

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultants for Mid-Term Evaluation of UNDP/GEF Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in the Headwaters of the Huaihe River Basin Project (HHRB Project)

1. Background

The project forms a key element of the China Biodiversity Partnership Framework (CBPF). It aims to ensure that global biodiversity conservation values are integrated into the management of Important Ecological Function Areas (IEFAs). Baseline efforts to develop specialized management regimes for such areas provide an *opportunity* to mainstream biodiversity conservation into the management of significant numbers of important landscapes across China by building on the complementarity and synergies between ecosystems functions conservation and biodiversity conservation. Such a solution would offer an essential complementary element to China's protected area strategy. The project will work with relevant stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels to address barriers to launching this important management approach and to ensure biodiversity conservation is an integral component. GEF support will focus on ensuring that biodiversity considerations are fully taken into account within this process. The project will demonstrate mainstreaming in the national-level IEFA to be established in the Headwaters of the Huaihe River Basin (HHRB), a biodiversity-rich, 21,109-km² area considered a high priority by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. Based on the HHRB pilot experience, the project will seek encourage replication at IEFAs throughout China. Mainstreaming work here will include both at a landscape level and at selected sectoral levels such as in medicinal plants, mining and tourism. **The present TORs focus exclusively on the Mid-Term Evaluation of UNDP/GEF Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in the Headwaters of the Huaihe River Basin Project (HHRB Project).**

The project goal is that of the CBPF as a whole, i.e., to significantly reduce biodiversity loss in China as a contribution to sustainable development. The project objective is to demonstrate practical mechanisms to mainstream biodiversity in China's Ecological Function Conservation Areas (EFCAs). The project consists of four mutually supportive outcomes. **Outcome 1** develops the overall framework for mainstreaming ecosystem and biodiversity concerns into governance at the project demonstration site. It establishes inter-sectoral management structures, which help to oversee the development of municipal and county-level plans as well as setting broad ecosystem-function and biodiversity targets for the site. **Outcome 2** works directly with key target sectors. It assesses and quantifies negative impacts emanating from these sectors, reviews the effectiveness of existing laws, policies, incentives, etc., develops alternative policies and incentive-based programs and, finally, increases awareness and capacities to manage and respond to revised regulations and incentives. **Outcome 3** ensures that biodiversity and ecosystem conservation goals are effectively integrated into poverty alleviation efforts; it draws heavily on the lessons emerging from Outcome 2 sectoral-based efforts, while demonstrating approaches to transforming those

sectors. Finally, **Outcome 4** supports the establishment of lesson learning networks at local and national levels.

The project was approved by the GEF Council in 2008 and the Project Document was signed in June 2009, and project was launched on 29 Dec. 2009.

2. Description of the Assignment

The purpose of the evaluation is to help guide the project's implementation from now till end of the project to achieve its objective. The MTE is also meant to synthesize lessons to help improve the project design and implementation of project activities. The mid-term evaluation will do this by:

- 1) to briefly review development and policy environment relating to Important Ecological Function Area (IEFA) and China Biodiversity Partnership Framework (CBPF), commenting on how these might have affected project performance and assess the extent to which the project remained relevant to the needs of its targets;
- 2) to perform interim assessment of the extent to which HHRB has successfully accomplished its objectives in terms of activities, outputs and outcomes as defined in the agreed Project Document (logframe), and assess the likelihood of achieving them upon project completion;
- 3) to identify implementing agency's institutional strengths and weaknesses, and identify potential options for improving project implementation capacities, which could include modification of activities, project management responsibilities, schedule of activities and budget allocations, among others;
- 4) to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of project outcomes.

3. Scope of Services

Three main elements to be evaluated are Delivery, Implementation and Finances. Each component will be evaluated using three criteria: Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness

Project delivery: The MTE will assess to what extent the HHRB project has achieved its immediate objectives. It will also identify what outputs, impacts and results have been produced and how they have enabled the project to achieve its objectives. The consultants are required to make assessment of the following issues under each priority area outlined below:

Institutional arrangement

- Preparatory work and implementation strategies
- Consultative processes
- Technical support
- Capacity building initiatives
- Project outputs
- Assumptions and risks

- Project related complementary activities

Outcome, results and impacts

- Efficiency of all project activities under the three major components
- Progress in the achievement of the immediate objectives (include level of indicator achievement when available)

Partnerships

- Assessment of national level involvement and perception
- Assessment of local partnerships, and involvement of stakeholders
- Assessment of collaboration between government, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations

Risk management

- Were problems/constraints, which impacted on successful delivery of the project identified at the project design stage and implementation?
- Were there new threats/risks to project success that emerged during project implementation?
- Were both kinds of risk appropriately dealt with?

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Assess the extent, appropriateness and effectiveness of adaptive management at all levels of the project implementation
- Has there been a monitoring and evaluation framework for the project and how was this developed?
- Is the reporting framework effective/appropriate?
- Is this framework suitable for replication/continuation by the end of the project?

Project Implementation

▪ Review the project management and implementation arrangements at all levels, in order to provide an opinion on its efficiency and cost effectiveness. This includes:

- i. Processes and administration:
 - Project related administration procedures
 - Milestones(Log-frame matrix)
 - Key decisions and outputs,
 - Major project implementation documents prepared with an indication of how the documents and reports have been useful
- ii. Project oversight and active engagement by UNDP and project steering committee
- iii. Project execution: Xinyang Municipal Government as the executing agency and project sub-executing agencies
- iv. Project implementation: UNDP as the Implementing Agency

Project Finances

How well and cost effectively have financial arrangements of the project worked? This section will focus on the following three priority areas:

1. Project disbursements
 - Provide an overview of actual spending against budget expectations
 - Critically analyse disbursements to determine if funds have been applied effectively and efficiently.
2. Budget procedures
 - Did the Project Document provide adequate guidance on how to allocate the budget?
 - Review of audits and any issues raised in audits and subsequent adjustments to accommodate audit recommendations;
 - Review the changes to fund allocations as a result of budget revisions and provide an opinion on the appropriateness and relevancy of such revisions
3. Coordination mechanisms
 - Evaluate appropriateness and efficiency of coordinating mechanisms between Implementing agency and executing agency, UNDP and Xinyang Municipal Government;
 - Does the HHRB approach represent an effective means of achieving the objectives?
 - How can the approach be improved?

Under the supervision of UNDP CO in consultation with Implementing Partners of HHRB Project, the mid-term evaluation team will accomplish the following tasks:

1) Review of the project design, planning and implementation

- Whether problems to be solved by the project are clear, the project approaches and strategy are sound, and immediate objectives and outputs are properly stated and verifiable in the project logical framework;
- Whether project problems to be solved still stand, project responses strategies and project adaptive management measures still relevant to national priorities and GEF strategies;
- Whether the designed institutional arrangement for project has been performing effectively during the project implementation and allocated responsibilities among key stakeholders are still relevant;
- Whether timeframe of the project is feasible and practicable; and
- Whether the project budget allocation is reasonable and practical based on the

situation changes and policy progress.

2) Review of project performance

- Timeliness and quality of inputs;
- Timeliness of activities undertaken;
- Project budget performance and cost-effectiveness budget performance;
- Ability of the project to utilize efficiently the inputs available to it;
- Quality and quantity of outputs produced;
- Achievement of immediate objectives;
- Factors that have facilitated or deterred the achievement of project objectives; and
- Co-funding mobilized till date;

3) Project impact

- To determine the extent to which the project objectives are expected to be achieved and what are the short-term and long-term impact of the project, including efficiency of the project, cost-effectiveness of the project, impact on mainstream biodiversity conservation in China, generation of income to local communities, replication and dissemination of project results within and outside project areas; awareness raised of biodiversity conservation by the public and decision makers.

4) Sustainability of project outcomes

- To analyze the risks and assumptions that are likely to affect the persistence of the project outcomes, including financial resources, socio-political, institutional and environmental risks.

5) Recommendations and lessons learnt

- Success stories;
- Problems in project implementation;
- Lessons learnt including technical, management, policy, capacity building and implementation arrangement;
- Recommendations including budget allocation adjustment suggestions etc.

4. The Requested Services and Activities

The team will use the information generated by the HHRB Project including baseline and information generated by the M&E framework, and seek the necessary contextual information to assess the significance and relevance of the results. The strategic priorities of biodiversity portfolio in GEF Phase IV will be used as benchmark for evaluation by the mid-term evaluation.

In order to carry out the evaluation tasks, the team will carry out the following activities during the assignment period:

- 1) Review of background material and preparation of a tentative evaluation plan to be agreed with UNDP CO and PMO of HHRB Project;

- 2) Desk review of documents provided by UNDP CO before start of the assignment;
- 3) Interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders including:
 - Project Steering Committee members including MOF, MEP officials responsible for the planning of IEFAs, FECO of MEP etc.
 - national-level officials in relevant sectoral ministries and other Government departments, particularly those involved with issues such as ecologically sound land use management, ecological certification and other incentive programs;
 - PMO and NPD of HHRB;
 - UNDP CO and UNDP RTA as required;
 - Municipal and county-level officials at HHRB;
 - production sector agents in the agriculture, mining, tourism and forestry sectors at HHRB;
 - Municipal and county-level women's federations to represent the interests of the aging and women's populations.;
 - Local beneficiaries in project pilot sites;
 - Key subcontractors, etc.
- 4) Field visits to selected demonstration sites to be agreed with UNDP CO and PMO.
- 5) Debriefing at the UNDP CO on the preliminary findings after the meetings and visits with participation of key stakeholders;
- 6) Preparation and finalisation of evaluation report by incorporating any additional comments from the UNDP CO and PMO.

5. Qualifications

The mid term evaluation team will consist of an international consultant and a national consultant. Both the international and national consultants are expected to have relevant academic qualification and evaluation experiences. In addition, it is desirable that the international and national consultants have as many as possible the following qualifications:

The team should ideally have the following competencies and attributes:

Expertise in:

- Capacity building and strengthening institutions;
- Post-graduate education in integrated natural resources management, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services or relevant fields;
- Community-based natural resource management;
- Knowledge of biodiversity conservation, ecological zoning, regulation and policy, etc
- Demonstrated experiences of evaluation of donor-funded development projects, specifically undertaking complex programmatic reviews.

Some prior knowledge of the following would be ideal:

- Knowledgeable about the relevant policies of the GEF, UNDP reporting frameworks, project requirements;
- GEF principles and expected impacts in terms of global benefits;
- The Principles of the Ecosystem Approach of the Convention on Biological Diversity; and,
- Knowledge to assess fit with CBD work programs and 2010 targets;

Competency in the following is also required:

- Demonstrated experience in institutional analysis;
- Excellent English writing and communication skills. Demonstrated ability to assess complex situations in order to succinctly and clearly distil critical issues and draw forward looking conclusions;
- Ability to assess complex situations in order to succinctly and clearly distil critical issues and draw forward looking conclusions;
- Professional experiences in working in China and with Chinese counterparts an asset; and,
- Excellent facilitation skills.

6. Expected Outputs

The consultant team are expected to deliver the following outputs:

- 1) An evaluation report presenting evaluation results of the project of approximately 40-50 pages, structured along the outline indicated, and recommendations for remaining timeframe of the project.
 - A detailed record of consultations with stakeholders will need to be kept and provided (as part of the information gathered by the evaluators), as an annex to the main report.
 - If there are any significant discrepancies between the impressions and findings of the evaluation team and stakeholders these should be explained in an Annex attached to the final report.
- 2) **Power Point Presentation** (circa 20-25 slides) covering the key points of the MTE, Debriefing of findings to UNDP CO, PMO and the GEF focal point.

A draft of both 1) and 2) above should be submitted within two weeks of the end of the in-country component of the evaluators' mission, and a final copy within two weeks after receiving written comments on the drafts from UNDP and PMO. The documents should be submitted in electronic format.

The findings of the evaluation will be used by Ministry of Finance as the GEF Focal Point in

China, Xinyang Municipal Government as the implementing partner and UNDP to better adjust project strategy and approaches to guide the project implementation in the remaining period.

7. Duration of the Contracts

Three work weeks, including travel time required. The consultant will visit Beijing and Xinyang city, Henan Province as agreed between UNDP CO and PMO of HHRB. The consultants will meet with government officials, project participants, and other stakeholders in order to evaluate the project implementation and impact. The travel schedule and logistics will be developed by UNDP CO in consultation with PMO/HHRB.

8. Payment Schedule

30% of the total amount due to the consultants will be paid upon signature of the contract. The remaining 70% is payable upon acceptance by UNDP CO of the evaluation report in its final form.

9. Start of the Assignment

March of 2012.

10. Documents to be provided for the Consultants:

I. Management Reports produced by the UNDP/GEF Project:

1. Project Document and Project Brief, agreement/contact
2. Inception report
3. Original Log Frame and any revision made to it
4. Tripartite Review (TPR) / Project Steering Committee minutes
5. Annual Work Plans
6. Project Implementation Reports (PIR)
7. Annual Project Reports (APR)
8. Annual audit reports and Annual Financial Statements
9. Annual M and E Reports/ SpreadSheets
10. All contracts with sub-contractors and related stakeholders (even in Chinese)
11. Meeting minutes including PSC, PMO meetings (even in Chinese)

II. Technical Reports produced by the UNDP/GEF Project team and consultants

Other useful and supporting documents and materials such as technical reports, work reports, campaign manual/books, etc.

III. Any map illustrating the project interventions

IV. Others

1. a list of all output documents produced by the project (and copies of these),
2. planned and actual expenditure by output (and activity) - for UNDP, GEF funds as well as for sources of co-financing (planned and actual expenditure including any in-kind contributions)
3. project baseline information,
4. the M&E Plan,
5. any other key monitoring or evaluation reports / reports from the CTA.
6. GEF BD-2 tracking tool (the same excel sheet with only BD-2 tab filled) with mid-term assessment and update on the progress towards indicator targets as per the logframe.

11. Sample Outline for the MTE Report

1) Executive summary

- Brief description of project;
- Context and purpose of the evaluation;
- Main conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned;

2) Introduction

- Purpose of the evaluation;
- Key issues addressed;
- Methodology of the evaluation;
- Structure of the evaluation.

3) The project(s) and its development context

- Project start and its duration;
- Problems that the project seek to address;
- Immediate and development objectives of the project;
- Main stakeholders;
- Results expected.

4) Findings and Conclusions

4.1 Project Formulation

- ✓ Implementation
- ✓ Stakeholder participation
- ✓ Replication approach
- ✓ Cost effectiveness
- ✓ Linkage of the project and other interventions within the sector
- ✓ Indicators

4.2. Project Implementation

- ✓ Delivery
- ✓ Financial management
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation
- ✓ Execution and implementation modalities
- ✓ Management by UNDP, World Bank and other partners
- ✓ Coordination and operational issues

4.3 Results to date

- ✓ Attainment of Objectives
- ✓ Sustainability
- ✓ Contribution to upgrading skills at National level

5) Lessons learned

6) Conclusions and recommendations, including overall rating of project implementation and the achievement of project outcomes and objective.

7) Evaluation report Annexes

- Evaluation TORs , Itinerary and list of persons interviewed
- Summary of field visits, including evaluators findings, issues raised and recommendations by different stakeholders
- List of documents reviewed
- Questionnaire used and summary of results if any
- Comments by stakeholders (only in case of discrepancies with evaluation findings and conclusions)