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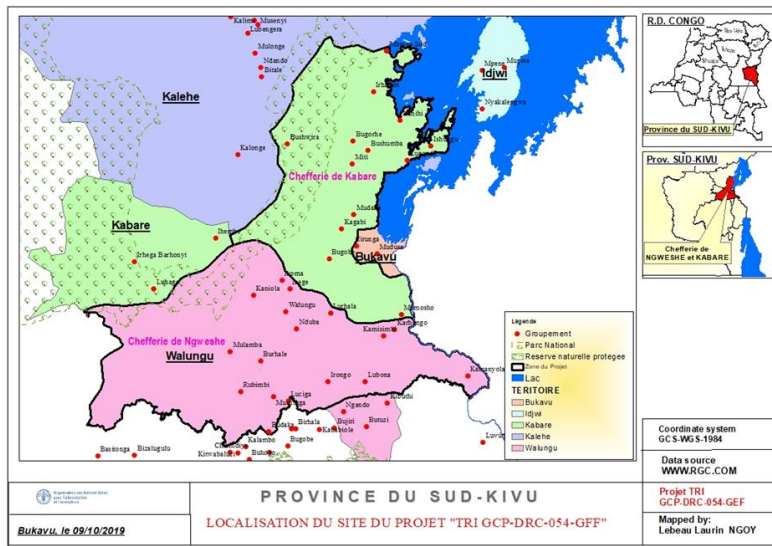


# Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

## Restoration and Sustainable Management of Ecosystems in South Kivu

### The Restoration Initiative Child project

FAO Project ID: GCP/DRC/054/GFF  
GEF Project ID: 9515



## Final Report

MTR mission conducted from 5 au 19 August 2022

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Kinshasa – Democratic Republic of Congo - April 2023

# Executive Summary

## A. Introduction

### 1. Background

This report presents the results of the Mid-Term Review, the main observations and the progress made in the implementation and execution of GEF-9515 project "**The Restoration Initiative, Child Project of the DRC: Improving the Management and Restoration of Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Resources in the Pilot Province of South Kivu**".

The project was declared operational on 10 October 2018 for a period of 5 years (2018 -2023) with a budget exceeding USD 2,000,000 which classifies it among the large projects, to be undergone, during its implementation, in accordance with the rules and procedures applicable to GEF projects, a mid-term review and a final evaluation at the end of its implementation.

This mid-term review is conducted under the direct supervision of the FAO Representative in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and project Budget Holder, Mr. Aristide Ongone Obame, with the support of the FAO-GEF Unit Focal Point (FAO GEF CU), Ms. Geneviève Braun and the FAO-Headquarters Team Leader.

The coordination of this exercise is ensured by the International Consultant, in his capacity as team leader, assisted by his national counterpart. The Team leader is responsible for conducting MTR activities and preparing and submitting the EMP's interim and final reports.

### 2. Objective and scope of the mid-term evaluation

This mid-term evaluation analyses the context, implementation and results of the achievements and progress achieved at mid-term of the FLR project over the period from 10 October 2018 to June 2022, almost 44 months (3.8 years) after its official declaration of start.

It identifies performance and the problems and challenges the project has faced, as well as drivers of change or inefficiency, and draws conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward with the project.

## B. Objectives and methodology of the EMP

### 1. Objectives

This mid-term evaluation is conducted in accordance with the guidelines for projects funded by the GEF Trust Funds, according to which a project with a budget exceeding USD 2 million must undergo during its cycle (i) a mid-term evaluation and (ii) a final evaluation towards the end of its implementation. Its main objectives include:

- i. Evaluate the overall achievements of the project after 3 years of project implementation,

- ii. Draw key lessons from project implementation, such as strengths, weaknesses, unforeseen events and threats, etc.,
- iii. Address the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, environment and climate change adaptation, and socio-economic issues as well as the harmonization of criteria to improve efficiency must also be addressed,
- iv. Make relevant recommendations to guide and improve the ongoing approach of the project and complete the remaining actions to achieve the expected results at the end of the project.

## **2. Evaluation Methodology**

The mid-term review of the project is conducted in four distinct stages including: (i) Start-up and methodology, (ii) Field assessment mission to the DRC days (15 days from 05 to 19 August 2022), and (iii) Analysis and synthesis of the information and data collected and (iv) Reporting, presentation of results, validation and finalization of the report.

The MTR is conducted in accordance with the TDRs according to the evaluation criteria: (i) relevance, (ii) effectiveness, (iii) efficiency, (iv) sustainability and (v) impacts. The analysis highlights the performance factors of stakeholders and the environmental and socio-economic cross-cutting dimensions of sustainable development in the intervention area. The MTR also analyzed the scope of MTR indicators, including (i) project activity reports, (ii) activity reports, (iii) preliminary observations and recommendations of field activities, (iv) MTR interim report, (iv) Final report including analysis of results, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations of the mid-term review, including comments and responses.

## **3. Phases**

As part of this mid-term review, the team of consultants, under the leadership of the CI/Team Leader, undertook, inter alia, the following specific tasks in the following five phases (see ToR, Annex 1):

- i. **Phase 1: Start and develop a methodology;**
- ii. **Phase 2: Document review;**
- iii. **Phase 3: Field Mission:** Site visits in the two chiefdoms of Kabare and Ngweshe, territories in Kabare and Walungu, and meetings and discussions with project stakeholders;
- iv. **Phase 4: Synthesis and analysis of data,** preparation and presentation of a preliminary report at the end of the MTR to the project field team, FAO-DRC and FAO-Headquarters;
- v. **Phase 5:** Development and submission of interim and final MTR reports.

In accordance with the ToRs, the MTR conducted an analysis of the mid-term indicators, including (i) project activity reports, (ii) activity reports, (iii) preliminary observations and recommendations of field activities, (iv) MTR interim report, (iv) final report including analysis of results, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations of the mid-term review, including comments and responses.

## C. Conclusion

Recall that the MTR took place 4 years after the start of the project and consists of analyzing the achievements covering the period from April 1, 2019<sup>1</sup> to June 30, 2022, 1 year from the end of the project. The conclusions aim to (i) inform FAO (implementing and executing agency), (ii) the implementing and co-financing partners of the project, as well as (iii) the government decision-makers of the DRC and the provincial and territorial political authorities of the province of South Kivu, on the progress made towards the results of the project, and on the lessons learned and recommendations of the necessary corrective measures to strengthen the achievements and the prospects for increase the chances of success of the project.

### C.1: Strategic Relevance of the Project

- i. **C1.1: DRC context and GEF/FAO priorities:** The project design is well aligned with (i) the environmental context, policies and regulations for the sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development of rural communities that depend on DRC resources, and (ii) GEF and FAO priorities and strategies for integrated forest resources management, sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. The MTR team is satisfied with the overall design of the project (S: 5/6).
- ii. **C1.2: Objectives and Results:** The objectives, results and outputs of the project are well aligned with the environmental and socio-economic issues of South Kivu province and more particularly in the chiefdoms of Kabaré and Ngweshe. *The MTR considers the project design to be generally satisfactory (S: 5/6)*
- iii. **C1.3: Logical Results Framework:** The logical framework of indicators and targets for the expected results of the project integrates government and provincial concerns. However, some indicators do not conform to the SMART nature of GEF-funded projects, as they are either (i) very ambitious and not achievable in the time available, particularly due to the weak capacities of the project teams, (ii) qualitative rather than quantitative and not consistent with the concepts of sustainable management of ecosystems and/or restoration of forest resources, and biodiversity conservation, etc. *The MTR rates the results framework as moderately satisfactory (MS:4/6).*

### C.2: Effectiveness of Results

- i. **C.2.1: Implementation Strategy:** The MTR notes that the implementation of the project has faced many challenges, including, (i) delays in the start-up of activities, (ii) the establishment of implementing partner teams, (iii) the acquisition of means and inputs, as well as (iv) the organization and capacity building of beneficiary communities in the implementation of project activities. *Nevertheless, despite these difficulties and the lack of proactivity in the chain of monitoring and evaluation of achievements, the implementation of the project is considered overall moderately satisfactory, (MS: 4/ 6).*

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<sup>1</sup> : April 1, 2019, official launch date of the project

- ii. **C.2.2: Project implementation:** Despite the start-up difficulties mentioned above, thanks to the inclusive participatory approach adopted, the project teams were able to supervise the beneficiary populations and carry out important achievements on the ground and produce more or less satisfactory results. Nevertheless, there are still significant weaknesses in terms of population capacity building that prevent the creation of reflexes and a dynamic of self-action on the ground to scale up achievements and achieve the expected results and changes. *The MTR rates the overall execution of the project as moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6).*
  
- iii. **C.2.3: Issues related to gender, vulnerable groups:** The project focused primarily in its approach on balance and equity that made it possible to take into account the issues of gender and women's empowerment (15,000 women 50+% of the number of beneficiaries) of the Dimitra Clubs and also supervised the populations of the camps of indigenous peoples in terms of nurseries and domestication of medicinal and food plants. The MTR notes that these issues have been addressed with great mastery and patience in order to arrive at satisfactory achievements in the field of nursery and domestication of medicinal plants and the pharmacopoeia, *considered very satisfactory (TS: 6/6).*
  
- iv. **C.2.4. Effectiveness of objectives and main results:** The MTR notes that despite the many difficulties encountered and the apparent weaknesses in the implementation and execution of the project, the outputs were able to produce acceptable intermediate results, in terms of:
  - ✓ **Environment and climate:** mitigation of CO2 Emissions at the local level (by 17% (70 Mt CO2) by 2030 compared to the emission scenario of the status quo (430 Mt CO2e) *is not yet perceptible and will not be achieved by the end of the project, unless the project is extended;*
  - ✓ **At the level of results:** (i) Objective 1: the policy, regulation and strategy documents, as well as pedagogical documents for university and vocational students, secondary and primary students developed in the field of "Forest Landscape Restoration – FLR" and participatory biodiversity management and conservation have not yet produced significant effects, due to their promulgation by the competent authorities; (ii) Objective 2: the outputs have not yet produced the expected intermediate results and demonstrated significant progress towards the effective feasibility of the expected changes in improving the forest cover of the area; (iii) Objective 3: the major efforts initiated and resulting in the development of 4 micro-projects developed to support FLR actions have not yet been implemented due to lack of funding from the institutions concerned (CAFI, etc.); (iv) Objective 4: there have been significant achievements in capacity-building and awareness-raising among populations, which have made it possible, among other things, to improve their knowledge and to become aware of their respective commitments and roles in order to create a local dynamic for change in their socio-economic environment and conditions. It is the same for the training of the 1662 members of 27 Club Dimitra and the 15 projects of accompaniment of the CDs, for lack of funding expected from Louvain Coopération.
  - ✓ *Nevertheless, if the achievements are considered moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6) for components 1 and 4, (ii) partially unsatisfactory (SI: 3/6) for components 2 and 3 for FLR and biodiversity conservation.*

### **C.3. Efficiency**

- i. The financial resources mobilized and used by the project are limited to the GEF contribution. No information was provided on co-financing (in kind) from the Government of DRC/MEDD and FAO. The same applies to other co-financing for which the contributions made by their respective projects are unknown.
- ii. The budgetary management of project resources did not optimize the overall modalities for the implementation of the project delivery capacity and achieve any efficiency of the project. In addition, most budget lines resulted in overruns which did not allow the annual programmes to be satisfactorily implemented in accordance with the budgetary planning and to produce the expected results, taking into account short- and medium-term financial costs.
- iii. *The MTR thus considers the effectiveness of resource mobilization to be moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6) and the financial management of the project in relation to the outputs obtained as moderately unsatisfactory (MS: 3/6).*

### **C.4. Sustainability:**

- i. The project's achievements did not demonstrate any tendency to ensure the sustainability of the few results produced, despite the fact that sustainability factors were satisfactorily identified and taken into account from the start of the project.
- ii. In addition, the adoption of techniques and strategies for resilience and agricultural adaptation to climate change does not seem to have been sufficiently taken into account in the choice of alternative income generation and enhancement of household economic viability.
- iii. *In this respect, the sustainability of the project's achievements is far from visible and therefore considered moderately unlikely (ML: 2/3).*

### **C.5. Impacts:**

- i. In terms of the impacts of the project's achievements, the MTR notes that the adoption of an inclusive participatory approach and awareness-raising facilitated the organization and capacity building of beneficiary populations and encouraged their collective and individual awareness to invest effectively and sustainably in the project's achievements in order to create sustainable conditions.
- ii. However, although aligned with the objectives, the hoped-for changes in both the environment and the socio-economic level of the populations have not yet produced the expected results of the efforts of the implementation teams and the contributions of the Dimitra Clubs due to lack of visibility and effectiveness of field achievements to produce concrete benefits at the level of the natural and socio-economic environment. *The MTR assesses the environmental impacts of the project as negligible (N: 1/3) and moderate socio-economic (N: 1/3), as they have no significant effect to achieve positive and lasting change in both intervention areas, even at the end of the project.*

### **C.6. Underperformance factors:**

- i. The MTR notes that (i) the low level of technical support from the supervisory bodies, in particular FAO headquarters and the Project Management Unit, (ii) the shortcomings of the monitoring and evaluation system for outputs, (iii) as well as the weak technical capacities of the field execution

teams, were the main factors of underperformance that limited the results of the project. Indeed, the many challenges to which the project was exposed could not provide answers to the questions of FLR techniques and support for the communities involved in the activities.

- ii. The MTR considers the consideration of these factors by the project teams moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6).

## D. Lessons Learned

The MTR presents here the lessons learned from the analysis of knowledge/experiences and the results generated by the implementation of the project. They are potentially able to enhance future actions and increase their value and potential for wider replication in the project area or similar areas. They are based on a review of good practices and successes or on problems encountered and mistakes made that could be avoided in the future. They provide information on the context from which they come and the contexts of their potential application of good practices, methodology or procedures relevant to the design and implementation (management, partnerships, M&E, etc.) of similar projects and programmes.

**D1. Lesson Learned 1: Start-up delay:** The MTR Team notes that the Mid-term assessment that was to be conducted after 2.5 years of implementation took place after 4 years, 1 year before project closure (October 2023), due to numerous start-up failures and the monitoring and evaluation system unable to guide the planning and implementation of the project's BTP. In view of the meagre results, the MTR believes that the level and quality of outputs should not change the results of the project by the end in October 2023.

**D2. Lesson Learned 2: Ambitious and evasive strategies:** Although the project is well aligned with directions, the MTR finds that due to delays due to failures in overall project management and overly ambitious strategies, the meagre progress made is the result of a narrow vision of lack of focus on results and effectiveness of outputs. In addition, the MTR finds that the project teams wanted to cast a wide net beyond the limits of their capacities, without relying on their financial means made available to the project and to enable them to do the minimum required in order to indicate the path to be followed during this pilot phase and to lay the groundwork for future improvement of the socio-economic conditions of local communities as indicated in the Prodoc.

**D3. Lesson learned 3: Harmonization of interventions:** In addition, the MTR notes that the project lacked a strategy for adequate harmonization and synergy of field interventions between actors, thus giving the impression that each party remains confined to its field of intervention according to the objectives of the signed APP, thus forgetting the interconnection and lack of boundaries of actions on the ground between stakeholders. Thus, the participatory approach aimed has not been able to overcome the many difficulties related to the size of the project area, the requirements of the nature of the proposed FLR and biodiversity interventions, and the vulnerability of populations, which have somewhat affected most of the achievements on the ground.

**D4. Lesson Learned 4: Low progress below expectations:** Due to the limited progress made, it would be illusory to expect, 1 year before the closure of the project, any significant evolution of the situation described above and which would be likely to produce relevant results, including (i) technical models of restoration and transposable to other similar Watersheds, (ii) planting techniques adapted to the fight against soil erosion and forest degradation, (iii) agricultural production techniques resilient

to climate change (Agroforestry, Conservation agriculture, Natural regeneration). In this context, it is unlikely that the project's actions will be able to achieve the expected outputs by the end of the project, i.e. in 12 months, due to the low state of development of biodiversity restoration and conservation achievements.

**D5. Lesson Learned 5: Project Efficiency:** The use of financial resources has been inefficient as their management is carried out at different levels that pose problems of tracking and reconciliation of expenditures and accounts, as revealed by the analysis of budget lines. In addition, the MTR did not receive the expenditure statements to make a more detailed analysis of the use of resources in order to measure their efficiency in relation to the activities carried out, as most budget lines resulted in overruns, as well as delays in the periodic allocations and acquisitions of the project that did not allow the full implementation of the annual work programmes in accordance with the budget planning. Indeed, the data collected in terms of the evolution of the socio-economic conditions of communities within the so-called restored or protected areas are still weak to reveal any significant impact with a value of significant change.

**D6. Lesson Learned 6: Real Capacity and Effectiveness of Dimitra Clubs:** The MTR notes that although the Dimitra Clubs were to be the linchpin of the implementation of the project, this is unfortunately not yet the case, as they have carried out few concrete achievements on the ground, with the exception of indigenous peoples who are very active on the ground. In addition, the MTR considers the current capacities of most Dimitra Clubs to be still limited and have no effect on concrete results. It should be noted that this kind of project focuses on land restoration in a context of unprecedented climate change and social pressure beyond the possible limits that the area can offer.

**D7. Lesson Learned 7: Levels and Quality of Results Achieved:** In view of the above, we believe that the level of achievement of results is still insignificant, with most achievements being at their beginning after 4 years of implementation and will not be achieved even at the end of the project. The implementation of the project has therefore failed to prove its effectiveness and to deliver the expected results at mid-term. The project's strategy of doing through implementing memoranda of understanding still lacks effectiveness and efficiency due to the multitude of factors and weaknesses mentioned above.

**D8. Lesson learned 8: Revitalization of CDs and their awareness of restoration:** It is important that the execution of the project is inspired by a new dynamic of awareness of organization and supervision of the populations grouped in the different Dimitra Clubs, based on the lessons learned from the project activities in order to better guide the execution of future programs so as not to suffer from the same weaknesses.

**D9. Lesson learned 9: Capacity building of staff at the RGEM Project as well as some agents of the organization at the General Management: Capacity building** of partners and populations is based on a good understanding of the objectives and expected results of the project and mastery of the inclusive and responsible strategy recommended for the correct implementation of the project. It will be up to the PMU to take the necessary steps to create the right conditions to encourage these types of initiatives by ensuring that they are applied by all actors to deliver the expected results.



#### **D10. Lesson learned 10: Planning project activities and developing tools and materials to use:**

The success of the project's achievements is based primarily on mastering the implementation strategy, mastering the technical packages and models and operational tools to be implemented, and especially the planning and monitoring and evaluation of activities and teamwork in the field.

#### **C. Recommendations**

The recommendations below are addressed first to the attention of FAO and the PMU, then to the project partners and local, provincial and central authorities of the DRC, or to any other stakeholder directly or indirectly involved in the realization of the project with the aim of taking adequate measures to resolve the identified problems affecting the successful implementation of the project and to improve the achievement and sustainability of the impacts of the project.

In light of the analysis and conclusions presented above in this report, the MTR team proposes to make the following recommendations, first with a view to improving the achievement of the expected results and objectives during this phase or to propose a second phase of the project.

Based on observations and analysis of results, conclusions and lessons learned, the MTR recommends, among other things:

**Recommendation 1: Endorsement of the MTR report** by FAO, GEF, Government of DRC, PMU and COPIL to guide implementation for the remaining part;

**Recommendation 2: Extension of the project for another 2 years, until October 2025 (2018-2025): the MTR recommends that FAO, GEF and the Government of DRC take the necessary steps to negotiate an extension of another 2 years until October 2025, for a total duration of 7 years (2018-2025).**

**Recommendation 3: Full review of PRODOC:** The review of the project document will be based on, inter alia: (i) objectives, activities, outputs and expected outputs, based on the Theory of Change; (ii) the architecture of the vertical logic of the chain, with a downward refocusing of the indicators of results (hectares to be restored, etc.) in order to make them more SMART; (iii) analyze the implementation strategy of the project, at all levels of delays or blockages, and difficulties, with the aim of improving the implementation of activities and achieving the expected results; (iv) Reassess the costs of activities and carry out a budget revision (reallocation of amounts by budget line, in case of renewal of the current budget) or request an increase in the project budget according to the estimated needs on deficit lines.

**Recommendation 4: Logical results framework:** (i) Review of the organizational, institutional and operational architecture for project implementation, and more specifically revisit the intervention sites; (ii) Resize the performance indicators, in particular (Number of hectares to be restored: 2000 Ha; 1500 beneficiaries, including men and women); (iii) Revitalize the implementation of the achievements of components 1 and 2 through the revision of the expected results indicators and propose a substantial budget.

**Recommendation 5: Review of the hierarchy of issues and priorities for intervention:** (i) Identify the issues and priority areas of intervention most likely to allow for significant changes; (ii) Review the

current technical support system with dynamic input and results-oriented monitoring and evaluation and mastery of technical packages; (iii) Translate the basis of the alternative scenario for the FLR based on the revised Results Framework and Theory of Change.

**Recommendation 6: Review of the project execution strategy:** the PMU must prioritize interventions and according to an appropriate implementation schedule by ensuring compliance with budget allocations, as well as the programming of field interventions with the commitment of beneficiary populations.

**Recommendation 7: Capacity building** of populations: (i) Focus on strengthening the organizational and operational capacities of the populations and members of Dimitra Clubs; (ii) Provide closer technical support under the effective supervision of FAO-Headquarters and MEDD.

**Recommendation 8: Refocusing, revitalizing and raising awareness of the Dimitra Clubs:** (i) Give the project a chance to achieve the project's outputs with available budget balances and additional resources, with the support of FAO, MEDD and PMU; (iii) Reduce the number of Dimitra Clubs to 40 at the rate of 20 CDs per intervention area and the number of intervention sites, to synergize the available financial resources and the activities to be carried out in the field.

**GEF Rating Matrix**  
Summary of MTR Ratings and Accomplishments

GEF Rating Table GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Classement1	References/comments
<b>A. RELEVANCE</b>		
Strategic relevance	Satisfactory (TS:6/6)	See P31-34
Objectives and results	Satisfactory (S:5/6)	See P34-36
Logical framework of results	Moderately satisfactory: (MS: 4/6)	Page p34-36
Design of project indicators	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page37
Results chains-ToC	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 39
Consistency of assumptions	Satisfactory (S:5/6)	Page 40
Institutional arrangements	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 41
Financial arrangements	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 43
<b>B. EFFICIENCY</b>		
Implementation Strategy:	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 44-46
Project Delivery:	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 46-49
Objectives and main results	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 53
Results at regional and sub-global level	Moderately unsatisfactory (SI: 3/6)	Page 53-54
Issues related to gender, vulnerable groups:	Very satisfactory (TS:6/6)	Page 54
Delivery of products	Moderately unsatisfactory (MU: 3/6)	Page 55
Achievement of Effects - Changes	Moderately satisfactory (MU: 4/6)	Page 57
<b>C. EFFICIENCY</b>		
Financial resources mobilized	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 57
Overall Resource Efficiency	Moderately satisfactory (MS : 3/6)	Page 57
<b>D. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE</b>		
Project design and preparation	Satisfactory (S:4/6)	PageP31-43
Quality of project implementation	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	PageP41-57
Project supervision (FAO, PSC, TFP, etc.)	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 45-53
Quality of project execution	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page45-54
Project management and implementation	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 47-53
Co-financing	N/A	N/A
Project partnerships and stakeholder involvement	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 44-54
Communication and knowledge management	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 55-57
Overall M&E Quality	Unsatisfactory (U: 3/6)	Page 40-47
Design of the M&E	Moderately satisfactory (MS: 4/6)	Page 40-43
Implementation of the monitoring / evaluation plan	Unsatisfactory (U: 3/6)	Page 40-54
<b>E. SUSTAINABILITY OF RESULTS</b>		
In relation to all risks	Moderately unlikely (ML: 2/3)	Page 60
In relation to financial risk	Moderately unlikely (ML: 2/3)	Page 60
In relation to socio-political risk	Moderately unlikely (ML: 2/3)	Page 60
Relative to institutional risk	Moderately unlikely (ML: 2/3)	Page 61
In relation to environmental risk	<i>Moderately Probable (ML)</i>	Vulnerable context
<b>F : Impacts</b>		
Environmental impact	Negligible (N: 1/3)	Page 61
Socio-economic impact	<i>Moderate (N: 2/3)</i>	Page 62