Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

FAO Project ID: GCP/CAF/002/GFF
GEF Project ID: 9514

FLR in Supporting Landscape and Livelihoods Resilience in Central African Republic

The Restoration Initiative Child project

Final Report

MTR mission conducted from 21 January to 09 February 2023

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Bangui - Central African Republic - April 2023

0. Summary

0.1 Introduction

1. The Terms of Reference (ToR) of this Mid-Term Review (MTR) state that the main objective is "to provide inputs to better guide the GCP*/CAF/002/GFF project - Forest and landscape restoration in support of landscape resilience and livelihoods in the Central African Republic (CAR) and making it more relevant to the country*'s needs ». The scope of the MTR covers the start of project implementation from 01 January 2019 to 31 December 2022. To achieve this objective, the MTR conducted its analysis using the evaluation criteria and questions set out in the GEF/FAO Guidelines for MPEs (2020) and the ToR. Similar to the MPEs carried out in Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe and Kenya, the MTR team applied a stakeholder analysis, an evaluation matrix, and built a theory of change for the TRI-RCA project during the start-up phase and which were updated and presented in Annex 3, 4 and 9. The MTR team, composed of an international consultant (Mr. Warren Olding) and a national consultant (Mr. Geoffroy Magbondo) began on January 3, 2023 with a start-up phase, a field phase from January 21, 2022 to February 4, 2023 and a synthesis phase until the end of March 2023.

0.2 Key results of the MTR

2. **Relevance -** Question 1*: Have the project results been consistent with country priorities, GEF operational programme strategies or focal areas, the FAO Country Programming Framework, the objectives of the Global IRR Project, and the needs and priorities of the targeted beneficiaries (local communities, women, and indigenous peoples, depending on the case)?* **Moderately satisfactory**

   Project results remain in line with AFRI-100/Bonn Challenge 2030 commitments, aligned with GEF-6 and FAO priority areas. Nevertheless, the project's strong sector-wide approach limits its broader strategic relevance to its articulation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017-2023 (RCPCA); especially the second pillar of action dedicated to the development of a new social contract between the State and the third pillar. This latter is based on economic recovery which includes the transition from subsistence agriculture to production systems more linked to food and agro-ecological approaches. As a result, Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) is not promoted as a national strategy for safeguarding the country's natural heritage, but rather as an activity integrated into forest and environmental policies. Thus, some key sectors that are either responsible for forest degradation in CAR are absent from the restoration process (especially the Ministry of Livestock), or there is a lack of adequate commitment, such as line ministries that are responsible for land use planning, land administration and local government, research and development of non-timber forest products and services (NTFPs). This situation was exacerbated by the absence of an effective coordination mechanism in CAR through which synergies between projects can be identified and developed.

3. **Effectiveness -** Question 2*: To what extent has the project met its expectations for outputs, outputs and objectives and what broader outcomes (if any) has the project achieved regionally and globally to date?* **Moderately unsatisfactory:** The project has experienced a significant delay in the delivery of the majority of its products planned in Prodoc and is not on track to achieve its objectives by the end of the project scheduled for 31/12/2023. For component 1, progress in creating an enabling environment for FLR is slow. Key legislation such as the Forest Code, agricultural policy and land use planning still lacks adequate provisions to promote FLR. The lack of forest studies to support informed policy dialogue on the formal adoption of FLR has not helped. However, the study on the development of wood energy production in the Bangui Basin has been completed and is currently in the process of consultation, although there are no plans to update the WISDOM platform designed by FAO to map wood energy supply and demand in CAR. Achievements in introducing FLR actions in project sites under Component 2 have been very modest. So far, only 42 ha have been reforested on two sites (Pissa and M'baïki) compared to the initial target of 3,221 ha in Prodoc (1.3%), or 1,377 ha granted by the final beneficiaries (3.1%). In addition, only two species (Essessang and Ayous) to promote the production and marketing of caterpillars were planted at the request of the beneficiaries, which is considered insufficient to restore the forest ecosystem. Similarly, no income-generating activities have been identified and promoted to date. Limited progress in institutional capacity development and FLR funding under component 3 contributed to the low level of progress in components 1 and 2. In particular, CIFAR and ISDR partners need to be strengthened. It also depends on the implementation of activities under component 4, which include exchanges with other IRR projects, the production of knowledge products and the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system that follows quantitative and qualitative objectives to support learning on transformational change at the local level.

4. **Efficiency -** Question 3*: To what extent was the project implemented efficiently and effectively in terms of costs?* **Moderately unsatisfactory**

   The project has struggled to convert resources into outputs and results, resulting in an estimated 35 per cent physical advance for all four components, while GEF expenditures amount to $2.06 million, or 34.6 per cent of the total GEF budget. At the same time, co-financing of other projects, including the South-West Regional Development Project (PRDSO) financed by AFD, and the Government Natural Resources Project (PGRN) financed by the GEF and implemented by the World Bank, amounted to USD 9.04 million as of 31/07/2022, which appears very high compared to the estimated physical progress of the project (of about 35%). In addition, only 1,527 ultimate recipients were reported to have directly participated in FLR training and capacity building exercises. As a result, the project spends an average of US$ 1,350 of GEF funds per beneficiary, which is high compared to other IRR projects implemented

by FAO and means that the project needs to improve its cost-effectiveness if it is to achieve meaningful results.

5. **Sustainability - Question 4**: What is the likelihood that the project results will remain useful or continue after the completion of the project and what are the main risks that could affect the sustainability of the project results and benefits (considering the financial, socio-economic, institutional and environmental and governance aspects)? **Unlikely**
   Evidence to date does not indicate that the project's key outputs and outcomes are sustainable. In particular, the risk type and level is assessed and reviewed largely independently from project planning, implementation and monitoring. As a result, project stakeholders were not sufficiently prepared to manage implementation delays and other challenges in a comprehensive and timely manner. In addition, the MTR team found that some socio-political, institutional, financial and climate change risks were underestimated in the PIR risk assessments and there is no evidence so far that the project has identified its exit strategy. In addition, given that the majority of project activities are either ongoing or still to start, there is no evidence of replication of FLR activities to date. However, one exception is the recent demarcation of a community forest (CF) with a simple management plan, which has been submitted to the Forest Department for analysis and approval. If granted, it will not only be a first in CAR, but also set a precedent for catalyzing more CF in the future.

6. **Factors affecting progress -** Question 5*:* What are the main factors preventing the project from achieving its results? **Unsatisfactory**
   Several factors contributed to the low level of project performance noted above. The project design has some shortcomings, particularly its sector-wide approach, rather than recognizing the importance of establishing a permanent national mechanism bringing together all implementing agencies that have a vested interest in the effectiveness and sustainability of FLR activities and the promotion of NWFP. Indeed, interviews with key figures confirmed that this is crucial to redefine FLR as a national strategy to save the country's forests, promote the development of the local economy and build resilience to the effects of climate change at the same time. There is also the lack of adequate quality control and risk management by the executing agency (Ministry of Environment, Sustainable Development), and the implementing agency (FAO, and the PMU) as well as a lack of effective decision-making mechanisms. To avoid long delays in the implementation of the project, it is necessary to set up a system to recruit staff, control the supply chain of equipment purchases, and have a permanent team for the approval of project documents and reports. The general lack of data and information to support and guide decision-making at all levels is also important. The project's monitoring and evaluation system, which lacks qualitative monitoring (essential to support learning and identify good practice) did not help either.

7. **Cross-cutting priorities -** Question 6*: To what extent have environmental and social issues been taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?* **Moderately satisfactory**
   Safeguards 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.4, 7.4 and 9, which were reported in the Prodoc ESS checklist, are satisfactorily managed, but two new backups have been triggered (2.1 and 2.4) due to the establishment of a buffer zone at the Bayanga project site and the introduction of exotic fruit trees in agroforestry development that could replace the many local varieties, resilient and in high demand in local markets and among BaAka indigenous peoples.

8. **Gender** - Question 7: *To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?* **Moderately satisfactory**
   The project provides favorable and equal access to men, women, young people, the elderly and people with disabilities to its field activities and training. However, there is no gender strategy in place in line with GEF-FAO guidelines, and it is evident in the field that women would like to have access to income-generating activities reserved only for them, and indigenous youth would like to see greater recognition and valorization of their knowledge in the FLR process.

9. **Links to the Global IRR Project (GCP) - Question 8:** What has the Global Child Project brought to the National Child Project, (including synergies between National IRR Projects) and what has the National Child Project brought to the Global IRR Project (GCP*)?* **Moderately satisfactory**
   The area in which GCP has brought the most value would be in the access to international training events on FLR tools and methods. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the shift to online learning has had less impact, with a lack of adequate technical follow-up in areas such as developing appropriate FLR maps at project sites in CAR and engaging contractors in initiatives such as the catering plant. However, so far, the TRI-CAR project has not brought any significant benefits to the GCP, although the potential to provide knowledge products on, for example, local agroforestry practices identified in Pissa, or on the in-depth knowledge of agroforestry – the biodiversity of the BaAka has the potential to have a significant impact in the TRI community and beyond.

10. **Impact and response to the COVID-19 pandemic - Question 9:** How well has the project managed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic? **Moderately satisfactory**
    The project attempted to manage the impact of the pandemic by switching to remote communication methods. However, the impact of the pandemic has led to delays of almost two years of operations that is greater than that of other IRR projects, because the government's decision to restrict field travel was only removed in April 2022.

Knowledge Activities/Products

11. The TRI-CAR project has produced very few knowledge products beyond technical materials that are linked to the project's expected products. As a result, the project lacks the production of specific articles, periodical newsletters, publications on the valorization of forest ecosystems, stories and stories on topics of interest to strengthen learning and inform decisions at all levels. Moreover, it is evident that stakeholders do not participate in international events, such as the XV Forestry Conference held in Korea in May 2022. However, despite this situation, the EGP team has identified that there is great potential for research and the development of knowledge products. For example, the ongoing work to create the country's first community forest (CF) at Boyama 2, Pissa, is of national and IRR interest. In addition, the MTR team has identified a high level of local knowledge on forest biodiversity that provides a wide range of local products used for food, medicine, house building, cosmetics, teeth cleaning, washing, etc. that are of interest to academic and scientific research and local and national development. In addition, indigenous peoples, such as the BaAka (pygmies), have their own indigenous knowledge and technologies that need to be studied so that stakeholders make decisions that do not lead to the erosion of this knowledge and technologies. Moreover, by recognizing and valuing local knowledge and technologies in general, the TRI-RCA project has the potential to advocate for FLR as a national strategy to restore peace, conserve biodiversity, stimulate the development of the local and national economy, while improving resilience at the same time.

Stakeholder Participation

12. The project encourages a wide selection of stakeholders within the Steering Committee (COPIL) and, through its implementing partners, applies an inclusive approach to its community activities and trainings on FLR. Group discussions held at the pilot sites of Pissa, M'baïki and Bayanga all confirmed that women, men, youth aged 15-25, adults and people with disabilities are all motivated to take part in these activities and attend the trainings. However, the MTR team identified three issues that affect the project's ability to energize stakeholder engagement to deliver results. First, the project failed to develop consensus on the definition of FLR and its application on the ground. Currently, all stakeholders understand that this is mainly a reforestation exercise using two varieties of trees that will produce caterpillars to support food security and income-generating activities. As a result, a number of ministerial departments deemed important are not proactively part of the COPIL and the working groups that have been set up to date. These include the Directors General responsible for the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Local Authorities, the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Health (MESA) and the Ministry of Economy and Cooperation (MEPC), as well as those responsible for research, development and marketing of NWFP, the Faculty of Science and the Laboratory of Rural Economics and Food Security (University of Bangui). Second, not all local communities consulted understood what FLR

means, or why it is important. Therefore, they do not see them as the main drivers of FLR, but rather as the beneficiaries of training and temporary jobs to plant trees. Third, stakeholder participation in exchanges and study tours in other TRI projects does not take place, especially to gain insight into their FLR approaches and NWFP promotion.

Progress towards the development objective of the project

12 The project carried out very sustained preliminary studies and preparatory activities that allowed it to launch some important activities such as the start of the RFP in Pissa and M'baïki in 2022, arrive at a consultation process on wood energy production in the Bangui Basin and identify the CF in Boyama 2. However, the project's progress has suffered from longer implementation delays than other IRR projects, which confirm that it is about two years behind schedule. As a result, progress towards the project objectives has not been satisfactory to date. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly severe in CAR and prevented project staff from visiting the field until April 2022. However, other factors, including delayed seed delivery, different tree planning methods, internal management, internal project management and long delays within FAO-CAR in responding to project requests, reports and actions, are also important factors contributing to the slowdown in project implementation. Indeed, an extension of the project is difficult to justify without the redefinition of the FLR as a national cross-sectoral strategy for safeguarding the country's biodiversity in which key sectors such as spatial planning, livestock, local authorities, economic development and finance are actively engaged to also reap the benefits of the FLR process.

Overall risk assessment

13 The overall risk rating for the MTR team is " **substantial** ". This is higher than the "moderate" rating in Prodoc and Project Implementation Reports (PIR). This is justified because a number of significant risks identified in these documents affected project performance more than reported. These include: (i) insufficient alignment with the objectives of the RCPCA in order to gain broader political support for FLR as a strategy to advance conflict resolution on natural resource reduction and build resilience and local development; (ii) lack of economic incentives for private forestry companies (SEFCA) to participate in the project as originally planned; (iii) the withdrawal of international partners (CIRAD) to oversee capacity building of research institutions such as ICRA and ISDR; (iv) the economic effects of the pandemic and the energy crisis which have reduced field activities; (v) extensive application of bushfires at project sites and/or livestock grazing has affected FLR activities. This situation is also not facilitated by insufficient application of risk management in project planning and monitoring.

0.3 Conclusions

14 **The overall conclusion of the MTR team is that key project stakeholders have not yet found tricks to manage the various risks that continue to affect project performance. For this reason, the MTR team considered that the risk management of the project is**

"substantial" for its uninterrupted operation. To this end, it would be imperative in the short term to have a plan and means to mitigate, bypass existing obstacles and bottlenecks that affect project performance and possibly in some cases remove them entirely. The following paragraphs summarize the MTR conclusions team on the evaluation criteria and key questions provided in its ToR.

15 **Conclusion 1 (C1) – Relevance - Question 1:** *Have the project results been consistent with country priorities, GEF operational programme strategies or focal areas, the FAO Country Programming Framework, the objectives of the Global IRR Project, and the needs and priorities of the targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women, and indigenous peoples, as appropriate)? The relevance of the project is* **moderately satisfactory**.

Despite its consistency with the country's commitments to restore 3.5 Mha by 2030 as part of the AFRI-100/Bonn Challenge, its alignment with the RCPCA, the relevance of the project is however somewhat overshadowed by its results, by its notable restriction to certain sectoral departments and by the fact that FLR issues seem new because they are not addressed in a way that specific in forest codes. The issue of FLR is understood as primarily forestry. The funding and management of the FLR depends largely on the support and cooperation of other implementing agencies (technical and financial partners). It turns out that without these operational bodies, the country cannot establish the governance structure that FLR processes will need to become effective and sustainable.

16 **Conclusion 2 (C2) - Effectiveness - Question 2***: To what extent has the project met its expectations in terms of outputs, outputs and objectives and what broader outcomes (if any) has the project achieved regionally and globally to date?* **The effectiveness of the project is moderately unsatisfactory.**
The project has failed to establish effective mechanisms at the national and local levels to achieve the expected results within the time frame originally set out in the planning. Land management is not topical. Indeed, not all implementing agencies that are engaged in land use, land administration and land management practices have come together to jointly define FLR as a national strategy that can help the country achieve its national and international priorities and commitments. The government does not always assert itself by taking the leader of the RFP. Indeed, in the absence of key actors around the table of government, research institutions, the private sector and civil society, it would be difficult to know how FLR, NWFP/IGA and CF can bring about change and scale up as envisioned in Prodoc.

17 **Conclusion 3 (C3) - Efficiency - Question 3***: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently*? **Project efficiency is moderately unsatisfactory.**

By reconciling GEF and co-financing expenditures (US$ 11,081,398) with the physical achievements of the project at the time of the evaluation, the actual implementation time of project activities and the remaining activities, the MTR team concludes that the use of project resources would be less than optimal. It is evident that several exogenous and endogenous factors (see conclusion 5) prevented the project from delivering results in a timely and cost-effective manner. Unless they are fully addressed and mitigated for the future, it would be likely that the project would struggle to achieve its objectives.

18 **Conclusion 4 (C4) - Project sustainability (viability) - Question 4: What is the likelihood that the project results will remain useful or continue after project completion and what are the main risks that could affect the sustainability of the project results and benefits (considering financial, socio-economic, institutional, environmental and governance aspects)? Sustainability of results is unlikely.**
All other things being equal, i.e. if there is no reframing in project management, the PPMC team concludes that sustainability is questionable. Indeed, project stakeholders do not work together to be effective and efficient. As a result, the project does not implement the necessary measures to achieve expected results and stimulate the learning, knowledge products and other communications needed to raise awareness among stakeholders and decision-makers at all levels about the multiple benefits of FLR.

19 **Finding 5 (C5) - Factors affecting progress (likelihood of survival and/or achievement of project outcomes) -** Question 5*: What are the main factors preventing the project from achieving its outcomes?* **Factors affecting project performance are unsatisfactory**: **A number of key factors continue to affect in some cases the life of the project in terms of the timely delivery of its products to the recipient, the recruitment of coordinators (international and domestic), the process for disbursing resources and the achievement of expected results. The MTR team found that the following issues are a hindrance to the delivery of the project:**

- **Component 1 has a number of weaknesses in design, in particular: (i) Lack of consideration of the Ministry responsible for spatial planning and lack of synergy in the design of forest and agricultural policy with FLR. The development of a spatial plan in the south-west of the country by the Ministry responsible for spatial planning should be favorable to the integration of FLR; Similarly, forestry and agricultural policies still need to be fully integrated into FLR; (ii) recurring bushfire problems for agriculture and livestock that do not include practices such as silvograzing. These problems should be addressed by the MADR and MESA; (iii) Lack of synergy between forest communities, local FLR coordinators, local government forest administration and participating villages;**

(iv) scaling up the FLR and AGR and calls for the mobilization of funds, but it does not actively involve the Ministries in charge of economy and finance.

- **The PMU structure does not include specialists to oversee the delivery of results under components 1 and 3;**
- **The lack of qualitative monitoring makes it impossible to capture lessons learned and good practices at all levels to support the further development of knowledge products; and an effective communication strategy to support informed decision-making on project activities.**
- **FAO stakeholders are sometimes responsible for slow decision-making, as they do not have a quality assurance mechanism in place to respond quickly to project needs**.

20 **Conclusion 6 (C6) - Cross-cutting priorities - Question 6**: *To what extent have environmental and social issues been taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?* **The management of the ESS checklist is moderately satisfactory.**
The MTR team is moderately satisfied with the way the project provides updates on the indicators that have been triggered in Prodoc (backups 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.4, 7.4 and 9), but concludes that backups 2.1 and 2.4 have been triggered since the decision was taken to establish a buffer zone at Mona Sao in the Bayanga site.

21 **Conclusion 7 (C7) - Gender - Question 7**: *To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?* **The project's focus on gender and indigenous rights is moderately satisfactory.**
The MTR team found that the project applies an inclusive approach to its activities and found no evidence of discrimination against any specific group, including indigenous groups such as the BaAka. However, the lack of research of the project (including the 2 PhD students) excludes the possibility of grasping local agroforestry systems of indigenous people and applying them as a legitimate FLR option.

22 **Conclusion 8 (C8) - Links to the Global IRR Project (GCP) - Question 8:** What has the Global Project for Children brought to the National Project for the Child, (including synergies between the national IRR projects) and what has the National Project for the Child brought to the Global IRR Project (GCP)? *The* **added value of the PAG is moderately satisfactory: The GCP offers quality online training sessions on FLR topics, but this does not mean that institutional and technical capacities have been improved, as there is no follow-up in the country to assess gaps to be identified online**.

23 **Conclusion 9 (C9) - Impact and response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the project - Question 9**: *How well has the project managed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?* **The project's response to the impact of the pandemic was Moderately Satisfactory.**

The impact of the pandemic in CAR was severe on the project, which is even one of the reasons for slowing down the implementation of project activities. Although the project implemented procedures to mitigate this impact, it was unable to reconnect with its local stakeholders and communities until April 2022.

0.4 Recommendations

24 **Recommendation 1 (R1) in response to C1, C4 and C5 - related to relevance, factors affecting progress and sustainability - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders and implementing agencies currently excluded from the IRR project: the relevance of the project should be redefined to Emphasize the multiple benefits that RFP can offer not only to achieve its international commitments to AFRI100-Bonn Challenge 2030, but to unite the country's implementing agencies so that FLR becomes a force for change that is fully aligned with the objectives of the RCPCA until the end of 2023 and the Development Plan that is currently being developed within the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Cooperation and which is scheduled to replace the RCPCA in 2024. That is, to establish a new social contract (Goal 2) and the transition to sustainable and resilient development (Goal 3). This approach must then be considered for integration into the national sustainable development strategy of the MEDD. Moreover, in the case of the new Development Plan replacing the RCPCA at the beginning of 2024, it is strongly recommended that every effort be made to ensure that the FLR strategy is integrated into this plan (during 2023) to pursue the country's commitments under the 2030 Agenda.**

Suggestions on how to implement R1:

a) **It is strongly recommended in the short term that MEDD, MEFCP, MADR and FAO invite all implementing agencies, plus representatives of civil society and research and development, who have an interest in FLR to a meeting (e.g. in the main FAO meeting room) to discuss the adoption of FLR as a national strategy to support the achievement of the objectives of the RCPCA and international commitments to not only AFRI-100/Bonn, but also the 2030 Agenda (in particular the relevant targets under SDGs 1, 13, 15 and 17).**

b) **It is recommended in the medium term that the discussion begin by evaluating the strategy as a "National Strategy to Save the Natural Heritage of the Country" and that such a strategy offers the potential to generate multiple benefits of interest to the policies of the implementing agencies, as follows:**

- **Expand community-based conservation of rainforest and savannah biodiversity, on the basis that local knowledge and technologies are the fastest and most cost-effective ways to restore and maintain their sovereignty and food security and other local products that support their**

livelihoods (this includes recognizing and valuing their knowledge of local plant seeds);

- **Maintaining forest/savannah food sovereignty opens up opportunities for transition from subsistence to the sale of forest/savannah products directly into the local and regional economy and, where there is a pressing demand, into the national and international economy.**
- **Strengthen land governance, especially if EFP is officially recognized as a land use category to: (i) conserve the country's natural heritage and; (ii) improve the possibilities for resolving conflicts related to the reduction of natural resources, in particular the livestock sector which needs to agree on transhumance corridors, pastures and forests designated for silvograzing, and also on pastures to be restored;**
- **Adapt local communities to the effects of climate variability and change, in particular through: (i) assisted natural regeneration of their forest and savannah ecosystems; (ii) the application of nature-based solutions that include resilient local varieties of trees, shrubs and plants, especially those with local uses; (iii) promotion of local and national seed saving methods that include in situ conservation practices;**
- **Demonstrates that FLR offers opportunities to support the development of global environmental benefits, such as carbon sequestration that supports mitigation and, therefore, potential entry into carbon markets (REDD+), as well as new opportunities to capture financing from Climate Investment Funds (CIFs), among others.**
- **Agreeing on a consensual understanding of FLR and a collegial strategy, a permanent National Working Group for FLR (GTN-RFP) should be set up involving high-level representatives (preferably DGs) for environment, forests, water, spatial planning, livestock, local government, finance and economy, as well as a selection of representatives of civil society and educational and research institutions;**
- **Designate the leader for the tasks and decision-making powers of this GTN-RFP should be defined with the support of the PMU, (based on the technical committees already set up by an Inter-ministerial Judgment and with the objective that it operates on two axes: the alignment of the policies of the supervisory agencies with the RFP and its implementation; (ii) long-term research and training programmes on FLR to be developed and applied by the faculties and institutes concerned within the University of Bangui, (after initial training and support from the TRI-RCA project). This should be implemented through a CoA while the TRI-RCA project is ongoing and funded by another GEF-funded project after closure.**
- **Formalize the national working group for FLR and delegated decision-making authorities approved by COPIL, so that project resources can be**

used to support the establishment of the working group. However, an alternative source of funding – preferably funded by the GEF as a LDCF project – should be identified to continue supporting the functioning of the working group until at least 2030.

- **Establish sub-national working groups in the sub-prefectures where the project operates to support the delivery of RFP decisions taken by the GTN-RFP in accordance with its mandate agreed by the COPIL.**
- **Continue with the TRI-RCA project as the secretariat of the GTN-RFP until an alternative has been identified. In this way, it is understood that decisions taken by the TNG-RFP on, for example, the development of FLR maps in coordination with all members of the working group to advance the main deliverables expected from the TRI-RCA project, such as the land use plan for the southwest.**
- **Ensure that FAO and GCP oversee the steps suggested above and adopt them as a case study to identify lessons learned and good practices on the application of FLR as a national strategy in other IRR countries and beyond.**

c) **It is strongly recommended that a high-level national or international expert with proven experience in institutional strengthening, land-use planning and natural resource management be recruited to oversee the overall development process of the GNG-RFP as well as all other activities under component 1 to promote a coordinated and coherent approach.**

25 **Recommendation 2 (R2) in response to C2 and C5 - related to the effectiveness of the project in achieving results and factors affecting progress - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders: considering the time lost in implementation caused by the severely affected pandemic in CAR and the humanitarian crisis that followed, It is recommended to extend the project for an exceptional period of two years until 31/12/2025. In this period, it is imperative that key stakeholders support COPIL and the National Working Group for FLR (GTN-RFP) prepare the development of the FLR Strategy and its implementation so that the project delivers its products and achieves its objectives during this period. The RFP strategy should start by developing a strategy for the South-West in which only four of the five Prodoc sites are set up as "pilot FLR learning sites" in Pissa, M'baïki, Bayanga and Berbérati. In the meantime, it is not recommended to continue looking for a new PPP to replace the SEFCA site in order to free up funds to support the proposed FLR strategy. In the four sites, the strategy should focus on scaling up local knowledge, technologies and practices on FLR and the development of local NWFPs that are used to support the livelihoods of local forest communities and are in demand in local, regional and national markets. The vision of the strategy, therefore, should be focused on the recovery of life systems that offer global environmental benefits, while the mission is to end business as usual.**

Suggestions on how to implement R2:

a) **It is recommended that the original budget for the SEFCA site be reallocated to prioritize funding for the implementation of the above-mentioned FLR strategy. Funding should focus on:**
   - **Employ a consultant to guide the achievement of expected results under Component 1, as well as advice on the integration of FLR into the sector policies of the participating implementing agencies in the proposed GTN-FLR;**
   - **Strengthen community-based activities under Component 2 to establish "FLR pilot learning sites" in the four pilot sites of Pissa, M'Baiki, Bayanga and Berbérati. In particular, funding should include support for the replication of agroforestry practices observed at Pissa 2 in the pilot sites of Pissa and M'Baiki. In this way, examples of local FLR approaches can be the subject of on-the-job training and the subject of the search for NWFPs of local, national and IRR interest carried out through a letter of agreement with LERSA/UB;**
   - **Intensify activities for the creation, implementation of simple management plans and research of CF identified in Pissa (Nguitto Community Forest) and Berberati (communities of "Ngbako-Toumbanzara, located about 24 km from Berberati on the Berberati-Nandobo axis and communities of the GBAZI sector on the Berberati Nazembe axis about 18 km;**
   - **Recruit two NGOs to oversee two demonstration sites for small-scale sustainable wood energy production in the Bangui Basin, preferably identified at the end of the consultation process scheduled for 2023;**
   - **Recruit a consultant to train the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Bangui (UB) on RFP tools and methods so that UB can take over and pursue a long-term training and research program to support the implementation of the RFP/NLP strategy in CAR. Part of the consultant's terms of reference should show support for UB to develop networking skills with other universities (especially engaged in TRI) to identify financial support after the end of the TRI-RCA project.**

b) **It is recommended that the TRI PAG identify areas of the FLR strategy where it can use its resources to support its implementation. For example, on supporting the development of UB's internal training capacity on FLR/NWFP proposed above, or producing a booklet on FLR good practices identified in the "FLR pilot sites" proposed above.**

26 **Recommendation 3 (R3) in response to C3 and C5 - related to efficiency and factors affecting progress - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders: It is imperative that the Project Task Force meet as soon as possible to determine a formal agreement on how to remove the current administrative bottlenecks that have caused delays in**

implementation and agree on a process for taking action. decision to expedite procurement, contracts, report approvals and other requirements. The main objective of this action is to ensure that rapid and responsive decision-making prevails and that delays in implementation are contained in weeks rather than months as currently (covering all staff recruitment proposed in the recommendations of this report, procurement, training events and exchanges, synergies with other projects, co-financing and reporting, among others).

<u>Suggestions on how to implement R3:</u>

a) **The Project Working Group meets virtually to reach a consensus agreement to accelerate the implementation of the project, appoints a permanent FAO-CAR staff member to act as focal point; it should be responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the activities and follow-up of the decisions of the Working Group in a timely manner.**
b) **The PMU reports to COPIL/Executing Agency on the implementation of the project on a periodic and regular basis, once the annual work plan has been approved by COPIL.**
c) **The PMU should be relocated from FAO to MEDD offices, with a small budget earmarked to renovate and develop a meeting and training room for the proposed GNT-RFP meetings above and the planned training activities in Bangui.**
d) **The PMU should be strengthened with, (i) the recruitment as soon as possible of the International Project Management Coordinator; (ii) two consultants as mentioned in R2 to support the executing agency in establishing the proposed R1-RFP (to implement Component 1 activities, in particular the integration of FLR into policies, strategies, plans, sector codes, etc.) and develop the technical capacity of the UB to support long-term FLR training and research including ROE and other training restoration tools, as well as the development of NWFP for the realization of IGAs with LERSA, (focusing on local markets and fairs); and (iii) a secretary who is contracted at least part-time, to manage all administrative and logistical matters with the MEDD, FAO and other stakeholders.**
e) **The PMU should immediately deploy its two (2) local agents to the ISDR offices in M'baïki and the forestry office that has been renovated by the PGRN in Berberati; and these must be equipped with work equipment (computer, printers, inverters, panel for electricity, etc.). With regard to the payment of "danger pay", it is recommended that it be paid from GEF funding to ensure that local coordinators have substantial resources beyond the current one as a change of scenery (at least 150,000 FCFA per month, per person) to work in areas that are not well secured or where other dangers may exist, including poisonous snakes, scorpions and spiders. They should be subject to performance reviews (updated reports, fieldwork) every six (6) months to confirm that both consultants are delivering products as planned and on time.**

f) **In addition to the quantitative indicators predefined in the project documents, the PMU adopts a set of qualitative indicators to support learning about the FLR process in CAR. These should include light and consistent surveys of knowledge, attitudes and practices conducted at the four (4) project sites by local NGOs and results used in project trainings and WGN-RFF meetings, among others.**

g) **The PMU should recruit a part-time communication specialist fluent in Sango and French to design a communication plan (project logo, slogan, advertorial, awareness-raising, site sponsorships, skits, T-shirts, press conferences, etc.) to stakeholders. This plan should also inform policy dialogue and political decision-making on the multiple benefits of FLR and NWFP, especially reducing the risks associated with depleting natural resources to ensure that field staff and partners are prepared to identify potential conflicts and mitigation measures that include the application of proactive monitoring by field actors.**

27 **Recommendation 4 (R4) in response to C4 and C5 - related to sustainability and factors affecting progress - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders: the project should make specific arrangements to initiate a set of research studies on the value of forest ecosystem services in CAR (rainforests and savannah), as foreseen in component 1 of Prodoc. Given the maximum time available, it is recommended that only one long-term PhD be funded by the project on a restoration/ecosystem topic chosen in consultation with UB, LERSA, ISDR and MEDD. The three-year duration would probably go beyond the project, but with the intention of supporting future GEF-funded projects dedicated to supporting the restoration process in CAR. The second PhD should be replaced by up to three (3) shorter postgraduate Master theses, also selected in consultation with UB, LERSA, ICRA, ISDR and MEDD and covering topics such as: (i) capturing existing knowledge on local agro-forestry practices; (ii) identify and promote silvograzing techniques that avoid bush burning; (iii) improve local communication methods on FLR through local environmental ambassadors and monitoring bodies. All topics to be funded must be formally agreed with COPIL at an extraordinary meeting if necessary.**

<u>Suggestions on how to implement R4:</u>

a) **It is recommended that studies take a holistic approach to FLR to promote learning about its multiple benefits and that by supporting and recognizing the value of local knowledge opportunities to promote win-win situations, such as: (i) promoting adaptation and mitigation is time to support NDC; (ii) how reforestation with local varieties is essential to preserve pollinators, pest management and seed distributors; (iii) How the development of NTFPs can promote social cohesion and the peace process.**

b) **It is recommended that studies target awareness of: (i) Government officials and policy makers on the multiple benefits of MSP/NWFP and strengthen the**

environmental, human, social and economic capital of a local community, but not their physical capital. In this way, the justification for public investment in basic rural infrastructure can be made (installation of rural roads, water supply, community centres, development of local market facilities and fairs, etc.); (ii) educational and university centres; advocate the need to increasingly include the concept of FLR in the field of education and encourage research on natural resources and NWFP; (iii) the general public on the importance of establishing a new social contract with government.

c) **The PMU should strengthen its communication strategy, seeking the support of GCP, FAO and UN services to exploit all types of media to reach the maximum number of people possible.**

28 **Recommendation 5 (R5) in response to C6 - related to cross-cutting priorities and sustainability - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders: The implementing partner (MEDD), FAO and PMU should pay more attention to the application of risk management not as a separate exercise, but as an integral part of planning, project implementation and monitoring.**

<u>Suggestions on how to implement R5:</u>

a) **Risks that affect project performance should not be identified in a general way that can affect project performance, but identified in relation to timely product delivery and results under the main components. In this way, practitioners think about how they will mitigate or eliminate these risks of not happening again.**
b) **The EHS team should be consulted to review environmental risks, new safeguards triggered (Safeguards 2.1 and 2.4) and measures that need to be implemented in the project. An annual report and the next PIR-4 should also report that these safeguards have been triggered, as well as explain how risks are managed in the delivery of results and lessons learned and good practices on this topic captured by M&E.**

29 **Recommendation 6 (R6) in response to C7 - related to gender and sustainability of FLR in forests of indigenous communities - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders: It is strongly recommended that the project should support high-resolution map development tools and finalize STAR analysis to produce useful data on threatened species and their habitats at least in southwestern CAR. This should be done with the support of the GCP and IUCN to ensure that the land use plan and maps of each pilot project site include, inter alia: (i) all planned RFP intervention sites per village; (ii) the three CF sites identified to date, plus the CF with the potential for CF fate at the project sites; (iii) forests predominantly occupied by the BaAka and other indigenous peoples, with whom discussions should be held to determine how to protect threatened habitats and species identified with them during STAR exercises. In addition, a specific study on**

BaAka in relation to FLR should be carried out to determine how the FLR approach can strengthen their life system (including the protection of endangered species), rather than eroding their local knowledge and technologies and losing species essential to the maintenance of the forest ecosystem.

<u>Suggestions on how to implement R6:</u>

a) **The project should hire a local expert (preferably from UB or ISDR) and, at the same time, ask the PAG to send a trainer on FLR tools and methods to apply the "trainer of trainer" principle. At the same time, the MEDD and the DGs responsible for spatial planning, livestock, forestry and agriculture, plus the UB, ISDR and ICRA should be equipped with a computer with a high-resolution monitor and battery to produce the thematic maps mentioned above, as well as to apply the results of methods such as STAR (especially to identify critical habitats in at least the sites of M'baïki and Bayanga bordering the Protected Areas). The maps must be produced in coordination by the TRI-RCA project in coordination with the UB in order to control they are produced at a standard scale recommended by GCP-TRI (1:10,000). The objective should be to establish a permanent capacity in the CAR to support the scaling up of FLR in the CAR in accordance with the proposed RFR strategy in R1.**
b) **The study of BaAka and other indigenous groups should combine the involvement of stakeholders from other TRI projects that have indigenous communities to support comparisons and contrasts.**
c) **The document produced should be published with the support of the PAG for dissemination as a national document and TRI.**

30 **Recommendation 7 (R5) in response to C7 (and R2) - related to cross-cutting priorities, gender and sustainability - to FAO, national and subnational stakeholders and PMU: It is recommended that the pilot project of wood-efficient stoves/stoves, solar stoves/stoves and the promotion of vegetable briquettes in the Bangui Basin.**

<u>Suggestions on how to implement R7:</u>

a) **It is important to learn from other projects promoting briquettes (TRI-ASAL), energy-efficient stoves (TRI-Pakistan and TRI-ASAL) and solar stoves/stoves (UNDP Senegal).**[1]
b) **Awareness and education are crucial to gaining acceptance. To achieve this, it is necessary to demonstrate the benefits of these new technologies such as: (i) saving time in collecting firewood, (ii) less health risks, (iii) more income (saving at least 3 kilograms of firewood used per day), (iv) improving family well-being), (iv) generate additional revenue with the time saved.**

[1] See the following link: www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/The%20Mekhe%20Solar%20Cooker-%20Senegal%20Case%20Study.pdf

c) **Ensure that all major technical and financial barriers have been identified as well as the main challenges the group may have.**
d) **Ensure that local people have been trained to produce the briquettes, or manufacture and maintain the improved and solar fireplaces/ovens (including a stock of main spare parts).**
e) **Study the development of a PPP to develop these technologies in direct support of the proposed national strategy in R1.**

31 **Recommendation 8 (R8) in response to C5 - related to effectiveness and factors affecting progress: It is recommended that key stakeholders meet to review the ToC in Annex 9 and review the (quantitative) targets in the results matrix to agree on new targets that can realistically be achieved in CAR during the proposed two-year extension. In addition, qualitative indicators should be included in the results matrix.**

Suggestions on how to implement R8:

a) **It is important to hold a participatory workshop with the support of FAO-R and GCP in which lessons should be learned from other TRI projects concerning the revision of the MR.**
b) **Qualitative indicators should focus on participatory evaluation. It is therefore recommended that surveys and questionnaires be managed by two dynamic young people (a man and a woman called *Village Forest Ambassadors*) in each community who are nominated by the community/village as promoters of FLR and monitoring (at least every three months) the extent to which local communities adopt the knowledge, attitudes and practices (PCA) for biodiversity restoration and conservation in relation to:**
    - **The application of different production approaches that replace bush fire, bushmeat hunting, and slash-and-burn in general with silvograzing techniques, agro-silvograzing, agroforestry, intercropping, pens where animals cannot move, internal measures to protect sacred sites, among others. It is important to include the question "*why do they like these new approaches compared to the old ones?*" to determine changes in knowledge);**
    - **The number and type of local plants that villagers plant and protect, to determine how agro-diverse and resilient they are compared to other villages/sites. Again, it is important to include the question *why do they like these new approaches compared to the old ones?* to determine changes in knowledge);**
    - **The adoption and expansion of their own technologies (including seed collection, storage and propagation) and the new technologies introduced, such as thrifty stoves, solar stoves and fireplaces, the use of vegetable briquettes (if promoted), rainwater harvesting, development of innovative**

family nurseries and in situ seed conservation, inter alia. Here it is important to ask *how local/new technology has changed their livelihoods and what are the good practices (including new cooking methods and recipes)? ;*

- **The adoption of new methods of communication between village forest ambassadors, project staff and government staff, such as the distribution of cheap smartphones and the use of telephone applications for village forest ambassadors, the introduction of BRCK (from Kenya), the development of verbal diaries by village elders success stories to produce videos and other knowledge products promoting CAR biodiversity and local knowledge (including the promotion of local seed saving methods that recognize local knowledge about their collection, storage, propagation, pollinators, etc. as mentioned in the suggestions under R1).**

0.5 Table 1 - Rating of GEF evaluation criteria

EGF criteria/sub-criteria	Classification[2]	Summary comments[3]
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Global Strategic Relevance	MS	The strategic relevance of FLR is not optimized at the national level to demonstrate that FLR is only a reforestation exercise, but an opportunity to develop a national strategy that fully supports the government's commitments in the RCPCA to establish a new social contract between people and the state and support the transition from subsistence agriculture to sustainable agricultural development. At the international level, the project is seen as supporting the government's commitment to AFRI100/Bonn Challenge 2030, but has so far failed to communicate the multiple benefits of FLR that are in line with GEF priority areas related to supporting the achievement of national commitments, the Paris/NDC Agreement, the CBD/Aichi targets, SDGs, among others.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	S	The project remains consistent with GEF6 focal areas BD-4 Programme 9: Land Degradation: LD-2 Programme 3; GL-3 Programme 4 Sustainable forest management; GDF-3 7 & and GDF-4 Program 10. Coherence with Program 9 (private sector) of SFM-4 is not evident especially vis-à-vis the development of forest products through IGAs.

[2] See rating scale at the end of the document.

[3] Include a reference to the relevant sections of the report.

A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and recipient needs	MS	The project is highly relevant to the RCPCA, but its COPIL and its working groups are not sufficiently engaged in the implementation of the project, especially the sectors responsible for land use planning, local government, livestock and the economy. This reduces the possibility of agreeing on the roles and functions of each implementing agency to integrate FLR into national and sectoral policies and action plans to meet national commitments on FLR (AFRI-100/Bonn Challenge), climate change (Paris Agreement/NDC/SDG-13), biodiversity conservation (NDC/NBSAP/SDG-15) and poverty reduction (SDG-1), inter alia.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	COPIL includes representatives of the GEF-funded PGRN project to support the updating of the Forest Code and CAFRI to support training on FLR. The AFD-funded PDRSO project, which ended in 2021, was also a member and supported complementary studies on wood energy production in the Bangui Basin. In addition, the project coordinated with the EU-funded VPA-FLEGT project working on timber certification. However, due to the absence of a national coordination mechanism for FLR, complementary actions are not designed to support the development of a coordinated and systematic approach to promoting FLR as a national strategy. Complementarity with other GEF-funded projects, including national IRR projects, has been found to be weak or non-existent.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MU	The project is progressing very slowly in producing results to achieve its objectives. The project is about two years behind schedule, which is far more than other IRR projects where delays have caused up to a year of lost operations. An extension of time is unlikely to yield significant results unless some significant bottlenecks are addressed at both the strategic level (defining the strategic value of FLR) and the operational level (project management reforms and reduction of FAO-CAR bureaucracy).
B1.1 Delivery of Project Results	MU	The delivery of the vast majority of project outputs is either well behind schedule or not meeting agreed targets. This situation has not been facilitated by a number of developments that are beyond the control of the project.
B1.2 Progress towards Project Outcomes and Objectives	U	The project has struggled to deliver concrete results since its launch in 2019. The overall physical progress of the project is estimated at 35% as of 31/12/2022. This is very low after four years of operations, but a number of factors have contributed to it, including security, logistical and personnel mobilization issues that have not resulted in any RFP action in Berbérati to date. As a result, the project is currently operating at only three of the five planned pilot sites.

- Result 1	U	The project has made slow progress in delivering its outputs under component 1. The selection of two PhD students to assess forest ecosystems and their economic value has not been concluded. The NBSAP update has not taken place although the STAR analysis to prioritize biodiversity restoration and guide management plans has begun, but has not been finalized. The updating of the Forest Code is still ongoing. The wood energy study of the Bangui Basin was completed by CIRAD and a ministerial order was issued to conduct seven public consultations on the development of sustainable wood energy production in the Bangui Basin. However, none of these consultations have taken place so far.
- Outcome 2	MU	Implementation of project activities through letters of agreement is proving difficult. So far, only 42 ha have been reforested as of 31/12/2022, (3.1% of the target agreed with the communities in the three sites that are operational). This was not helped by SEFCA's decision not to participate in the project in 2019 due to a lack of tax incentives to fund FLR. In addition, the project was unable to mobilize local facilitators in the pilot sites. WWF is demonstrating its ability to plan and prepare RFP activities with local communities, but delays in signing the LoA forced FLR activities on the ground to be postponed to the 20023 rainy season. A very positive element is the identification of a FC in Boyama 2 community covering an area of 1,048 ha. However, the MECFP site inspection did not take place to validate the site, before it could be assessed and approved by the Technical Review Committee, the Minister of the MEFCP issues the Order in Council formally recognizing the CF. Following this, a revision of the forest policy will be necessary to improve FC in CAR.
- Outcome 3	MU	Institutional strengthening activities on the application of FLR methods and tools such as CEOF/SEPAL, ROAM, QSIG, etc. have only been provided online and the ability to apply them requires additional training and technical supervision. In addition, training programs do not focus on the trainer-of-trainer principle to ensure that an appropriate institution inherits and continues training and supervision. In addition, CIRAD refused to oversee the capacity development of CIFAR and ISDR due to cost. As a result, none of these institutions has sufficient capacity to provide effective FLR in the pilot sites.
- Result 4	MU	The achievement of planned results is behind schedule. CAR stakeholders have participated in international and regional TRI events in person and online since the pandemic, including trainings provided by ICRAF on CEOF/SEPAL in Nairobi and organized by FAO. But it has not been possible to carry out exchanges with other IRR projects so far, although an exchange is planned in Cameroon in 2023. The production of knowledge

		products is low to date. Therefore, stakeholders do not use such products to raise awareness about FLR and make informed decisions on its adoption as a national strategy to support its scale-up as foreseen in Prodoc. M&E follows the nine core IRR indicators as well as the project indicators established in the Prodoc results matrix. However, there is no ongoing qualitative monitoring to support learning changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices, or on economic development. In addition, it does not sound the alarm when delays in decision-making prevent the start/end of activities.
- Overall rating of progress towards objectives/results	MU	The project does not produce concrete results or stimulate adequate learning to enable the project to achieve its objectives. Several factors are at play behind this situation, some of which are not sufficiently mitigated. This is not facilitated by the fact that the M&E system does not monitor risks, nor does it apply risk management in its planning and operations.
B1.3 Probability of impact	UA	Not assessed at MTR
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency[4]	MU	The project struggles to convert its financial resources into outputs and results. As of 31/12/2022, the project had spent 34.6% of GEF funds to provide an estimated overall physical advance of 35%. However, taking into account the co-financing of other projects (USD 9 037 693), the total expenditure amounts to USD 11 098 451. This is a very high amount of financing to achieve a physical advance of only 35%. In addition, the total number of direct beneficiaries who participated in capacity-building during the same period would be 1,527 persons. This indicates that the project spends USD 1,350 per beneficiary, which is considerably higher than other TRI projects managed by FAO. As a result, the project offers an unsatisfactory level of profitability so far.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT RESULTS		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks affecting sustainability	HL	A number of significant risks identified by the project are not sufficiently mitigated, which is likely to affect the ability of stakeholders to continue the FLR process in CAR after the end of the project. At the political level, there is a high risk that the project will not be able to carry out significant reforms unless it succeeds in developing the FLR case with all operational bodies that have engaged in land use or land administration and management activities in CAR, or on FLR financing and NWFP development. At the prefecture/sub-prefecture level, there is an

[4] Includes cost-effectiveness and speed.

		urgent need for official coordinators to identify, plan and supervise the implementation of FLR and the promotion of NWFP. At the community level, there is a need to ensure that the FLR process is clearly understood and that they are the drivers and guardians of the FLR process to ensure that instead of eroding local knowledge and technologies, it fully integrates and values them.
D1.1. Likelihood of financial risks affecting sustainability	L	Financial risks are very likely to prevent stakeholders from continuing the FLR process, unless some major deficiencies are addressed. First, at the political level, the ministries responsible for finance and economy do not actively participate in COPIL or the working groups. This is not helped by the absence of a consultant to oversee the identification of national and international funding to finance FLR and NWFP until at least 2030 to coincide with the promises of the Bonn Challenge 2030 and which should be overseen by UNEP. Second, at the service delivery level, the project did not identify one or more academic partners who could undertake and continue: (i) a long-term training programme to consolidate the FLR process until at least 2030; (ii) a long-term research programme working with local and indigenous communities on identifying nature-based solutions they are already applying to be integrated into FLR scale-up (such as the agroforestry systems observed in Pissa by the EGP); (iii) long-term partners from the private and non-governmental sectors who can support the development of inclusive supply chains in NWFPs.
D1.2. Likelihood of socio-political risks affecting sustainability	L	Socio-political risks have not been sufficiently recognized by FAO and PMU as substantial risks to the sustainability of FLR activities. Political unrest and bandits continue to affect large parts of the country and this includes access to some of the communities at the Berbérati site. The capacity to manage social conflicts is weak.
D1.3. Likelihood of institutional and governance risks affecting sustainability	ML	Institutional risks affect performance due to lack of funding and capacity. The December 2020 general elections resulted in the division of MEDDEFCP into MEDD and MEFCP, meaning that the project works with two main implementing agencies, instead of one. Staff turnover is an issue, which was noted during the MTR mission, when several senior MEFCP managers who had worked with the project were dismissed on the day of the interview. The lack of representation and commitment from ministries responsible for land use planning and local government means that the political scope for establishing FLR and CA as recognized land uses is more difficult to achieve. Similarly, the biggest threat to the country's forests and FLR are livestock herders, but the Ministry of Livestock is completely absent from the RFP agenda. Governance mechanisms (including local community monitoring) to monitor bushfire enforcement are weak or non-existent.

D1.4. Likelihood of environmental risks affecting sustainability	MU	Environmental risks are low and unlikely to have a major effect. However, the extensive use of bushfires and mining operations in search of gold and diamonds pose a growing threat to water resources. For example, the construction of a dam on the Sangha River (Bayanga) by a Chinese company that holds a concession to exploit gold deposits restricts navigation and fishing.
D2. Probability of catalysis and replication	U	Adoption and replication of FLR, CF and NWFP is unlikely as the funds and capacity to provide them are not in place. Unless more is done to recognize that the primary holders of knowledge about FLR and NWFP in CAR are the communities themselves, the likelihood of catalyzing change is low. However, if local knowledge is studied and its ability to apply its technologies (such as the highly successful agroforestry techniques in Pissa), integrated into long-term training programmes (managed by UB), then the prospects for catalyzing FLR and NWFP could be significant. and a game changer for the RCA.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and preparation [5]	MU	The project design has shortcomings that affect performance. They include: (i) the absence of a permanent national mechanism that can establish and guide national and subnational FLR/NWFP working groups engaged in defining and overseeing the implementation of FLR as a national strategy; (ii) the need for consultants to oversee the integration of FLR into the sectoral policies and plans of implementing agencies that have an interest in FLR or its financing; (iii) the need for an academic institution to be trained to undertake and implement a long-term RFP training and research program; (iv) the need to review certain Prodoc products and objectives to what is realistic and achievable in the current socio-political and economic context; (v) lack of integration of risk management into project planning.
E2. Quality of project implementation	MU	Overall, the quality of the project's online training was found to be satisfactory, but follow-up was much less evident in capitalizing on the training provided. The studies carried out by CIRAD and its local partners were considered satisfactory by providing data on the supply and demand of wood energy production in the Bangui Basin and by obtaining a ministerial order to conduct public consultations on the implementation of wood energy production. The quality of training provided by CIFAR and ISDR to assist local communities in implementing FLR was rated moderately unsatisfactory. On the one hand, their four-month letters of engagement were far too short to allow them to oversee RFP activities. On the other hand, their lack of capacity

[5]These are factors affecting the ability of the project to start as planned, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among the implementing partners at the start of the project.

		means that they have not provided the local community with an adequate understanding of what FLR really is.
E2.1 Quality of FAO project implementation (BH, LTO, CTA, etc.)	MU	The quality of FAO's technical support has been moderately unsatisfactory at both the country and headquarters levels. Although attempts by FAO-R to find timely solutions with the FAO Representative took place through a number of remote meetings, none materialized. Country visits by FAO-R staff since the lifting of travel to CAR in 2022 have not been carried out, except by CTA which visited the project once in 2022.
E2.1 Project monitoring (CSP, project working group, etc.)	MU	The PSC has a large membership (26) and organizes biannual remote meetings rather than an annual meeting as proposed in Prodoc. However, the PSC struggles to bring together all its members. Moreover, the implementation of its decisions at the last two meetings in April and October 2022 was complicated by the departure of the international project coordinator in April 2022.
E3. Quality of project execution	MU	The quality of project execution by the MEDD acting as executing agency was complicated by the decision to split the MEDD and the MEFCP in 2021. As a result, it relies on a separate department to provide technical support, which it can no longer directly control. The quality of project execution is also not subject to PMU quality assurance to ensure that it receives timely incentives to complete tasks and track product delivery.
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and implementing partner performance, administration, staff, etc.)	MU	The PMU suffered the loss of two National Coordinators and the departure of the International Coordinator after completing his three-year contract. The morale of the remaining staff was found to be low and lacking a clear vision and mission, indicating that the PMU suffered from a combination of internal management deficiencies and a lack of adequate support and cooperation from key stakeholders to overcome the obstacles that slowed implementation. Weaknesses in the project design regarding PMU staffing requirements also affected project implementation. In particular, the absence of consultants responsible for the delivery of outputs under components 1 (on policy) and under component 3 (on training and research) are major gaps when considering that socio-political, institutional and financial risks in the CAR have had a negative impact on project implementation since 2019.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MU	The MTR team found that financial management and co-financing appear to be a shared problem by all IRR projects. For example, it is unclear how more than $7 million in co-financing was accounted for in the project through 2021, given that the project was not fully operational due to the pandemic and the December 2020 presidential election. Accounting for expenditures under each component is not conducted by FAO-

		CAR. Instead, the budget is managed based on training, equipment, staff, and administration expenses. That was a more efficient way of managing resources, but wondered why Prodoc allocated the GEF budget by component if such accounting was not applied.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	Partnerships with the GEF-funded PGRN project, the AFD-funded PDRSO project (completed in 2021) and CAFI have not provided any significant evidence that they have affected the implementation of the project. However, the interviews confirmed that both PGRN and PDRSO funded the production of local development plans in 21 forest communes in the south-west of the country, which included the communes in the project's pilot sites. However, there is no evidence that this was coordinated with the TRI-RCA project. Therefore, the integration of FLR into these plans still needs to be completed. In addition, the project coordinates with the EU-funded VPA-FLEGT project, which was relaunched in 2022. There is no evidence that the project affected the TRI-RCA project.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MU	The TRI-CAR project produces very few knowledge products, partly due to low levels of implementation progress. This includes specific articles, periodic newsletters, publications on forest ecosystem assessments, stories and stories on topics of interest to strengthen learning and inform decisions for all levels. Despite their collaboration with CIFAR and ISDR, neither produced research material that could have been included in international events, such as the XV Forest Conference held in 2022.
E7. Overall M&E Quality	MU	The M&E system is designed to track activities and results in Prodoc and the nine core indicators of the IRR programme. As with other IRR projects, qualitative indicators that encourage learning about transformational change are not applied in the M&E system. As a result, learning space is limited in the TRI-CAR project. The quality of the reports in the PPR and PIR reports was rated moderately unsatisfactory, with the reports being confused in some cases with planning for future actions.
E7.1 M&E Design	MS	The M&E system is designed to track implementation progress in accordance with the reporting needs of PIPs and RPPs. M&E is therefore not designed to collect data and promote learning on good practices, or stimulate advocacy campaigns for FLR.
E7.2 Implementation of the M&E Plan (including financial and human resources)	MS	The implementation of the M&E plan is limited by the lack of local coordinators on the ground and the general lack of functioning in the project sites until the second half of 2021.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MU	Several factors caused delays and affected the performance of the project. However, TRI projects do not appear to have adequate

		guidelines on how to address and mitigate these factors, for example through the GCP helpdesk.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other dimensions of equity	MS	The participation rate of women in the main activities of the project is 37.5% (572) against a total of 1,527 people. Overall, the project implements equal access for men, women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities. However, data collection on these categories of participants is not carried out. Overall, women are reluctant to participate in activities over which they do not have complete control. Women-only activities have been requested at two sites.
F2. Human rights questions	MS	The mid-term review found no evidence that it implements the FPCC, but found that these principles are applied by WWF. In addition, there is evidence that the project applies a rights-based forestry approach to CF development at Boyama 2 and it is planned to establish a CF in Berbérati at two sites (savannah sites). However, a management strategy for transhuman communities in Niger, Chad, Cameroon and northern CAR has not been identified.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Compliance with EHS standards is satisfactory, although none of the guarantees are followed in the M&E plan.
Overall project rating	**MU**	