheme beneficiary

26. Mr. Stoyan Stoyanov, farmer from Zimevitza, project grant scheme beneficiary
27. Ms. Stefanka Koleva, Mayor of Zimevitza village, farmer and project grant scheme beneficiary
28. Ms. Dimitrina Trendafilova Petrova, farmer from Zimevitza and project grant scheme beneficiary
29. Mr. Lichev, Head of the Municipal Office of MAF at Stamboliisky
30. Mr. Ivan Pirinov, Mayor of Kurtovo Konare village
31. Ms. Emilia Shusharova, Secretary of the Chitalishte "Kurtovo Konare", grant scheme beneficiary
32. Vassilka and Georgy Radevi, farmers from Novo Selo and project grant scheme beneficiaries
33. Mr. Petar Georgiev, mayor of Isperihovo and grant scheme beneficiary
34. Iliya and Ginka Dimitrovi, farmers from Isperihovo and project grant scheme beneficiaries
35. Ms. Dora Gadjeva, farmer from Byaga and project grant scheme beneficiary
36. Ms. Marena Dimitrova, Secretary of Chitalishte "Zora", village of Radilovo and project grant scheme beneficiary
37. Mr. Kiril Metodiev, Senior Expert, RIEW Pazardzhik

Annex 7. Evaluation Field Visit Schedule

Date	Venue	Participants
Tuesday, 17 April 2012		
	UNDP office	*Language of meetings: English*
9:30 – 12:00		Overview of agenda and briefing with: Ms. Maria Zlatareva, UNDP Head of Office Ms. Emiliana Zhivkova, UNDP Programme Analyst
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager
14:00 – 15:00	BSPB office	Ms. Nada Tosheva, BSPB Executive Director Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager Mr. Mark Day – RSPB (the person liaising between BSPB and RSPB in all joint projects)
15:00 – 15:30		Meeting with the Mobile Advisory Team Bessaparski Hills: Mr. Georgi Popgeorgiev, Biodiversity Expert Mr. Dimitar Plachiiski, Rural Development Expert Ms. Edita Difova, Agri-environment Expert
15:45 – 16:30		
16:30 – 18:00		Meeting with the Mobile Advisory Team Ponor: Mr. Stoyan Nikolov, Biodiversity Expert Mr. Borislav Tonchev, Rural Development Expert
Wednesday, 18 April 2012		
8:30 – 18:30	Travel to Ponor via BSPB vehicle	*Language of meetings: Bulgarian; interpreter: Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager* Meetings with farmers and stakeholders
10:30 – 11:30	Godech Municipality	Mr. Andrei Andreev, Mayor Ms. Iliana Grigorova, senior expert EU projects at the municipality and representative to the Local Action Group Ms. Neli Nikolova, senior expert, municipal office of MAF
11:30 – 12:30	v. Ravna	Visit the farm of Emil Todorov, grant scheme beneficiary
12:30 – 13:30	travel from Godech to Svoge	
13:30 – 14:30		Visit the farm of Stoyan Stoyanov, grant scheme beneficiary
14:30 – 15:00	v. Zimevitsa Lunch on the farm	
15:00 – 16:00	v. Zimevitsa	Ms. Stefanka Koleva, mayor of the village; farmer and grant scheme beneficiary;
16:00 – 17:00	v. Zanoge	Visit the farm of Wild Flora and Fauna Foundation; Mr. Ilian Iosifov, farmer and horse riding center
17:00 – 18:30	travel to Sofia	
Thursday, 19 April 2012		

		Individual meetings with Steering Committee members:
9:30 – 10:30	Ministry of Agriculture and Foods	*Language of meetings: English* Mr. Alexander Atanasov, Chief Expert Agri-environment Department, Rural Development Directorate
10:40 – 11:40	Executive Forestry Agency	Ms. Albena Bobeva, Senior expert, European Integration and International Cooperation Department Ms. Nikolina Simeonova, Senior expert, Programme and Project Planning Department (former expert at the National Agriculture Advisory Service)
12:00 – 13:00	Ministry of Environment and Waters	*Language of meeting: Bulgarian; Interpreter: Mr. Alexander Bardarov, evaluation team member* Ms. Raina Hardalova, Head, Biodiversity Department
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch break	
14:30 – 15:30	State Fund Agriculture, Payment Agency	*Language of meetings: English* Mr. Yanislav Yanchev, Expert, Direct Payments Department
16:00 – 17:00	BSPB office	Ms. Yanka Kazakova – grant scheme evaluation and Rural Development Program evaluator
17:00 – 18:00		Mr. Stoilko Apostolov – Bioselena – partner organization Mr. Gerassim Gerassimov, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
Friday, 20 April 2012		
8:00 – 18:30	Travel to Bessaparski Hills	*Language of meetings: Bulgarian; interpreter: Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager* Meetings with farmers and stakeholders
9:30 – 10:15	Stamboliiski	Mr. Lichev, Municipal office of MAF
10:30 – 11:15	v. Kurtovo Konare	Ms. Emilia Shusharova, Secretary of chitalishte “Kurtovo Konare”, grant scheme beneficiary; Mr. Mayor v Kurotovo Konare
11:30 – 12:15	Novo Selo	Visit the farm of Vasilka and Georgi Radevi, GS beneficiary
12:30 – 13:15	Lunch	
13:30 – 14:15	v. Isperihovo	Visit the farm of Ilyia and Ginka Dimitrovi
14:30 – 15:15	v. Isperihovo	Mr. Petar Georgiev, Mayor
15:30 – 16:00	v. Byaga	Ms. Dora Gadjeva, farmer
16:15 – 16:45	v. Radilovo	Ms. Marena Dimitrova, Secretary, chitalishte “Zora”, grant scheme beneficiary

17:00 – 17:30	Pazardjik	Mr. Kiril Metodiev, senior expert, Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters
Saturday, 21 April 2012		
9:30 – 10:30	BSPB office	*Language of meetings: Bulgarian; interpreter: Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager* Mr. Rossen Tsonev, Associate Professor, Sofia University Mr. Chavdar Gussev, Senior Researcher, Bulgarian Academy of Science
10:30 – 11:30		Ms. Julia Grigorova WWF – grant scheme applications evaluation; partner in policy work
12:00 – 13:00	Green Days Fair – Sofia, National Theater Park	Visit BSPB stand at the fair and meet small farmers and producers supported by the project
Monday, 23 April 2012		
9:30 – 11:30	UNDP office	*Language of meetings: English* Debriefing and presentation of draft outline of final evaluation report with: Ms. Maria Zlatareva, UNDP Head of Office Ms. Nada Tosheva, BSPB Executive Director Ms. Miroslava Dikova, Project Manager

Photo 1 Project and Evaluation Team Members with Grant Scheme Beneficiaries