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Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project "Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management for mitigating land degradation and contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas" (GEF ID 5825) (2016-2020)

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Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) for mitigating land degradation and contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas
GEF ID 5825
31/10/22

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This Terminal Evaluation was prepared for UNEP by Nino Partskhaladze, as an external consultant in close collaboration with Janet Wildish, Evaluation Manager at the UNEP Independent Evaluation Office.

The evaluator would like to express her gratitude to all persons who contributed to this evaluation, as listed in Annex 2. The evaluator would also like to thank Mr. Ersin Erin, Project Task Manager and Ms. Kety Tsereteli, Project Manager for their contribution and collaboration throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will contribute to the continuous improvement of similar projects in Georgia and other countries.

BRIEF CONSULTANT BIOGRAPHY

Ms. Nino Partskhaladze is an evaluation specialist with over 20 years of experience in evaluating development projects for various donor agencies. Her background is in Environmental Sciences/Policy and in International Development Policy.

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ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Joint Evaluation: No

Report Language(s): English

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Brief Description: This report is a Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP project, 'Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) for mitigating land degradation and contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas', implemented between 2016 and 2020. The project's overall development goal was to support integration of good Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) principles and practices into national policy and institutional frameworks to ensure adoption of economically viable practices by rural communities. The evaluation sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

Key words: Sustainable land management, policy and legislative framework, demonstration projects, pilots, windbreaks, crop rotation, pasture management, soil protection, land use plans, maps, knowledge management.

Primary data collection period: September – December 2021

Field Missions: Sartichala village in Gardabani municipality, Kasristskali village in Akhmeta municipality and Dedoplistskaro town in Dedoplistskaro municipality.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

EA	Executing Agency
EIEC	Environmental Information and Education Centre
EU	European Union
FMO	Fund Management Officer
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IBiS	Integrated Biodiversity Management in the South Caucasus
ICC	Information and Consultation Center
LD	Land Degradation
L-SLM	Landscape and Sustainable Land Management
LUP	Land Use Plan
MEPA	Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture
MoENRP	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NILMS	National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy
PM	Project Manager
PMP	Pastures Management Plan
PoW	Programme of Work
PSC	Project Steering Committee
ProDoc	Project Document (must be reviewed by PRC before any project can be undertaken, with the approval of the managing division director)
RECC	Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus
SC	Sustainable Consumption
SD	Sustainable Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TM	Task Manager
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Table 1: Project Identification Table

GEF Project ID:	5825	Umoja no:	P1-33GFL-000962 SB-006797
Implementing Agency:	UNEP	Executing Agency:	RECC on behalf of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture
Relevant SDG Targets:	1.2, 1.5, 2.3, 2.4, 5.5., 5.c, 5.c.1, 6.6, 15.3	GEF Focal Areas:	LD1, LD3
Sub-programme:	3: Ecosystem Management, Healthy and Productive Ecosystems	Expected Accomplishment(s):	(a) Use of the ecosystem approach in countries to maintain ecosystem services and sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems is increased (PoW 2016-2017) The health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks at the national and international levels" (PoW 2018-2019)
UNEP approval date:	PCA signed on 30.05.2016	Programme of Work Output(s):	Output 1 for EA (a): Methods and tools for adaptation developed and piloted, and disseminated through knowledge networks along with adaptation approaches, research results, lessons learnt and good practices
Date of CEO Endorsement	24.11.2015	GEF approval date:	14.02.2016
Expected start date:	31.05.2016	Actual start date:	31.05.2016
Planned completion date:	30.05.2019	Actual operational completion date:	30.11.2020
GEF financing amount:	923,484 USD	Actual total expenditures reported as of Dec 2021	844,460 USD

First disbursement:	21.07.2016	Planned date of financial closure:	31.05.2021
No. of formal project revisions:	2	Date of last approved project revision:	30.11.2020 – 7 mo added (prev. 30.04.2019 – 12 mo added)
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	5	Date of last Steering Committee meeting:	30.11.2020
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (planned date):	05.2018	Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):	05.2019
Terminal Evaluation Report (planned date):	12.2021	Terminal Evaluation (actual date):	03.2022
Country:	Georgia	Region:	Europe
Dates of previous project phases:	Not applicable	Status of future project phases:	Not applicable

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project background

1. The GEF-funded "Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) for Mitigating Land Degradation and Contributing to Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas" project was designed to address the land degradation concerns in the arid and semi-arid areas of Eastern Georgia. These concerns mainly relate to soil salinization, wind erosion and soil fertility decline caused by unsustainable land management practices.

2. UNEP launched the project's implementation in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (RECC), that was chosen by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection (MoENRP[1]) of Georgia as its designated NGO for the project's execution. This NGO hosted the project's implementation unit.

3. The project's main objective was to support the integration of good Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) principles and practices into national policy and institutional framework to ensure adoption of economically viable practices by rural communities. To achieve the objective the project set out to a) improve legal, policy and institutional frameworks on L-SLM at national level; b) demonstrate benefits of introducing L-SLM practices in the production system in three municipalities of Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions[2], including Gardabani, Dedoplistskaro and Akhmeta; and c) capacitate national stakeholders on developing and implementing SLM plans/initiatives.

4. The project was implemented during 2016-2021 with GEF financing of 923,484 USD. Upon the completion of the project the Terminal Evaluation (TE) was undertaken for two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and all its project partners. The evaluation was conducted under the overall responsibility of the UNEP Evaluation Office. It used both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods for obtaining information on key evaluation criteria presented in this report under the evaluation findings chapter.

Key findings

5. The evaluation found that the project delivered eight out of nine outputs and contributed to the achievement of all outcomes to varying degrees. One of the most notable achievements was the adoption of the Law on Windbreaks and related amendments to other laws which ensures the care and maintenance of windbreaks. The project provided a substantial contribution to the development of this law by facilitating a participatory process and supporting the revision of the draft law.

6. Several other important legal acts such as the Environmental Assessment Code and the Spatial Planning, Architecture and Construction Code have also been adopted by the Parliament of Georgia. These legal acts have the potential to positively affect the integration of SLM issues in decision-making processes. Additionally, two laws related to the ownership and management of agricultural lands, with potential implications on SLM, were also adopted. Furthermore, a few more developed legal acts are waiting to be submitted to the Parliament. These developments are a significant step forward toward improving the SLM enabling environment in Georgia.

[1] By the end of 2017 this ministry merged with the Ministry of Agriculture, and was renamed to the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture (MEPA)
[2] According to the second NAP, these regions were some of the most severely affected regions in Georgia in terms of land degradation.

7. The evaluation found that the project's awareness raising activities and knowledge transfer interventions contributed significantly to placing SLM issues high on the political agenda which resulted in the consideration of important legislative initiatives by the decision-makers. Moreover, strong ownership of results, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders suggest that the work will be continued on further improving the enabling environment for SLM.

8. Another important result of the project was the demonstration of the benefits from, and adoption of, SLM practices by farmers in the areas of windbreaks' management, pastures' management and crop rotation. The windbreaks' pilots showed the farmers and local authorities the resource requirements and techniques for planting/rehabilitating and maintaining such installations, as well as the preconditions for achieving the desired survival rates. One of the important conditions for the areas planned for rehabilitation was to have a low risk of occurrence of human-induced fires.

9. Demo-farmers, practicing monoculture cropping prior to their involvement in the crop rotation pilot project, have seen the benefits of diversified farming. These benefits included an increase of their soil productivity, higher yields, reduction of expenses on fertilizers and pesticides and an increase in revenues. As a result, more community members adopted the practice, and the areas under pea cultivation quadrupled over the last four years.

10. The pastures' pilots demonstrated to a certain degree the benefits of using electric fences, rotational grazing, weed control and improved hay management techniques. However, the growing of one of the introduced crops for the improvement of pastures productivity, sainfoin, was abandoned due to extreme climatic conditions experienced during the pilot project. The existence of this or other risks, in the view of the evaluation, requires pilot projects to have longer durations so that the benefits have a chance to be observed and strengthened[3].

11. The evaluation revealed that the project considered, to a certain extent, equity of opportunities for various population groups, and proportionally included the representatives of different gender and ethnic minority groups in the project's activities. However, the degree of responsiveness to gender or minority groups needs in the developed legal or planning documents is unclear due to the lack of relevant analysis. Moreover, when designing communication messages for the wider population, the project was less responsive to the language concerns for a certain proportion of minority groups who did not know the state language.

Conclusions

12. The overall project's assessment is Satisfactory due to the encouraging programmatic achievements under all three of its components.

13. Some challenges were identified in the responsiveness to gender and minority groups' needs, upscale of SLM practices, risk management and financial oversight.

Lessons Learned

14. The L-SLM project's experience revealed some important lessons with regard to the implementation of the pilot projects. First, it was discerned that the correct identification of the duration of pilot projects plays an important role. In this case, a longer duration

[3] The pilot projects' duration was about 15 months.

would have better ensured the demonstration of all the benefits and the full uptake of the suggested technologies by farmers.

15. The second lesson learnt relates to the risk management for obtaining desired results. The evaluation discovered that comprehensive risk assessments and sound mitigation planning exercises are vital components for ensuring the success of pilot projects, their continuity and the efficiency of investments.

Recommendations

16. As UNEP, in partnership with RECC, is starting a new, GEF-funded project in Georgia (ID 10643, Low Carbon Solutions through Nature Based Urban Development for Kutaisi City), there is an opportunity for these recommendations to be addressed in that project.

17. Recommendation 1: Promote human rights-responsive planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting by: a) Building the capacity of the project team and technical staff on human rights-based approaches, including on gender and minority issues' mainstreaming and equity, b) Setting up relevant mechanisms and allocating appropriate resources for identifying, documenting, and responding to the needs of marginalized groups to ensure the attainment of equal benefits by men and women, and by minority and other groups.

18. Recommendation 2: Improve the continuity of results and the upscale potential of pilot projects by: a) Paying particular attention to the duration of the pilot projects, b) Properly identifying and assessing the risks to the uptake and continuity of suggested technologies and planning appropriate mitigation measures, c) Developing exit strategies for each pilot project, d) Involving the Rural Development Agency as one of the implementing partners in future projects in land degradation area, as its territorial units provide the extension services in the municipalities of Georgia.

19. Recommendation 3: It is noted that the executing agency, RECC, implemented this project and provided narrative and financial reports in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in its agreement with UNEP. however, this evaluation recognizes areas in which UNEP's processes and requirements should be reviewed and, potentially revised. it is recommended that UNEP improves its results-based expenditure reporting and financial oversight by: a) requiring results-based reporting on expenditures (this is expected to be supported by a new project management system, IPMR); b) requiring sub-contracted parties to present detailed budgets; c) requiring sub-contracted parties to report on expenditures and transferring back unspent amounts as relevant; d) requiring sub-contractors to follow GEF requirements on vehicles' purchase with GEF funds; e) requiring reporting on actual amounts of co-financing and f) providing templates for the proof of co-financing in the appendices of project cooperation agreements.

I. INTRODUCTION

20. This report presents the results of the Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the medium-size project 'Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) for mitigating land degradation and contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas' (GEF ID 5825), which in this document is referred to as the L-SLM project. The L-SLM project was designed to address land degradation concerns and support progress towards the strategic and operational objectives given in the 10-year strategy of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the second National Action Plan (NAP) of Georgia.

21. Under its land degradation (LD) focal area, and to support the country's efforts to implement UNCCD and UNFCCC, the GEF approved the project in February 2016 with 1,011,215 USD GEF financing which included 87,731 USD GEF Agency Fee[4]. The project was implemented from June 2016 to November 2020 following two extensions with a combined duration of 19 months. The original proposed end date was 30 May 2019.

22. UNEP, as the Implementing Agency, launched the project's implementation in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center for Caucasus (RECC), that was chosen by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resource Protection (MoENRP[5]) of Georgia as its designated NGO for the project's execution.

23. The project contributed to the UNEP's three areas of strategic focus[6]: Ecosystem Management, Environmental Governance and Environment Under Review. More specifically, it contributed to UNEP's 2016-17 and 2018-19 Programmes of Work under the respective Expected Accomplishments for Sub-Programme 3: "Use of the ecosystem approach in countries to maintain ecosystem services and sustainable productivity of terrestrial and aquatic systems is increased" and "The health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks at the national and international levels".

24. UNEP's Ecosystems Division, (formerly the Division of Environmental Policy Implementation - DEPI), was the management division and assigned the project's Task Manager to provide project oversight to ensure its adherence to GEF policies/criteria and the achievement of the expected outcomes in an efficient and effective manner.

25. The project's main objective was to support the integration of good Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) principles and practices into national policy and institutional frameworks to ensure the adoption of economically viable practices by rural communities. To achieve the objective the project set out to a) improve legal, policy and institutional frameworks on L-SLM at national level; b) demonstrate benefits of introducing L-SLM practices in the production system in three municipalities of Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions[7], including: Gardabani, Dedoplistskaro and Akhmeta; and c) capacitate national stakeholders on developing and implementing SLM plans/initiatives.

26. In line with UNEP' Evaluation Policy[8] and Programme Manual[9], the TE of the project was undertaken after the project end in 2021. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the project performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, and determine

[4] In addition, 45,662 USD was spent for project preparation (PPG Grant).
[5] By the end of 2017 this ministry merged with the Ministry of Agriculture, and was renamed to the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture (MEPA)
[6] According to the UNEP's Medium Term Strategy 2014-2017
[7] According to the second NAP, these regions were one of the most severely affected regions in Georgia in terms of land degradation.
[8] https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation-office/policies-and-strategies
[9] https://wecollaborate.unep.org

outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The evaluation assessed the project components that were implemented at different levels (national, subnational, community and farm-level) and in three districts of Georgia; it also looked beyond the pilot communities/districts for the evidence of pilot interventions' replication and upscale. The TE notes that a management-led Mid Term Review was carried out in 2019.

27. The evaluation had two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and all its project partners (see the stakeholders section below). The latter will be the target audience for the evaluation's findings, including UNEP, relevant donor agencies active in the environment protection area, national and local governments, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs), research and academic organizations.

II. EVALUATION METHODS

28. This TE was conducted under the overall responsibility of the UNEP Evaluation Office, and it used a participatory approach, whereby key stakeholders were informed and consulted throughout the evaluation process.

29. The evaluator used both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods for obtaining information on key evaluation criteria presented in this report under the findings section and to provide answers on the following key strategic questions[10]:

    Q1: To what extent, and in which ways, did the project's gender analysis inform gender responsive actions and were benefits experienced by women farmers, women heads of households and/or members of women's organized groups?
    Q2: To what extent were the pilot projects implemented as planned and their efficacy demonstrated and documented to contribute to the achievement of the project's outcomes?
    Q3: To what extent, and in which ways, did the project achieve the ambitions for sustainability set out in the Project Document. Specifically, was an effective exit strategy developed and implemented?
    Q4: (Where relevant) What changes were made to adapt to the effects of COVID-19 and how might any changes affect the project's performance?

30. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy, the UNEP Programme Manual and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations, this TE/MTE has been carried out using a set of 9 commonly applied evaluation criteria which include: (1) Strategic Relevance , (2) Quality of Project Design, (3) Nature of External Context, (4) Effectiveness (incl. availabity of outputs; achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact), (5) Financial Management, (6) Efficiency, (7) Monitoring and Reporting, (8) Sustainability and (9) Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues.

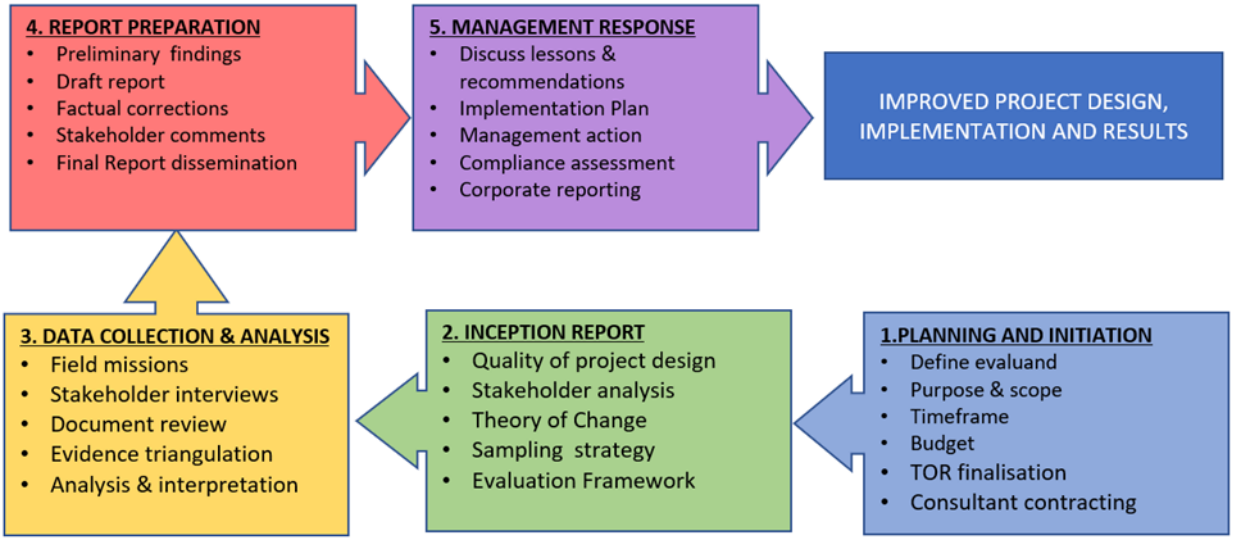
31. Most evaluation criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated from Highly Likely (HL) down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

32. The UNEP Evaluation Office has developed detailed descriptions of the main elements required to be demonstrated at each level (i.e. Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory) for each evaluation criterion. The evaluator has considered all the evidence gathered during the evaluation in relation to this matrix in order to generate evaluation criteria performance ratings.

33. The evaluation consisted of several steps, including the elaboration of the evaluation design, data collection and analysis, field site visits, discussion of preliminary results with key project stakeholders, drafting the terminal evaluation report, receiving feedback and finalizing the report.

[10] The answers to the key strategic questions can be found under findings and conclusions sections.

Figure 1: UNEP Evaluation Process



34. The evaluation Inception Phase, conducted in April-May 2021, laid the foundation for the data collection and analysis stage. It established the framework for the evaluation (see Annex V), detailed data collection tools and elaborated the theory of change against which the project accomplishments were assessed. The quality of the project design was also assessed at this stage.

35. The second data collection and analysis phase took place during October-December 2021 and involved **data triangulation** – the collection and analysis of data using various methods and from different sources to enhance the credibility of the evaluation. The evaluation consulted with project and partner agencies' websites and social media sites; reviewed project documents and records, meetings' minutes and project-produced studies/assessments; training materials; project-elaborated policy and legislative documents; other documents and data produced by the government, academia, partner and other agencies (see Annex II for the list of documents consulted). The sources for the TE included over 90 interviewed individuals representing all types of stakeholders including project staff and consultants, national and local government, donor agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, private sector representatives, and farmers (see Annex III for the list of consulted stakeholders).

36. The **desk research** employed at the inception phase was directed at reviewing the key project documents to design the TE study. At the implementation stage the desk research helped to get answers to the evaluation questions by examining and verifying project data/records and checking the quality of project deliverables.

37. **Field visits** were undertaken in mid-October to three out of six project sites. The sites for the visits were chosen based on two main considerations. First, to represent all possible types of pilot projects including windbreaks, crop rotation and pasture management. The second consideration was to represent all three project municipalities of Akhmeta, Dedoplistskaro and Gardabani.

38. Interviews with six farmers were conducted during the field visits. The evaluator also observed the elements of project activities including: a) the condition of pastures and project installations at the pasture management site in Kasristskali, b) the condition of windbreaks in Gardabani, and c) the stored seed material for crop rotation in Dedoplistskaro. The field visit occurred after the harvest and therefore did not allow for the observation of the cultivation/growth of introduced crops. Furthermore, in compliance

with the Georgian COVID-19 regulations, the evaluator ensured wearing the face masks and keeping safe distances from the respondents.

39. The evaluator conducted **in-depth interviews** with the project staff members, representatives of the government and partner agencies using the online platform. Six project beneficiaries were interviewed face-to-face during the field visit, and 11 more demonstration farmers were interviewed by phone using the semi-structured questionnaire. Furthermore, structured interviews by phone were conducted with 40 training participants using a questionnaire (see more on that in the next paragraph). In total, 94 respondents were reached through face-to-face, phone and online interviews.

40. A **phone-based survey** of local farmers and decision-makers from three project municipalities, who participated in capacity building events, was conducted for eliciting information about their participation in knowledge transfer events, in local planning, and about their level of awareness and adoption of L-SLM practices (see Annex VI for the survey questionnaire).

41. The sampling frame[11] included 126 individuals and the intention was to reach 55 farmers to have a representative survey with 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error using the random sampling with random number generator. However, about a third of the sampled respondents could not be reached by phone[12], and, therefore, the findings from the interviewed 40 respondents cannot be generalized to the whole study population, though, they still present some interesting information and it will be given under the Achievement of Outcome 3 section.

Table 2. Respondents' Sample

Respondent Category	**Entity**	**# People Involved (M/F)**	**# People Contacted (M/F)**	**# Respondent (M/F)**	**% Respondent**
Project team *(those with management responsibilities)*	Implementing agency	3 (2/0)	2 (2/0)	2 (2/0)	66%
	Executing Agency (RECC)	8 (3/5)	4 (2/2)	4 (2/2)	50%
Respondent Category	**# Entities Involved**	**# People Involved (M/F)**	**# People Contacted (M/F)**	**# Respondent (M/F)**	**% Respondent**
Project (implementing/ executing) partners *(receiving funds from the project)*	4	8 (4/4)	5 (3/2)	5 (3/2)	50%
Project (collaborating/ contributing[13]) partners *(not receiving funds from the project)*	14	≈ 40	19 (9/10)	19 (9/10)	≈ 50%
Project experts	-	12 (8/4)	7 (5/2)	7 (5/2)	58%
Demonstration farmers[14]	-	42 (33/9)	17 (14/3)	17 (14/3)	40%

[11] See http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html
[12] The selected training participants were either out of the cell-phone coverage area, not responding or out of the country.
[13] Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc).
[14] Includes the ones for crop rotation pilots, Gardabani windbreak farmer, Kasristskali pasture management team members, and pastoral farmers from Akhmeta municipality.

Respondent Category	Entity	# People Involved (M/F)	# People Contacted (M/F)	# Respondent (M/F)	% Respondent
Teacher training participants	-	181	2	2 (0/2)	1%
Training participants reached through the survey:					
Farmers	-	31 (26/5)	13 (12/2)	12 (11/2)[15]	39%
Government workers at local levels (excl. non-project municipality)	-	95 (64/31)	30 (20/10)	28 (20/8)[16]	29%

42. After the data collection stage, the evaluator discussed the preliminary findings with the key stakeholders through two zoom sessions. One session was held with the UNEP evaluation manager and the task manager. Another session was held with the national project partners which included the project manager, coordinator, and two MEPA representatives, one of which had a sub-contract with the RECC, and another was the chair of the Project Steering Committee and was involved in project design and implementation phases.

43. Throughout the TE process and in the compilation of the evaluation report efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups, including women and ethnic minorities. The participants were reached at the time convenient to them (mostly from 5 to 9 pm). The evaluator also conducted one interview in the Russian language with the representative of ethnic minority group. Furthermore, the data were collected in view of ethical considerations and after obtaining their informed consent.

44. It should be noted that the TE encountered a few **limitations** during the data collection stage. First, one limitation was that the time that passed since the respondents' participation in project activities[17] and this impeded respondents to accurately recall some information/details. Second, a high non-response rate under the phone survey of training participants did not make it possible to obtain a representative sample, making it hard for the results to be generalizable to the whole study population. Plus, a phone survey took longer than was expected, as most of the study population was available for interviews in the evenings, during a 2–3-hour window. Third, because of the season when the field visits were undertaken, the evaluator was not able to observe the cultivation of crops, however, it was possible to see the condition of harvested crops. With regards to crops cultivation, the evaluator relied on project monitoring reports and interviews with farmers.

[15] One contacted farmer refused to participate
[16] Many government workers could not be reached by phone.
[17] For example, many training events and demo-trials were conducted 3-4 years ago.

III. THE PROJECT

A. Context

45. The project under evaluation was designed to address the problem of land degradation in Georgia which was affecting about 35% of agricultural lands[18] in almost all parts of the country, and especially in the regions of Shida, Kvemo Kartli and parts of Kakheti. During the National Action Plan development process for the Third National Communication to UNCCD, three municipalities in the Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions were identified as the most vulnerable to land degradation. These municipalities - Akhmeta and Dedoplistskaro in the Kakheti region and Gardabani in the Kvemo Kartli region were covered by the project interventions.

Figure 2. Map of project areas in Georgia

46. Land degradation in the project areas was affecting the productivity of pastures and lands under cultivation. That in turn was contributing to lower incomes of local farmers who were moving elsewhere to find higher income earning opportunities. (The TE found, for example, that just in one village of Kasristkali, half the farmers of the pastures management team emigrated to other countries or moved to other regions of Georgia within the last two-three years.)

47. The main forms of land degradation that the project worked to address concerned wind erosion, overgrazing and soil exhaustion due to monoculture farming. Wind erosion was largely caused by the loss of windbreaks[19] which at the time of the project's start was mainly attributed to the burning practices of fields.

48. Low awareness of farmers about SLM practices, poor development of the L-SLM concept at municipal and national levels, and inadequate policy and legal framework was identified by the project document (ProDoc, 2015) as one of the major underlying causes of land degradation in Georgia. Hence, the project intended to work to address those underlying causes.

[18] Georgia's 3rd National Report to UNCCD, 2014
[19] The majority of windbreaks were lost soon after the break-up of the Soviet Union, when electricity shortages forced farmers to cut trees to survive harsh winter conditions.

B. Results Framework

49. The project objective was to support the integration of good Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) principles and practices into national policy and institutional framework to ensure adoption of economically viable practices by rural communities. The project also included capacity building and SLM demonstration activities in three municipal sites of Georgia. Delivered as three components, the project has three outcomes and nine associated outputs that are summarized in the table below.

Table 3: Project Outcomes and Outputs[20]

Component	Project Outcomes	Outputs
1. Policy, regulatory and institutional reforms to mainstream L-SLM practices	1. Improved legal, policy and institutional framework on L-SLM at national level	1.1 National legal and policy framework related to Land Management sector reviewed and recommendations for harmonizing existing SLM framework developed. Recommended policy and amendments with due gender consideration prepared and submitted for endorsement to the relevant governmental entities
		1.2 Needs assessment report with due gender consideration and addressing national institutional framework (including coordination) in Georgia to deliver positive SLM adaptive management elaborated and considered by national authorities
		1.3. National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy Paper completed and approved by the government of Georgia
		1.4 Land degradation e-Atlas at scale 1: 200,000 for whole territory of country is prepared and disseminated for governmental institutions and other stakeholders
2. Demonstrating benefits of introducing L-SLM practices in the production system	2. Rural communities in selected municipalities of Georgia adopt economically viable L-SLM practices	2.1 Vulnerability profiles for Gardabani, Dedoplistskaro and Akhmeta municipalities established and local community land use plans that reflect the needs of both women and men developed
		2.2 A package of L-SLM demonstration [activities] (up to 6 ha per each pilot site) with due gender consideration (e.g., in agroforestry/windbreak management, pasture management, soil protection), piloted
3. National capacity development and knowledge management	3. Capable national stakeholders develop and manage SLM issues	3.1 Training conducted on L-SLM practices targeted at least 100 national/sub-national female and male decision makers and local/community representatives with attempt to achieve gender parity.
		3.2 Training on impact indicators of good SLM practices in agricultural, environmental and socio-economic sectors conducted to enable stakeholders to develop indicators and establish a system to monitor and evaluate them
		3.3 Knowledge of L-SLM practices developed and disseminated including to women organized groups.

[20] According to the approved CEO Endorsement Project Document, Appendix 1.

C. Stakeholders

50. The project's key stakeholders, besides the main implementing (UNEP) and executing partners (MEPA, RECC), included a broad spectrum of change agents that had important roles to play in attaining the project results. This section discusses the roles, influence and contributions of these stakeholders.

51. One of the important stakeholders for the project was the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources (MoEPNR), which had an enormous role, interest and an influence over the project's results. It is important to note that by the end of 2017 the MEPNR was merged with the Ministry of Agriculture to form the **Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA)**. This entity was actively involved in all stages of the project's life-cycle, starting from the project design, facilitating policy and legislative changes, overseeing project implementation and ending with the provision of some follow-up activities such as further development of the legislative framework for SLM. Most of these activities were guided by the MEPA's land resources protection unit, the head of which is also a UNCCD focal point and was a chair of the Project's Steering Committee (PSC).

52. MEPA's legal entity of public law (LEPL) *Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC)* was a project subcontractor, that implemented the awareness raising and capacity building activities. It should be noted that prior to the project implementation the EIEC did not have experience in the area of land degradation and the project was a good opportunity for them to expand their capacities in the field and to own the project results.

53. MEPA's *Agricultural Information and Consultation Centers (ICCs)*, having the role of extension services' provider in 54 municipalities of Georgia and were one of the main stakeholders at local levels. These centers were under the Ministry of Agriculture prior the start of the project. However, since 2018 they have become subordinated to the regional relations department of the Rural Development Agency (RDA[21]) of the MEPA. Representatives of ICCs were involved at all stages of the project implementation in all three project municipalities - mostly in the development of pilot projects and in facilitating implementation of project activities. They also participated in capacity building events.

54. One more important MEPA entity, *LEPL Agricultural Research Center*, was closely involved in project implementation and provided its' contributions in the selection of pilot sites/activities and is also supposed to provide some project follow-up.

55. Two other ministries involved in project activities through consultations and the provision of support included the **Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development** (MESD) and the **Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Developmen**t (MRDI) that work on the issues related to SLM policy development, state lands management and the support to municipal growth. Representatives of these ministries served on the PSC and contributed to many meetings and discussions held by the project. In addition, MESD worked with the project on the inventarization of windbreaks in Dedoplistskaro municipality.

56. **Local municipal governments** are responsible for the management of windbreaks (since November 2021) and land resources under municipal ownership. Municipalities are also responsible for the development of spatial plans and for supporting the agriculture/rural development. Therefore, they had high interest in project results and showed strong support during its implementation. Municipality administrations were one of the key actors in supporting the delivery of project results, including the development of local land

[21] It has a status of non-commercial legal entity and has a right to receive donor funds. One of the main functions of ICCs is the provision of capacity building support to farmers by introducing them to modern technologies/innovations.

use plans. These municipalities were also represented in the project steering committee and were actively involved in the consultations during the project design, in the development of legislative acts and the delivery and oversight of pilot projects.

57. **Research organizations and academia** (including the Agrarian University, Institute of Geography, etc.) undertake research activities and are the owners of important data on land degradation. They were consulted during the project preparation and their role in the project was to provide assistance in the identification of land-related priorities and solutions, and information for the development of maps.

58. **Local farmers** were involved in the project planning through consultations, and both men and women were involved in consultation meetings and later in the training sessions and project implementation. The role of demonstrator famers in the project was to support the implementation of pilot initiatives, adopt economically viable L-SLM approaches and help with spreading the knowledge among their community members.

59. **Local community-based organizations** (CBOs), especially those active in the environmental area, usually supported the implementation of projects in their respective geographic areas and played a role in the community mobilization and knowledge transfer. This was the case regarding the Kasristskali Development Center in the Akhmeta municipality. Two other CBOs were project subcontractors and participated in the planning of the pilot project and later in their implementation and supervision activities. These and other CBOs were also actively involved in the consultations and discussions during the project design phase.

60. Lastly, one group of important stakeholders were the **donor-supported projects** (see the table below) that were implemented in Georgia in the related climate change and biodiversity areas. These projects actively collaborated with L-SLM project, co-financed significant proportions of the project's outputs and/or replicated some of its results.

Table 4. Information about donor-financed projects collaborating with L-LSM project *(projects are listed according to the start of their implementation)*

Project	Donor/Impl. Organization	Years	Deliverables of importance for L-SLM project (unless otherwise indicated)
Sustainable management of pastures in Georgia (EU's ClimaEast Initiative)	EC/UNDP	2013-2016	The project facilitated the development of pasture management plan, electric fencing, rotational grazing and other techniques. The experience of this project was used by the L-SLM project.
Harmonization of Information Management[22] for Improved Knowledge & Monitoring of the Global Environment in Georgia.	GEF/UNDP	2015-2019	Delivered institutional needs assessment with regards to Rio conventions (incl. UNCCD) monitoring and reporting. Facilitated the elaboration of relevant indicators, capacity building on their collection and analysis.
Enhancing Resilience of Agriculture Sector in Georgia (ERASIG)[23]	GEF/IFAD	2015-2020	Conducted regulatory Impact Assessments for two draft laws on Windbreaks and on Soil Protection.

[22] Later will be referred to as Harmonization of Information Management Project.
[23] It's 3rd component aimed at improving the enabling environment for climate-risk reduction in agriculture

Project	Donor/Impl. Organization	Years	Deliverables of importance for L-SLM project (unless otherwise indicated)
Global Forest Watch (GFW)	GEF/UNEP	2015-2019	Provided a platform/portal for hosting the land degradation database developed by the L-SLM project.
Forest Service International Programs	US Forest Service	2015-2022	Capacity building of national actors on pasture/ grasslands management and policies development.
Farmer to Farmer Programme in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia	USAID/ ACDI-VOCA	2015-2019	Conducted a study in Signagi municipality which enabled L-SLM project to assess the feasibility of implementing the proposed pilot in the area.
Integrated Biodiversity Management in the South Caucasus (IBiS) Environmental Programme for the South Caucasus	GIZ[24]	2015-2019 2018-2021	Delivered windbreak management policy, technical guidelines on windbreaks rehabilitation, documents related to pastures management, spatial planning document for Akhmeta municipality, and many others.
Support to Traditional Agriculture in Tusheti	Czech Dev. Agency / CCRG	2015-2018	Complemented a pilot project in Akhmeta municipality on improving the hay meadows management by purchasing a hay pressing equipment; cooperated on crops rotation.
Irrigation and Land Market Development	WB/NAPR	2017-2023	Produced land systematic registration data for Arkhiloskalo community. The database was used by the L-SLM project for developing LUP for the community.
Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Target Setting Programme (TSP)	UNCCD secretariat/ MEPA	2018	LDN TSP[25] provided access to the estimates from global data sources allowing the mapping of LDN baseline and quantification/localization of areas affected by land degradation. Trends and drivers of land degradation were also identified.
Generating Economic and Environmental Benefits from SLM for Vulnerable Rural Communities of Georgia	GEF/UNEP	2018-2023	The project replicated L-SLM project's two pilots – one on crop rotation and another on windbreaks (RECC is a partner in the project).
Establishment of Vashlovani Biosphere Reserve in Kakheti Region	EU/RECC	2019-2021	L-SLM project provided data, land use plan to the project for Arkhiloskalo community.
Achieving LDN Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands	GEF/FAO	2020-2023	The project works on the development of national legal framework on sustainable pastureland management; Used the experience of L-SLM project on pastures management.

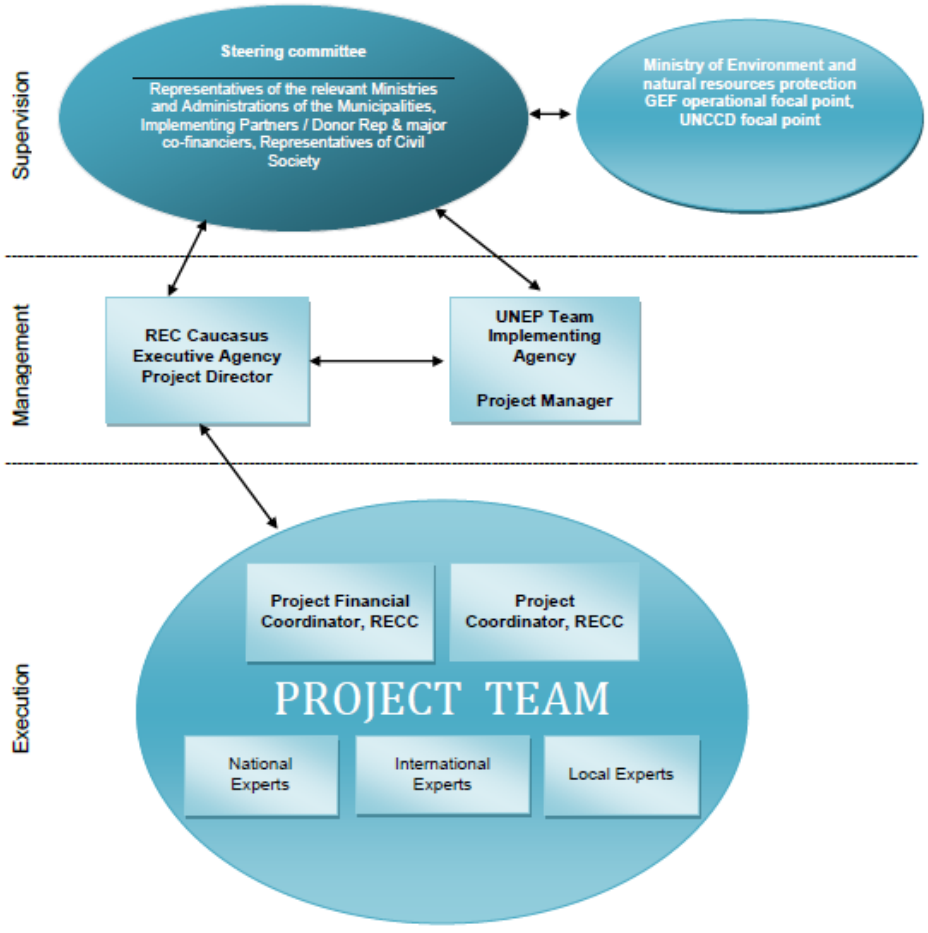
[24] German Society for International Cooperation
[25] National Target Setting to Achieve Land Degradation Neutrality in Georgia. Final Report. April 2018. https://knowledge.unccd.int/sites/default/files/ldn_targets/2018-11/Georgia%20LDN%20TSP%20Country%20Report.pdf

D. Project Implementation Structure and Partners

61. UNEP, as the GEF implementing agency, provided project oversight to ensure the adherence to GEF policies and the achievement of expected outcomes in an efficient and effective manner. Project supervision was entrusted to the UNEP Ecosystems Division Director who discharged this responsibility to the assigned Task Manager (TM). The TM exercised oversight over the project through his country visits, participation in Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings and the review of progress and financial reports, in collaboration with the UNEP's Fund Management Officer (FMO).

62. The Executing Agency was the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection which was later restructured into the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture. The key employees of the Ministry, responsible for the project supervision, were the UNCCD focal point and GEF operational focal point. The ministry entrusted the execution of the project to an NGO - the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (RECC) that had a track record of working in the area of land degradation. The Executing Agency sub-contracted international and national organizations and consultants to support the project implementation. It also partnered with local, national and donor agencies through their projects - listed in Table 4 above.

Figure 3. Project organigram with key stakeholders (as presented in ProDoc)



E. Changes in Design during Implementation

63. The project had two no-cost extensions due to the delays encountered with the delivery of five outputs. The first extension was requested for 12 months in April 2019 and the second extension asked for seven additional months in November 2020. As a result the project

made revisions to its workplan and budget that were agreed to by the Project Steering Committee and UNEP.

64. Another change to the project design concerned the abandonment of Output 1.3 which was formally documented and justified in the meeting minutes of the PSC, conducted on 14th February 2020.

F. Project Financing

65. The total GEF approved budget for the project's implementation was 1,011,215 USD which included 87,731 USD UNEP agency fee. The remaining 923,484 USD GEF financing was sought to be supplemented by 3.65 million USD cash and in-kind co-financing from municipal governments (in-kind contribution) and from the projects implemented in Georgia, financed by various donor agencies. At the project's inception, there were a small number of donor-financed projects, while during the project's implementation their number and contributions increased.

66. According to the project's financial reports, the total expenditures were spent exactly as it was budgeted (see the tables below): more than half of the budget was allocated to the pilot projects' implementation, while the remainder was spent on improving the enabling environment and capacity building activities.

Table 5. Budget at design and expenditure by components (in USD)

Component	**Estimated cost at design**		**Actual cost / expenditure**	
	GEF Grant	**Co-financing**	**GEF Grant**	**Co-financing**
Component 1: enabling environment	211,737	800,000	211,737	800,000
Component 2: pilots	515,448	2,000,000	515,448	2,000,000
Component 3: capacity development	112,345	852,968	112,345	852,968
Total (not incl. PMC[26] of 83,953)	**839,531**	**3,652,968**	**839,531**	**3,652,968**

Table 6. Budget at design and expenditure by budget categories (in USD)

Budget categories	**Planned**	**Actual exp.**	**% Difference**	**% from total exp.**
Personnel (RECC)	195,800	286,106	46%	31%
Experts (int. and local)	122,400	94,562	-23%	10%
Pilots	300,000	216,338	-28%	23.4%
Knowledge management	171,784	166,848	-3%	18.1%
Travel, transportation, car	74,100	82,229	11%	8.9%
Supplies and other costs	13,831	31,832	130%	3,4%
Evaluations and audits	45,542	45,542	0	4.9%
Total	**923,457**	**923,457**	**0**	**100%**

[26] Project Management Cost

Table 7. Co-financing contributions by organizations and by type of contributions

Organization	**Cash**	**In-kind**	**Total**
RECC	394,568	1,023,400	**1,417,968**
GIZ	-	495,000	**495,000**
UNDP	670,000	-	**670,000**
UNEP	-	50,000	**50,000**
GIS-Lab	-	50,000	**50,000**
Green Alternative	-	220,000	**220,000**
3 municipalities	-	750,000	**750,000**
Total	**1,064,568**	**2,588,400**	**3,652,968**

IV. THEORY OF CHANGE AT EVALUATION

67. The evaluation consultant reconstructed the Theory of Change (TOC) at evaluation primarily based on the project's logical framework, which later was revised to better reflect and formulate the project's intended results (see Table 8). The evaluator also considered the actual (as verified by the current evaluation) and anticipated longer-term results of the project and their inter-relationships / flow of causation.

Table 8. Logical framework as given in ProDoc and as in TOC at evaluation

Objective/Results as in ProDoc	Obj./Results as in TOC at evaluation	Explanation for changes
Project Objective: To support integration of good L-SLM principles and practices into national policy and institutional framework to ensure adoption of economically viable practices by rural communities	**Project Objective:** To reduce land degradation and accompanying rural poverty in Georgia by supporting the integration of L-SLM principles and practices into national policy, legal and institutional framework and by ensuring the adoption of economically viable *L-SLM* practices	Reformulated project objective reflects the main problem it is addressing land degradation, and the accompanying problem of rural poverty. It also specifies the type of promoted economically viable practices: L-SLM, that was missing in the original statement.
Impact: Missing	Reduced extent/severity of land degradation, contributing to poverty reduction among rural populations in Georgia	Missing impact statement was added.
Intermediate outcomes (*changes beyond the project outcomes that are required to contribute to impacts*): Missing	1. Economically viable L-SLM practices are replicated/upscaled nationwide 2. National and local level stakeholders sustainably manage land resources 3. Anthropogenic pressures on land resources reduced 4. Productive capacity of land resources maintained / improved 5. Cost-savings (in the long run at least) due to employing LD preventive measures 6. Reduced numbers of people adversely affected by land degradation 7. Increased resilience of local populations to the effects of climate change	Missing intermediate outcome statements were added.
Component 1: Policy, regulatory and institutional reforms to mainstream L-SLM practices		
Outcome 1. Improved legal, policy and institutional framework on SLM at national level	**Outcome 1**. Improved legal, policy and institutional framework on SLM at national level **Outcome 1.1.** Institutional set-up/mechanisms at national and local gov. levels facilitate SLM **Outcome 1.2.** Developed legal mechanisms/framework support application of laws related to SLM	Specific sub-outcomes were added, showing clearly the expected system-level changes.

Objective/Results as in ProDoc	Obj./Results as in TOC at evaluation	Explanation for changes
	Outcome 1.3. L-SLM is mainstreamed into policy and legal framework by national and local government stakeholders.	
Output 1.1. National legal & policy framework related to land management sector reviewed, recommendations for harmonizing existing SLM framework developed, amendments prepared and submitted for endorsement	**Output 1.1.** Relevant government entities receive, for endorsement, recommendations and amendments for harmonizing existing land management framework and *mainstreaming* L-SLM principles and practices into relevant policy and legislative documents	Activity-type statement was reformulated into an output-type one. Mainstreaming of L-SLM principles/practices into relevant documents was also added which, according to the ProDoc, the project was intending to do.
Output 1.2. Needs assessment report with due gender consideration and addressing national institutional framework to deliver positive SLM adaptive management elaborated and considered by national authorities	**Output 1.2.** National authorities (MEPA, MRDI, MESD) receive gender-informed recommendations for improving institutional arrangements for SLM	Activity-type statement was reformulated into an output-type one. Conducting needs assessment was removed, as it was one of the activities undertaken for elaborating recommendations on institutional arrangements.
Output 1.3. National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy Paper completed and approved by the government of Georgia	**Output 1.3.** National authorities receive for consideration National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy (NILMS) paper	The statement was reformulated into an output-type one. (Completing the work on NILMS is an activity while approval/adoption an outcome.)
Output 1.4. LD web-portal with maps at scale 1:200 000 for whole territory of country is prepared and disseminated to gov-al and other stakeholders, including women groups	**Output 1.4.** Governmental and other stakeholders, have access to LD E-Atlas with maps at scale 1:200 000 *(as one of the knowledge products, this output should have been under Component 3 which is about knowledge management)*	Activity-type statement was reformulated into an output-type statement. Women groups were removed from the statement as from web-analytics it is impossible to measure the sex-ratio of the portal visitors.
Component 2: Demonstrating benefits of introducing L-SLM practices in the production system		
Outcome 2. Rural communities in selected municipalities of Georgia adopt economically viable and environmentally sustainable L-SLM practices	**Outcome 2.** Rural communities in selected municipalities of Georgia adopt economically viable L-SLM practices. **Outcome 2.1.** Farmers/members of rural communities see the social, economic, and environmental benefits of applying SLM principles and practices, demonstrated by the project.	The new outcome here reflects the purpose of having farm/ community demo projects: to demonstrate social, economic and environmental benefits. Adoption of practices depends on the outcomes of demonstration projects.
Output 2.1. Vulnerability profiles for 3 municipalities established and local community Land Use Plans (LUPs) that reflect the needs of both women and men developed	**Output 2.1.** Local stakeholders have LUPs available for two communities, reflecting the needs of both women and men and based on developed vulnerability profiles for 3 municipalities.	Activity type statement was reformulated into an output-type one. Development of vulnerability profiles was an activity that served various needs – for LUPs, pilot projects development, etc. The most important under this

Objective/Results as in ProDoc	Obj./Results as in TOC at evaluation	Explanation for changes
		output was the LUPs development.
Output 2.2. A package of L-SLM demonstration with due gender consideration (e.g. in agro-forestry, pasturelands management and soil protection), piloted	**Output 2.2.** Local communities/farmers obtain practical understanding of L-SLM tools/approaches	Activity type statement was reformulated into an output-type one.
Component 3: National capacity development for SLM and knowledge Management		
Outcome 3. Capable national stakeholders to develop and manage SLM issues	**Outcome 3.** National and local level stakeholders[27] apply their knowledge and capacities to develop and manage SLM issues **Outcome 3.1.** Capacitated stakeholders develop National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy and action plans. **Outcome 3.2.** Local stakeholders develop gender-sensitive local community land use plans, incorporating L-SLM principles **Outcome 3.3.** Capacitated selected demo-farmers / community members apply SLM principles in their farms, communities	Capacity development component was about building capacities at all levels. So, the statement included local stakeholders as well.
Output 3.1. Training conducted on LSLM practices targeting at least 100 national/ subnational female and male decision makers and local/ community representatives with attempt to achieve gender parity	**Output 3.1.** At least 100 national/subnational female and male decision makers and local/community representatives, including those of women organized groups, have increased knowledge on L-SLM approaches and practices.	Activity type statement was reformulated into an output-type one: emphasis is placed on the stakeholders' knowledge acquisition, instead of conducted trainings.
Output 3.2. Training on impact indicators of good SLM practi-ces in agricultural, environ-menttal and socio-economic sectors conducted to enable stakeholders to develop indi-cators and establish a system to monitor and evaluate them	**Output 3.2.** National stakeholders receive knowledge for developing SLM indicators and establishing a system for their monitoring	Activity type statement was reformulated into an output-type one. The system was developed for SLM indicators, not just for SLM impact indicators.
Output 3.3. Knowledge of L-SLM practices developed and disseminated including to women organized groups	**Output 3.3.** Stakeholders, including women organized groups, have access to knowledge products/services on L-SLM	Activity type statement was reformulated into an output-type one.

[27] National and local level government, civil society representatives, farmers, community members. Local stakeholders developed LUPs and PMP, farmers appled SLM principles on their lands.

68. As depicted in the logical framework, the main objective of the project was the reduction of the extent and severity of land degradation, with the accompanying reduction in rural poverty. The solution for addressing the problem was to tackle three main root causes: a) underdeveloped policy and regulatory framework for SLM that hindered for example the protection and maintenance of windbreaks, reduction of conflicts over the use of grasslands, etc., b) low awareness among farmers/community members about the L-SLM practices and its benefits, and c) low awareness among decision-makers about the L-SLM approaches and the importance of their integration.

69. The project envisioned to address the above root causes through its three components: a) the work on the L-SLM enabling environment, b) showcasing the benefits of L-SLM planning (LUPs) and applying SLM practices in the production systems, and c) by capacity building of all relevant stakeholders: farmers, CSOs, local and national government personnel.

70. The revised TOC diagram given in Figure 4 shows the inter-linkages among these components and causal pathways. Here the path from outputs to impacts shows the changes required at individual farmers', communities', government's levels. Thus, *one pathway* is from becoming aware of SLM issues and principles, to using those principles on farm, community, and ecosystems' levels; *another pathway* starts from using knowledge products, land use plans and developed capacities for elaborating and managing SLM issues at community, municipal, national and at ecosystems' levels; and *a third pathway* starts from the inputs for policy/regulations development to improving the enabling environment for SLM so that is supports the first two pathways on the one hand, and on the other hand directly supports the changes at ecosystems' level (e.g. through establishing biosphere reserves).

71. It can be seen from the TOC diagram also that the above pathways are interlinked in many different ways as is the example of a third pathway, supporting and enabling the other pathways to happen. Together with the causal pathways, it is important to underline the preconditions, so called assumptions and drivers, that if present, are expected to contribute to the realization of the intended results. The list of drivers and assumptions accompanying the causal pathways are given in the box on the next page.

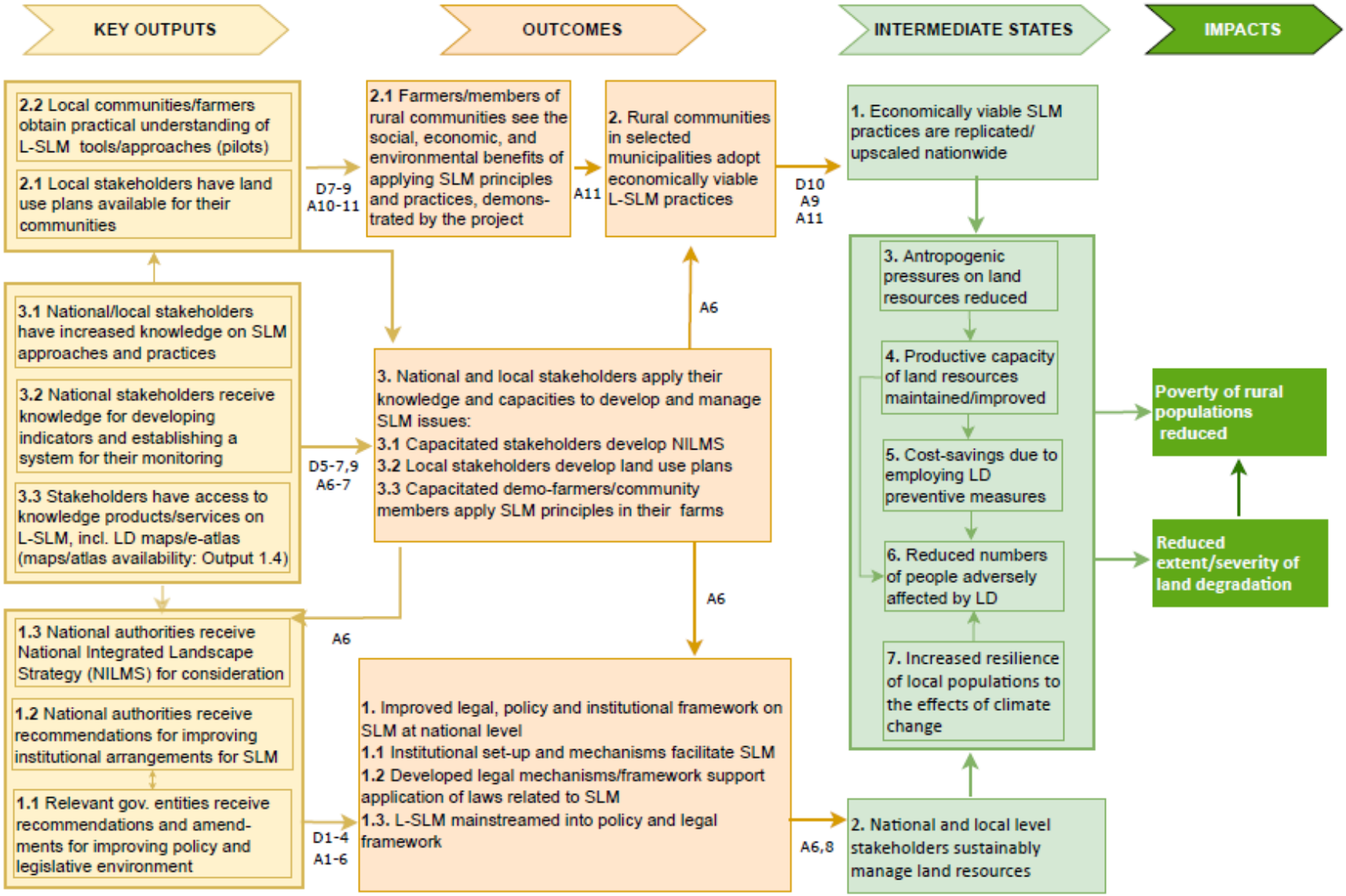
Box 1. Drivers and assumptions for the TOC[28]

Drivers	Assumptions
1. Suggestions/recommendations produced by the project are sound and evidence-based, discussed and validated via stakeholders' workshops	1. Political will exists to improve the enabling environment on SLM
2. The legal and policy framework provides incentives for the adoption of L-SLM	2. All relevant stakeholders, especially line ministries, are actively involved
3. Decision-makers are sensitized on SLM issues	3. High level participation of stakeholders ensures ownership of results and commitment for follow-up
4. Active involvement of all stakeholders, especially line ministries and parliamentarian committees	4. Government institutions collaborate on SLM mainstreaming into sectoral policies and plans
5. Knowledge sharing mechanisms and products are tailored to target audiences	5. Decision-makers adopt the proposed recommendations for policy, legislative and institutional changes
6. Knowledge portal, e-atlas is maintained, remains accessible and facilitates continued	6. Stakeholders are willing/ready to collaborate and participate in planning and implementation processes

[28] Note: drivers and assumptions are largely based on the information given in the project's logical framework, risks analysis and in other parts of the project design document..

Drivers	Assumptions
access of various stakeholders to up-to-date information on SLM issues/practices (beyond the project end) 7. Right people are selected for capacity building interventions 8. Developed pilots are tailored to local circumstances and are upscale-promising 9. Demo-farmers and community members follow the suggested technologies 10. The barriers for pilots upscale are identified and measures for their reduction/removal are either directly implemented or proposed to relevant stakeholders	7. Local authorities actively participate in the elaboration of LUPs 8. Adequate resources are identified/allocated for the enforcement of regulations and implementation of plans (incl. LUPs) 9. National and local media is interested to cover L-SLM issues 10. Weather conditions permit to demonstrate the benefits of introduced SLM practices 11. Demo-farmers are willing to invest in pilot projects and transfer the received knowledge/experience to others

Figure 4. Project's Theory of Change at Inception *(Note: the numbers for the Drivers(D) and Assumptions(A) come from Box 1 above)*



V. EVALUATION FINDINGS

A. Strategic Relevance

72. This section gives the results of the assessment of the project's relevance in relation to UNEP's/GEF's/country policies and strategies at the time of project approval. It also includes an assessment of the complementarity of the project at design or during inception[29], with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups.

Alignment to UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) and Programme of Work (POW)

73. The evaluation found that the L-SLM project was well aligned with the UNEP MTS 2014-2017 and UNEP POW 2014-2015 under which it was approved. More specifically, the project fit under three MTS development subprogrammes: Subprogramme 3 – Ecosystem Management, Subprogramme 4 - Environmental Governance and Subprogramme 7 - Environment Under Review.

74. The aim of the UNEP's Ecosystem Management Subprogramme was the maintenance of biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services in a sustainable and equitable manner. One of the relevant Expected Accomplishments for L-SLM project concerned the integration of ecosystem services and their benefits into the development planning and accounting. The project contributed to this output through creating the institutional, legal and policy conditions necessary for integrating ecosystem services into the development planning at the national and municipal levels, as well as through developing land use plans for communities.

75. The objective of the Environmental Governance Subprogramme was to strengthen synergies and coherence in environmental governance to achieve environmental goals in the context of sustainable development. Two relevant Expected Accomplishments were related to: a) the enhanced capacity of countries to develop and enforce laws and strengthen institutions to achieve internationally agreed environmental objectives and goals, and to comply with related obligations; b) mainstreaming environmental sustainability in national and regional development policies and plans. In these regards, the project planned relevant measures for achieving internationally agreed environmental objectives and goals, especially with regards to UNCCD monitoring and facilitating local level land use planning with environmental considerations.

76. Finally, the project's activities contributed to the objective of the seventh subprogramme of MTS – Environment Under Review, which aimed at empowering stakeholders in decision-making and policymaking through the provision of scientific information and knowledge. The project's third component was about generating, analyzing and communicating environmental information and knowledge to all interested stakeholders, including the decision-makers and and increasing their capacities on SLM issues.

Alignment to Donor Strategic Priorities

77. L-SLM project was approved under the GEF's land degradation (LD) focal area as the project's expected outcomes and interventions were found to be conforming with two LD focal area objectives and related outcomes. The first LD-1 focal area objective was with regards to agriculture and rangeland systems which was aiming at maintaining and improving the flow of agro-ecosystem services sustaining the livelihoods of local

[29] A project's inception or mobilization period is understood as the time between project approval and first disbursement. Complementarity during project implementation is considered under Efficiency section.

communities. The project's outcomes and outputs were designed to directly contribute to the achievement of this objective through the development of policy, legal and regulatory frameworks, and introduction of innovative SLM practices at landscape level.

78. GEF-5 LD-3 integrated landscapes objective was about reducing pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape, and the related outputs concerned the development and implementation of integrated landscape management plans, developing and testing of INRM tools and methodologies, and dissemination of information on SLM technology and good practices. Exactly these outputs were planned by the project as well.

Relevance to National Priorities

79. Georgia is a party to many relevant conventions, including UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNCBD and the designed L-SLM project responded to a number of national programmes, policies and strategies for meeting the requirements of those conventions. The Second UNCCD National Action Program (NAP) of Georgia (2014-2022) in fact served as a guidance document for the project implementation as the project's objectives and interventions were addressing the key problems and causes identified by the Second NAP, e.g. the unfavourable landscape change due to the climate change and land degradation, lack of information and low level of awareness of decision makers, unsustainable utilization of natural resources, gaps in the legislation regarding SLM, etc.

80. The Third National Communication (TNC)[30] under UNFCCC identified Kakheti region of the project as one of the uniquely vulnerable regions to the effects of climate change and recommended a few remedial measures such as the restoration-construction of windbreaks for protecting agricultural lands from droughts and winds, introduction of soil enriching perennial crops to farmers, development of land management plans – the measures that the project considered and incorporated in ProDoc.

81. The Second National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP-2) for 2014-2020 recognized soil erosion and overgrazing as factors causing the degradation of agricultural ecosystems and rural grasslands and identified the lack of regulations and mechanisms for SLM promotion to be one of the important root causes, the area that the L-SLM project intended to address.

82. Land degradation was recognized as one of the most important problems in agriculture management sector in Georgia by the Agricultural Development Strategy (2012-2022). It was largely attributed to unsustainable land management, improper use of pesticides and fertilizers, natural disasters intensified by climate change, etc. Hence, the document recommended the adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices.

83. Furthermore, GEF funding provided the possibility for elaborating a road map for harmonization of land management with the European Union land directives and its standards under the Association agreement between Georgia and the EU.

84. In view of the above, in can be concluded that the project was in a full alignment with national priorities as it targeted those geographic areas and planned to address those problems and root causes that were identified as problematic by the national policy documents, agreements and plans. Furthermore, the project planned to contribute to the implementation of the plans under relevant conventions and to meeting the country's commitments.

[30] By the time of the ProDoc preparation the draft TNC report was available.

Complementarity with Existing Interventions

85. The evaluation revealed that the project took account of all relevant ongoing and planned initiatives addressing land degradation, and related ecosystem management and environmental governance issues in the country and in project areas. The ProDoc listed about 10 relevant initiatives[31] that were close to completion or were still ongoing by the project start and identified possible synergies for avoiding duplication of efforts.

86. The project design also established complementarity with three thematic areas of the United Nations system in Georgia. These areas as given in the UN's Partnership for Sustainable Development (UNPSD 2016-2020) document are:

    a) *democratic governance*, one of the targets of which envisaged better use of data and addressing the development needs of the most vulnerable groups during the development of national and sub-national development policies and plans. The L-SLM project design document also envisaged generating data/information/maps for informing the development of land use/ pastures management plans (PMPs), and other planning initiatives.

    b) *livelihoods* thematic area that envisaged the development of policies for supporting applications of innovations and rural development. Here as well, the project planned to make a positive contribution to the elaboration of policies on windbreaks, pastures management and soil protection in support of innovative and sustainable agricultural practices.

    c) *human security and community resilience* thematic area that targeted the enhancement of institutional and legislative systems for environment protection, sustainable management of natural resources and disaster risk reduction.

87. Moreover, during the project preparation and implementation phases, the L-SLM project complemented and built upon the findings of GEF-financed two enabling activities (EAs) under UNFCCC and UNCCD. The first EA, implemented by UNDP, supported the preparation of the TNC under UNFCC (2012-2015), and collected/updated information on national circumstances, greenhouse gas inventories, climate change mitigation, etc. The second EA – Alignment of National Action Programme (NAP) and Reporting Review Process (2013-2014) - was implemented by UNEP for supporting the implementation of UNCCD strategy in the country.

Rating for UNEP Alignment:	Highly Satisfactory
Rating for Donor Alignment:	Highly Satisfactory
Rating for Relevance to National Priorities:	Highly Satisfactory
Rating for Complementarity:	Highly Satisfactory
Overall Rating for Strategic Relevance:	**Highly Satisfactory**

B. Quality of Project Design

88. The evaluation found that the project design was strong in terms of clearly showing the project's alignment and relevance to UNEP/GEF/Donor and global/national priorities. The design was also strong in clarifying challenges in operating context, identifying governance and supervision arrangements, knowledge transfer mechanisms, proposing sound budgets and efficiency measures. The project document, however, was insufficiently elaborated with regards to addressing sustainability concerns and showing the full spectrum of intended results and causality. Considering the ratings and the

[31] Many of those initiatives are listed in Table 4 together with their contributions.

weighting factors for each of the assessed design elements (see Table 9 below), the quality of project design is rated as Satisfactory.

Table 9. Summary table for project design quality assessment[32]

	Section	Brief Comments	Rating[33]	Weight	Total
A	Operating Context	The project identified most of the challenging operational factors.	5	4	0.16
B	Project Preparation	The ProDoc provided adequate situation analyses, though the stakeholder analyses did not cover all the key players.	5	12	0.48
C	Strategic Relevance	The ProDoc was clear in terms of its alignment and relevance to donor and national priorities.	6	8	0.4
D	Intended Results and Causality	The design document captured key shorter-term results but fell short of describing a full spectrum of results and causal pathways.	3	16	0.64
E	Logical Framework and Monitoring	The logframe captured important short-term key results and developed SMART[34] indicators and targets for many of them. The workplan was not well planned in terms of duration and sequence of activities.	4	8	0.32
F	Governance & Super-vision Arrangements	The project's governance and supervision model was comprehensive and clear	5	4	0.2
G	Partnerships	External partners were identified, and roles and responsibilities were defined for most of them.	5	8	0.32
H	Learning, Communication and Outreach	The ProDoc identified a clear knowledge management approach though the analysis was not given of existing communication networks.	5	4	0.2
I	Financial Planning / Budgeting	The budget was adequate at design stage, considering the level of co-financing	5	4	0.2
J	Efficiency	The ProDoc identified pre-existing institutions, and strategies for increasing efficiency, including opportunities for synergies. Timeframe was tight for the set targets, which together with unforeseen circumstances resulted in no-cost project extensions.	5	8	0.4
K	Risk identification and Social Safeguards	The ProDoc identified most risks and a potentially negative env-al, economic and social impacts	5	8	0.32
L	Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	The ProDoc addressed some elements of sustainability but exit and upscaling strategies were envisaged to be developed later.	4	12	0.48
	Total Weighted				

[32] Some improvements in the project design were made during the project inception period leading to an improvement in this rating between the evaluation inception report and this final evaluation report.
[33] Rating scores: 6=highly satisfactory, 5=satisfactory, 4=moderately satisfactory, 3=moderately unsatisfactory, 2=unsatisfactory, 1=highly unsatisfactory, 0=not applicable
[34] Smart refers to results that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented.

Rating for Project Design: Satisfactory

C. Nature of the External Context

89. The project during its implementation did not experience any conflicts or political upheavals, however its operations were affected by the political context. Local municipal elections and the merging of two line ministries into one Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture in 2017 influenced the plans for the implementation of pilot projects and delayed the discussions and review of the proposed policy and legislative framework.

90. Moreover, the drought of 2018 in Kakheti region negatively affected the yields of project-introduced crops, along with other crops cultivated in project areas. Nevertheless, some crops still proved themselves useful in adverse climatic conditions (e.g. cultivating pees as a predecessor crop).

91. Finally, as most of the project's activities were completed by the time of Covid-19 pandemics start, it had a minor influence on the project: the mobility restraints halted some of the project's fieldwork for monitoring purposes, conduct of PSC and annual meetings, and the project team could not attend the discussion of the land use plan for one community. Despite the challenges, the majority of the planned outputs were delivered fully.

Rating for Nature of the external context: Favourable

D. Effectiveness

92. This section gives an integrated analysis related to the achievement of results. The analysis itself was guided by the causal pathways represented by the reconstructed TOC at Evaluation. Moreover, the section explains change processes and the roles of key actors, as well as drivers and assumptions under the three sub-headings: availability of outputs, achievement of project outcomes and likelihood of impact.

93. For each output-level result, this report presents the relevant output statement with associated activities, deliverables and benchmarks[35] in order to show what was planned by the project. The report then gives the assessment of the results obtained by the end of the project or as of February 2022 – the time when the evaluation report was prepared. In the end the section on effectiveness covers the likelihood of impact.

COMPONENT 1. Policy, Regulatory, and Institutional Reforms to Mainstream L-SLM Practices

Availability of Output 1.1 (Fully Available)

Relevant government entities receive recommendations for harmonizing existing land management frameworks and mainstreaming L-SLM principles and practices into relevant policy and legislative documents		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
1.1. 1. Analysis of national policy and legal framework related to land management sector and development of	Report on policy and legal framework analysis including recommendations for further improvement is elaborated,	Analysis report and recommendations for harmonizing existing LM framework is available by Yr1

[35] *Benchmarks* are as given in Annex I of the ProDoc, while the output *statements* are as presented in the reconstructed TOC at Evaluation column in Table 8 of this report.

recommendations for harmonizing existing land management framework	discussed and agreed by stakeholders. Copies of developed legal amendments	
1.1.2 Presentation and discussion of the findings and recommendations to the stakeholders national workshop	Minutes of the national workshop and agreed recommendations	National Workshop is held by the end of Yr1
1.1.3. Drafting amendments to legislation, discussions with stakeholders and submitting the agreed draft amendments to authorities	Draft amendments to harmonize LM legal framework and to mainstream L-SLM principles	Amendments to legislation are drafted by Yr2; Amendments agreed and officially submitted by Q4 Yr2

94. Output 1.1, along with Output 1.2 on institutional recommendations, was designed to contribute to an improved enabling environment for L-SLM through the provision of certain inputs to policy and decision-makers. The specifics of those inputs were not identified in the ProDoc, rather the expected work on drafting the amendments to the legislation was supposed to be based on the analysis of a policy and legal framework and on the discussion of its findings.

95. The below sections will review the deliverables under this output that were produced by the project directly with GEF funding.

Report on legal framework analysis related to land management sector

96. The report was made available by the end of the first year which was in accordance with the revised workplan, adopted after the project's inception meeting. The report reviewed and provided good assessment of over 30 policy and legal documents related to SLM and identified significant gaps. The report, however, did not provide recommendations to the project or government agencies on the ways forward. The findings of the analysis without recommendations[36], were discussed at a stakeholder workshop held in June 2017 which to a certain extent determined the future work on improving the enabling environment by the project stakeholders. The workshop participants agreed with the main findings of the policy/legal analysis, as well as with the need of developing an overall national land policy (see the next paragraph).

Land State Policy: Recommendations for Land State Policy Development

97. This recommendations document stressed the importance of developing the state policy on land to fill the main gap[37] in Georgia's policy framework and provided some guiding principles and directions for its development. Even though such a deliverable was not foreseen by the project, and the project did not act upon it (as it was outside the project's scope), this blueprint document itself would be valuable for policy and decision makers, should they decide to go ahead with the land state policy elaboration.2

Draft Law on Windbreaks and amendments to related legislation

98. Windbreaks had been recognized as a priority issue for soil protection and prior to the project start there was a draft bill prepared by the Parliament's agrarian committee. The stakeholders at the inception workshop saw the role of the project in continuing the work on the development of that legislative piece. Furthermore, the decision was made at the inception workshop to produce the relevant policy document first, with the analysis of the situation[38]. The analysis and the work on the windbreaks policy development was done by

[36] 1.1.2 activity planned the elaboration and discussion of recommendations as well.
[37] The lack of a unified land management policy was noted also in the State of the Environment report 2014-2017 produced in 2018.
[38] The analysis covered the existing windbreak infrastructure, threats and barriers in applying sustainable management of windbreaks, institution arrangements, legal gaps analysis, recommendations.

GIZ as part of the project's co-financing, and it was based on the Terms of Reference prepared by the project.

99. During the period from December 2016 to October 2017 the project organized and facilitated six meetings on windbreaks, including a high-level meeting with the participation of deputy ministers. The discussions covered the vision on windbreaks' rehabilitation and maintenance and later the policy framework document "Windbreaks Management Framework: Main Challenges" (the draft version of the document became available by the end of May'17). More meetings were held in the municipalities as well.

100. Following up on the windbreaks policy document, the project reviewed the draft Law on Windbreaks, incorporated the issues identified by the windbreaks policy document, and in August 2018 developed a revised version of the Draft Law on Windbreaks. The Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Draft Law, that was prepared under the GEF/IFAD's ERASIG project[39], became available in February 2019.

101. The L-SLM project also submitted necessary amendments to seven existing legislative acts. These acts included Local Self-Government Code, Tax Code, Criminal Code, Administrative Offences Code, Law on Public Registry, Law on Soil Protection and the Law on Soil Conservation and Improvement of Soil Fertility. Overall, the whole package of the legislative proposals and Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on windbreaks was ready for submission to the Parliament by March 2019. (The package was submitted to the Parliament by its Agrarian Committee in April 2021 and later the draft law was adopted in November 2021, almost five years after the start of the work on this legislative piece by the project.)

Revised Governmental Resolution No424 and Methodology on Sustainable Lawn Production

102. At the request of MEPA and following the decision made at the inception meeting, the project hired consultants to revise the Governmental Resolution N 424 of 31 December 2013 on Technical Regulation for Removing, Storage and Use of Soil. The revision was necessitated by the shortcomings of the existing legislative act as its articles were deemed to be inappropriately organized and insufficiently explained. Moreover, the revised version includes the attachment on the Methodology on Sustainable Lawn Production based on best international SLM practices that was required by lawn producers. The revised resolution was submitted to MEPA by 2018, however, it's submission to the Parliament awaits the submission and approval of the new Draft Law on Soil Protection. This legal document was developed by MEPA, though due to the Parliament's busy schedule, it was not submitted by the time of the evaluation. (The Draft Law on Soil Protection combined and amended two earlier existing and deficient laws - the Law on Soil Protection and the Law on Soil Conservation and Fertility Improvement. The new draft law, however, did not fully address the deficiencies identified in the legal framework analysis report produced under the project.)

Box 2. List of deliverables produced directly by the project under Output 1.1

1. Report on the analysis of legal and policy framework (recommendations missing)
2. Blueprint for land policy development
3. Updated Draft Law on Windbreaks and relevant amendments to the existing seven legislative acts due to the proposed law.
4. Revised governmental resolution N424 of 31 December 2013 on technical regulation for removing, storage and use of soil, with a new attachment on the lawn production alternatives.

[39] This project was implemented by IFAD under its Agriculture Modernization, Market Access and Resilience Project (AMMAR). ERASIG's third component aimed at improving the enabling environment for climate-risk reduction in agriculture.

Deliverables available through co-financing

103. Together with executing the L-SLM project, the RECC was involved in the implementation of other projects in the SLM area which made it easier for this organization to facilitate the parallel processes and to ensure that they complement each other. The organization leveraged resources from the projects that it was involved with. Such projects included a) GEF/IFAD's Enhancing Resilience of Agriculture Sector in Georgia (ERASIG) project under which RECC delivered two regulatory impact assessments for the Draft Law on Windbreaks and the Draft Law on Soil Protection; b) the background study on pastures under the GIZ-supported project "Facilitation of Establishment of the State Programme for Sustainable Pasture Management in Georgia"[40]. This study served as a starting point for the work on pastures legislation development, which currently continues under the GEF/FAO funded project where RECC is also a partner.

Box 3. List of deliverables produced by other projects / stakeholders through co-financing

1. Draft Law on Soil Protection – produced by MEPA under UNDP's Harmonization of Information Management project
2. RIA for the Draft Law on Soil Protection – under GEF/IFAD's ERASIG project
3. RIA on windbreaks – under GEF/IFAD's ERASIG project.
4. Windbreak Management Policy (2018) – developed with the support of GIZ's Sustainable management of Biodiversity in Georgia project and within the frame of L-SLM project
5. The Economics of Land Degradation in Georgia: Pasture Management. Legal and institutional analysis. 29.11.2018. GIZ, ELD
6. Pastures Management in Georgia: Situation Analysis and Main Challenges, Recommendations for Development of Pastures Sustainable Management Programme / Document of Desk-based Research (Background Study) for Facilitation of Establishment of the State Program for Sustainable Pasture Management in Georgia. 2019. The study was prepared under IBiS umbrella through the GIZ-supported project on "Create Enabling Conditions for Establishment of State Program on Sustainable Pasture Management" and was implemented by RECC.
7. Policy Brief: Pasture Management in Georgia. GIZ, ELD, Altus Impact. 2017

Availability of Output 1.2 (Fully Available)

National authorities receive recommendations for improving institutional arrangements for SLM		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
1.2.1 Review institutional capacities at national/local levels regarding L-SLM issues and their mainstreaming and development of the capacity building plan at institutional and individual levels	Institutional capacity needs assessment report	Institutional capacity needs assessment report is drafted by the end of Yr1
1.2.2 Presentation and discussion of findings of the institutional needs assessment and capacity building plan with stakeholders on the national workshop	Minutes of the workshop and agreed recommendations	Final Institutional capacity needs assessment report is available by the Y3

104. Under this output the national authorities were expected to receive for their consideration the institutional framework analysis report with regards to SLM and the related capacity building plan. In turn, the findings were supposed to be discussed at the stakeholders' meeting for their validation, gathering the feedback, and obtaining consent.

105. In order to avoid the duplication of efforts and at MoENRP's request, the part of this output was timely delivered by UNDP under its GEF-financed Harmonization of Information Management project. The report analysed the capacities and gaps mostly with regards to UNCCD monitoring and reporting whereas the part on SLM management was not covered. However, due to the institutional changes (merging of two line ministries

[40] This project was part of a wider German Government supported IBiS programme run by GIZ.

responsible for the environment and agriculture) the L-SLM project updated the report by the end of 2018 and successfully covered the SLM management part as well, including to a certain extent the capacity building plan for SLM. Moreover, the UNDP-facilitated needs assessment and capacity building plan were discussed at a national workshop, with the participation of all the relevant stakeholders. No separate meeting was organized by the project for the discussion of the updated needs assessment report, rather the findings were discussed at various meetings held on different topics.

Box 4. List of main deliverables produced under Output 1.2.
Deliverables produced directly by the project
1. Revised Needs Assessment Report (2018)
Deliverables produced under other projects (considered as co-financing)
1. Needs Assessment Report (2016) – under the GEF/UNDP Harmonization of Information Management project
2. Capacity Development Plan (2016) - under the GEF/UNDP Harmonization of Information Management project

Availability of Output 1.3 (Cancelled, approved by PSC)

National authorities receive for consideration National Integrated Landscape Management Strategy (NILMS) paper		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
1.3.1 Identify priorities/main directions for the elaboration of NILMS, including rapid stocktaking, review of relevant documents and identifying of stakeholders	Paper on priorities and main directions of NILMS including stocktaking of relevant plans, policies and reports	Paper on priorities and main directions of NILMS is drafted by Q2 Yr1
1.3.2-1.3.4 Stakeholder consultations, developing draft NILMS, presentation and discussion at the workshop	Draft NILMS; Minutes of stakeholder meetings and of the national workshop	by Yr1
1.3.5 Submission of final draft of NILMS to in-line Ministries and state agencies	NILMS is shared for review, improvement and validation	Revised NILMS is validated and available by Yr 3

106. The work on NILMS was supposed to start in the first year of the project's implementation. However, it was postponed until the third year as the project management and stakeholders decided to develop focal area policies first (windbreaks, soil protection, etc.), with their subsequent integration into NILMS. The evaluator considers that there was no need to wait for the development of legislative proposals as NILMS could have informed better their preparation. Eventually, the elaboration of NILMS was abandoned due to the lack of funds.

107. It should be noted that the ProDoc allotted insufficient time (one year) for the NILMS elaboration. The preparation of such strategies usually involve highly participatory processes, including the forming of working groups and conducting workshops for relevant stakeholders. The ProDoc did not elaborate on the steps/processes involved and did not allocate sufficient resources.

108. The evaluator finds that the project could have planned a smaller-scale undertaking, such as the development of the integrated landscape management strategy for one pilot municipality or for rural landscapes affected by land degradation. This would have built the experience of stakeholders for the later preparation of the national document. At the very least the project could have set the stage for NILMS development by reviewing the international experience with the development of such strategies (the processes, outputs and outcomes).

Availability of Output 1.4 (Fully Available)

Governmental and other stakeholders have access to land degradation e-atlas with maps at scale 1:200 000		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
1.4.1 Developing of the concept of LD internet portal through consultations. Stocktaking and review of existing data and identifying gaps	Paper on concept of the land degradation internet portal	Concept of LD internet portal is developed by Q2 Yr1
1.4.2 Gathering and analysing data for the preparation of LD internet portal	LD Geo-Database in GIS format (Content: satellite, climate data, precipitation, slope, etc.)	LD database for East Georgia is developed by Q4 Yr1; for West Georgia by Yr2
1. 4.3. Spatial Modelling, Accuracy Assessment in the field and Map Development	LD maps in GIS format at scale 1:200000	For East Georgia by Yr2, for West Georgia by Yr2.
1.4.4 Introducing stakeholders LD, sensitive analysis, recommendations at the workshop	Minutes of the workshop, recommendations from participants	Stakeholder validation workshop held by Yr2.
1.4.5. Web Portal Developing	LD web-portal is available through internet for wide public	LD e-Atlas is available by Yr3.

109. The evaluation revealed that the project did a good job in delivering this output in a coordinated way. Instead of duplicating the efforts which entailed conducting a parallel review of existing data and developing the concept for the portal, the project utilized the findings/outputs of the GEF/UNDP's Harmonization of Information Management project. This project stockpiled data and identified indicators and databases for inclusion into the environmental information management system, which was suitable for the land degradation portal as well.

110. Together with active participation in the above processes, the L-SLM project provided technical support in the development of Soil Information System database in GIS format, based on the identified indicators and information sources. As a result, the earlier existing databases[41] were consolidated into a single unified database and graphic and alphanumeric datasets were also combined. In addition, a new interface for data viewing and entering was created which made the viewing, retrieval, update and analysis of data easier. This was done by a contracted firm which later trained relevant stakeholders on its use.

111. Furthermore, the project succeeded in leveraging the resources with GEF/UNEP's Global Forest Watch (GFW) project and in incorporating its land degradation database under the GFW's web portal[42]. Under the UNEP/GFW project the project stakeholders received further training on the use of Forest and Land Use Atlas of Georgia.

112. Despite the successes, however, the challenge remains in having access to accurate, high resolution and timely environmental information. The soil database contains data mostly collected during 2003-2007 (which is still valuable for scientific or other purposes), or satellite data that has a low resolution (the latter supplied to Georgia by the UNCCD secretariat under its Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)target setting program. Validation of some data was done only at a small scale.

Box 5. List of main deliverables produced under Output 1.4

Deliverables produced directly by the project

- Soil information system, maps

Deliverables produced under other projects through co-financing

- Concept for web portal – under GEF/UNDP Harmonization of Information Management Project
- Stockpiling and review of existing data on LD – under GEF/UNDP Harmonization of Information Management Project
- Web-portal under GEF/UNEP GFW project

[41] One of the identified datasets that contained vast amount of nationwide data was collected/created during 2003-2007 under the KfW-financed project on soil information system. Since then, that data could not be accessed due to the absence of the specific software in which it was entered. The project made this information accessible by converting data to GIS format.

[42] https://atlas.mepa.gov.ge/maps/LandDegradationmap?l=en

Achievement of Outcome 1 (Fully Achieved)

Improved legal, policy and institutional framework on SLM at national level			
Outcome indicators	*Baseline*	*Targets/Milestones*	*Assumptions/Risks*
Amended policy and legislation framework (e.g. in the agroforestry, soil protection and pasturelands management sectors, as proposed by the review of the framework)	Policy and legal framework not explicitly supportive of L-SLM mainstreaming. Weak and unsystematic communication between various state agencies and other stakeholders on L-SLM, no clear delineation of roles and responsibilities	Policy and legal framework is revised and amendments agreed with all stakeholders by end of YR3	The state agencies and other stakeholders are open to the introduction of L-SLM principles and ready to strengthen cooperation and information/data exchange

113. A review of the deliverables produced under this project and the interviews with various stakeholders indicate that the project contributed greatly to the improvement of SLM policy and regulatory framework using several approaches. These included the provision of forums for discussions and consultations, mobilizing support, including through co-financing, and the provision of a direct technical assistance for the regulatory documents' development. The evidence shows that the SLM enabling environment has improved in a number of ways that will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

114. One of the most important changes, to which the project provided a direct and substantial contribution, concerns the adoption of the Law on Windbreaks which was adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in November 2021. By adopting this legal act, the government has set the stage for proper planning, design, establishment, rehabilitation, maintenance and protection of windbreaks as the new law clarified the roles and responsibilities of all the relevant actors and introduced important incentives and punitive measures. Amendments have also been made to seven other legal acts to reflect the requirements of the newly adopted law which in turn further ensures the effective functioning of the Law on Windbreaks and its enforcement. Moreover, in March 2022 the government has also approved a regulation on the rules of windbreaks' rehabilitation, installation, care, protection and monitoring (Government Decree No146).

115. Since the conduct of the legislative review by the project, several regulatory documents have been revised and new ones have been adopted by the government of Georgia. Thus, the new Environmental Assessment Code[43] was adopted in June 2017 that addressed most of the concerns expressed in the legislative review[44]. The new Code now requires the assessment of impacts for both public and private projects (earlier it was required only for private activities), and the assessment of impacts will be done both for land and not just for soil. The new code also includes a wider list of activities requiring environmental impact assessment. Similarly, the concerns raised with regards to land zoning and construction permits were also considered by the newly adopted Spatial Planning, Architecture and Construction Code of Georgia that was adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in July 2018. Both of these newly introduced legislative documents allow for better integration of land issues into decision-making processes.

[43] The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a new tool for Georgian legislation, which allows documents on spatial planning, as well as political documents to be evaluated at an initial planning stage. According to the State of the Environment Report for 2014-2017, this Code is in line with the EU Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as well as the Espoo Convention. (The Espoo Convention sets out the obligations of Parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early stage of planning.)

[44] The evaluator reviewed the new legislative piece against the concerns raised by the legislation review paper to determine to what extent those concerns were addressed. However, it should be noted that the draft new Environmental Assessment Code was developed before the project policy consultant conducted the legislative review, and the project consultant's remarks were based on the review of the old law which had many deficiencies.

116. At MEPA's request, the project facilitated a few meetings for the development of two laws related to ownership and management of agricultural lands, both of which were adopted by the Parliament in June 2019. These laws are a) the Organic Law of Georgia on Agricultural land Ownership and b) the Law on Functional Purpose Designation for Lands and Sustainable Management of Agricultural Lands. The latter law regulates issues related to the designated purpose of land and the principles of sustainable management of agricultural land to ensure its rational use and protection. The law also provided legal grounds for establishing the National Agency for Sustainable Land Management and Land Use Monitoring under MEPA that can be considered as a positive step towards improving institutional arrangements for SLM.

117. According to the interviewed MEPA representative for this evaluation, the discussions of institutional needs and of the existing challenges in SLM area at various forums, including the ones conducted under the L-SLM project, have contributed to placing the issue of strengthening the land management institutional capacities high on the agenda.

118. One more issue that was placed high on the agenda is the issue of pasturelands management, to which the current and co-financing projects provided important contributions by conducting studies (see Items 5-7 in Box 3), discussing their findings, facilitating spatial planning processes and developing pastures management guiding documents.

119. Another positive development concerns the improved availability of an information base for decision-making processes. Despite the challenges in getting high resolution and timely land degradation data, the land degradation e-atlas, the development of which was facilitated by the project, provides a good basis for identifying trends and making appropriate decisions. Currently, the main users of the database, along with various academic institutions, are the agricultural research centre under MEPA and the newly established agency on SLM and land monitoring[45]. The experience with using the product showed that the database can be useful in initial phases of spatial planning and landscapes rehabilitation.

120. In addition to the above mentioned promising developments, there are a few more waiting to be materialized. According to MEPA representatives, the new Draft Law on Soil Protection is soon to be submitted to the Parliament for adoption. So too is the new government Resolution No 424 on Technical Regulation for Removing, Storage and Use of Soil and the accompanying methodology of sustainable lawn production that was developed with L-SLM project's inputs. Apparently, the delay in the submission of those documents was caused by the busy schedule of the Parliament and the priority given to the legislative acts specified by the Association Agreement with the EU.

121. One of the main remaining challenges is the coordination and mainstreaming of SLM issues into sectoral policy documents. Donor-financed projects help to coordinate issues by facilitating the establishment of working groups, consultative processes and organizing high-level meetings. However, the systematic governmental mechanisms of coordination and mainstreaming are underdeveloped for effectively managing the land issues dispersed under many governmental institutions. The development of a land policy blueprint document together with NILMS could further help with addressing the issue should they be placed high on the political agenda.

[45] Google analytics for the pageviews of land degradation page of the e-atlas shows that there were 787 unique visitors with 1,543 page views during the period of its launch to October 21, 2021. However, the average time on page was low, 32 seconds.

COMPONENT 2. Demonstrating Benefits of Introducing L-SLM Practices

Availability of Output 2.1 (Fully Available)

Local stakeholders have LUPs available for their communities, reflecting the needs of both women and men and based on vulnerability profiles developed for three municipalities.		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
2.1.1. Organizing workshop for selecting pilot areas for SLM activities	Minutes of the workshop	Workshop held and municipalities selected by Yr1
2.1.2. Development of indicators for vulnerability assessment and validation at the experts' workshop	Indicators for vulnerability assessment; Minutes of the workshop	Workshop held and indicators developed by Yr1
2.1.3. Gathering and analysing data and development of vulnerability profiles for 3 selected municipalities	Report on a vulnerability profile for three selected municipalities	Vulnerability profiles are elaborated by Yr2
2.1.4. Introducing vulnerability profiles at the workshop with participation of local authorities	Minutes of the workshop Vulnerability profiles are approved	Workshop held and vulnerability profiles adopted by Yr2
2.1.5. Drafting of community LUPs	Drafts of LUPs for two municipalities	Drafts of LUPs developed by Yr3
2.1.6 Introducing LUPs to decision makers and public	Feedback received from relevant local authorities on acceptance of LUPs	Workshops held and local LUPs adopted by Yr3

122. The project completed all six deliverables under this output. The main deliverables – LUPs for two communities were delayed[46] which was one of the reasons necessitating project extensions. The main cause for the delay was the late availability of the required data that the project was expecting to get from other partners, and therefore, the delay was justifiable. For Arkhiloskalo community (Dedoplistskaro municipality) the project was waiting for the results of the systematic registration of lands, conducted by the government. As to the Shenako community of Akhmeta municipality, the project was dependent on the availability of Akhmeta municipality's spatial planning documents[47], developed under the GIZ's Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) initiative.

123. As a review of project reports and the interviews with project stakeholders show, the project applied a sound approach to LUPs' development as it involved participatory and capacity building processes: the project held meetings on the introduction of the objectives of such plans, conducted group discussions with local stakeholders and presented draft land use plans. For Arkhiloskalo municipality the project consultant(s) and the management itself was not able to present the developed draft plan to local stakeholders due to the COVID restrictions. The presentation instead was made by the municipality itself, which gathered positive feedback and agreement with the findings and recommendations. (It should be noted that because communities do not have a legal basis, the community LUPs' formal approval was not required.)

124. The LUPs themselves were developed by an international consultant in cooperation with the national consultant for Arkhiloskalo community whose capacity was built on LUPs preparation. The latter conducted a field study in Arkhiloskalo for gathering data on land use practices and other relevant indicators and developed land zoning and other maps following the methodology and guidance offered by the international consultant. This data/ information was provided to the international consultant who analysed the findings, held group discussions with stakeholder representatives and developed LUPs based on their insights and feedback.

[46] LUP for Shenako community was developed in December 2018, and LUP for Arkhiloskalo was available in March 2020.
[47] GIZ-supported initiative generated GIS and remote sensing data for Akhmeta municipality and provided a spatial planning documentation for the whole municipality of Akhmeta.

125. An overview of LUPs revealed that these documents offer good recommendations based on sound data/evidence and inputs from local stakeholders. The documents though, both LUPs and vulnerability profiles of communities, lack gender analyses for assuring that the plans reflect the needs of both men and women as indicated in the output statement[48]. One may assume, however, that because women were almost equally represented at planning and discussion meetings, which is recorded and documented with photographic material, the resulting documents reflect the needs of both women and men. The recommendations proposed in the LUPs in fact have a potential to promote women's economic empowerment.

126. The plans were discussed at the meetings and were also uploaded on the Internet, but they were not printed. Because the LUPs contain technical methodological parts, the evaluator believes that the project could have produced, printed and disseminated a short, simple summary (e.g. a two-pager) among the members of relevant communities. This could have ensured further the spread of information about the plans and commitment for their implementation.

Availability of Output 2.2 (Fully Available)

Local communities/farmers obtain practical understanding of L-SLM tools/approaches		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
2.2.1 Elaboration of pilot micro-projects for selected municipalities	Package of pilot micro-projects	Pilot projects are developed by Yr2
2.2.2 Stakeholders validation of pilot projects, and of selection criteria and procedures for partners selection	Minutes of the validation workshop. MoU between RECC and administration of the selected municipalities	Validation workshop held and MoUs signed by Yr2
2.2.3 Selection of the partners for pilots' implementation	Signed agreements with CBO/local farmers on pilots' implementation	Agreements signed by Yr2
2.2.4 Implementation of pilot projects in selected municipalities	Monitoring/evaluation reports on pilot Projects' implementation	Implementation of pilots launched by Yr2
2.2.5 Independent technical and financial audit of the pilot micro-projects with a view to developing scaling-up recommendations (Revised by the evaluator: *M&E activities for the pilots*, including assessments of cost-effectiveness)	Independent monitoring that analyse effectiveness of project, including pilot project's social and environment impacts (Revised by the evaluator: *M&E reports* for the pilots)	2 technical and financial audits completed by Yr3

127. The project implemented all the activities related to developing, implementing and evaluating pilot projects. The project measured the results of the pilots in the middle of their implementation and then upon their completion. Furthermore, the planning for pilot projects and their approval by the stakeholders was done in a timely manner except for two pilot projects in Gardabani municipality. Here the originally planned pilot projects were changed due to the local elections and change in the priorities of the newly elected government officials.

128. The pilots' planning document was elaborated by an international consultant in a participatory manner based on the review of existing data/information[49], field visits and consultations with local and national stakeholders. The document included ten proposals for the implementation of pilot projects in three municipalities. The eleventh proposal on the rehabilitation of salinized soils was developed by the national consultant for an additional, unplanned municipality of Signagi. This pilot was added at the Ministry of Agriculture's request, after getting the approval from stakeholders at the project's

[48] Vulnerability profiles gave only sex-disaggregated statistics for the numbers of municipality inhabitants and employed persons.
[49] Prior conducted studies identified the areas which needed to be improved and restored.

inception workshop. This proposal was based on the findings of the study that was conducted in cooperation with the USAID-funded farmers to farmers support programme.

129. The developed proposals were evidence-based, well developed, specifying the objectives, pilot sites, planned activities, stakeholder ownership/ responsibilities, resource requirements, time schedule, risks, outcomes and indicators. The proposals were reviewed during the planning meetings by the expert team and MoENRP (with the participation of the deputy minister) and seven pilot projects were approved for the implementation. In the end, only three of them were implemented, one abandoned, and three more were replaced with an alternative activity. The substitution of three pilot projects with the new ones prolonged the planning phase for the pilot projects' development and the start of their implementation. The table below shows the approved and implemented pilot activities by the project.

Table 10. List of approved and implemented pilot projects

Municipality	Proposals for approved pilots	Implementation status	Reasons for changes
Akhmeta	Improvement of pastures in Shenako community through pastures rotation and weed control	**Implemented**: 6.3ha land fenced for pasture rotation; weeds and shrubs removed; Additionally crop rotation and new plants introduced.	
	Improvement of degraded part of sheep migration corridor in Alaverdi community (the intent was to fence degraded areas, control weeds and establish a paddock system)	**Substituted** with the improvement of pasturelands in Kasristskali community through the elaboration of pasture management plan, fencing the degraded pastureland, and weed control.	Problems with the ownership of lands and the need for pastures management regu-lations development beforehand.
Dedoplistskaro	Rehabilitation of windbreaks to reduce wind erosion on state-owned lands	**Implemented** ≈14 km, 5.5 ha of windbreaks rehabilitated. 4ha were burnt in 2019 due to field burning practices.	
	Increasing fertility of soils via the introduction of crop rotation system with peas and buckwheat	**Implemented:** Crop rotation with peas was introduced on 100 ha of lands in seven communities, among 21 grain grower demo-farmers.	
Gardabani	Rehabilitation of eroded pasture lands in Lemshveniera through irrigation, mulching, fencing, etc.	**Substituted** with five year/ five crop rotation system on four demo-plots, with a total area of 50ha and 6 demo-farmers.	Newly elected local government representatives re-considered the priorities for interventions.
	Establishment of an extensive fruit orchard in Gamarjveba for restoring degraded pasturelands and reducing wind erosion	**Substituted** with windbreaks establishment on a private property in Sartichala community at about 7ha plot, 6.7km long	
Signagi	Rehabilitation of salinized soils in Tibaani community	**Not implemented** (Signagi was not included in ProDoc, it was added later at MEPA's request)	Insufficient funds (project paid for the proposal preparation)

Pilots selection criteria

130. The evaluation found that the selection of pilot project sites and activities followed a structured process that was well documented and was based on the sound criteria

developed by the international consultant. The criteria were further elaborated with regards to specific pilot projects and validated by the national and local stakeholders.

131. One of the obvious natural criteria for the pilots' selection was for the site to be a land degradation hotspot and have problems/challenges managing land sustainably. The social criteria included the commitment of local stakeholders and the potential for the intervention to have ecological, social and economic benefits. Finally, the general criteria included reaching the maximum number of community members, the possibility of upscaling and desirably for a municipality to have a history and positive past experiences in managing lands. (One of the initial criteria was to give the priority to municipal/state owned lands, but it was reconsidered as in some cases there were problems with the ownership status of such lands and/or unclear responsibilities for their maintenance.)

132. In general, the primary and obvious inclusion criterion for the pilot projects is the factor of *innovativeness* which was not always evident from the proposals' document for the pilots (i.e. exactly what element of the pilot was unique). A majority of SLM practices introduced by the project can be considered unique to pilot areas, though for a few of them it can be only partially true. The pilots on sustainable pastures management in Kasristskali community for example had a predecessor project implemented by UNDP during 2013-2016[50]. This project was implemented in the adjacent areas for Vashlovani protected areas and had PMP development, electric-fencing, pastures rotation, weed control, hay management and other components. However, the approach of the L-SLM project in developing the PMP was a bit different as it was intended to be implemented by farmers and not by the protected areas management; the plan and indicators for measurement were simpler and more adapted to the stakeholders' capacities.

133. Another such pilot is the one on windbreaks rehabilitation in the Dedoplistskaro municipality, where GIZ had similar projects in the area prior the project start. The L-SLM project used the tree species that were tested by GIZ in the area. The new elements introduced by the L-SLM project included the use of no ploughing or harrowing on replanted areas, a special scheme for planting, and the use of water accumulating granules. A related project in the Gardabani municipality on the installation of windbreaks on a private farm can be considered novel as windbreaks have not been installed in that municipality since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

134. The uniqueness of the pilot project on crops rotation in the Dedoplistskaro municipality was the introduction of a legume crop, pea, as a predecessor crop for grains[51]. However, prior the project start, GIZ had a similar pilot in the area but with using another predecessor legume crop, soya. The interviewed respondents, however, were not aware of the soya cultivation in the municipality and the GIZ's experience was not reviewed/analyzed by the L-SLM project (i.e. with regards to possible barriers to the upscale of such pilots).

135. The crop rotation pilot in the Gardabani municipality introduced a unique[52] multi-year crop rotation scheme to serve the needs for both growing crops and raising livestock. Pastures pilots in the communities of Akhmeta municipality also introduced innovative techniques for weed control via rotational grazing, cutting the grass at certain periods of

[50] This is UNDP's Project implemented under the EU's Clima East Initiative: 'Sustainable management of pastures in Georgia to demonstrate climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits and dividends for local communities.
[51] Dedoplistskaro municipality is one of the main grain producer areas of Georgia and the grains monoculture planting had been practiced in the area for decades. This was leading to soil depletion and to the use of high amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
[52] Multi-year crop rotation schemes were in place during Soviet times, however, because of centralized decision-making on agricultural issues and centralized management of farms local residents did not have much knowledge and had not been practicing since with a few exceptions.

time, seeding sainfoin and improving hay management using proper machinery[53]. (Electric fencing for rehabilitating degraded pastures and thistle cutting for weed management was introduced by the GIZ project earlier.)

Left hand: winter wheat. Right hand: peas three weeks after sowing in Dedoplistskaro municipality, April 2018 (Source: WOCAT publication[54])

Demo-farmers selection

136. The selection criteria of land plots[55] for crop rotation included a) their size: from 1 to 5 ha, which was later expanded to 11 ha[56], b) fertility levels: poor, average, c) grain monocropping for many years, d) willingness of farmers to try and follow new techniques suggested by the project, and e) readiness to provide necessary co-financing/investments in terms of agricultural works and some inputs. The sizes of the selected demo-plots on pea introduction in the Dedoplistskaro municipality ranged from 2 ha to 11 ha and were in seven different communities. The sizes of fields for five-year crop rotation pilots ranged from 4.5 ha to 24 ha (the biggest plot was managed by three farmers), thus representing different categories of farms in terms of their size and soil fertility.

137. The evaluation determined that all the developed criteria and procedures were sound. However, a few more criteria could have been possibly added, such as the *willingness for knowledge transfer*[57] and for that reason, the requirement for demo-farmers to have *adequate communication skills*. The interviews with demo-farmers did reveal that all the respondents transferred the received knowledge (on crops raising, agrotechniques) to other community members even without a special clause in their contracts.

138. Moreover, it would have been useful to have an *inclusion/exclusion criteria* according to the demo-farmer type as it was unclear if the government worker, who was also practising agriculture, was allowed to be a demo-farmer, or if gender or ethnic minorities issues were

[53] Hay pressing machine was purchased for the community in collaboration with the Czech-funded project. The machine is used for the neighbouring Omalo community as well.
[54] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/technologies/view/technologies_4275/
[55] Report on Implementation of Pilot project on crop rotation in Dedoplistskaro, Annex 15 to 2018 Half-Yearly Progress Report.
[56] The reason for the change was the late delivery of seed materials due to which a few farmers refused to plant, therefore, the decision was made to give more seed material to other registered farmers who had enough plots of land for sowing.
[57] A relevant clause on knowledge transfer obligation could have been added to the contract with demo-farmers, especially regarding crop rotation pilots.

to be given any special consideration. The ICCs' representatives who were extensively involved in the demo-farmers recruitment process (spreading information about the opportunity[58], helping farmers with completing applications, short-listing, interviewing and selection), noted that the attention was paid to selecting those farmers who had a good reputation and influence in the communities.

139. Azeri minorities who live mostly in the Gardabani municipality[59] (out of three project municipalities), constituted half of the selected crop rotation demo-farmers: three out of six demo-farmers were ethnic Azeri. Eight out of twelve pasture management team members in Kasristskali community were the representatives of Azeri and Armenian ethnic minorities.

140. Furthermore, women constituted almost a third of crop rotation demo-farmers (8[60] out of 27). This proportion can be considered high, as women in the project communities are mainly engaged in unpaid subsistence work in their homestead. Grain fields on the other hand are often situated away from homesteads and are taken care mostly by men, unless it is a household with no work-capable men[61]. Usual homestead chores among the interviewed women stakeholders included housework, caretaker work, manual work in the garden, taking care of animals and milking them, house-level processing of agricultural products, including making cheese, conserves and drying fruit.

Pilots' duration

141. The planned duration of pilots was about 15 months and included the selection of sites and demo-farmers, procurement of agricultural inputs/services, knowledge transfer activities, implementation of planned SLM interventions and measuring outcomes and cost-effectiveness based on one-year results. Pilots' assessment reports and stakeholder interviews suggest that the planned timeframe was tight and the short duration had an inherent risk on the uptake of new technologies by farmers as in case of unforeseen circumstances the results could not had been demonstrated.

142. Thus, one of the realized risks for the sainfoin's introduction in Akhmeta municipality was an unusually hot season which negatively affected the outcomes. As a result, the demo-farmers abandoned its growing. With a longer pilot duration and continued expert support, the farmers could have been encouraged to continue raising such an important plant both for soils and farm animals.

143. The experience with pastures management in Kasristskali showed that the pastures management team members needed continued support and feedback for the full-fledged implementation of the PMP.

144. A longer duration was required for the five-year crop rotation pilot as well. The project expert was providing consultations and farm visits for a few subsequent years even after finishing his contract with the project (free of charge). As a result, an adaptation was made to the design of the crop rotation scheme based on the experiences of the farmers with the introduced crops.

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[58] The project also advertised the opportunity through the Internet on RECC's and municipalities websites, local newspapers and notice boards on municipality buildings.

[59] According to the most recent 2014 census data (source: http://census.ge/files/results/Census_release_ENG.pdf), 6.3% of population identifies themselves as ethnic Azeris, the majority of which live in Kvemo Kartli region (Gardabani municipality is part of that region).

[60] Six women farmers were selected in Dedoplistskaro municipality (grain growers) out of 21, and two women farmers in Gardabani municipality – out of six demo-farmers.

[61] This information is based on the interviews with over 50 local stakeholders for this evaluation who were asked about women's role/tasks in agricultural activities.

Pilots' Implementation arrangements

145. The project used efficient arrangements for the pilots' implementation. The project contracted two local organizations with relevant work experience with the GIZ's IBiS project to implement the pilots on pastures management and windbreak rehabilitation. For the crop rotation pilots the project hired agricultural experts who developed agricultural schemes, information and training materials, provided capacity building support and consultations to farmers, and the monitoring and assessment of results.

146. Additional monitoring was done by an international expert as well. In parallel, the project management was involved in the overall monitoring, procurement[62] of agricultural inputs and other activities.

147. Moreover, the project cooperated actively with ICCs that helped with the recruitment of demo-farmers, providing additional oversight, warehousing the project-delivered seed material and distributing it to the selected demo-farmers. Local government representatives were also helpful with providing venues for discussions/trainings and disseminating information.

148. Furthermore, the research institute of MEPA was involved in testing soil samples and is supposed to conduct another round of testing in 2022 for five-year crop rotation pilots in Gardabani municipality. (All the above stakeholders were involved in the pilots' planning processes.)

Achievement of Outcome 2 (Fully Achieved)

Rural communities in selected municipalities of Georgia adopt economically viable L-SLM practices after seeing the social, economic and/or environmental benefits of applying SLM principles and practices, demonstrated by the project			
Outcome indicators	*Baseline*	*Targets/Milestones*	*Assumptions/Risks*
At least three municipalities (Dedoplistskaro, Gardabani and Akhmeta) demonstrate L- SLM practices.	Limited access to appropriate information on land degradation	Pilot projects are successfully implemented by end of project	State agencies and other stakeholders are open to the introduction of L-SLM principles and ready to strengthen cooperation and information exchange

149. As field visits and interviews with project stakeholders showed the project succeeded in demonstrating the benefits of introduced SLM practices. The evidence also indicates that the economically viable SLM techniques were adopted by rural communities to a certain extent. The following paragraphs will discuss the benefits and outcomes for each type of technology introduced by the project.

Windbreaks' installation / rehabilitation

150. The windbreak installation pilot on a private farm in *Gardabani* municipality demonstrated to the farm owner and community members the methods and viability of undertaking such an exercise. The farm owner, interviewed for this evaluation, had a good understanding of the benefits of such agroforestry practice for protecting lands[63] from wind erosion and of the expected benefits in the future (when trees are grown). Not surprisingly, the owner invested in fencing his land plots and installing a drip irrigation system that together with the maintenance costs, exceeded the amount invested by the project on the procurement and installation of tree saplings.

[62] The procurement was done locally by sub-contracted organizations as well.

[63] The owner was cultivating vines and fruit trees.

Installed windbreak in Gardabani municipality. Left: May, 2018 (Source: L-SLM project files), right: October 2022 (Source: L-SLM project Evaluator's field visit photo)

151. The planted trees (6.7km, 7ha) included four different species (Poplar, Cypress, Cedar and East Thuja) and had an average survival rate of over 73% after half a year. However, the owner replanted trees to cover the gaps and installed a drip irrigation system and the windbreak was in a good shape at the time of evaluation visit – two years after the planting. According to the private owner, the farmers from neighbouring communities also show an interest in the technology and visited his plots to see the windbreaks. The project estimates that the windbreak influence zone is 405ha benefitting 30 neighbouring farmers. Moreover, the municipality and MEPA's extension service representatives who were involved in the pilot project's implementation have received knowledge and experience on windbreaks installation.

Maintenance mowing of a new planting of a windbreak, Dedoplistskaro municipality, June 2018 (Source: WOCAT publication[64])

152. The positive outcomes from the windbreaks project in the *Dedoplistskaro* municipality are the increased capacities of national and local stakeholders (municipality representatives, territorial ICCs) in planning and executing windbreaks' rehabilitation projects. This included a windbreaks' inventorization that was done in close collaboration with the State Property Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development. The experience was accumulated in windbreaks' maintenance works as well. New practices introduced by the project for windbreaks' maintenance included no ploughing or

[64] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/technologies/view/technologies_4274/

harrowing on reforested plots to ensure undisturbed soil structures, and the use of water accumulating granules to aid water infiltration near the trees and the reduction of surface run-off.

153. The results of the windbreaks' rehabilitation in Dedoplistskaro municipality showed that these installations require better care in drought conditions for ensuring at least 70% survival rate of planted trees. This was the target stated in the agreement with the sub-contractor. The mid-term monitoring of the pilot showed the survival rate of 54%. In the end, a large part of the newly rehabilitated windbreak in Dedoplistskaro municipality was destroyed by fires in 2019 due to the field burning practices.

154. The risks of human-induced fires had a certain likelihood of occurrence in Dedoplistskaro municipality mainly due to insufficient incentives / punitive measures for stopping field burning practices[65], and insufficient fire extinguishing capabilities in the municipality for dealing with large-scale fires. The Draft Law on Windbreaks was not adopted at that time which was one of the main risk reduction factors. The municipality administration was unable to prevent fires despite their monitoring activities and additional work with farmers, that was yet another risk reduction mechanism the project was relying on, together with the awareness raising activities.

Crop Rotation

155. Project records and evaluation interviews indicate that crop rotation pilots showed to grains growers in the Dedoplistskaro municipality the benefits of applying nitrogen-fixing predecessor crop - peas[66]. All nine interviewed demo farmers for this evaluation reported at least 15% increase in their grains yields, in revenues, and a simultaneous reduction in spending on nitrogen fertilizers[67]. The increase in yields was reported compared to the results of the previous year when the climatic conditions were more favourable. One demo-farmer reported even higher difference when he compared his yields from two neighbouring plots for just one given year – the yields obtained from the plots sown with a predecessor crop was up to 50% higher than the ones obtained from the plot without using such practice. Increases in revenues, calculated by the project, constituted 442 GEL/ha on average[68].

156. Moreover, in addition to an increase of grains yields, the harvested peas themselves were either sold and/or used by farmers for own needs – e.g. used as a food for animals, for personal consumption and for retaining as seed material for sowing on other plots (many farmers with several land plots did the latter). An additional benefit was obtained by integrating pea residues into the soil, although only a minority of interviewed demo-farmers used this practice.

157. After seeing the benefits, the pea raising was continued and according to various sources[69] the area under pea cultivation over the last four years has increased from 100 ha to 400 ha, encompassing the plots of other farmers as well. The total area under pea cultivation though constitutes only 0.4% of all applicable grain fields as according to

[65] Farmers mostly burn crop residues as it is easier and cheaper for them to burn than to collect/shred or integrate them back into the soil.
[66] Peas are sown in the spring, while grains in the summer. Because of fixing nitrogen from the air, the change in the carbon/nitrogen proportion leads to higher decay rates of organic carbon from crop residues and higher fertility of soils.
[67] A few interviewed farmers noted also the improved health/colour of their grains' plantations, some correctly attributing it to the reduction of plant diseases that usually is linked to crops diversity.
[68] PIR for 2019 FY
[69] These sources include the ICC and local government representatives, agricultural inputs store owner. The number is based on their estimates. Interviewed demo-farmers also noted that they sold their harvest of pees as a seed material to other farmers; they also transferred the knowledge on the crop growing.

Dedoplistskaro municipal government data[70] the area sown with grains is from 30,000 ha to 35,000 ha. Considering that peas are desirable to be sown every third year on the same plot, then in any given year 10,000 hectares are desirable to be under pea or other legumes/crops cultivation.

158. A few interviewed demo-farmers suggested that they were not happy with the selling price of peas, plus it was difficult for them to find clients/markets, and that was not appealing to many farmers who were relying heavily on fertilizer and pesticides use for grains cultivation. Therefore, together with awareness and capacity building activities, it is important to ensure the access of farmers to the markets. It is important also to further regulate the food safety field according to the requirements under the Association Agreement with the EU, so that farmers are encouraged to use pesticides appropriately.

Harvesting of peas in Dedoplistskaro municipality, July 2018 (Source: WOCAT publication[71])

159. Concerning the five-year crop rotation scheme in the Gardabani municipality, the demo-farmers here have also seen an increase in their yields over the last four years and to a certain extent applied the suggested practices with some modifications. These changes were agreed with the project's agronomist who continued supporting the farmers even after the end of his short-term contract.

160. Altogether, a multi-year crop rotation scheme was introduced on four plots, however one year after the start of the pilots, the owner of one demo-farm emigrated and the other one sold his farm. Respondents for this evaluation for Gardabani pilots (both farmers and government representatives) could not name even one farmer who replicated the scheme, though noted that there was an interest among local farmers. One of the explanations given for this was the necessity to have bigger farms for such rotation scheme, whereas the Gardabani municipality has mostly smallholder farmers having less than one hectare of land. In the respondents' opinion the scheme was also more suited to farmers with many animals. Another explanation was that a few suggested crops required irrigation that is not available to many farmers. Some more reasons given included the low access to mechanization and difficulty obtaining the seed material for specific crops (e.g. Sorghum).

[70] https://dedoplistskaro.gov.ge/ge/soplis-meurneoba (in Georgian)
[71] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/technologies/view/technologies_4275/

Sustainable pastures management

161. The project achieved some positive outcomes in the Shenako and Kasristskali communities of the Akhmeta municipality where sustainable pastures management practices were introduced. Kasristskali farmers had the electric fence installed in their community for the first time which, together with the weed control measures, helped with the rehabilitation of the degraded pastureland. This was evident from L-SLM project monitoring reports, including the before and after photos of the area. The evaluation field visit also verified the good condition of the fenced plot and proper care of the fence itself[72] which the members of the pastures' management team have learned from the project, together with the el-fence installation and weed management.

162. According to the interviewed farmers, three more plots in the community were el-fenced after seeing the benefits of the pilot project[73], and one more was installed by the project itself in the neighbouring Ole community with saved funds. A similar situation was reported for the Shenako community where demo-farmers helped other farmers in the neighbouring villages with el-fences' installation (with the farmers' own funds).

Digging out the thistles, Shenako community, June 2019 (source: WOCAT publication[74])

Weed cutting, Shenako community, June 2018 (source: L-SLM project files)

[72] The area under the fence was kept free of grass/weeds, wires were tight and spaced properly, and the voltage was almost the same at two different ends, resulting in almost no loss of electricity in the system.
[73] However, instead of German-produced high quality el-fence materials that were provided by the project, the locals assembled fences themselves using the locally available materials which were less effective and more difficult to operate.
[74] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/technologies/view/technologies_4273/

El-fenced site of intervention on the right, in comparison to weed-dominated common pastureland in Kasritskali, June 2018 (source: WOCAT publication[75])

163. The electric fences, which locals are using for their calves, help farmers better organize the grazing, improve quality of grass and thus animal nutrition and protect their livestock from wild animals, resulting in the reduction of losses. However, as the evaluation interviews with demo-farmers revealed, rotational grazing is not used within the fenced areas, except for the one in Shenako community. Farmers in this community also follow improved hay management practices with using the hay pressing machine which was procured with co-financing.

164. As to the application of measures given in the PMP in Kasristskali community, it should be noted that half of the trained pastures management team members left the community after the pilot project's end, within two years. Moreover, the monitoring of pastures was not conducted by a designated team member who still resides in the community. This team member was not given any forms where he could enter the pastures monitoring data. Furthermore, the information was conflicting regarding the application of pastures rotation schemes as given in the PMP, and it could not be further verified.

165. The field observation of the part of Kasristskali community pastures' condition during the evaluation fieldwork visit revealed that weeds were relatively well managed. However, one of the drought-resistant perennial legume plants, sainfoin, was not reseeded in both Kasristskali and Shenako communities. Sainfoin was introduced to help improve pastures' productivity, weed control and improve nutritional diet of livestock, and hence their productivity. According to interviewed community members these plants could not flourish in the weeds and under unfavourable weather conditions. With a longer pilot project's duration, the farmers could have been encouraged to continue with sainfoin cultivation.

COMPONENT 3. National Capacity Development and Knowledge Management

Availability of Output 3.1 (Fully Available)

At least 100 national/subnational female and male decision makers and local/community representatives, including those of women organized groups, have increased knowledge on L-SLM approaches and practices

[75] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/technologies/view/technologies_4276/

Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
3.1.1. Elaboration of training modules on contemporary L-SLM principles and practices for decision makers and farmers	Training modules; Questionnaires for assessment of training effectiveness	Training modules are elaborated by Q4 Yr1
3.1.2 Conduct of trainings on SLM practices for at least 100 decision makers and community representatives	Post training assessment reports (based on questionnaires); List of trained persons	1st round of trainings by Yr1; 2nd by Q3 Yr3

166. The review of the project's implementation showed that the activities under this output were implemented mostly within the planned timeframe[76] and the delivery of its results exceeded the set target.

167. The purpose of the EIEC-conducted trainings for farmers and decision makers was to increase their knowledge about the existing problems of soil degradation and about the sustainable methods of land management. The developed training module covered broadly contemporary L-SLM principles and practices applicable for different parts of Georgia and for various climate and geographic conditions (practices covered included even those that were not the focus of pilot SLM activities - e.g. composting, mulching, terracing, etc). Moreover, the training had both theoretical and practical components which was highly appreciated by the interviewed training participants.

168. EIEC conducted two rounds of trainings on SLM practices and their application. The first round of trainings, conducted in early 2017, included the Signagi municipality where the implementation of an additional pilot was planned (along with three other municipalities). The second round of trainings conducted in 2018 covered only three project municipalities of Akhmeta, Dedoplistskaro and Gardabani.

169. The trainings involved 415[77] participants in total, vs. 100 planned. 108 participants were the representatives of national and local governments[78], mostly from ICCs and executive and legislative branches of local governments. Among this category of training participants 34 were women and 9 ethnic Azeri minorities.

Trainings of decision makers and farmers on SLM in project municipalities (Source: Project Newsletter of 2017)

170. The second important category of trained participants were farmers[79] from project municipalities who did not work for the government institutions. 31 farmers participated in the trainings from which four were demo-farmers, seven ethnic minority farmers and six women. Some more female representatives were trained by the project through the

[76] The last annual meeting was rescheduled to a later date due to the Covid-19 restrictions.
[77] This number excludes double counting. Five participants attended the trainings twice, both in 2017 and 2018.
[78] The interviews revealed that majority of the government training participants were also involved in farming.
[79] Information about the upcoming trainings was printed in local newspapers and was available on the notice boards of municipal administrative buildings, along with its availability on the Internet (municipality and project websites). Municipality and ICC staff members also helped with spreading the information by word of mouth.

delivery of training sessions to 181 school and preschool teachers in project municipalities, the absolute majority of which were women. In view of this, more than half of the training participants were women.

171. It is unknown what proportion of teachers, or their families were practicing agriculture[80]. Nonetheless, their training was important[81] to promote knowledge dissemination in project areas[82], especially considering teachers' reach and respect in the communities. One of the interviewed teachers, for example, mentioned that she transferred the received knowledge to students involved in Eco-clubs. Along with the teachers, the EIEC trained 42 representatives of eco-clubs (including 23 girls) from schools from all over the country.

172. Another category of training participants included 35 students of the agricultural college in the Kakheti region which included 10 female participants. According to the lecturer at the college who attended the trainings, the college courses had almost all the training topics covered by their curricula. However, it was a good opportunity for students to receive information in a different and consolidated format.

173. It should be noted that half of the training participants in the Gardabani municipality were ethnic Azeri. These participants could understand Georgian, but there is a sizable proportion of ethnic minority residents/farmers in the municipality who do not[83]. Therefore, educational materials could have been translated and printed (at least shorter versions) in the Azeri language. There was a case when, on an as needed basis, the project translated and provided crop rotation guidance materials in the Azeri language to one demo-farmer.

174. In addition to EIEC's capacity building events, the project also conducted more specific trainings on pea cultivation (21 demo farmers), multi-year crop rotation (6 demo-farmers), and on pastures management for 12 pasture management team members. The latter training was about collecting information on pastures conditions and measuring indicators.

Availability of Output 3.2 (Fully Available)

National stakeholders receive knowledge for developing impact indicators of good SLM practices and establishing a system for their monitoring		
Activities	Deliverables	Benchmarks
3.2.1. Elaboration of training modules on impact indicators of good SLM practices	Training module on impact indicators,	By Q4 Yr 1
3.2.2. Carry out the training on impact indicators and development of indicators	Post training assessment reports, list of trained persons; Elaborated indicators	By end of Q4 Yr 3
3.2.3 Establishment of the system to monitor and evaluate indicators	Paper on monitoring of good SLM Practices; Measured indicators	Monitoring system is launched by Q2 Yr 2
3.2.4 Development of the evaluation report on impact of SLM practices and introducing to the stakeholders	Report on impact of SLM practices. Minutes of the workshop.	Report is available by Q2 Yr3 Workshop held by Q3 Yr3

175. The current L-SLM project complemented the GEF/UNDP's Harmonization of Information Management project on the establishment of the system for monitoring and

[80] Usually, the majority of residents from the project's three municipalities have at least a small homestead plot, with the exception of Gardabani town (source: based on Google maps and evaluator's familiarity with the region).
[81] Teachers' trainings were included in the 2nd NAP for UNCCD, and EIEC has established contacts and vast experience of working with preschools and schools.
[82] There was no written obligation for knowledge transfer.
[83] The evaluator could not locate any recent survey data, but according to this source https://eecmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Policy_Papers_ENG.pdf over 70% ethnic Azeris in Gardabani could not understand Georgian back in 2009. The situation has changed significantly since then, after the introduction of Georgian language as a required subject in Azeri schools. The knowledge of Georgian is high among young ethnic Azeri population.

reporting on UNCCD and other Rio Conventions. The L-SLM project provided a contribution in terms of offering the evidence[84] from its pilot SLM activities and facilitating one meeting on impact indicators[85]. The bulk of the activities on the system's establishment and capacity building were done under the UNDP's project. This project started in May 2015, however, the L-SLM ProDoc did not consider the possible links/overlaps[86].

176. The review of the timeline of implementation showed that all the activities were implemented later, as UNDP's project had its own timeframe. Moreover, the results from the pilot projects also became available late.

Availability of Output 3.3 (Fully Available)

Stakeholders, including women organized groups, have access to knowledge products/services on L-SLM practices		
Activities	*Deliverables*	*Benchmarks*
3.3.1 Preparation and publishing of educational booklet on L-SLM practices	500 copies of educational booklets disseminated in pilot municipalities	Educational booklet is published and disseminated by Q4 Yr 1
3.3.2 Publishing of newsletters on project news, events, activities, progress, lessons learned	6 newsletters are published and disseminated	6 newsletters are published and disseminated by end of Q4 Yr 3
3.3.3 Preparation and broadcasting of radio/TV reports and articles	Records of the radio/TV reports. Copies of published articles	At least 3 articles and 3 radio/TV reportages in media sources by Q4 Yr 3
3.3.4 Development of a project portal on RECC web-site	High quality project web-portal integrated into RECC web-site	Web-portal is available from Q2 Yr1 till project end
3.3.5 To conduct 3 annual Multi-stakeholder Consultative forums on the project progress and achieved results	Minutes of the workshop Lists of participants	By the end of each year

177. The evaluation suggests that the activities under this output were completed according to the workplan, except for the third annual meeting which was postponed due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Additional activities were also conducted by the EIEC, including the celebrations of the World Day to Combat Desertification[87].

178. The project website was developed and updated with news about the project activities and educational materials. However, by the time of this evaluation, some of the important reports and knowledge products (e.g. training materials, pasture management plan, etc.) were not available either on the project or on the RECC's website.

179. One of the important knowledge products prepared, printed and disseminated by the project included the booklet on soil degradation, its causes and solutions. The booklet was prepared in Georgian and English languages. As noted above, almost half of the population in the Gardabani municipality are ethnic minorities and a significant proportion of farmers living there do not command good Georgian language skills. It would have been better, therefore, to have some basic information on SLM practices published in the Azeri language as well.

180. The review of the project's media monitoring reports and of different governmental, media and other websites indicate that the project's interventions enjoyed wide coverage. The news about the project's activities and some of its results were published on national

[84] However, Activity 3.2.4 basically is the same as Activity 2.2.5 (see Page 37)
[85] This meeting was about raising the participants' awareness about the UNCCD strategy and NAP indicators.
[86] Institutional needs assessment and capacity building plan for Output 1.2 was also done under the UNDP project.
[87] The EIEC celebrated the World Day to Combat Desertification in 2018 and 2019. The events for 2020 and 2021 were held online. According to the EIEC, the Center continues to celebrate the International Day to Combat Desertification with various exciting events and implements awareness raising activities every year.

and local governments' websites. Over 10 TV and radio reportages, as well as many articles in print media were dedicated to covering the issues of pastures management and other project interventions. Interesting results, lessons learnt were also shared internationally through the UNCCD-recommended global database on SLM[88] and through the participation of MEPA and project representatives to global forums[89].

Achievement of Outcome 3 (Fully Achieved)

National and local level stakeholders apply their knowledge and capacities to develop and manage SLM issues			
Outcome indicators	*Baseline*	*Targets/Milestones*	*Assumptions/Risks*
Number of L-SLM principles considered while land use planning in 3 municipalities	There is lack of information and limited knowledge on L-SLM approaches and on modern technologies to deal with land degradation at local and national levels. Land management issues are not reflected in the trainings provided by EIEC. Land use planners and communities do not have satisfactory access to information and tools for LUPs' planning.	At least 100 stakeholders are trained on SLM. Strengthening of EIEC for the delivery of training modules on SLM.	Readiness of stakeholders to be involved in the project activities

181. The Evaluation evidence suggests that the project's awareness raising activities and knowledge transfer interventions contributed significantly to placing SLM issues high on the political agenda which resulted in the consideration of important legislative initiatives by the decision-makers. Moreover, SLM measures were considered when planning LUPs for Shenako and Arkhiloskalo communities and a PMP for Kasristskali community.

182. Regarding the outcomes of the capacity building activities on SLM issues, the survey conducted among 40 farmer training participants showed that all the participants found the trainings useful for gaining knowledge about SLM techniques. 67% (26 farmers) of participants[90] reported abstaining from earlier used field burning practices after the trainings and 11%[91] (4 farmers) reported starting the crop rotation. Moreover, all the participants noted that they transferred the received knowledge to their community members. (Application of SLM practices by capacitated demo-farmers was discussed under the Achievement of Outcome 2 section.)

Likelihood of Impact

183. The evaluation considers that the likelihood of the intended positive impacts becoming a reality is probable due to the following findings:

184. The *drivers to support the transition from outputs to project outcomes and intermediate states (see Box 1 and Figure 4) were in place*, with partial exception of the last driver: "The barriers for pilots upscale are identified and measures for their reduction/removal are either directly implemented or proposed to relevant stakeholders". Based on the interviews with demo-farmers the evaluation found that not all the relevant barriers were removed for the upscale of crop rotation pilots. These relate to the following`:

[88] https://qcat.wocat.net/en/wocat/list/?type=wocat&filter__qg_location__country=country_GEO&filter__qg_funding_project__funding_project=1051

[89] 1) UNCCD COP 13 Open Dialogue: Climate change and land (a dialogue with civil society), 09 September 2017; 2) First Global Land Degradation Neutrality Forum, 4-5 July 2018, 3) GEF Assembly, Interactive Session at the CSO Forum, Viet Nam, 26 June 2018.

[90] Nine farmers reported burning their fields before the trainings

[91] 13 survey participants were using crop rotation in their vegetable gardens or other plots even before the trainings (appropriateness of crops for rotation is unknown). Four more farmers applied this practice after the trainings. The number of respondents involved in crops raising was 36.

- Lack of knowledge about the quality seed input providers.
- Difficulties in getting the produce to the markets and selling at a desired price. A few farmers wanted to have relevant equipment for further processing of peas (e.g. washing and sorting).
- Difficulties in the timely access to crop harvesting and/or other machinery.

Bagged dry peas stored by the L-SLM project's demo-farmer, October 2022. (Source: the TE evaluator's field visit to Dedoplistskaro)

185. While these topics were outside the project's scope of work, the project might have still wished to invest time and resources for compiling/researching and sharing information on the following items: a) input providers, b) market demand on peas nationally, c) possibilities for value chain development, d) availability of relevant support projects and programmes for linking farmers to the resources and markets. These measures could have helped the communities with regards to the implementation of LUPs as well, together with the identification of resource requirements and possible sources of finance.

186. Most assumptions of the change processes hold with the partial exception of a couple of them. These include a) the assumption regarding the adoption of legal documents (not all the legal documents elaborated by the project were adopted by the time of the evaluation), and b) the assumption regarding the allocation of resources for the implementation of plans (e.g. LUPs) and enforcement of regulations.

187. The legislative framework had improved by the time of evaluation with regards to the windbreaks management that ensures the protection of such installations. The government has adopted a state program on windbreaks inventorization which will provide information for expected windbreaks renovation and installation works. Moreover, the replication of windbreaks rehabilitation projects is ongoing under a GEF-6 funded project in land degradation area[92]. The benefits from these projects are expected after at least a decade in terms of decreased wind erosion and soil quality. Increase in biodiversity though is expected to be sooner. This eventually will contribute to the increase in agricultural production and in incomes of local populations.

188. The legislative framework/regulations for pastures management are being developed, while the elaborated Draft Law on Soil Protection is waiting to be submitted to the Parliament. Once the regulations are in place and enforced, the likelihood of achieving the intermediate states and impact will improve further, especially considering the demonstrated benefits of SLM practices.

Rating for Availability of Outputs:	Satisfactory
Rating for Achievement of Outcomes:	Satisfactory
Rating for Likelihood of Impact:	Likely
Overall Rating for Effectiveness:	**Satisfactory**

[92] According to the latest project implementation report 53.1km of windbreaks were rehabilitated in Kakheti and Shida Kartli regions by June 2021.

E. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

189. The review of project documents and records showed that regular expenditure reports were submitted mostly in a timely manner and the expenditures were within the approved annual budgets or within the timely revised annual budgets. The budget revisions themselves were based on a regular analysis of actual expenditures.

190. The evaluation found that the procurement of goods and services was done through transparent tendering processes. In those cases when tenders were not announced for service providers, the justification was given and relevant permissions were obtained from the PSC and UNEP. The three directly contracted partners included two local NGOs, responsible for the pilot projects' implementation in two municipalities, and the EIEC, sub-contracted for the implementation of the project's third, capacity building, component.

191. The point of concern was the completeness of financial information for the project's third component that was implemented by the EIEC, and which was not flagged by the auditors. Thus, Article 3.2 of the agreement between the RECC and EIEC reads as follows: "The cost for three main activities and project management fee are specified in Appendix B (*budget*)". However, the budget included only two items[93] - trainings and a vehicle's costs the purchase of which was not communicated to GEF[94]. Moreover, the same Article 3.2 of the agreement contained the provision about no obligation of returning the unspent funds.

192. The agreement with EIEC also did not contain the requirement to report financial expenditures to the RECC, there was a provision only to keep the records[95] (Article 4 of the Agreement). Moreover, according to the EIEC and RECC representatives the sub-contracted organizations are not required to present detailed expenditures, as the agreed budgets are supposed to include realistic cost estimates for the provision of services. The evaluator could not locate the relevant government regulation in that regard and verify the claim.

193. With regards to the results-based expenditure reporting, a relevant template was not provided to the implementing organization in the appendices of the PCA, hence, the detailed reporting by components and budget lines is not available. The evaluator was presented only with the summary of spending by components (see Table 5), but how this summary data was obtained is unclear.

Table 11. Financial management table

Financial management components:	Rating	Evidence/ Comments
1. Adherence to UNEP's/GEF's policies and procedures:	**U**	
Evidence indicating shortcomings in the project's adherence to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules	Yes	The budget for the implementation of the project's third component, submitted by the sub-contracted organization, was incomplete and the expenditure reports were also not available from the sub-contractor.

[93] It should be mentioned here that the budgets for the other two sub-contracted organizations, local NGOs, were detailed.
[94] According to the GEF Guidelines on Project and Program Cycle Policy (GEF/C.59/Inf.03), "the use of GEF funds to purchase vehicles is strongly discouraged. Such costs are normally expected to be borne by the co-financed portion of PMCs. Any request to use GEF funding to purchase project vehicles must be justified by the exceptional specific circumstances of the project/program. The Secretariat assesses such requests and decides whether to approve them".
[95] The EIEC presented three invoices indicating the spent funds but not specifying the types of the activities undertaken with those resources.

Financial management components:	Rating	Evidence/ Comments
2. Completeness of project financial information:	**MS**	
Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	Sufficient details were given at design
Revisions to the budget	Yes	Three budget revisions were made in 2017, 2018 and 2019 due to the cost savings in a few budget items and because of project extensions. The modifications to the budget can be seen in Table 6. It should be noted that despite the increase of expenditures on project personnel by 46%, the reported PMC did not change.
All relevant project legal agreements	Yes	PCA, agreements with EIEC and other sub-contractor organizations, consultants, demo-farmers.
Proof of fund transfers	Yes	All five funds transfer remittance advice documents were made available to the evaluator.
Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	No	The evaluator could confirm the contributions made by various projects (even more contributing projects were added later), also the in-kind contributions of government representatives, however, the proof of the exact provided amounts (cash or in-kind) is not available[96]. The project reported exactly the same amount of co-financing as it was budgeted.
A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes	Summary annual and consolidated project expenditure reports were available by budget lines and by project components. Reporting on the expenditures by project components was not detailed (only the overall spending by components is available – see Table 5). No relevant template was provided to the EA for results-based reporting.
Copies of any completed audits and management responses	Yes	Completed audit reports are available for four years
Any other financial information required for this project	Yes	Tender and vacancy announcements, co-financing commitment letters from project partners
3. Communication between finance and project management staff[97]	**S**	
Project Manager (PM) and Task Manager's (TM) level of awareness of the project's financial status	S	TM and FMO were aware of the project's financial issues through financial reports and budget revisions.

[96] According to the executing agency it was unclear what type of proof was required as the explanation was not provided in the PCA or its annexes. Besides, receiving the proof of co-financing from governmental counterparts was challenging as some of the expenditures were part of the wider governmental expenditures and the separation of those expenses was not feasible.
[97] The evidence for this component is based on the self-evaluation questionnaire completed by TM, FMO and interviews with the PM.

Financial management components:	Rating	Evidence/ Comments
		Project director had access to financial reports prepared by the RECC's finance officer.
Fund Management Officer's (FMO) knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done	HS	Final cash advance requests submitted by the Executing Agency were reviewed and approved by the FMO following the reconciliation of audit reports against the reported project expenditures.
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among FMO and PM/TM	S	TM had weekly coordination meetings with the UNEP's finance team for updating each other on various projects.
Contact/communication between by FMP, PM, TM during the preparation of financial and progress reports	S	Before the reports were submitted, the drafts were shared with FMO. The FMO would review and give feedback on the reports. TM and FMO communicated on the status of reporting through emails and during weekly meetings.
PM, TM and FMO responsiveness to financial requests during the evaluation process	S	The evaluator received all necessary documents.
Overall rating	**S**	

Completeness of Financial Information

194. As given in Table 11, the completeness of financial information was rated as Moderately Satisfactory. The evaluator was able to obtain almost all applicable items related to the financial management of the project. More specifically, these documents include: a high-level project budget for secured funds, given also by funding sources; funds transfer documents from UNEP to the EA, audit reports, partner legal agreements and documentation for all amendments/revised budgets.

195. The templates for regular expenditure reporting, given in the PCA's annex, did not foresee the results-based reporting, only by budget lines. It should be noted that the overall expenditures by components are the same as planned (see Table 5), however, the evaluator cannot verify this information.

196. With regards to the proof of the delivery of in-kind contributions, the declaration letters of intent were obtained in writing from project partner organizations. However, similar documents are not available for the actual co-financing received. Besides, the PCA annexes did not include a template for clarifying what kind of proof was required (see also Footnote 99). The evaluator was able to ascertain the occurrence of the activities described in the letters of intent, without obtaining the values of the actual cash or in-kind contributions. It should be noted here also that the expected and actual amount of co-financing was the same, even though there were substantial additional in-kind contributions received under the GEF/UNDP Harmonization of Information Management Project.

Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff

197. The communication between the finance and project management staff was found to be Satisfactory, as project management was aware of UNEP's financial reporting requirements and of the project's financial status. The FMO had a strong awareness of overall project progress when financial disbursements were made, and there was regular and frequent contact between the project management and FMO.

Rating for Adherence:	Unsatisfactory
Rating for Completeness:	Moderately Satisfactory
Rating for Communication:	Satisfactory
Overall Rating for Financial Management:	**Moderately Satisfactory**

F. Efficiency

198. The evaluation determined that the project was implemented in a relatively efficient manner considering its duration with two no-cost extensions, reasons for those extensions, complexities, established synergies with similar initiatives (see Table 4) and the number of outputs/benefits produced with the given financing. Moreover, the contracting of capable local organizations for overseeing and executing the pilot projects' activities, enhanced the efficiency of project operations.

199. As outlined in Section C of the findings chapter, the project experienced delays due to the structural changes in the main executing body (MoENRP) of the national government and due to the local elections that prolonged decision-making processes. In some other instances, the project was dependent on the outputs of other projects and decided to delay the start of the development of LUPs for example to save resources and avoid the duplication of efforts for datasets production. Harmonization and coordination of activities with other initiatives was the justifiable reason for adapting the timeline and/or sequencing of activities, which served well the efficiency aspect.

200. Cost-effectiveness was somewhat hampered with the procurement of two vehicles and destruction of project-rehabilitated windbreaks by human-induced fires during the project's implementation, given that the likelihood of the occurrence of fires in that area could have been considered by the project.

Rating for Efficiency: Moderately Satisfactory

G. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring Design and Budgeting

201. The project's monitoring plan covered all the indicators in the logical framework, and identified baselines, targets, means of verification, data collection frequency and persons responsible for monitoring progress. In addition, individual pilot projects had their own monitoring plans with indicators, frequency of data collection and responsible parties.

202. Indicators developed for the pilots were sound, while a few indicators for the overall project could have been more relevant to the corresponding results. Moreover, the impact level indicators and the related baselines, targets were absent. This was because the main problem, land degradation, was not included in the objective's statement (see Table 8). The Indicators were missing for intermediate states as well, as they were also not identified by the ProDoc. However, the completed LD tracking tool is available for different periods of time, providing measurement for longer-term results. It should be noted also that the developed indicators are not disaggregated by relevant stakeholder groups, including gender and minority groups.

203. The project allocated adequate funding for mid-term and final evaluations. Moreover, the M&E budget constituted about 7.5% of the GEF's funding.

Monitoring of Project Implementation

204. As evidenced through progress reports, the L-SLM project's monitoring system facilitated the timely tracking of results throughout the project's implementation period.

The project gathered and documented the baseline data, and later the data on project results, which was regularly shared with the UNEP Task Manager, PSC members and with wider stakeholders at annual and PSC meetings.

205. Under the capacity building component of farmers and decision-makers, the project evaluated the participants' satisfaction with the delivery of trainings (based on the analysis of completed questionnaires), and according to the EIEC representative, the project adapted the training materials and its delivery based on the obtained feedback.

206. Under the second, SLM demonstration component, the project measured relevant indicators before, during and after the pilots' implementation that were documented in various reports and shared both locally and internationally, the latter through WOCAT publications and UNCCD events (see Para 180). The indicators' measurement itself was done using a variety of methods that included the laboratory testing of soil samples, field observations by agronomists on the usage of SLM techniques, measuring the growth of seedlings, and interviewing of farmers on the obtained yields. The gender related data under the pilots component was collected on sex composition of demo-farmers, about the participants of various meetings – e.g. for LUPs or PMP preparation. Communities' vulnerability profiles and socio-economic studies, that were used for the planning documents preparation, also collected sex-desegregated data, however, gender analysis was not given. Moreover, the community profiles collected information about the ethnic composition of two project municipalities, but the data about project beneficiaries were not disaggregated by ethnic minorities.

207. As to the first component on the improvement of the enabling environment for SLM, the project monitored and recorded the delivery of studies, amendments to legislation and other deliverables, all of which were widely discussed among relevant stakeholders and modified when needed, based on the received feedback.

Project Reporting

208. The project produced four biannual reports, four annual project implementation reports (PIRs) over the period of 4.5 years of its implementation (one report every six months) and a final summary report. These reports were based on the UNEP-provided templates and were completed fully, attaching the documentation/evidence of the project's progress in the appendices[98]. In some cases however it was difficult to identify from the reports and appendices which of the deliverables/outputs were produced with GEF financing and which ones with the co-financing under different projects.

Rating for Monitoring Design and Budgeting:	Satisfactory
Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation:	Highly Satisfactory
Rating for Project Reporting:	Highly Satisfactory
Overall Rating for Monitoring and Reporting:	**Highly Satisfactory**

H. Sustainability

Socio-political Sustainability

209. The evaluation evidence suggests that there is strong ownership, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders to sustain results which was manifested by the establishment of the agency on SLM and land use monitoring, approval of the program on windbreaks' inventarization and registration, adoption of the Law on

[98] Gender disaggregated data was also given.

Windbreaks, and the continued work on other legislative initiatives regarding land degradation[99].

210. The project outcomes at the same time had a high degree of dependency[100] on socio-economic and political factors. Thus, the evaluation findings suggest the loss of the project-rehabilitated windbreaks to the fires in 2019 was due to a number of factors, including: insufficient regulations at that time; the low incomes of local farmers looking for easy ways to get rid of crop residues; low demand/underdeveloped markets for crop residues in Dedoplistskaro municipality itself and the inability to reach wider markets.

211. According to the interviews with project stakeholders, burning of fields after harvest was still practiced by some farmers, despite the awareness raising activities by the project and its partners. The main drivers for this practice were the inability of farmers to pay for the expenses of collecting crop residues or for their shredding/integration into the soil. Besides, many farmers, especially those with no farm animals, did not have incentives for collecting residues. By the time of the TE though the demand and prices on crop residues increased and, according to respondents, so did the farmers' incentives for residuals collection.

212. In the Gardabani municipality which has more animal and poultry farms, the burning of fields is rare as many farmers use residues for their own animal husbandry and/or to satisfy the existing local demand. Therefore, the sustainability of the installed windbreaks on a private farm in the Gardabani municipality is high. The windbreaks installation also has a well-invested owner providing good oversight and maintenance. (In contrast, in Dedoplistskaro municipality windbreaks were rehabilitated on both state and private lands and according to the project's MTR report they were not well maintained.)

213. The prospects of the replicated pilots on *windbreaks* rehabilitation under another GEF/UNEP project[101] look promising, in view of the above developments: better regulations, increased awareness, and increased demand on crop residues which often is the cause of fires.

214. Socio-economic and political factors also have an influence on the sustainability of results of *pastureland management pilot projects*. Thus, due to the unfavourable socio-economic conditions, half of the trained pasture management team members in Kasristskali village emigrated or moved elsewhere by the time of evaluation, and those left, do not have capacities to undertake pastures monitoring or explain the practices to the newcomers. The lack of regulations in this area also hinders the sustainable grasslands management and the reduction in conflicts over the pastures use.

215. Socio-economic factors also affect the sustainability of *crop rotation pilots*. The project-introduced peas in the Dedoplistskaro municipality were planted for the fourth year in a row using the same original seed material that was purchased by the project. Some other community farmers also adopted the practice and the planted area quadrupled[102]. However, there was little indication for the intention of purchasing new seed material (see also Para 158, 184, 185). A few farmers had reservations because of the price of seed material which was considered high in relation to their earnings. The seed material was

[99] While the Law on Windbreaks was high on the political agenda and enjoyed strong support from the Agrarian Committee of the Parliament, the Draft Law on Soil Protection could not even be submitted.
[100] The level of dependency by the time of evaluation is changing to a moderate level.
[101] Generating economic and environmental benefits from sustainable land management for vulnerable rural communities of Georgia project (2018-2023).
[102] From 100 to 400 ha, which is still a small portion of 35,000 ha area under grains plantations (Source: https://dedoplistskaro.gov.ge/ge/soplis-meurneoba)

provided free of charge by the project, and the replicating farmers got the pea seed at a much-reduced price from demo-farmers (from the subsequent years' yields).

Financial Sustainability

216. Project outcomes have a moderate dependency on financial flows to persist: The adopted Law on Windbreaks provides a good basis for ensuring the sustained effects of future windbreaks' installations. Additionally, some other legislative acts for ensuring soil protection are already prepared and waiting to be submitted to the Parliament. The work on the enabling environment for pastures management is ongoing under the donor-supported projects.

217. Moreover, the awareness raising work on land degradation issues by EIEC and ICCs continue. One of the recent ongoing UNDP[103] projects is envisioning the support to EIEC for developing training and retraining programs within the concept of life-long learning for farmers which will further develop its capacities. The project will also support ICCs for information dissemination among farmers, which is the main task of this institution (provision of extension services). The Agricultural Research Center of the MEPA is also actively involved in farmers education.

218. The financial sustainability of the pilot initiatives varies by their type. For the windbreaks pilot on a private farm, for example, the future maintenance costs will be borne by the farmer and no additional financing will be necessary. Regarding the pastures' pilots, the evaluation revealed that the provided equipment and tools are maintained, and the demonstrated practices are applied to a certain extent for generating continued benefits without the influx of additional funds. Implementation of certain measures given in LUPs for two communities may require the mobilization of resources the volume of which is not identified.

Institutional Sustainability

219. The country has appropriate governance structures to ensure the enforcement of the newly adopted Law on Windbreaks, the issue however could be the adequacy of staffing. Regarding the pastures and soil fertility management, the responsibilities of the relevant parties need to be clarified first by the relevant regulations, which are still in the pipeline.

220. The project contributed to increasing the capabilities of government structures, including that of EIEC. This institution has accumulated the experience in raising the awareness on land degradation issues and has the ability to continue delivering similar activities in the future. ICCs, the extension services providers, have gained the experience by supporting the L-SLM pilot interventions and spreading the awareness about SLM practices. Furthermore, the representatives from its parent institution the Rural Development Agency (RDA) were actively involved in the meetings/discussions at the national level and showed an interest in lessons learnt and results.

221. Support from ICCs during the project implementation was strong. Considering that ICCs have a clear responsibility in promoting the use of best agricultural practices on the ground, there are indications from the stakeholder interviews that their support for the promotion of SLM practices will continue. The same is true regarding the MEPA's agricultural research center, which is also supposed to provide the follow-up on soil fertility measurements in the Gardabani municipality.

[103] The project is funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation

222. It should be noted that ICCs were previously subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture, and the merging of two ministries created favourable preconditions for the uptake of environmental considerations by ICCs and its parent institution, the RDA[104]. The exit/upscale strategy of the project could have suggested a systemic approach for this, for going beyond the individuals capacitated by the project in three municipalities and for ensuring the RDA's continued support to environmental considerations.

Rating for Socio-Economic Sustainability:	Moderately Likely
Rating for Financial Sustainability:	Likely
Rating for Institutional Sustainability:	Likely
Overall Rating for Sustainability:	**Moderately Likely**

I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Preparation and Readiness

223. The evaluation evidence suggests that the project was effective at assembling the project team at the RECC, establishing appropriate governance arrangements, holding an inception workshop, and forming the PSC. The project also developed the workplan for the first year, costed procurement and monitoring plans, and exit and communication strategies.

Inception workshop, 7 Sep 2016

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

Quality of Project Management and Supervision Performed by Executing Agency

224. The executing agency, the RECC, had effective arrangements for the project's management and supervision. The PSC was established to provide oversight and guidance and was convened once a year for discussing the progress and ways forward. The exception was the final year when following up on the MTR recommendation the PSC meeting was held twice.

225. The RECC had prior programmatic experience with implementing a GEF-funded enabling activity for UNCCD, and other donor funded projects in the land degradation thematic area. It's financial and administrative capacities were also deemed in line with international standards by the auditors, although the drawbacks were not flagged (see Paras 191-192).

226. The review of TORs and agreements showed that the project partners and consultants had clearly defined responsibilities and were managed and supervised well by the project manager. Moreover, the project management sub-contracted capable local organizations, with relevant experience for the implementation of the required tasks. These organizations' proximity to project sites enhanced the level of communication with local authorities and farmers.

227. The project management employed adaptive management regarding the change of plans in the pilots' implementation. The project also accommodated the requests of key government stakeholders concerning the work on legislative amendments. Moreover, the

[104] ICCs on the ground act according to the tasks defined for them by the RDA.

project adapted to the challenges introduced by COVID-19 by conducting the last annual and PSC meetings online.

228. The project execution could have been stronger by enhancing the planning for the delivery of all outputs, more specifically, by timely identification of issues and mobilizing support for NILMS' development; also, by assuring more cost-effective delivery of the third component, executed by EIEC, and by improving the risk management (see Para 236).

Quality of Project Management and Supervision Performed by Implementing Executing Agency

229. The project management from UNEP side has changed during the project implementation. The new TM assumed the responsibilities close to the project's start and the new FMO joined the management team in the last year of the project's implementation. As evidenced from the interviews with UNEP staff members, the transition/handover processes were smooth due to a well-functioning system for information documentation and exchange.

230. The evaluation ascertained that UNEP provided strong guidance and supervision to the executing partner through frequent consultations[105], information exchange, participating at annual and PSC meetings[106] and undertaking two mission trips to Georgia. The evaluation revealed though that the guidance on the prioritization of tasks could have been stronger in view of the abandonment of Output 1.3 and considering the inclusion of unplanned municipality in the project.

Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation

231. The project succeeded in reaching and involving all the important stakeholders and in mobilizing support for the achievement of most outputs and outcomes. Many partnership arrangements were identified in the ProDoc under its stakeholder analysis parts, and later it was revised during the development of the communication strategy in the inception phase. As a result, the project team maximized coherence between various stakeholders by exchanging learning and expertise and pooling resources.


Development process of the Pastures Management Plan for Kasristskali community, 2018 (Source: PMP document)

[105] According to the interviews with the project team and the Task Manager, the working relationship was constructive and timely feedback was provided from the TM and Fund Management Officer.
[106] These were done mostly through online platforms.

232. The project was effective also in promoting stakeholder ownership by involving all the relevant key players early in the planning, consultations and later in the implementation and evaluation processes (the latter through the PSC, MTR and TE). As shown in earlier sections of this report, the project conducted many meetings to discuss challenges and solutions at both national and local levels when planning for policy/legislative changes or for developing local planning documents – LUPs and PMP. The data/evidence collection was a participatory process as well, with the involvement of government stakeholders and community members.

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity

233. The review of project documents and stakeholder interviews revealed that the project was somewhat responsive to the issues of human rights and gender equity. To start with, many outputs and outcome statements in the ProDoc envisioned the incorporation of gender considerations in the development of policy/legislative documents and in project interventions[107]. However, many important documents, such as the communication strategy, pilot projects' planning document[108], vulnerability studies[109], LUPs and RIAs for two draft laws, for example, do not include gender analysis or give any references to gender (e.g. LUPs and RIAs). Moreover, the planning and other documents developed by the project do not include minority groups[110].

234. The project paid attention to involving women and ethnic minorities in many of its interventions. These included the capacity building events, planning and implementation of pilot projects, development of LUPs. Moreover, ethnic minorities in the project's activities were represented approximately in the same proportions as is their share in the general population in project areas. The majority of ethnic minorities selected for the participation in project activities had a good command of Georgian language. However, a considerable proportion of ethnic minorities living in the Gardabani municipality, especially those older than 50 years, do not understand or read Georgian, and the project's third component on the knowledge transfer interventions did not respond to this need (e.g. in terms of printing some awareness raising materials in the Azeri language).

Environment and Social Safeguards

235. The ProDoc included the completed Environmental and Social Safeguards Checklist which did not identify any negative impact. Later, the project progress reports were tracking safeguard issues and reporting that no safeguard issues arose. Moreover, through various studies and assessments the project was evaluating environmental, social and economic impacts on the key stakeholders.

236. The project was also identifying, rating risks and proposing risk mitigation measures. In total seven risk factors were identified with an overall rating – low. However, the evaluation found that the risks identification and assessment was not strong regarding, for example, the uptake of new technologies by farmers in case of unforeseen circumstances (see Para 141), regarding windbreaks installations (see Paras 154, 210) or the upscale of crop rotation pilots (see Para 160, 184,185).

[107] The project did not have a specific budget line on gender as back in 2015 when the project was planned, it was not required.
[108] Pilots planning document only suggests involving women, children and other groups in tree planting activities.
[109] These studies give only sex-disaggregated data for population and employed persons numbers without the analysis of gender roles or of any specific needs and recommendations.
[110] Vulnerability studies conducted for three municipalities give the numbers of ethnic minorities. However, the numbers are not given for the Gardabani municipality which has the highest proportion of ethnic minorities. The document does not include the analysis of the issues faced by ethnic minorities – e.g. knowledge of the state language.

Country Ownership and Drive-ness

237. As the findings under the effectiveness section suggest the project implementation was country-driven, with MEPA leading the change processes and providing strategic guidance. Two more relevant government ministries supporting these processes were the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure that were the members of the PSC. With their support, and with active involvement of the Agrarian Committee of the Parliament, it was possible to move from outputs to project outcomes, such as the adoption of the windbreaks law. In addition, the project enjoyed strong support from municipal governments and from territorial bodies of the MEPA that provided substantial in-kind contributions.

Communication and Awareness Raising

238. The evaluation evidence suggests that the project identified and reached almost all the relevant types of key stakeholders[111] with SLM communication messages, according to the developed communication strategy. Moreover, the project employed diverse communication activities, including TV, radio, print and social media to spread awareness over the life of the project. Additionally, many stakeholder meetings facilitated the exchange of information among diverse group of stakeholders.

Rating for Preparation and Readiness:	Satisfactory
Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision for RECC:	*Moderately Satisfactory*
Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision for UNEP:	*Satisfactory*
Overall Rating for Quality of Project management and Supervision:	Satisfactory
Rating for Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation:	Highly Satisfactory
Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity:	Moderately Satisfactory
Rating for Environment and Social Safeguards:	Moderately Satisfactory
Rating for Ownership and Drive-ness:	Satisfactory
Rating for Communication and Awareness Raising:	Satisfactory
Rating for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues:	**Satisfactory**

[111] The project did not cover a part of ethnic Azeri minority groups - those without the knowledge of the Georgian language, living mostly in Gardabani municipality.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

239. **Conclusion 1**. **L-SLM project contributed greatly to improving the enabling environment for windbreaks management through mobilizing support and promoting land degradation issues among policy and decision makers in Georgia. The project, however, fell short in mobilizing the support for developing the framework document for SLM mainstreaming – the National Integrated Land Management Strategy.**

240. Achievements in improving the windbreaks management enabling environment were made possible with the strong support from the Parliament's Agrarian Committee and from different divisions of MEPA, among many other stakeholders. Equally important was the establishment of synergies with other projects and provision of high-level forums for the discussion of SLM issues. Moreover, the project assured the participation of all relevant stakeholders in planning, implementation and review of pertinent measures, that made the decision-makers, including those in the parliament, more receptive/sensitized towards SLM issues and to the recommendations made by the project.

241. The above preconditions created a good ground for the national authorities to consider the developed legislative proposals on soil protection. With regards to NILMS, the project did not have a sound approach towards its elaboration at project design and were not address through adaptive management.

242. **Conclusion 2**. **The project succeeded to a certain extent in achieving the uptake of SLM practices by demo-farmers and their community members through demonstrating the benefits of introduced technologies.**

243. Evaluation evidence indicates that the windbreak's installation pilot was successful at a private farm where the project selected a well-invested and motivated farmer, with a high-level of awareness of the benefits of such installations. The experience with windbreaks rehabilitation was less successful on lands under mixed ownership, in the area prone to human-induced fires. The recently enacted legislation, to which the project contributed, will hopefully solve the challenges related to securing the protection of windbreaks and stimulate the future windbreaks rehabilitation/installation works (such works are ongoing under GEF-6 project in LD area).

244. The application of improved pastures management practices was evident at project sites. The Shenako community, with the exposure to many donor-financed projects, showed good results. However, Kasristskali community, with ethnic minorities, did not *fully* follow the developed pastures management plan, pointing to the need for longer support for such pilots. Moreover, due to the short duration of the pilot, without experts' subsequent support, the farmers in both communities gave up on growing agronomically beneficial forage legume – sainfoin[112], which was recommended by the consultants (see Para 165).

245. The evaluation revealed the success of the crop rotation pilot in Dedoplistskaro municipality which is one of the main grain producer municipalities in Georgia. Here the areas under the newly introduced pea fields (the grains' predecessor crop) quadrupled over the last four years, encompassing the plots of not only the demo-farmers but of other community members as well. Despite this success, the achieved coverage with planted peas is about 4% of all applicable lands in the municipality, and the extent of monocropping is still high (see Para 157).

[112] Sainfoin did not grow well due to weeds and extreme drought.

246. The project facilitated the participatory land use planning processes at communities' level through which the community members arrived at meaningful recommendations for the sustainable management of their land resources. Some of these recommendations can be implemented with own resources, while others require an influx of investments, and hence, the project could have helped with the development of resource mobilization plans, that would have assured further the plans' implementation.

247. **Conclusion 3**. **Ethnic minorities' representatives and women benefited from participating in the pilots' planning and implementation processes, and from capacity building events. However, the reports and studies produced by the project do not provide gender analysis besides giving sex-disaggregated data. Moreover, the project did not consider the language constraints of wider ethnic minority farmers living in the Gardabani municipality.**

248. The evaluation revealed that the project to a certain extent considered equity of opportunities for various population groups. Thus, the share of ethnic minority direct project beneficiaries corresponded with their proportion in general population in project areas[113]. However, the language concerns of certain proportions of ethnic minority groups were not considered when designing communication messages for wider population groups. (The awareness raising materials were printed only in Georgian and a few in the English language.)

249. The evaluation also found that disproportionally higher number of women[114] than men were involved in the training events on SLM issues, benefiting women's agricultural homestead activities. The share of female demo-farmers was relevant to the context. Moreover, an equal proportion of women participated in the development of pilot projects and LUPs that assures the consideration of the needs of both men of women. Yet, these aspects are not discussed under the relevant documents.

250. **Conclusion 4. Overall, the project's assessment was found to be Satisfactory due to the encouraging programmatic achievements under all its three components. Some challenges remain though with the upscale of SLM practices. In addition, the project's operational management was found to be an area requiring strengthening.**

251. The project's exit strategy correctly identified and employed the main mechanisms for the upscale of introduced SLM practices. These mechanisms included the conduct of needs assessments, tapping into the global knowledge base and employing international expertise, raising awareness of relevant stakeholders, improving the enabling environment for SLM, and building capacities of local stakeholders. Nonetheless, the evaluation revealed that the prospects of upscale for the crop rotation pilots do not look promising (see Para 215).

252. Those prospects could have been improved by establishing a stronger risk management system for properly identifying, assessing and controlling risks. The evaluation findings showed also that inadequate risks management influenced the efficiency of project operations as well (see Para 236).

253. Financial oversight of the project was another area requiring strengthening at a system level as independent auditors did not flag the issues with the budget submitted by one of the project's sub-contractors. (see Paras 191-192). Moreover, the results-based expenditure reporting was weak as a template for such reporting was not provided to the

[113] Direct beneficiaries include those who attended the trainings conducted by the EIEC in Gardabani municipality, those who were selected for the crop rotation pilots and those living in Kasristskali community where one of the pastures management pilots was implemented.
[114] This was conditioned by the training of school and pre-school teachers, the absolute majority of which are women.

EA. The relevant template was not available also for the provision of the proof of co-financing.

254. Conclusion 5. COVID-19 pandemic influenced mostly the conduct of a few meetings which were held in an online format.

B. Summary of project findings and ratings

255. The table below provides a summary of the ratings and findings discussed in Chapter V. Overall, the project demonstrates a Satisfactory rating.

Table 12. Summary of the ratings and findings

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
Strategic Relevance		**HS**
Alignment to UNEP MTS and PoW	The project was aligned with UNEP MTS 2014-2017 and UNEP POW 2014-2015.	HS
Alignment to Donor strategic priorities	The project was aligned with GEF's LD1 and LD3 focal area objectives and related outcomes.	HS
Relevance to national priorities	The project responded to a few national programmes, policies and strategies for meeting the requirements of UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNCBD conventions to which Georgia is a party.	HS
Complementarity with existing interventions	The project complemented all relevant initiatives addressing land degradation, and related ecosystem management and environmental governance issues in the country and in project areas.	HS
Quality of Project Design	The project design was strong in terms of clearly showing the project's alignment and relevance to UNEP/GEF/Donor and global/national priorities. The design was also strong in terms of clarifying challenges in operating context, identifying governance and supervision arrangements, knowledge transfer mechanisms, proposing sound budgets and efficiency measures. The project document, however, was insufficiently elaborated with regards to addressing sustainability concerns and showing the full spectrum of intended results and causality.	**S**
Nature of External Context	Nature of External Context had limited influence on the project. Political factors (merging of two ministries, local elections) delayed the development and approval of several deliverables.	**F**
Effectiveness		**S**
1. Availability of outputs	TE found that eight out of nine outputs planned were delivered fully - either by the L-SLM or other projects (co-financing). The outputs were delivered mostly in time, considering the project's re-aligned timeline[115], to allow high levels of use. Moreover, the outputs were of good quality, and produced with a meaningful involvement of intended users.	S

[115] Under the original timeline only three outputs were delivered timely.

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
2. Achievement of project outcomes	The project contributed greatly to the improvement of SLM policy and regulatory framework through the provision of avenues/forums for discussions and consultations, obtaining co-financing, and the provision of a direct technical assistance for the regulatory documents development. The project succeeded in knowledge transfer and demonstrating the benefits of introduced SLM practices; the evidence also indicates that the economically viable SLM techniques were adopted by rural communities to a certain extent.	S
3. Likelihood of impact	Most drivers were in place, and many assumptions hold. The legislative framework is partially improved as more legislative acts are waiting to be adopted and developed.	L
Financial Management		**MS**
1. Adherence to UNEP's financial policies and procedures	The project expenses cannot be fully tracked for its third component where the sub-contractor did not present the comprehensive budget or the expenditure reports (there was no requirement according to the Agreement between RECC and EIEC). Besides, the sub-contractor purchased a vehicle without the approval from GEF.	U
2. Completeness of project financial information	The evaluator was able to obtain almost all applicable items related to financial management of the project, except for the breakdown of expenditures incurred by the EIEC and the proof of co-financing.	MS
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	The evaluation evidence suggests that communication between the finance and project management staff was satisfactory	S
Efficiency	The project was implemented in a relatively efficient manner with many synergies/coordinative actions but with some losses in cost-effectiveness for certain pilots.	**MS**
Monitoring and Reporting		**HS**
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	The project's monitoring design contained all the indicators given in the logframe, though a few indicators needed improvement.	S
2. Monitoring of project implementation	Monitoring system facilitated the timely tracking of results throughout the project's implementation period.	HS
3. Project reporting	Project reporting was based on the UNEP-provided templates and were completed fully on a regular basis, with the attached documentation/evidence of the project's progress.	HS
Sustainability		**ML**
1. Socio-political sustainability	The sustainability of project outcomes has a moderate degree of dependency on social/political factors and there is strong ownership, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders. The exit strategy did not fully consider the different options for strengthening socio-economic sustainability.	ML

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
2. Financial sustainability	Project outcomes have a moderate dependency on future funding and the majority of the required funding has been secured.	L
3. Institutional sustainability	Institutional sustainability is promising for windbreaks development, in other areas relevant regulations are still in the pipeline or waiting for an adoption.	L
Factors Affecting Performance		**S**
1. Preparation and readiness	The project took appropriate measures to start the project implementation in a timely manner and to mobilise the support.	S
2. Quality of project management and supervision	*By Executing Agency: Moderately Satisfactory* The project had effective arrangements for its management and supervision, with the need of strengthening the risk management and tasks prioritization. *By Implementing Agency: Satisfactory* UNEP provided strong guidance and supervision to the executing partner	S
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	The project succeeded in reaching and involving all the important stakeholders and obtaining support for the achievement of the project's outputs and outcomes.	HS
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity	Gender considerations were incorporated in the project's context and logframe, less so during its implementation. Ethnic minorities were not included in the ProDoc; nonetheless the project involved them in the pilot' planning (e.g., PMP), implementation, and in capacity building events.	MS
5. Environmental, social and economic safeguards	The project was tracking environmental, social and economic safeguards and project impacts through various studies; however, comprehensive risks identification/assessment was lacking.	MS
6. Country ownership and drivenness	Government agencies provided strategic guidance, led the change processes, and endorsed project results.	S
7. Communication and public awareness	The project's communication strategy was fully implemented and reached diverse audiences[116], driving change processes.	S
Overall Project Performance Rating		**S**

[116] With the exclusion of some part of ethnic minorities

C. Lessons learned

Lesson Learned #1:	**Pilot projects' duration plays an important role in the demonstration of benefits and in the uptake of introduced SLM practices.**
Context/comment:	L-SLM pilot projects' duration was planned to be about 15 months. However, as the experience of the project showed, such a short duration poses certain risks to the full uptake of suggested technologies and demonstration of the benefits (see Paras 141-144).

Lesson Learned #2:	**Comprehensive risks assessment and sound mitigation planning exercises are vital components for ensuring the success of pilot projects and the efficiency of investments.**
Context/comment:	The windbreak's rehabilitation pilot in Dedoplistskaro municipality was facing many risks that were correctly identified based on the previous experiences of similar pilots. Three main challenges for windbreaks maintenance included: a) insufficient regulations for windbreaks maintenance and protection, b) burning of crop residues by farmers, and c) inadequate fire response capabilities at local level. These risks were identified and considered during the pilot's planning process. However, the occurrence of fires was downplayed, hoping that the robust awareness raising campaign and talks with farmers, along with monitoring by local authorities[117], would reduce or eliminate the risks of large fires. Furthermore, the fire response capabilities were considered improved due to the addition of one more truck in the municipality. However, this was still insufficient for dealing with large scale fires. Most importantly, one of the main ingredients for the shift from awareness to action was not considered: Farmers with low financial resources in the area look for easy and cheap ways to get rid of unwanted residues. *Incentives to collect or utilize the residues were not in place (see also Paras 210-212)*. Therefore, the project could have further mitigated the risks by linking farmers to the markets or other farmers so that they would sell their residues. Another important factor for risks' mitigation was having proper regulations. However, these were not in place. The Law on Windbreaks was adopted only 3.5 years after the start of the work on the windbreaks pilot.

[117] Local authorities in turn do not have much resources for monitoring.

D. Recommendations[118]

Recommendation #1:	**Promote human rights-responsive planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting by:** a) Building the capacity of the project team and technical staff on human rights-based approaches, including on gender and minority issues' mainstreaming and equity. b) Setting up relevant mechanisms and allocating appropriate resources for identifying, documenting, and responding to the needs of marginalized groups to ensure the attainment of equal benefits by men and women, and by minority and other groups.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	This recommendation is addressing the challenge identified in Conclusion 3 and Paras 125 and 234.
Priority Level [119]:	Critical recommendation
Responsibility:	**UNEP**: for ensuring the incorporation of human rights approaches into the project documents and for overseeing their implementation. **Project executing partners** may wish to expand their understanding of human rights-based approaches by participating in relevant online or other courses[120].
Proposed implementation timeframe:	Starting as soon as possible and applying it to any ongoing or planned project.

Recommendation #2:	**Improve the continuity of results and the upscale potential of pilot projects by:** a) Paying particular attention to the *duration* of the pilots to make sure there is sufficient time to demonstrate benefits and allow for the uptake of suggested technologies. b) Properly identifying and assessing the *risks* to the uptake and continuity of suggested technologies and planning appropriate mitigation measures. c) Developing *exit strategies* for each pilot project. These strategies may incorporate such elements as:

[118] Both UNEP and RECC are starting the work on new project in Georgia: Low Carbon Solutions through Nature Based Urban Development for Kutaisi City (GEF ID 10643) and the recommendations given in this section can be considered under that or any other upcoming project.

[119] Select priority level from the three categories below:
Critical recommendation: address significant and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided regarding the achievement of programme objectives.
Important recommendation: address reportable deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance might be at risk regarding the achievement of programme objectives. Important recommendations are followed up on an annual basis.
Opportunity for improvement: comprise suggestions that do not meet the criteria of either critical or important recommendations, and are only followed up as appropriate during subsequent oversight activities.

[120] A few of the interesting courses include the following:
1) Gender Mainstreaming and Sustainable Development https://www.itcilo.org/courses/gender-mainstreaming-and-sustainable-development ; 2) Gender Responsive Budgeting https://portal.trainingcentre.unwomen.org/product/gender-responsive-budgeting/ https://portal.trainingcentre.unwomen.org/product/gender-responsive-budgeting-analysis-and-strategies-moving-forward-from-theory-to-practice/ ; 3) Gender Equality and Development – An Overview https://olc.worldbank.org/content/gender-equality-and-development-%E2%80%93-overview-self-paced ; 4) Gender in Climate-Smart Agriculture Projects https://olc.worldbank.org/content/gender-climate-smart-agriculture-projects-self-paced 2

	- the identification of government agencies for the provision of follow-up activities - helping with markets access (for buying relevant inputs or selling obtained yields/crop residues) - helping with value chain development either directly or through connecting with appropriate projects/investors - helping with resource mobilization d) Involving the Rural Development Agency as one of the *implementing partners* in future projects in LD area, as its territorial units, the ICCs, have relevant responsibilities and experience. (See also Para 217)
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The recommendation is addressing the challenge identified in Conclusion 4.
Priority Level:	Important
Responsibility:	**UNEP**: for promoting the development of exit strategies for individual pilot projects for projects in Georgia and elsewhere. **Project executing partners** may wish to develop and implement exit strategies for pilot projects under GEF-6 and GEF-7 and improving risk management.
Proposed implementation timeframe:	Starting as soon as possible and applying it to any ongoing or planned project.

Recommendation #3:	It is noted that the Executing Agency, RECC, implemented this project and provided narrative and financial reports in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in its agreement with UNEP. However, this evaluation recognizes areas in which UNEP's processes and requirements should be reviewed and, potentially revised. It is recommended for the UNEP to **Improve results-based expenditure reporting and financial oversight by:** a) Requiring results-based reporting on expenditures (this is expected to be supported by a new project management system, IPMR); b) Requiring sub-contracted parties to present detailed budgets; c) Requiring sub-contracted parties to report on expenditures and transferring back unspent amounts as relevant; d) Requiring sub-contractors to follow GEF requirements on vehicles' purchase with GEF funds; e) Requiring reporting on actual amounts of co-financing, and f) Providing templates for the proof of co-financing in the Appendices of PCAs
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The recommendation is addressing the challenge identified in Conclusion 4.
Priority Level:	Critical
Responsibility:	**UNEP**
Proposed implementation timeframe:	Starting as soon as possible and applying it to any ongoing or planned project.

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Place in text	Comment	Evaluator's Response
Recommen-dation 1	1. There is not any assessment or any barrier related to human rights but suddenly Recommendation 1 suggests: Promote human rights-responsive planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting. 2. I couldn't find any context on this issue. 3. The only comment was that the Gardabani ethnic minority was not in the reports and a comment on language barrier on some communication materials. 4. I suggest this recommendation is made more specific so that we can benefit from it in other projects. Otherwise, it is very confusing and gives the impression that the project had some human rights issues, which was not the case.	1. Recommendation 1 is based on the Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity section of the report and on Conclusion 3. 2. As can be seen from Para 233 the evaluation reviewed pilot projects' planning document, vulnerability studies, land use plans and regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for two draft laws and found that none of the documents included gender analysis for ensuring, for example, that the proposed pilots, land use plans or policies benefit equally men and women or that they provide equal opportunities. (These aspects were not analyzed in relation to other disadvantaged groups as well). This is an important aspect for promoting human rights-responsive planning and implementation. 3. It should be noted also that the ProDoc placed emphasis on gender issues: "A *gender analysis* will underpin the development and implementation of pilot projects", "Output 2.2. A package of L-SLM *with due gender consideration* piloted", "Output 1.1… Recommended policy and amendments *with due gender consideration* prepared and submitted for endorsement to the relevant governmental entities". Moreover, RIAs, according to the Government Resolution No35, should include social assessment, and an equality assessment in particular. 4. Regarding the Azeri minorities, they constitute over 40% of one of the three pilot municipality's population and their language barrier had been a known issue (see Footnote 83). The project did not consider this barrier during the planning phase and the budget was not responsive to the ethnic minorities' needs. This is a human rights issue, especially when the GEF project's aim is to cover wider population with SLM messages. One of the project's outputs states: "Knowledge of L-SLM practices developed and *disseminated*, including to women organized groups". 5. Parts A and B of the recommendation specify the recommended measures: capacity building and resources allocation that is relevant for the implementing agency as well.

Para 11,13	5. Ethnic minority issue had not been identified in the Project documents at PIF or PPG (CEO Endorsement) stages. During the implementation, existence of national minority languages did not cause any communication problem. Ethnic minority representatives who did not know the official language of the state (Georgian) were communicated either in Russian and in case of Azerbaijanian representatives, by the Azerbaijani native speaker Project staff (e.g., Ms. Eugenya Mekhtieva). 6. Due to the formal requirement under national law of Georgia, all legal documents, as well as all planning documents that could be subject to formal approval by line ministries and/or municipal authorities have to be drafted, reviewed and distributed in official state language – Georgian. For that reason, the Project was not in a position to produce bi- and three- lingual versions of the above documents. In addition, the Project budget did not envisage costs for such translations. 7. As to the communication messages – these messages were distributed in a form of brochures and leaflets, but mainly through internet and social media in Georgian and English languages. the Project budget did not envisage extra expenses for such translations. The Project budget did not envisage extra costs for communication in Azerbaijanian and/or Armenian languages.	6. <u>Re: 5th and 7th bullet points:</u> Paras 11, 13 are the summaries/conclusions. More details about those findings and conclusions can be found in the body of the report. The report acknowledges the efforts made by the project in including ethnic minorities (139, 173, 234, 248) in its activities and in assisting the selected beneficiaries with the translation. The fact that the project did not budget for the translation of awareness raising materials into the ethnic minority language supports the Conclusion 3 and the statements made in Paras 11 and 13. 7. <u>Re: 6th bullet point:</u> As noted in Para 233 (and related footnotes), the pilot projects planning document, vulnerability studies, regulatory impact assessments for two draft laws, and land use plans for two communities did not contain the analysis regarding gender (the issue is not about the translation). While gender analysis was envisaged by the ProDoc, the analysis by ethnic groups was not. Hence, the statement made in Para 11 of the evaluation report: "The degree of responsiveness to gender or minority groups needs in the developed legal or planning documents is unclear due to the lack of relevant analysis."
Para 171	8. It is not possible to indicate the proportion of teachers who are large farmers, however it should be considered that the vast majority of the local rural population is engaged at least in family, small farming activities.	8. Footnote 80 addressed this comment: "Usually, the majority of residents from the project's three municipalities have at least a small homestead plot, with the exception of Gardabani town"
Para 173, 234, 248	9. Due to the fact that the main target group of the project was not directly representatives of ethnic minorities, the translation of study materials into Azeri was not provided within the project. English-language study materials were made available to the non-Georgian segment and were available to all participants.	9. The main target group for SLM messages and communication campaign was the decision makers and farmers living in project municipalities, *including* the significant percentage of ethnic Azeris living mostly in one of the project's target municipalities (over 40% of Gardabani municipality's population is Azeris). Moreover, based on Footnote 83, about half of that population does not understand Georgian.

	10. It should also be noted that during the meetings / trainings, the representatives of the ethnic minority stated that they did not have a problem with understanding the Georgian language and were involved in the work process. In addition, materials provided in Georgian for ethnic minorities are a means of their civic integration and motivation to practice state language.	10. The provision of integration opportunities for a few tens of Azeri representatives is helpful, but the aim of the GEF project was to advance the adoption of SLM practices in the pilot municipalities and nationwide and the spreading of SLM awareness raising materials in Azeri language would have benefitted further the achievement of this purpose. Gardabani's Azeri population who do not know Georgian, most likely do not know English either.
Para 177	11. The World Day to Combat Desertification was widely celebrated in 2018, 2019 by the Centre. The events scheduled for 2020-2021 were held online due to Covid-19 circumstances. Furthermore, despite the completion of the project, the Centre continues to celebrate the International Day to Combat Desertification with various exciting events and implements awareness raising activities every year.	11. Para 177 notes the conduct of the events for the World Day to Combat Desertification. More detailed information about the years/format is added in the Footnote 87.
Paras 191, 200	12. The purchase of the car was considered by a service contract of EIEC and REC. That time the Centre did not have a car. In order to provide the service agreed within the agreement, it was financially justified, to purchase a car rather than to rent a transport for each activity to be held in the project pilot municipalities as far as awareness raising activities include a lot of meetings with local people as well as organizing trainings and information meetings planned for several years with the project. It should be noted as well that the car served to another GEF funded project on "Environmental Management and Decision-Making for Improved Monitoring of Rio Convention Implementation". In addition to the trainings, meetings and events under the S-SLM project, 17 meetings under another project was conducted in all regions of Georgia covering 345 representatives from 65 municipalities. Renting the transport and hiring a driver for each meeting would be more expensive rather than purchasing a car. This action is also important in terms of sustainability, as the purchased car would provide a technical assistance to the center for years to raise awareness, especially since the center continues to work	12. According to the GEF Guidelines on Project and Program Cycle Policy (GEF/C.59/Inf.03), "*the use of GEF funds to purchase vehicles* is strongly discouraged. *Such costs are normally expected to be borne by the co-financed portion of PMCs*. Any request to use GEF funding to purchase project vehicles must be justified by the exceptional specific circumstances of the project/program. The Secretariat assesses such requests and decides whether to approve them". 13. The inclusion of the vehicle in the service contract should have been agreed with the GEF Secretariat as *the purchase was planned with GEF funds*.

	on sustainable land management issues after the project completion as well. 13. It should be noted too that the car was purchased by tender according to the state procurement law, therefore the car was purchased with the least price presented in the tender. 14. Furthermore, it should also be noted that this decision was particularly important in terms of safety of people travelling frequently within the project. In the case of the purchase of a car, the center was responsible for the maintenance of the car, and therefore all travels were maximally protected from unforeseen events. 15. It must be taken into account that the purchase of the car did not have any negative impact on the number and quality of activities carried out by the Centre, on the contrary it contributed in terms of time and efficiency, as noted in the report too. 16. In addition, the program on "Environmental and Agricultural Education in School" developed by the Centre and a guide for primary school teachers, which combines 8 environmental and agricultural textbooks, can be considered as in-kind contribution and logical continuation of the project, as one of the textbooks is on "land management and the fight against desertification." It is significant that the Centre has already trained more than 3000 primary school teachers to integrate the program into the school space countrywide, including the capacity of 148 primary school teachers in Dedoplistskaro, Akhmeta and Gardabani municipalities (S-SLM project areas), and hundreds of students from these municipalities are studying such important issues as land management and the fight against desertification.	
Para 191	17. REC and EIEC signed an agreement not a contract	14. Noted and revised accordingly.

Para 191	18. The agreement between REC and EIEC is bilingual as well as its budget so it could not be able to be only Georgian	15. Noted and revised accordingly (the footnote is deleted).
Para 191	19. Purchasing of the second car that was included in the budget attachment of the contract between the RECC and EIEC operating under the MoENRP, was supported by the MoENRP. The rationale behind this purchase was that for that time the EIEC did not have its own car necessary for implementation of the activities in pilot municipalities under the said contract.	16. Please see Bullet Points 12 and 13 in the last column of this table.
Para 192	20. The agreement with EIEC did not contain requirement to report financial expenditures to the RECC as agreement was formulated in a form of sub-service-contract that was financially reported to UNEP in entire separate budget line under "Sub-Contracts" budget headline.	17. Para 191 notes this information and also notes that *the presented budget was incomplete*, whereas according to GEF and UNEP requirements <u>all GEF funds should be accounted for</u>. The EIEC's budget included only two items: training costs and a vehicle. It did not include the cost estimates for other relevant expenses. In the absence of expenditures reporting, having the comprehensive budget was of high importance. 18. The "Sub-contract" budget line in the ProDoc and in the expenditure reports *was broken down* by smaller budget lines. It is unknown which budget line was charged for the EIEC's vehicle purchase.
Para 192	21. The agreement between EIEC and REC obliges the EIEC to provide a service for the activities mentioned in the agreement. Therefore, it does not need to have more detailed budget lines.	19. See Bullet Point 17 in the last column of this table
Para 192	22. The agreement with EIEC included submitting invoices to REC identifying the services are provided and requests next payment/instalment for further services. There were 3 payments/instalments in total. According to the agreement, the provider is obliged to perform services indicated in the agreement and invoices are the documents that approve that appropriate service is provided. Therefore EIEC submitted invoices to REC.	20. Added Footnote 95. The submitted invoices to RECC contained the following text: "EIEC provided the first (second, third) part of the services to RECC under the Agreement signed on 28.11.2016 between RECC and EIEC. The cost of the service is …" These invoices did not specify the type of the provided services (e.g. publishing of certain number of information materials, conduct of certain number of meetings/trainings, etc.) and the associated expenses.

Para 192	23. According to the Georgian legislation, a service provider is not committed to provide the documents that are not mentioned in the agreement. EIEC provided the service according to the terms of the agreement. It is not clear for EIEC, on what bases the evaluator is requesting the documents that are not considered by the service agreement. All the reports that are considered by the agreement, are provided by EIEC to REC and the evaluation report also indicates that all activities have been implemented and even some of them exceeded the planned ones.	21. *Please* see Bullet Points 18 and 20 above.
Para 196, table 11	24. PCA and its annexes do not provide for exact definition of “proof for in-kind and/or cash contribution”. In most of the cases governmental in-kind and/or cash contributions were part of wider governmental expenditures and were not budgetary, financially or otherwise separated from other wider elements. Therefore, it was not technically feasible to provide detailed accounting, bank transfer or financial documents as a poof on exact in-kind/cash co-financing costs.	22. Footnote 96 is added to Table 11 to explain the challenges with obtaining the proof of co-financing. Para 195 notes now that the relevant template was not included in the appendices of the PCA agreement. Also, a relevant point was added to Recommendation 3
Para 228	25. Paragraph 237 does not address this issue. Not clear.	23. The paragraph number is adjusted (Para 236 instead of Para 237).

ANNEX II. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project planning, reporting documents and agreements

1. Project Identification Form
2. GEF approved CEO Endorsement Request package, including the project design document with its appendices
3. Agreement between UNEP and MoENRP
4. Agreement between UNEP and RECC
5. Agreement between RECC and EIEC
6. Three contracts for consulting services on pilot projects implementation with Eco-Institute, Association of Vashlovani Protected Areas, Friends Association of Tusheti Protected Areas.
7. Contracts with demo-farmers
8. TORs for nine project experts and project team members
9. Memorandums of Understanding with Ministry of Agriculture, National Agency for Public Registry, Caritas, ACDI/VOCA, WRI
10. Communication strategy
11. Exit strategy
12. M&E Plan
13. Two letters of extension
14. Three revisions to budgets
15. Four co-finance reports
16. Four external audit reports, including information on annual expenditures
17. Five remittance advise documents (disbursements from UNEP to RECC)
18. Project Implementation Report for the Fiscal Year 2017 (1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017)
19. Project Implementation Report for the Fiscal Year 2017 (1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018)
20. Project Implementation Report for the Fiscal Year 2017 (1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019)
21. Project Implementation Report for the Fiscal Year 2017 (1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020)
22. Half yearly progress report (reporting period 15, June- 15 December, 2016)
23. Half yearly progress report (reporting period 15, June- 15 December, 2017)
24. Half yearly progress report (reporting period 15, June- 15 December, 2018)
25. Half yearly progress report (reporting period 15, June- 15 December, 2019)
26. Project final report
27. Mid-term review report
28. Minutes for the following meetings: project inception meeting, four PSC meetings, three annual meetings, five meetings on windbreaks policy/legislation discussions, meetings for the pilots development
29. Trainings' implementation reports
30. Pilot projects proposals document, 2017
31. Pilot projects monitoring reports
32. Two TM's mission reports

Project outputs (including those obtained through co-financing)

L-SLM project deliverables

33. Report on the analysis of legal and policy framework, 2017
34. Institutional analysis report, 2019
35. Recommendations for land policy development, 2018
36. Revised governmental resolution N424 of 31 December 2013 on technical regulation for removing, storage and use of soil, with a new attachment on the lawn production alternatives.
37. Revised Law on Windbreaks and amendments to seven legislative acts
38. Training module on L-SLM, 2017
39. Soil degradation causes and solutions (project booklet)
40. Vulnerability profiles for three project communities, 2017
41. Kasristskali community socio-economic assessment, 2018
42. Pasture management plan for Kasristskali community
43. Land use plan for Shenako community
44. Land use plan for Arkhiloskalo community
45. Two project newsletters

Outputs produced through co-financing

46. RIA on the Draft Law on Windbreaks (under GEF-IFAD project)
47. RIA on the Draft Law on Soil Protection (under GEF-IFAD project)
48. Policy Brief: Pasture Management in Georgia. GIZ, ELD, Altus Impact. 2017
49. Windbreak Management Policy, GIZ, 2018
50. The Economics of Land Degradation in Georgia: Pasture Management. Legal and institutional analysis, GIZ, ELD, 2018
51. Pastures Management in Georgia: Situation Analysis and Main Challenges, Recommendations for Development of Pastures Sustainable Management Programme, GIZ, 2019.
52. Report on the Roles and responsibilities of relevant national agencies for implementation of the commitments under the UNCCD to carry out monitoring, information and data sharing tools as between governmental as non-governmental organization, 2016, UNDP

Previous evaluations

53. Terminal evaluation of UNDP's sustainable management of pastures in Georgia project, 2016.
54. Terminal evaluation of UNDP's harmonization of information management project, 2018
55. IBiS project evaluation, GIZ, 2021

Reference documents

56. UNEP MTS 2014-2017
57. UNEP POW 2014-2015

58. The Second UNCCD National Action Program of Georgia (2014-2022)
59. The Third National Communication under UNFCCC
60. Georgia's 3rd National Report to UNCCD, 2014
61. Environmental Assessment Code of Georgia
62. The Second National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2014-2020
63. State of the Environment report 2014-2017
64. Agricultural Development Strategy of Georgia for 2012-2022
65. National Target Setting to Achieve Land Degradation Neutrality in Georgia. Final Report. 2018
66. UN's Partnership for Sustainable Development (UNPSD 2016-2020)

ANNEX III. PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE EVALUATION

Organization	Name	Position	Gender
National Government			
1. MEPA, Department of Amelioration and Land Management	Nino Chikovani	Head of Land Resources Protection Unit, UNCCD Focal Point	F
2. MEPA, Department of Amelioration and Land Management	Maka Manjavidze	First Category Chief Specialist at Land Resources Protection Unit	F
3. MEPA, Department of Environment and Climate Change	Nino Tkhilava	Head of Department	F
4. MEPA, Department of Amelioration and Land Management	Eka Sanadze	Head of Hydro-melioration Unit	F
5. MEPA, EIEC	Tamar Aladashvili	Director	F
6. MEPA, EIEC	Irine Kutateladze	Former Deputy Director	F
7. MEPA, Agriculture Research Center	Giorgi Gambashidze	Head of Soil Research Laboratory	M
8. Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure	Lamara Beridze	Chief Specialist	F
Implementing Agency			
9. UNEP	Ersin Esen	Task Manager	M
10. UNEP	George Saddimbah	FMO	M
Executing Agency			
11. RECC	Sophiko Akhobadze	Project Director	F
12. RECC	Keti Tsereteli	Project Manager	F
13. RECC	Palavandishvili	Financial Officer	M
14. RECC	Mikheil Kurdadze	Information Officer	M
15. RECC	Lali Tevzadze	Biosphere Reserve Project Manager	F
Local Government and MEPA's territorial organs			
16. Administration of Dedoplistskaro Municipality	Malkhaz Merabishvili	Deputy Mayor	M
17. MEPA, ICC Dedoplistskaro territorial unit	Giorgi Benashvili	Head	M
18. MEPA, ICC Dedoplistskaro territorial unit	Marine Otarashvili	Deputy Head	F
19. Administration of Akmeta Municipality	Ioseb Labauri	Specialist	M
20. Administration of Akmeta Municipality	Avto Gviniashvili	Representative to Akhmeta	M
21. MEPA, ICC Akhmeta territorial unit	Ira Elanidze	Head	F
22. MEPA, ICC Gardabani territorial unit	Irakli Khozrevanidze	Head	M
Civil Society Organizations			

Organization	Name	Position	Gender
23. Georgian Protected Areas Network association, Friends of Tusheti Protected Areas Association,	Anzor Gogotidze	Managing Director	M
24. Association of Vashlovani Protected Areas (sub-contractor)	Amiran Kodiashvili	Chairman	M
25. Local CBO Kasristskali Development Center	Zviad Buachidze	Head of NGO	M
26. Aisi College	David Papuashvili	Head of Programs	M
27. Aisi College	Tamar Japoshvili	Lecturer	F
Project Experts			
28. E.C.O Institute of Ecology	Hanns Kirchmeir	International Consultant for pilots and LUPs development and monitoring	M
29. Tbilisi State University	Besik Kalandadze	Agricultural Expert, Trainer	M
30. Academy of Agricultural Sciences	Nato Kakabadze	Agricultural Expert, Trainer	F
31. Tbilisi State University	Paata Turava	Legal Expert	M
32. CNF	Giorgi Arabuli	Expert for LUPs development	M
33. NGO Environment & Development	Kakha Bakhtadze	Expert for PMP development	M
34. NACRES	Temo Popiashvili	Trainer on Pastures monitoring	M
FARMERS			
35. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Nona Toklikishvili	Teachers training participant	F
36. Farmer from Akhmeta	Tamar Ukuridze	Teachers training participant	F
37. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Lia Khutsishvili	Demo Farmer, peas	F
38. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Elene Benashvili	Demo Farmer, peas	F
39. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Paata Menteshashvili	Demo Farmer, peas	M
40. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Giorgi Gorashvili	Demo Farmer, peas	M
41. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Nodar Zurashvili	Demo Farmer, peas	M
42. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Valeri Khasaia	Demo Farmer, peas	M
43. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Zurab Tetvadze	Demo Farmer, peas	M
44. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Davit Nateladze	Demo Farmer, peas	M
45. Farmer from Dedoplistskaro	Gela Natroshvili	Demo Farmer, peas	M
46. Farmer from Gardabani municipality	Akbar Omarov	Demo Farmer,Crop rotation	M
47. Farmer from Gardabani municipality	Marine Iremashvili	Demo Farmer,Crop rotation	F
48. Farmer from Gardabani municipality	Soso Orkuashvili	Demo Farmer, windbreaks	M
49. Farmer from Shenako, Akhmeta municipality	Irodi Bukvaidze	Demo farmer, pastures	M
50. Farmer from Omalo, Akhmeta municipality	Sergo Meladze	Community member, el-fence	M
51. Farmer from Kasristskhali	Alex Iajhiani	Pastures management team member	M
52. Farmer from Kasristskhali	Turala Asanov	Pastures management team member	M
Bilateral/multilateral organizations			

Organization	Name	Position	Gender
53.UNDP	Nino Antadze	Team Leader, Environment and Energy Portfolio	F
54.GIZ	Natia Kobakhidze	Senior Advisor on Integrated Biodiversity Management	F
(21 female and 33 male respondents)			

ANNEX IV. EVALUATION ITINERARY

Date: 11 October 2022

Location	Pilot Project	Persons Met	Gender
Village Sartichala, Gardabani municipality	Windbreak installation on a private farm	Soso Okruashvili, the owner of the farm	M
Village Kasristskali, Akhmeta municipality	Pastures management	Alex Iajhiani, pastoral farmer, PMP team member	M
		Zviad Buachidze, Head of local CBO Kasristskali Development Center	M
Dedoplistskaro town	Crop rotation (pea cultivation)	Lia and Iago Khutsishvilis, Demo-farmers	F M
		Valeri Khasaia, demo-farmer	M

ANNEX V. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS	SOURCES OF
A.	**Strategic relevance**		
1	To what extent is the project in alignment with UNEP's MTS 2014-2017 / 2018-2021 and Programme of Work (POW)?	Document review, Interviews	Project documents, UNEP MTS – 2014-2017 / 2018-2021, and Programme of Work, SDGs UNEP staff, PSC members, representatives of donor agencies
2	To what extent are project's objectives and implementation strategies consistent with global, regional and national environmental priorities?		
3	To what extent is the project in alignment with the requirements of the EU Association Agreement?		
4	To what extent is the project in alignment with the the targets of SDGs?		
5	To what extent has the project explored and built complementarity with other existing initiatives? (Assessment of coherence/Level of alignment with initiatives by national and local government agencies and donor funded projects)		
B.	**Quality of Project Design**		
	See Annex 3 of this report	Desk study, interviews	Project document; Progress reports Project team
C.	**Nature of External Context**		
6	How did the political, environmental, social, institutional context change, if at all, and how did it affect project implementation?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
7	What were, if any, the adaptive management measures planned and implemented in response?		
D.	**Effectiveness**		
	Availability of Outputs		
8	How successful was the project in delivering the planned outputs and in a timely manner? In case of delays or modifications to the outputs, what were the reasons?	Desk study, interviews, case studies, survey	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies, survey data
9	How participatory was the delivery of outputs?		
10	What were the factors influencing the delivery of outputs – both facilitating and hindering factors, such as quality of project management and supervision, preparation and readiness, etc.?		
11	How useful and relevant were the delivered outputs to intended beneficiaries?		
12	How satisfactory was the quality of generated knowledge products content-wise (incl. studies, training and other information materials, etc.) in terms of communicating clearly key findings / concepts, relevant issues, etc. and considering the existing knowledge and capabilities of target audiences?		
	Achievement of Project Outcomes		
13	To what extent the capacities were built of various stakeholders on L-SLM principles and practices – of farmers, community members, including women, CSO, local and national government representatives, and other important stakeholders?	Desk study, interviews, case studies, survey	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies, survey data
14	How successful were pilot projects in terms of demonstrating economic and environmental benefits?		
15	To what extent did the land management planning processes improve at selected local communities level?		
16	How participatory was the development of LUPs? How local stakeholders were involved in their development? How meaningful was local populations' participation in decision-making processes, including of women and young people?		

17	To what extent did the land management planning processes improve at a national level?		
18	To what extent were the planning processes and developed documents responsive to the needs of women and other marginalized groups?		
19	How participatory were the planning processes at a national level?		
20	To what extent were the proposed changes considered/adopted?		
21	To what extent got the SLM integrated into the legal and policy framework?		
22	How the changes in the institutional set-up and mechanisms facilitate SLM?		
23	To what extent the developed legal mechanisms support the application of laws related to SLM? Provide incentives for the adoption of SLM?		
24	To what extent did the policy, legal and institutional framework improve overall?		
	Likelihood of impact		
	General questions: To what extent did the project achieve the most important outcomes to attain intermediate states and the impact? To what extent did the assumptions for the change processes from outputs to project outcomes hold? To what extent are the drivers to support transition from project outcomes to intermediate states in place?	Desk study, interviews, case studies, survey	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies, survey data
25	To what extent did the capacity building activities address the capacity building needs of participants / were tailored to their needs, involved the right type of participants for capacity building?		
26	To what extent did the capacity building activities consider prior knowledge and existing capabilities of target audiences?		
27	To what extent do the trained national and local government representatives remain in the system? *(the above three questions linked to institutional sustainability)*		
28	To what extent did the relevant stakeholders, including women, participate in the project planning and implementation processes (for ensuring ownership/sustainability of results)? *(linked to financial sustainability)*		
29	To what extent do the land use plans identify the sources of financing for implementing L-SLM measures? Are the adequate resources allocated for 2021 for implementing those plans?		
30	What is the willingness/readiness of local and national stakeholders to invest in L-SLM measures?		
31	To what extent have the extension been activities continued by demo-farmers, ICCs, and/or other relevant stakeholders?		
32	To what extent do various stakeholders have continued access to knowledge products on L-SLM issues?		
33	To what extent were the pilot projects tailored to local circumstances to support the transition from project outcomes to intermediate states and impacts?		
34	To what extent are the pilots replicated in the neighboring areas?		
35	To what extent are the incentives mechanisms developed to ensure the application of L-SLM principles and practices, to ensure the upscale of results?		
36	To what extent L-SLM issues are covered by the media?		
37	Did any unintended negative effects resulted from project interventions?		
38	What is the extent of any positive changes at relevant communities, municipalities levels - i.e. in the a) productivity of soils,		

	b) reduction in the levels of anthropogenic pressures, c) reduction in the numbers of people negatively affected by land degradation, d) improving resilience of local populations to the effects of climate change, e) cost-savings due to employing LD preventive measures? f) improving incomes of local populations?		
39	To what extent has the management of L-SLM issues improved at municipal and national levels?		
E.	**Financial Management**		
40	To what extent did the financial management of the project adhere to UNEP's financial policies and procedures?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
41	How complete was the financial information of the project?		
42	How adequate was the amount of financing for achieving stated outcomes/project objective?		
43	How sound was the budget planning and execution? (Did expenditures match the approved budget / work-plan? What were the reasons for under/overspent budget, if any?)		
44	To what extent did the financial management issues affect the timely delivery of the project or the quality of its performance?		
45	What levels of co-financing did the project obtain (Percent of planned)?		
F.	**Efficiency**		
46	To what extent was the implementation of project activities compliant with the original plan, both with regards to time and financial budgets? If not, were there any impacts on planned outputs and outcomes?	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
47	To what extent was the project cost-effective?		
48	To what extent did the project utilize/build on the existing data sources, structures, information and communication channels, networks, similar initiatives? If yes, how did they influence the delivery of project results?		
49	To what extent the partnerships/synergies were established with similar initiatives?		
G.	**Monitoring and Reporting**		
	Monitoring design and budgeting		
50	How adequate was the project's M&E plan in terms of completeness of indicators, indicator definitions (SMART), frequency of data collection, and resource allocation (both human and financial).	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
51	To what extent were the project's indicators and methods for data collection relevant and appropriate for tracking progress?		
	Monitoring of project implementation		
52	To what extent was the monitoring system operational - indicators measured timely, with indicated frequency and methods of data collection - throughout the project's implementation?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
53	To what extent is the gathered baseline data relevant, accurate and appropriately documented?		
54	To what extent was the monitoring the representation and participation of disaggregated groups (incl. women, marginalized, vulnerable groups) in project activities conducted?		
55	What was the quality of the information generated by the monitoring system and how it was used to adapt and improve project execution, achievement of outcomes and for ensuring sustainability?		
56	What was the performance at the project's completion against Core		

	Indicator Targets? 57 To what did the project implement MTR recommendations?		
	Project reporting		
58	To what extent were the reporting requirements fulfilled - vis a vis the taken obligations (PIR, progress reports, financial reports, etc.) and with respect to the effects of the project on disaggregated groups?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
H.	**Sustainability**		
	Socio-political sustainability		
59 60 61 62	To what extent do social and political factors support the continuation and further development of project outcomes? To what extent the individual and/or institutional built capacities, if any, are sustained or have a potential to be sustained, considering the socio-political stability, staff turnover, and other factors. To what extent do the trained national and local government representatives remain in the system? What is the level of readiness of national government stakeholders to continue work on the project's initiated policy and legal changes, and on strengthening the institutional arrangements.	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
	Financial sustainability		
63	To what extent are the project outcomes financially sustainable at pilot sites', communities, and national levels?	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
	Institutional Sustainability		
64 65	To what extent the sustainability of project outcomes (esp. policies and laws) dependent on issues related to institutional frameworks and governance? To what extent are the institutional capacity development efforts likely to be sustained?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
I.	**Factors affecting project performance and cross cutting issues**		
	Preparation and readiness		
66 67 68	What changes were made to the project design after the project approval? To what extent the documents promised in the design were developed: e.g. communication and stakeholder engagement plan? What was the extent and quality of engagement of the project team with all the relevant stakeholder groups (how well those groups were identified)?	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
	Quality of project management and supervision		
69	How effective was the project management in terms of: - Planning and implementing activities for delivering the stated results, supervising the project performance? - Ensuring the participation of all the relevant stakeholders in project activities? - Ensuring coordination, knowledge sharing among the involved parties / similar initiatives - Responding to and overcoming challenges, managing risks?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
	Stakeholder participation and cooperation		
70 71	To what extent the stakeholder engagement plan was implemented? To was extent did the project involve all the relevant stakeholders in	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key

	its implementation?		stakeholders, case studies
72	How effective were the mechanisms for stakeholder participation and cooperation – e.g. PSC, knowledge portal, etc.		
73	To what extent was the engagement of different - gendered, marginalized groups, etc. – was ensured?		
74	What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/program as evolved from the time of the MTR?		
	Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity		
75	To what extent has the project applied the UN Common Understanding in the human-rights based approach (HRBA) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
76	To what extent does the intervention adhere to UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment?		
77	To what extent has project implementation and monitoring taken into consideration: (i) possible inequalities (especially those related to gender) in access to, and the control over, natural resources; (ii) specific vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups (especially women, youth and children) to environmental degradation or disasters; and (iii) the role of disadvantaged groups (especially those related to gender) in mitigating or adapting to environmental changes and engaging in environmental protection and rehabilitation?		
78	What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas?		
	Environmental and social safeguards		
79	To what extent did the project address environmental and social safeguards primarily through the process of environmental and social screening at the project approval stage?	Desk study, interviews	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders
80	To what extent did the project assess and manage risks (avoidance, minimization, mitigation or, in exceptional cases, offsetting) of potential environmental and social risks and impacts associated with project activities? How the identified risks were addressed?		
81	To what extent UNEP requirements[121] were met to: review risk ratings on a regular basis; monitor project implementation for possible safeguard issues; respond (where relevant) to safeguard issues through risk avoidance, minimization, mitigation or offsetting and report on the implementation of safeguard management measures taken?		
82	To what extent were the pilot projects screened for any safeguarding issues and environmental and social risk assessments conducted?		
83	To what extent did the project management management of the project minimize the project's environmental footprint?		
84	What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval?		
	Country ownership and driven-ness		
85	To what extent was the momentum built among the project's stakeholders for them to take the results from outcomes to intermediate states and impacts.	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
86	How committed are the stakeholders (incl. gov. representatives across different ministries) to implement the developed plans and		

[121] For the review of project concepts and proposals, the Safeguard Risk Identification Form (SRIF) was introduced in 2019 and replaced the Environmental, Social and Economic Review note (ESERN), which had been in place since 2016. In GEF projects safeguards have been considered in project designs since 2011.

	adopt the suggested changes to the legal framework (e.g. the adoption of the Law on Windbreaks ,etc.)?		
	Communication and public awareness		
87	What was the effectiveness of communication of learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups arising from the project during its life?	Desk study, interviews, case studies	Project documents, project team, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies
88	What were the challenges and effectiveness of the knowledge management approach (knowledge gaps identification, knowledge generation, transfer, application), including: knowledge and learning deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); knowledge products/events; communication strategy; lessons learned and good practice; adaptive management actions?		
89	What is the sustainability of the communication channels established under the project?		
90	What was the effectiveness of public awareness activities that were undertaken during the implementation of the project to influence attitudes or shape behavior among the target stakeholders?		
91	How effectively were the existing communication channels and networks used, including meeting the differentiated needs of gendered or marginalized groups?		
92	How the feedback was gathered from the involved stakeholders? What was the effectiveness of feedback channels? of grievance redress mechanisms, if available?		

ANNEX VI. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Agricultural Activities/Practices		
1. Could you please tell me if you or your family have been engaged in agricultural activities at any point over the last 4 years?	Yes No	1 2 --> End
2. Have you had grazing animals over the last 4 years?	Yes No	1 2 --> 8
3. Have you used own pastureland, common pasturelands or both?	Own Common Both	1 2 --> 7 3
4. I am going to read out a few techniques and for each of them could you please tell me if you used it in the last four years on your pastureland(s) and which one was a novel practice?	1. Practiced in the last 4 years	2. Novel practice (recently)
A Pastures rotation	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
B Cutting weeds	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
C Planting legumes	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
D Cutting grass periodically	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
5. How satisfied were you with the fertility of your pasture(s) in the last agricultural season?	Satisfied Somewhat satisfied Unsatisfied	1 2 3
6. Over the last 4 years, has your pasture's fertility mostly improved, deteriorated or remained the same?	Improved Deteriorated No change Difficult to answer/DNK	1 2 3 4
7. *If the code on Q3 = 2 or 3*: To your knowledge, over the last 4 years, the fertility of the common pasturelands have improved, deteriorated or stayed the same?	Improved Deteriorated No change Difficult to answer/DNK	1 2 3 4
8. Have you or your family been involved in growing crops over the last 4 years?	Yes No	1 2 --> 16
9. In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the crops' yields during the last agricultural season?	Satisfied Somewhat satisfied Unsatisfied	1 2 3
10 In the last 4 years, has your crop yield in general (for the most part) increased, decreased or remained the same?	Increased Decreased Stayed the same Difficult to answer/DNK	1 2 3 4
11 What do you think were the reasons for the decrease?	Unfavourable weather conditions Use of inadequate inputs Use of inadequate practices Personal reasons (health, time..) Other _____	1 2 3 4 5
12 I am going to read out a few agricultural practices and for each of them could you please tell me if you have used them over the last four years and which one was a novel practice?	A. Practiced in the last 4 years	B. Novel practice (recently)
A Crop rotation	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
B Installing windbreaks	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
C Saying no to burning fields	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
D Sideration	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
E Mulching	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
F No tilling	Yes 1 No 2	Yes 1 No 2
13 How many hectares of land have you used for agricultural purposes in the last 4 years?	__	

14	Who was involved in agricultural activities over the last 4 years? *(circle all that applies)*	Myself Male family member(s) Female fam. member(s) Hired help	1 2 3 4
15	Over the last 4 years has the income received from agriculture increased, decreased or stayed the same?	Increased Decreased Stayed the same	1 2 3
Sources of Information/Trainings			
16	What are your sources of information on agricultural issues?	Community members TV/radio slm.ge website Other Internet Social media Printed info materials Trainings ICC/municipality Agric.input providers Other_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 99
17	Do you have access to Internet from home or cell phone?	___	
18	Now I will be asking about the training(s) that you received from SLM project. How would rate the training(s) – useful, somewhat useful or not useful?	Useful Somewhat useful Not useful	1 2 3
19	Would you recommend such trainings to farmers?	Yes No	1 2
20	Have you transferred the knowledge received from the training(s) to others? *If yes:* to whom?	Not shared Family members Community members Students	1 2 3 4
Personal Details			
21	Sex of the respondent	Female Male	1 2
22	How old are you?	___	
23	Have you worked for the following organizations in the last 4 years?		
	A Gov. organization	Yes 1	No 2
	B Budgetary organization	Yes 1	No 2
	C Commercial entity	Yes 1	No 2
	D CSO	Yes 1	No 2
	E Own farm	Yes 1	No 2
	F None of the above	Yes 1	No 2
24	In which municipality have you lived mostly over the last 4 years?	___	

ANNEX VII. EVALUATION BRIEF

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project "Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management for Mitigating Land Degradation and Contributing to Poverty" GEF ID # 5825

UN environment programme | Evaluation Office

Overview of the Project and Evaluation

The GEF-funded "Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management (L-SLM) for Mitigating Land Degradation and Contributing to Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas" project was designed to address the land degradation concerns in the arid and semi-arid areas of Eastern Georgia that were caused by inadequate legal and institutional environment and unsustainable land management practices. Therefore, the project set out to a) improve legal, policy and institutional framework on L-SLM at national level; b) demonstrate benefits of introducing L-SLM practices in the production system in three municipalities of Georgia that were most severely affected by land degradation.

UNEP launched the project's implementation in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus, that was chosen by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection of Georgia as its designated organization for the project's execution. The project was implemented during 2016-2021 with the GEF financing of 923,000 USD.

Upon the completion of the project the terminal evaluation was undertaken for two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and all its project partners. For meeting these objectives, the evaluator conducted the review of project records/documents and of other relevant literature, field visits to three project sites, interviews with all key stakeholders and a survey of trainings' participants. These activities allowed to obtain the evidence on project results and lessons learnt that will be discussed in this brief.

Project's Achievements/Results

The evaluation found that the project contributed to the achievement of all outcomes to varying degrees. One of the most notable achievements was the adoption of the Law on Windbreaks which ensures the care and maintenance of such installations. The project provided a substantial contribution to the development of this law by facilitating a participatory process and supporting the revision of the draft law.

Several other important legal acts such as the Environmental Assessment Code and the Spatial Planning, Architecture and Construction Code have also been adopted by the Parliament of Georgia since the start of the project's implementation. These legal acts have the potential to positively affect the integration of SLM issues in decision-making processes. Additionally, two laws related to the ownership and management of agricultural lands, with potential implications on SLM, were also adopted. These developments are a significant step forward toward improving the SLM enabling environment in Georgia.

The evaluation found that the project's awareness raising activities and knowledge transfer interventions contributed significantly to placing SLM issues high on the political agenda which resulted in the consideration of important legislative initiatives by the decision-makers.

Moreover, strong ownership of results, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders suggest that the work will be continued on further improving the enabling environment for SLM.

Photo: Installed windbreak on a demo-plot

Another important result of the project was the demonstration of the benefits from, and adoption of SLM practices by farmers in the areas of windbreaks management, pastures' management and crop rotation. The windbreaks pilots showed the farmers and local authorities the resource requirements and techniques for planting/rehabilitating and maintaining such installations, as well as the preconditions for achieving the desired survival rates. One of the important conditions for the areas planned for rehabilitation was to have a low risk of occurrence of human-induced fires.

Demo-farmers, practicing monoculture cropping prior to their involvement in the crop rotation pilot project, have seen the benefits of diversified farming. These benefits included an increase of their soil productivity, higher yields, reduction of expenses on fertilizers and pesticides and an increase in revenues. As a result, more community members adopted the practice, and the areas under pea cultivation in the pilot municipality quadrupled over the last four years.

Photo: El-fenced pasture, Kasristskali community

The pastures' pilots demonstrated to a certain degree the benefits of using electric fences, rotational grazing, weed control and improved hay management techniques. However, the growing of one of the introduced crops for the improvement of pastures productivity, sainfoin, was abandoned due to extreme climatic conditions experienced during the pilot project. The existence of this or other risks, in the view of the evaluation, requires pilot projects to have longer durations so that the benefits have a chance to be observed and strengthened.

The evaluation revealed that the project considered, to a certain extent, the equity of opportunities for various population groups, and proportionally included the representatives of different gender and ethnic minority groups in the project's activities. However, the degree of responsive-ness to gender or minority groups needs in the developed legal or planning documents is unclear due to the lack of relevant analysis. Moreover, when designing communication messages for the wider population, the project was less responsive to the language concerns for a certain proportion of minority groups who did not know the state language.

Overall, the project's assessment was found to be Satisfactory due to the encouraging programmatic achievements under all three of its components. Some challenges were identified in the project's operational management and in the upscale of SLM practices. The project's exit strategy to support upscaling correctly identified and employed the main mechanisms including: the conduct of needs assessments; tapping into the global knowledge

base and employing international expertise; raising awareness of relevant stakeholders; improving the enabling environment for SLM; and building capacities of local stakeholders. The prospects for upscaling could have been improved by establishing a stronger risk management system for properly identifying, assessing and controlling risks.

Lessons Learnt

The L-SLM project's experience revealed some important lessons with regard to the implementation of the pilot projects. First, it was discerned that the correct identification of the duration of pilot projects plays an important role. In this case, a longer duration would have better ensured the demonstration of all the benefits and the full uptake of the suggested technologies by farmers.

The planned timeframe for the pilot projects' implementation was a little over a year and such a short duration contained inherent risks to the demonstration of the full scope of the benefits. The evaluation discovered that some risks were realized for three pilot projects. One of the realized risks was unusually hot weather conditions that affected the uptake of sainfoin cultivation by pastoral farmers. With a longer pilot duration and continued expert support, the farmers could have been encouraged to continue growing agronomically beneficial forage legume – sainfoin. The experience with pastures management in one location also showed that the pastures management team members needed continued support and feedback for the full-fledged implementation of the developed pastures management plan.

A longer duration was required for the five-year crop rotation pilot as well which was facing the risk of not following the developed scheme by demo-farmers. The project's agricultural expert was providing free-of-charge consultations and farm visits for a few subsequent years even after the completion of his short-term contract. After the end of the pilot project the agricultural specialist made an adaptation to the design of the crop rotation scheme based on the experiences of farmers with the project-introduced crops and encountered circumstances. All the above demonstrates the necessity for having a flexible approach with defining a suitable duration for each individual pilot project.

The second lesson learnt relates to the risk management for obtaining desired results. The evaluation discovered that comprehensive risk assessments and sound mitigation planning exercises are vital components for ensuring the success of pilot projects, their continuity and the efficiency of investments.

The implementation of the windbreak's rehabilitation pilot in Dedoplistskaro municipality showed that the project was facing many risks that were correctly identified based on the previous experiences of similar pilots. Three main identified risks included: a) insufficient regulations for windbreaks maintenance and protection, b) burning of crop residues by farmers and their insufficient awareness of the associated threats/disadvantages, and c) inadequate fire response capabilities at local level.

These risks were considered during the pilot's planning process. However, the occurrence of fires was downplayed, hoping that the robust awareness raising campaign and talks with farmers, along with monitoring by local authorities, would reduce or eliminate the risks of large fires. Furthermore, the fire response capabilities were considered improved due to the addition of one more fire truck in the municipality. However, this was still insufficient for dealing with large scale fires. Another important factor for risks' mitigation was having proper regulations, specifying the roles and responsibilities of the involved parties regarding windbreaks' maintenance. However, such regulations were not in place. The Law on Windbreaks was adopted only 3.5 years after the start of the work on the windbreaks pilot.

Finally, one of the most important mitigation measures for further reducing the occurrence of human-induced fires was not proposed. Thus, in addition to raising the awareness of farmers about the threats of burning fields, local farmers also needed to have additional incentives for abstaining from using such practice. Burning crop residues was considered by farmers as a cheap way to clear the fields to prepare them for next year's planting. The evaluation showed that the incentives for collecting and utilizing crop residues were not in place. Therefore, the project could have further mitigated the risks by linking farmers to the relevant markets or to other farmers looking for such inputs.

Ways Forward

Based on the analysis of project results and of facilitating/hindering factors, the evaluation recommended to improve the continuity of results and the upscale potential of pilot projects by:
a) Paying particular attention to the duration of the pilots to ensure there is sufficient time to demonstrate benefits and allow for the uptake of suggested technologies.
b) Properly identifying and assessing risks to the uptake and continuity of suggested technologies and planning appropriate mitigation measures.
c) Developing exit strategies for each pilot project.

Another recommendation concerns the promotion of human rights-responsive planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting by:
a) Building the capacity of the project team and technical staff on human rights-based approaches, including on gender and minority issues' mainstreaming and equity.
b) Setting up relevant mechanisms and allocating appropriate resources to identify, document, and respond to the needs of marginalized groups to ensure the attainment of equal benefits by men and women, and by minority and other groups.

ANNEX VIII. BRIEF CV OF THE EVALUATOR

Nino Partskhaladze, Freelance Evaluator

Nationality	Georgian
Country experience	Europe: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Romania Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Lebanon, Pakistan America: USA
Education	MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy from the University of Manchester, CEU MA in International Development Policy from Duke University
Key qualifications	Expertise in developing, managing and evaluating donor-funded projects, country programmes, thematic areas (25 years' experience) Expertise in quantitative and qualitative research methods, interviewing techniques, sampling, statistical analysis, reporting
Selected assignments in environment area	UNEP – Independent Assessment of Closed Projects under the Special Programme; Responsible for assessing the chemicals and waste management projects in Belarus, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Serbia UNEP/GEF – Terminal Evaluation of Global Forest Watch project; Responsible for evaluating the project activities in Georgia UNDP – Five Independent Country Programme Evaluations of UNDP offices in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kyrgyz Republic; Responsible for evaluating the areas of energy, environment and disaster risk reduction UNDP/GEF – National Capacity Self-Assessment for Global Environmental Management; Responsible for root-cause analysis and crosscutting issues UNDP/GEF – Reducing Trans-boundary Degradation of the Kura-Aras River Basin Project (Design Phase, PDFA); Team leader for developing action plans for three Caucasus countries OECD – Feasibility Study for Debt for Environment Swap in Georgia; Responsible for developing and assessing the pipeline of projects in wastewater management sector NIRAS – Evaluation of Sida-funded project in Georgia on municipal and hazardous waste management GFA Consulting Group – Peace and Conflict Analysis for KfW-funded Support Program for Protected Areas in the Caucasus
Other skills	Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, SPSS, PowerPoint, QDA Miner, Google Forms, Survey Monkey Excellent command of English, Russian and Georgian languages

ANNEX IX. GEF PORTAL QUESTIONS

Question 1: What was the performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets[122]?
Response: The projects performance at the project's completion against Core Indicator Targets was satisfactory considering the below developments. • *Agriculture policy enhancement (Score 4)*: Important legislative documents were developed and adopted by the government for the prevention and reduction of land degradation, including the Law on Windbreaks which was adopted by the parliament of Georgia in November 2021 (Paras 114-116, 120). • *Sustained agricultural productivity (Score 5)*: Increases in the yields of main crops (grains) are sustained over the long-term due to the introduction of crop rotation (Paras 155, 157, 159). • *Land area under diversified production (Score 5)*: About 500 ha of land area is estimated to be under diversified production due to the introduction of crop rotation practices (Para 157, Table 10). • *Framework strengthening INRM (Score 1)*: No INRM framework in place. • *Integrated land management plans (Score 3):* Land use plans were developed for two communities; no formal adoption was required (Paras 122,123).
Question 2: What were the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project as evolved from the time of the MTR?
Response: The engagement of stakeholders in the project activities remained high from the time of the MTR. As a result of this engagement a policy environment for SLM was enhanced, a pasture management plan and two land use plans were developed, and new SLM practices were applied and adopted by farmers.
Question 3: What were the completed gender-responsive measures and, if applicable, actual gender result areas? *(Based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)*
Response: The project ensured the participation of women in the project's planning and implementation activities and collected gender-disaggregated data. Women were involved in capacity building events, planning/implementation of pilot projects and development of LUPs. More than half of the training participants were women and an appropriate proportion (about a third) of women demo-farmers benefitted from the implementation of pilot projects (Paras 140,159,170).
Question 4: What was the progress made in the implementation of the management measures against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval? The risk classifications reported in the latest PIR report should be verified and the findings of the effectiveness of any measures or lessons learned taken to address identified risks assessed. *(Any supporting documents gathered by the Consultant during this review should be shared with the Task Manager for uploading in the GEF Portal)*
Response: The ProDoc included the completed Environmental and Social Safeguards Checklist which did not identify any negative impact. Later, the project progress reports were tracking safeguard issues and reporting that no safeguard issues arose.

[122] The indicators were identified retrospectively.

The final project implementation report identified seven risk factors with an overall rating Low. However, the evaluation found that the risks identification and assessment was not strong regarding the uptake of new technologies by farmers in case of unforeseen circumstances, windbreaks installations or the upscale of crop rotation pilots (Para 236).

Question 5: What were the challenges and outcomes regarding the project's completed Knowledge Management Approach, including: Kn0owledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions? *(Based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

Response: The project had a sound knowledge management approach which used diverse knowledge transfer tools for reaching the intended audiences. These tools included:

- Project website (http://slm.ge) along with the websites of implementing organizations that contained information about the project interventions and L-SLM issues.
- Developed e-atlas on land degradation that is publicly available on the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture's website (https://atlas.mepa.gov.ge/maps/LandDegradationmap?l=en)
- Publication of a) newsletters on project progress, b) an educational booklet on soil degradation, its causes and solutions, c) articles with the project's results and lessons learnt on WOCAT SLM database. In addition, the project's interventions enjoyed wide coverage in national and local media outlets, including print media, TV/radio and Internet-based media outlets (Para 178-180).
- Trainings on L-SLM issues for 415 participants, including the decision-makers, farmers, teachers and students.
- Demonstrations of L-SLM approaches/practices. The project had pilot projects in crop rotation, windbreaks installation/rehabilitation and pastures management areas.
- Planning/consultation sessions with relevant stakeholders for discussing the challenges and finding solutions in a participatory manner (in addition, studies were conducted prior to the planning activities – Para 207). Such sessions/meetings were held with national and local stakeholders for the improvement of SLM policy/legal environment, development of pilot projects, land use plans and a pasture management plan.
- Three annual stakeholder meetings for discussing project progress and results.

Question 6: *What are the main findings of the evaluation?*

Response:

- L-SLM project contributed greatly to improving the enabling environment for windbreaks management through mobilizing support and promoting land degradation issues among policy and decision makers in Georgia. The project, however, fell short in mobilizing the support for developing the framework document for SLM mainstreaming – the National Integrated Land Management Strategy (Conclusion 1).
- The project succeeded to a certain extent in achieving the uptake of SLM practices by demo-farmers and their community members through demonstrating the benefits of introduced technologies (Conclusion 2).
- Ethnic minorities' representatives and women benefited from participating in the pilots' planning and implementation processes, and from capacity building events (Conclusion 3).
- Overall, the project's assessment was found to be Satisfactory due to the encouraging programmatic achievements under all its three components (Conclusion 4).

ANNEX X. QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE TERMINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluand Title: Applying Landscape and Sustainable Land Management for mitigating land degradation and contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas" (GEF ID 5825)

Consultant: Nino Partskhaladze

All UNEP evaluations are subject to a quality assessment by the Evaluation Office. This is an assessment of the quality of the evaluation product (i.e. evaluation report) and is dependent on more than just the consultant's efforts and skills.

	UNEP Evaluation Office Comments	Final Report Rating
Substantive Report Quality Criteria		
Quality of the Executive Summary: The Summary should be able to stand alone as an accurate summary of the main evaluation product. It should include a concise overview of the evaluation object; clear summary of the evaluation objectives and scope; overall evaluation rating of the project and key features of performance (strengths and weaknesses) against exceptional criteria (plus reference to where the evaluation ratings table can be found within the report); summary of the main findings of the exercise, including a synthesis of main conclusions (which include a summary response to key strategic evaluation questions), lessons learned and recommendations.	Final report: An excellent Executive Summary – concise, gives the reader all they need to know. In particular, the evaluator has a very neat and effective way of not only reporting the results but including the way in which the project supported those results.	**6**
I. Introduction A brief introduction should be given identifying, where possible and relevant, the following: institutional context of the project (sub-programme, Division, regions/countries where implemented) and coverage of the evaluation; date of PRC approval and project document signature); results frameworks to which it contributes (e.g. Expected Accomplishment in POW); project duration and start/end dates; number of project phases (where appropriate); implementing partners; total secured budget and whether the project has been evaluated in the past (e.g. mid-term, part of a synthesis evaluation, evaluated by another agency etc.) Consider the extent to which the introduction includes a concise statement of the purpose of the evaluation and the key intended audience for the findings?	Final report: Good introduction, also concise.	**6**
II. Evaluation Methods A data collection section should include: a description of evaluation methods and information sources used, including the number and type of respondents; justification for methods used (e.g. qualitative/ quantitative; electronic/face-to-face); any selection criteria used to identify respondents, case studies or sites/countries visited; strategies used to increase stakeholder engagement and consultation; details of how data were verified (e.g. triangulation, review by stakeholders etc.). Efforts to include the voices of different groups, e.g. vulnerable, gender, marginalised etc) should be described. Methods to ensure that potentially excluded groups (excluded by gender, vulnerability or marginalisation) are reached and their experiences captured effectively, should be made explicit in this section. The methods used to analyse data (e.g. scoring; coding; thematic analysis etc.) should be described. It should also address evaluation limitations such as: low or imbalanced response rates across different groups; gaps in	Final report: The report was written while UNEP was strengthening its approach to describing Evaluation Methods. Some additional paragraphs need to be included but it was generally a detailed section.	**5**

documentation; extent to which findings can be either generalised to wider evaluation questions or constraints on aggregation/disaggregation; any potential or apparent biases; language barriers and ways they were overcome. Ethics and human rights issues should be highlighted including: how anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and strategies used to include the views of marginalised or potentially disadvantaged groups and/or divergent views. Is there an ethics statement? E.g. *'Throughout the evaluation process and in the compilation of the Final Evaluation Report efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups. All efforts to provide respondents with anonymity have been made.*		
III. The Project This section should include: • *Context:* Overview of the main issue that the project is trying to address, its root causes and consequences on the environment and human well-being (i.e. synopsis of the problem and situational analyses). • *Results framework*: Summary of the project's results hierarchy as stated in the ProDoc (or as officially revised) • *Stakeholders:* Description of groups of targeted stakeholders organised according to relevant common characteristics • *Project implementation structure and partners:* A description of the implementation structure with diagram and a list of key project partners • *Changes in design during implementation:* Any key events that affected the project's scope or parameters should be described in brief in chronological order • *Project financing:* Completed tables of: (a) budget at design and expenditure by components (b) planned and actual sources of funding/co-financing	Final report: Good section	**6**
IV. Theory of Change The *TOC at Evaluation* should be presented clearly in both diagrammatic and narrative forms. Clear articulation of each major causal pathway is expected, (starting from outputs to long term impact), including explanations of all drivers and assumptions as well as the expected roles of key actors. This section should include a description of how the *TOC at Evaluation*[123] was designed (who was involved etc.) and applied to the context of the project? Where the project results as stated in the project design documents (or formal revisions of the project design) are not an accurate reflection of the project's intentions or do not follow UNEP's definitions of different results levels, project results may need to be re-phrased or reformulated. In such cases, a summary of the project's results hierarchy should be presented for: a) the results as stated in the approved/revised Prodoc logframe/TOC and b) as formulated in the *TOC at Evaluation*. *The two results hierarchies should be presented as a two-column table to show clearly that, although wording and placement may have changed, the results 'goal posts' have not been 'moved'.* This table may have initially been presented in the Inception Report and should appear somewhere in the Main Review report.	Final report: Good section – TOC well displayed and assumptions/drivers listed clearly.	**5**

[123] During the Inception Phase of the evaluation process a *TOC at Evaluation Inception* is created based on the information contained in the approved project documents (these may include either logical framework or a TOC or narrative descriptions), formal revisions and annual reports etc. During the evaluation process this TOC is revised based on changes made during project intervention and becomes the *TOC at Evaluation*.

V. Key Findings **A. Strategic relevance:** This section should include an assessment of the project's relevance in relation to UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies at the time of project approval. An assessment of the complementarity of the project at design (or during inception/mobilisation[124]), with other interventions addressing the needs of the same target groups should be included. Consider the extent to which all four elements have been addressed: i. Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities ii. Alignment to Donor/GEF/Partners Strategic Priorities iii. Relevance to Regional, Sub-regional and National Environmental Priorities iv. Complementarity with Existing Interventions	Final report: Good section – good articulation of the contribution the project was intended to make to the various strategies and priorities.	**6**
B. Quality of Project Design To what extent are the strength and weaknesses of the project design effectively summarized?	Final report: Good – concise and well laid out for the reader.	**6**
C. Nature of the External Context For projects where this is appropriate, key external features of the project's implementing context that limited the project's performance (e.g. conflict, natural disaster, political upheaval[125]), and how they affected performance, should be described.	Final report: Good section	**6**
D. Effectiveness **(i) Outputs and Project Outcomes:** How well does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of the a) availability of outputs, and b) achievement of project outcomes? How convincing is the discussion of attribution and contribution, as well as the constraints to attributing effects to the intervention? The effects of the intervention on differentiated groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation, should be discussed explicitly.	Final report: Good quality section – provides detail in table format plus interesting narrative.	**6**
(ii) Likelihood of Impact: How well does the report present an integrated analysis, guided by the causal pathways represented by the TOC, of all evidence relating to likelihood of impact? How well are change processes explained and the roles of key actors, as well as drivers and assumptions, explicitly discussed? Any unintended negative effects of the project should be discussed under Effectiveness, especially negative effects on disadvantaged groups.	Final report: Good quality section – provides detail in table format plus interesting narrative.	**6**
E. Financial Management	Final report: Good analysis	**5**

[124] A project's inception or mobilization period is understood as the time between project approval and first disbursement. Complementarity during project implementation is considered under Efficiency, see below.

[125] Note that 'political upheaval' does not include regular national election cycles, but unanticipated unrest or prolonged disruption. The potential delays or changes in political support that are often associated with the regular national election cycle should be part of the project's design and addressed through adaptive management of the project team.

This section should contain an integrated analysis of all dimensions evaluated under financial management and include a completed 'financial management' table. Consider how well the report addresses the following: • *Adherence* to UNEP's financial policies and procedures • *completeness* of financial information, including the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used • *communication* between financial and project management staff		
F. Efficiency To what extent, and how well, does the report present a well-reasoned, complete and evidence-based assessment of efficiency under the primary categories of cost-effectiveness and timeliness including: • Implications of delays and no cost extensions • Time-saving measures put in place to maximise results within the secured budget and agreed project timeframe • Discussion of making use during project implementation of/building on pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. • The extent to which the management of the project minimised UNEP's environmental footprint.	Final report: Good discussion	**5**
G. Monitoring and Reporting How well does the report assess: • Monitoring design and budgeting *(including SMART results with measurable indicators, resources for MTE/R etc.)* • Monitoring of project implementation *(including use of monitoring data for adaptive management)* • Project reporting *(e.g. PIMS and donor reports)*	Final report: Good discussion	**5**
H. Sustainability How well does the evaluation identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to undermine or contribute to the persistence of achieved project outcomes including: • Socio-political Sustainability • Financial Sustainability • Institutional Sustainability	Final report: Good discussion	**5**
I. Factors Affecting Performance These factors are <u>not</u> discussed in stand-alone sections but are **integrated in criteria A-H as appropriate**. Note that these are described in the Evaluation Criteria Ratings Matrix. To what extent, and how well, does the evaluation report cover the following cross-cutting themes: • Preparation and readiness • Quality of project management and supervision[126]	Final report: Good discussion	**5**

[126] In some cases 'project management and supervision' will refer to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to

• Stakeholder participation and co-operation • Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality • Environmental and social safeguards • Country ownership and driven-ness • Communication and public awareness		
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations **i) Quality of the conclusions:** The key strategic questions should be **clearly** and succinctly addressed within the conclusions section. This includes providing the answers to the questions on Core Indicator Targets, stakeholder engagement, gender responsiveness, safeguards and knowledge management, required for the GEF portal. It is expected that the conclusions will highlight the main strengths and weaknesses of the project and connect them in a compelling story line. Human rights and gender dimensions of the intervention (e.g. how these dimensions were considered, addressed or impacted on) should be discussed explicitly. Conclusions, as well as lessons and recommendations, should be consistent with the evidence presented in the main body of the report.	Final report: Good conclusions	**5**
ii) Quality and utility of the lessons: Both positive and negative lessons are expected and duplication with recommendations should be avoided. Based on explicit evaluation findings, lessons should be rooted in real project experiences or derived from problems encountered and mistakes made that should be avoided in the future. Lessons are intended to be adopted any time they are deemed to be relevant in the future and must have the potential for wider application (replication and generalization) and use and should briefly describe the context from which they are derived and those contexts in which they may be useful.	Final report: Good lessons	**5**
iii) Quality and utility of the recommendations: To what extent are the recommendations proposals for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting the project or the sustainability of its results? They should be feasible to implement within the timeframe and resources available (including local capacities) and specific in terms of who would do what and when. At least one recommendation relating to strengthening the human rights and gender dimensions of UNEP interventions, should be given. Recommendations should represent a measurable performance target in order that the Evaluation Office can monitor and assess compliance with the recommendations. In cases where the recommendation is addressed to a third party, compliance can only be monitored and assessed where a contractual/legal agreement remains in place. Without such an agreement, the recommendation should be formulated to say that UNEP project staff should pass on the recommendation to the relevant third party in an effective or substantive manner. The	Final report: Recommendations will be responded to in the management response.	**5**

implementing partners and national governments while in others, specifically for GEF funded projects, it will refer to the project management performance of the executing agency and the technical backstopping provided by UNEP. This includes providing the answers to the questions on Core Indicator Targets, stakeholder engagement, gender responsiveness, safeguards and knowledge management, required for the GEF portal.

effective transmission by UNEP of the recommendation will then be monitored for compliance. Where a new project phase is already under discussion or in preparation with the same third party, a recommendation can be made to address the issue in the next phase.		
VII. Report Structure and Presentation Quality		
i) Structure and completeness of the report: To what extent does the report follow the Evaluation Office guidelines? Are all requested Annexes included and complete?	Final report: Follows structure – good inclusion of photos	**6**
ii) **Quality of writing and formatting:** Consider whether the report is well written (clear English language and grammar) with language that is adequate in quality and tone for an official document? Do visual aids, such as maps and graphs convey key information? Does the report follow Evaluation Office formatting guidelines?	Final report: Well written	**6**
OVERALL REPORT QUALITY RATING		**5.5**

A number rating 1-6 is used for each criterion: Highly Satisfactory = 6, Satisfactory = 5, Moderately Satisfactory = 4, Moderately Unsatisfactory = 3, Unsatisfactory = 2, Highly Unsatisfactory = 1. The overall quality of the evaluation report is calculated by taking the mean score of all rated quality criteria.

At the end of the evaluation, compliance of the evaluation process against the agreed standard procedures is assessed, based on the table below. *All questions with negative compliance must be explained further in the table below.*

Evaluation Process Quality Criteria	**Compliance**	
	Yes	**No**
Independence:		
1. Were the Terms of Reference drafted and finalised by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
2. Were possible conflicts of interest of proposed Evaluation Consultant(s) appraised and addressed in the final selection?	**Y**	
3. Was the final selection of the Evaluation Consultant(s) made by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
4. Was the evaluator contracted directly by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
5. Was the Evaluation Consultant given direct access to identified external stakeholders in order to adequately present and discuss the findings, as appropriate?	**Y**	
6. Did the Evaluation Consultant raise any concerns about being unable to work freely and without interference or undue pressure from project staff or the Evaluation Office?		**N**
7. If Yes to Q6: Were these concerns resolved to the mutual satisfaction of both the Evaluation Consultant and the Evaluation Manager?	**N/A**	
Financial Management:		
8. Was the evaluation budget approved at project design available for the evaluation?	**Y**	
9. Was the final evaluation budget agreed and approved by the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
10. Were the agreed evaluation funds readily available to support the payment of the evaluation contract throughout the payment process?	**Y**	
Timeliness:		

11. If a Terminal Evaluation: Was the evaluation initiated within the period of six months before or after project operational completion? Or, if a Mid Term Evaluation: Was the evaluation initiated within a six-month period prior to the project's mid-point?	**Y**	
12. Were all deadlines set in the Terms of Reference respected, as far as unforeseen circumstances allowed?	**Y**	
13. Was the inception report delivered and reviewed/approved prior to commencing any travel?	**Y**	
Project's engagement and support:		
14. Did the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and identified project stakeholders provide comments on the evaluation Terms of Reference?	**Y**	
15. Did the project make available all required/requested documents?	**Y**	
16. Did the project make all financial information (and audit reports if applicable) available in a timely manner and to an acceptable level of completeness?	**Y**	
17. Was adequate support provided by the project to the evaluator(s) in planning and conducting evaluation missions?	**Y**	
18. Was close communication between the Evaluation Consultant, Evaluation Office and project team maintained throughout the evaluation?	**Y**	
19. Were evaluation findings, lessons and recommendations adequately discussed with the project team for ownership to be established?	**Y**	
20. Did the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and any identified project stakeholders provide comments on the draft evaluation report?	**Y**	
Quality assurance:		
21. Were the evaluation Terms of Reference, including the key evaluation questions, peer-reviewed?	**Y**	
22. Was the TOC in the inception report peer-reviewed?	**Y**	
23. Was the quality of the draft/cleared report checked by the Evaluation Manager and Peer Reviewer prior to dissemination to stakeholders for comments?	**Y**	
24. Did the Evaluation Office complete an assessment of the quality of both the draft and final reports?	**Y**	
Transparency:		
25. Was the draft evaluation report sent directly by the Evaluation Consultant to the Evaluation Office?	**Y**	
26. Did the Evaluation Manager disseminate (or authorize dissemination) of the cleared draft report to the project team, Sub-Programme Coordinator and other key internal personnel (including the Reference Group where appropriate) to solicit formal comments?	**Y**	
27. Did the Evaluation Manager disseminate (or authorize dissemination) appropriate drafts of the report to identified external stakeholders, including key partners and funders, to solicit formal comments?	**Y**	
28. Were all stakeholder comments to the draft evaluation report sent directly to the Evaluation Office	**Y**	
29. Did the Evaluation Consultant(s) respond adequately to all factual corrections and comments?	**Y**	
30. Did the Evaluation Office share substantive comments and Evaluation Consultant responses with those who commented, as appropriate?	**Y**	

Provide comments / explanations / mitigating circumstances below for any non-compliant process issues.

Process Criterion Number	**Evaluation Office Comments**