

Management Response of the Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR Terminal Evaluation

Project Title: Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR (SAFE Ecosystems Project)

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Terminal Evaluation recommendation 1.

The project should thoroughly review the project costs and underlying practices engaged in by the project to evaluate if similar approaches are to be pursued in future projects. While this recommendation spring from the large DSA expenditures it is equally relevant to look at project costs with regard to project benefits and evaluate if such expenses are fully justified.

Management response:¹**Fully Accept**

The project has already reviewed the cost of the various project intervention activities with the aim of ensuring efficiency and minimizing unnecessary costs; this has been particularly noted during project implementation period between the Mid-Term Review and the Terminal Evaluation. The same approach will be used in the remaining months of the project as will apply the same criteria in future projects.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking ²	
			Comments	Status ³
1.1 Monitor costs of all project-related activities to ensure efficiency and justification has been undertaken for the remainder of the project resulting in less than 30 percent in reduction of costs.	30 June 2022	UNDP & PMU	The project reviewed the implementation costs in all project activities aimed at minimizing unnecessary expenditure.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 2.

Regarding the project purchase equipment etc. the project (i.e. UNDP) ensure, to the extent possible, via its handover protocols, that the entities which has received and used equipment under the project are also the ones who maintain said equipment following the operational and financial closure of the project.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

UNDP and Project Management Unit (PMU) will conduct hand-over of all the project assets in accordance with the Assets Management Section of the NIM SOPs prior to project closure with a focus upon ensuring proper maintenance of the assets and/or equipment after project closure.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Consultation with Implementation Partner on handing over timelines of all assets under the project in accordance to Assets Management Section of the NIM SOPs. Handing over all project assets and/or equipment.	30 June 2022	UNDP & PMU	Engagements were undertaken with relevant stakeholders and handing over completed as per NIM standard operating procedures	Completed

¹ Select one: Fully Accept, Partially Accept, Reject

² Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC).

³ Select one: Not initiated, Initiated, Completed, Completed, No longer applicable

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 3.

For future projects it is recommended that the project risks, including the Social and Environmental risks, its issue and lessons learned logs as well as the projects indicators (Results Framework and GEF Core indicators) are not treated as static documents but is used in project's active and regularly monitoring. This is to ensure that the project is on track etc. and is meeting its obligations. Early identification and reactions can save the projects for complications later on in the implementation process.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

All stakeholders acknowledge the importance of undertaking detailed project risk analysis with regards to social and environmental safeguards during the project development stage. Furthermore, it is recognized that the project results framework is not static and should be updated regularly during as part of stakeholder engagement to ensure the targets set are achievable during project implementation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Steps have already been established to ensure that risk assessment is undertaken at project development and quarterly review of actions to mitigate the risks in future projects.	31 March 2022	UNDP	The newly revised UNDP 2021 Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Policy has necessitated that risks are to be assessed during the project development phase and regularly monitored throughout project implementation. Additionally, UNDP regularly monitors all risks as per the set risk management procedures.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 4.

The project should use the remaining time of the project to actively build knowledge hub where knowledge products from the project can be place for longevity. As part of this the project should ensure that its capacity building work is captured and made accessible online, for instance via recording project presentations and trainings etc. In this regard, the project could establish its own platform, use an existing national platform or rely on UNDP portals such as Exposure and Panorama. Along the same lines knowledge management should become a central part of a future projects and as part of any contract or sub-contract related to capacity building that training videos, on-line courses and accessible training materials should be prepared and made available on a web-based media.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

There are many successes and lessons learned from the project implementation that can be utilized in future programming in Lao PDR. The project has already developed knowledge materials to showcase approaches which worked well for potential upscaling and replication in similar context including video documentation from the beneficiaries' experiences. As such, the project will explore suitable platforms such as Exposure and Panorama and share relevant knowledge products to a wide audience before the project concludes.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Explore and set up at least two suitable platforms to enable increased sharing of knowledge products.	30 June 2022	PMU	The project developed knowledge products of various forms such as photo albums, good practice booklets, case-studies, and video documentary, lessons learned and success stories shared through project social media, UNDP-panorama and exposure platforms.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 5.

The project should prior to project operational closure develop its exit strategy outlining not only how the bearing elements of the project can be brought forward through new project interventions, but also how the set-ups and benefits within the project area can be maintained through ongoing and future provincial and district interventions.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

The project initiated an exit strategy engagement with relevant stakeholders prior to Terminal Evaluation with the focus on the sustainability of key project intervention areas. Further engagements will be undertaken to ensure provision of continuous support by the relevant stakeholders on the key successful project interventions areas and continued benefits to the communities.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Continue to conduct stakeholder consultations on the potential takeover/hand-over of various project-initiated interventions.	30 June 2022	PMU	The exit strategy was discussed with relevant stakeholders prior to terminal evaluation and finalized in Quarter 1, 2022.	Completed
5.2 Final project exit strategy to be completed and responsibilities of various actors clarified.	30 June 2022	PMU	Exit strategy was completed with key actions for various stakeholders beyond project cycle highlighted.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 6.

For future projects data collection exercises such as Capacity Development Scorecard, and the METT score analysis should not done through desk surveys but via stakeholder workshops, as this would provide added benefits in terms of education and knowledge sharing, as well as create broader local ownership of the exercise.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

Participatory stakeholder engagement in data collection exercises plays a significant role in strengthening ownership and capacity of the involved actors. It also strengthens the sustainability of the interventions and therefore the recommendation will be implemented in future GEF projects.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Mechanisms have already been put in place to ensure participatory engagement in data collection will be implemented in all future GEF projects.	31 March 2022	UNDP	n/a	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 7.

Future project should undertake Knowledge, Attitude and Practices surveys to enable the project to capture behavioral change among the project beneficiaries.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

Follow-up studies and surveys play an important role determining the progress made in the various project interventions by measuring changes in behavior, as well as determine the satisfaction of the beneficiaries. For the purpose of improved learning and informed decision making, this recommendation will be factored into future projects.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
7.1 Incorporation of KAP surveys and follow-up studies where necessary in project development in accordance with results-based management approach.	31 March 2022	UNDP	n/a	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 8.

The project should prior to project operational closure undertake an end-of-project Biodiversity Intactness Index survey. While such survey might not provide for any new information per se, due to the limited time between this and the previous survey, running the survey again would verify whether the index (and the exercise) can be seen as an efficient, valuable and practical tool for biodiversity monitoring and evaluation.

Management response:**Partially Accept**

In principle, the Project agrees that undertaking a second Biodiversity Intactness Index survey would verify if this index is in fact an efficient and practical tool to determine the change in the status of biodiversity intactness as compared to the period before the project intervention. However, the cost of the study, available expertise on the subject in Lao PDR and the time required to complete the study limits the ability to implement this recommendation. However, the project will explore other potential simplified biodiversity data collection methodologies which could be implemented sustainably.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
8.1 Explore simplified biodiversity data collection method to be adopted for biodiversity monitoring.	30 June 2022	PMU	Review of biodiversity data collection and potential biodiversity intactness analysis explored. Survey protocols for key species had been developed and review of the existing data drew conclusion that further review required expertise which was not available in country.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 9.

The project should take a close look at its combined village engagement “packaged” to not only look at what worked well and what did not. The project should look at which components in an active village engagement is needed to make it effective and then identify how such interventions could be anchored within different government entities (and their respective programs). This analytical work could provide a central guide for cross-sectoral cooperation at provincial and district

Management response:

Fully Accept

The sustainability of initiated activities is one of project priorities in ensuring continuation of successful interventions. The project will review the various project activities and the potential continuation by respective Government departments in the area working on the same interventions. Some district authorities have shared their commitment to continue with some of the impactful project activities.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
9.1 Consultations with the relevant Government departments and development partners on takeover of initiated activities.	30 June 2022	PMU	Consultations with a relevant government department held and key action for follow up identified as part of project exit strategy.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 10.

As a central component of the project's community work are the community agreements it is recommended that the project review of its approach for community involvement and identify lessons learned and best practices. This review could benefit from not only looking at the SAFE Ecosystems project's work but also from similar engagements undertaken by other development partners, as well as the Lao PDR Government. The review could result in common agreed approaches for simple and cost-effective engagements.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

Community conservation agreements were a new concept in the areas targeted by the project. A number of lessons were learned, and practices identified during the project implementation. The project will review alternative community agreement approaches to enable identification of cost-effective approaches in interventions undertaken during project implementation in comparison with approaches undertaken by other development partners. The project will document conservation agreement experiences and implementation practices for sharing with the relevant stakeholders.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
10.1 Review of conservation agreements approaches.	30 June 2022	PMU	Review of conservation agreement approaches in the region undertaken.	Completed
10.2 Prepare a knowledge management document on conservation agreement approaches completed.	30 June 2022	PMU	Knowledge products shared on UNDP-panorama platform	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 11.

Future projects should keep track of co-financing commitments as well as new investments during the project period regularly. It would have been prudent if the project had collected this information on a regular basis for instance in connection with the annual PIR and as a minimum prior to the Mid-term Review and the Terminal Evaluation.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

In line with updated GEF rules on co-financing, UNDP recognizes that regular and consistent tracking of co-financing resources will need to be done annually. It will also be important to examine whether or not parallel co-financing projects identified during the ppg phase remain relevant to the goals and objectives of GEF project throughout the implementation period.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
11.1 In line with GEF rules on implementation, establish an annual tracking system on project parallel co-financing as part of the annual project implementation report.	31 March 2022	UNDP	Steps taken to ensure that co-funding resources are annually tracked.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 12.

For future projects project safeguard and monitoring tools should be well drafted and based on local ownership and input. Project results and indicator targets should be agreed to with the stakeholders who ultimately will be responsible for implementing the projects and ensuring that these targets are reached. In other words, project targets should not only be targets of the project but targets of the individual involved entities engaged in the project. As part of this local formulation workshops, engaging key champion stakeholders could be used in the drafting process.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

With the launch of social and environmental standard (SES) policy in early 2021, UNDP has made it mandatory that all projects incorporate identified environmental and social risks within project activities, as well as participation of key stakeholders and beneficiaries during the project development stage. Furthermore, in future project development, detailed engagements with relevant stakeholders are to be undertaken to ensure that targets set are achievable and ownership project interventions.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
12.1 Trainings have already been conducted on social and environmental standards and awareness enhanced on participatory stakeholders' engagement at the project development	31 March 2022	UNDP	Training has been conducted and SES Support team established.	Completed

Terminal Evaluation recommendation 13.

For future projects the project should immediately after the onboarding of the central project staff key technical personnel undertake a thorough review of the project documentation to identify potential inconsistencies in said documentation, which might impact the project implementation or the achievement of the project goals and targets, including GEF Core Indicator and Results Framework targets. Identified concerns should be raised through available UNDP channels in order to bring about acceptable changes addressing the identified concerns where possible.

Management response:**Fully Accept**

The importance of key staff from project inception is widely acknowledged to ensure that documentation, technical support and engagement with the relevant stakeholders are undertaken appropriately. Furthermore, facilitate identification of areas of concern within the project document which needs to be timely addressed for effective project implementation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
13.1 In future projects, ensure timely recruitment of key project staffs as well as develop more robust inception period to facilitate adequate review of the project results-based management framework.	31 March 2022	UNDP	Plans have already been put in place to ensure timely recruitment of staff	Completed